THE *TANCI FENG SHUANGFEI*: A FEMALE PERSPECTIVE ON THE GENDER AND SEXUAL POLITICS OF LATE-QING CHINA

by

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The late-Qing *tanci* "A Pair of Male Phoenixes Flying Together" (*Feng shuangfei* 鳳雙飛; preface dated 1899) is unusual for its depiction of a wide variety of gender issues and sexual relationships. Because the 52-chapter work is credibly attributed to the female poet Cheng Huiying, who is known to have written the poetry collection *Beichuang yin'gao*, the *tanci* gives scholars a unique opportunity to see how a gentry woman thought of the gender roles and sexual politics of the late Qing.

My dissertation contains two major sections. Chapters I and II look at Cheng Huiying and her work as part of the "talented women" (*cainü* 才女) culture. These two chapters demonstrate how Cheng Huiying deliberately establishes herself as a unique

female writing subject and advocates women's agency in determining their own marriage arrangements, one of women's biggest concerns in premodern China.

Chapters III to VI put *Feng shuangfei* into the larger context of male-authored fiction and examine how it adopts and rewrites the conventions and motifs common to *xiaoshuo* fiction from a female writer's perspective. I first argue that *Feng shuangfei* can be considered a serious literary work due to its sophisticated structural design and characterization, although *tanci* are usually considered as more popular literature. I then evaluate how the female author of this *tanci* subtly reinvents three gendered motifs that commonly appear in male-authored *xiaoshuo* fiction. The three motifs are male same-sex eroticism and homosociality, female same-sex desires, and the stereotypes of shrew and ideal wife. Through subtle twists in the plot, the *tanci* suggests the possibility of the expression of female subjectivity and agency within patriarchal Confucian society even while it follows and supports the normative Confucian order.

The perspectives on gender norms and sexual practices offered in this *tanci* both display how a gentry woman thought about these issues in late imperial China and suggest how the rapid and vast social and ideological changes occurring during the turn of the century opened new spaces for Cheng Huiying to imagine increased agency and autonomy for women within the domestic sphere.

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To my beloved parents and husband.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

My dissertation focuses on a *tanci* (弹词), *Feng shuangfei* (凤双飞, Two Male Phoenixes Flying Together), authored by Cheng Huiying 程蕙英, a female writer, in the late nineteenth century. I will look closely at this single *tanci* work to explore the female author's perspectives on desire, sexuality, gender politics, and women's subjectivity.

Tanci is a genre of fiction which includes vernacular and rhymed prosimetrical narratives and usually serves as an oral performance. *Tanci* developed from *taozhen* (陶真), a performing art of storytelling accompanied by *pipa* (琵琶), a lute popular during the Tang and Song period. The term *tanci* appeared during the Ming but was generally called *cihua* (词话). In the late Ming, *cihua* divided into two subgenres, *tanci* (plucked rhymes) and *guci* (鼓词, drum songs), depending on the length of verse, performance dialect and accompanying musical instruments. While *guci* uses 10-syllable verse, northern dialects, and drums, *tanci* uses southern dialects, basically the Wu dialect, in 7-syllable verse, and is performed with *pipa* lute and *sanxian* (三弦, three-string guitar); it is therefore also called *nanci* (南词, southern verse).

During the mid-Ming, the literati started composing *tanci* and changed *tanci* into a literary genre of higher register. Yang Shen's 杨慎 (1488-1559) *Ershiyi shi tanci* (二十一史弹词) was based on the twenty-one dynasties' histories and brought

tanci into the literati's world of composition. Thereafter, *tanci* bifurcated into two lines: one remained as a performance genre of oral storytelling, and the other was adopted by literati to become a written form of scholar *tanci* novels.[1] Literary women also began to write *tanci* and their *tanci* works have been termed *tanci* novels by recent scholars.[2] Although she rejects the nomenclature as *xiaoshuo* novels, Ellen Widmer explains that this term distinguishes these works from *tanci* in general, including oral performance and the ones written by men, in that "their authorship, narrating voice, and intended readership were all female."[3] In my dissertation, I try to avoid the term "*tanci* novels" but instead will directly use the term "*tanci*."

Following the popularity of *Tian yu hua* (天雨花, The Heavens Rain Flowers) during the late Ming and the early Qing, a number of female-authored *tanci* appeared, including *Yuchuan yuan* (玉钏缘, The Destiny of the Jade Bracelet), *Anbang zhi* (安邦志, The Records of Pacification), *Zaisheng yuan* (再生缘, The Destiny of Rebirth), *Zaizao tian* (再造天, Rebuilding Heaven), *Liuhua meng* (榴花梦, The Dream of the Pomegranate Flower), *Meng ying yuan* (梦影缘, The Destiny of Dream and Shadow), *Bi sheng hua* (笔生花, Flowers Growing from Writing Brushes), and *Feng shuangfei*.[4]

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[1] See details of the history of *tanci* in Bao Zhenpei 鲍震培, *Qingdai nü zuojia tanci xioshuo lungao* 清代女作家弹词小说论稿 (Tianjin: Tianjin shehui kexueyuan, 2002), 66-73.

[2] See Hu Siao-chen 胡晓真, *Cainü cheye weimian* 才女彻夜未眠 (Taibei: Maitian chuban, 2003) and Ellen Widmer, *The Beauty and the Book: Women and Fiction in Nineteenth-Century China* (Cambridge and London: Published by Harvard University Asia Center; Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2006).

[3] Widmer, *The Beauty and the Book*, 14.

[4] The preface of *Tian yu hua* is dated Shunzhi 8 (1651), so scholars deduce that the book was finished and circulated during the late Ming and the early Qing. The earliest extant printed edition is the Yiyin zhai 遗音斋 edition, dated Jiaqing 9 (1804). It is presumable that it circulated in manuscript form before the printed version came out. For details, see Li Ping's 李平 preface to *Tian yu hua*, in Tao Zhenhuai 陶贞怀, *Tian yu hua* 天雨花, ed. Zhao Jingshen 赵景深, (Henan: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1984), 1-29. Given the thematic similarity to eighteenth-century fiction, some scholars question the reliability of this date. See W. L. Idema, *The Red Brush:*

Jiang Ruizao 蒋瑞藻 (1891-1929) quoted Yang Rongshang 杨蓉裳 (1754-1816) who paralleled *Tian yu hua* with *Honglou meng* (红楼梦, The Dream of Red Chamber; also known as *Shitou ji* 石头记, The Story of the Stone) calling them "*nanhua beimeng*"(南花北梦, *The Flower* of the south and *The Dream* of the north).[5] Chen Yinke 陈寅恪 (1890-1969) and Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892-1978) first reevaluated *Zaisheng yuan* as an important piece of literature after the May Fourth Movement advocated against "old fictions." *Bi sheng hua*, together with *Zaisheng yuan* and *Tian yu hua*, are now considered the "three major works of *tanci*" (弹词三大). These

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Writing Women of Imperial China (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004).

These *tanci* are listed in the order of presumable time of circulation. For more bibliographic information, see Tan Zhengbi 谭正璧 and Tan Xun 谭寻, *Tanci xulu* 弹词叙录(Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981), and Bao, *Qingdai nü zuojia tanci xioshuo lungao* 清代女作家弹词小说论稿, 229-300.

The author and the date of *Yuchuan yuan* are unknown, but it is believed to be the earliest *tanci xiaoshuo*, which circulated during the late Ming; the earliest extant edition is the Jingguan zhai 静观斋 edition, dated Daoguang 22 (1842).

The author and the date of *Anbang zhi* are also unknown; the earliest extant edition is dated Daoguang 29 (1849). Because of its immature form (there are only volumes, but it is not divided into chapters), it is believed to be an early text.

The authors of *Zaisheng yuan* are Chen Duansheng 陈端生 (1751-1790/1796?) and Liang Desheng 梁德绳 (1771-1847); according to Chen Yinke 陈寅恪 and Guo Moruo's 郭沫若 research, Chen wrote it from the 1760s to 1780s and Liang continued it during the 1820s until the 1840s; the earliest extant edition is Baoren tang 宝仁堂 edition, dated Daoguang 2 (1822).

The author of *Zaizao tian* is Hou Zhi 侯芝 (1768?-1830); its preface is dated Daoguang 6 (1826); the earliest extant edition is the Xiangye ge 香叶阁 edition, dated Daoguang 8 (1828). It is a sequel to *Zaisheng yuan*.

The authors of *Liuhua meng* are Li Guiyu 李桂玉 and Huanmei nüshi 浣梅女史; its preface is dated Daoguang 21 (1841); it had been circulated in manuscript form, but was not printed until 1998.

The author of *Mengying yuan* is Zheng Danruo 郑澹若 (1811?-1860); the self-authored preface is dated Daoguang guimao (1843); the earliest extant edition is the Zhujian zhai 竹简斋 edition, dated Guangxu 21 (1895).

The author of *Bi sheng hua* is Qiu Xinru 邱心如 (1805?-?); its preface is dated Xianfeng 7 (1857); the earliest extant edition is dated Guangxu 20 (1894).

The author of *Feng shuangfei* is Cheng Huiying 程蕙英; its preface is dated Guangxu 25 (1899); but oddly, the earliest extant edition is the Yiyi xuan 怡怡轩 edition, dated Guangxu ershisi nian (1898).

[5] Jiang Ruizao 蒋瑞藻, *Xiaoshuo kaozheng* 小说考证 (Taibei: Wannianqing shudian, 1972), 309. The quoted book, *Guiyuan congtan* 闺媛丛谈 by Yang Rongshang, is no longer extant.

works of, for, and by women provide a platform for scholars to directly study the perspectives of literary women during the Qing.

My research object, *Feng shuangfei*, consists of fifty-two chapters and is about the political achievements and romantic lives of the talented and loyal Guo Lingyun 郭凌云 and Zhang Yishao 张逸少, who are nicknamed "two male phoenixes flying together (双凤齐飞)." Through close readings, I will analyze how the author used descriptions of sexual behaviors, including heterosexuality, male same-sex practices, and female same-sex desire, as important thematic components in plot and character development. By the late nineteenth century, an elite woman could include sexual content in her discursive world, given the appropriate genre. By comparing *Feng shuangfei* to vernacular *xiaoshuo* fiction, I want to focus on how Cheng Huiying viewed and used questions of desire and sexuality differently from mainstream male writers. I hope to uncover Cheng's own voice, under the male "orthodox" ideology, on these issues as well as to delineate the influence by those major mainstream male-authored works on *tanci* authored by this female writer.

While female poetry flourished, *tanci* also began to appear as a literary genre primarily of, for and by women, although men were obviously reading them as well, since they were commenting on them. It was the major and most popular fictional genre among women, although women also wrote dramas during the Ming and Qing. Qiu Jin 秋瑾 chose the *tanci* form in her work *Jingwei shi* (精卫石, The Stone of Jingwei) in the 1900s to educate women about equality between men and women.

Although scholarly attention has lagged behind that given to *xiaoshuo* fiction, the genre is slowly being given a place in China's literary history. There were quite a few articles published about *Zaisheng yuan* after Chen Yinke recognized its value during the 1930s, as well as articles on *Tian yu hua* and *Bi sheng hua*, the other two of the "three major works of *tanci*." In addition to Ellen Widmer's research, Bao Zhenpei 鮑震培 from mainland China and Hu Siao-chen 胡晓贞 from Taiwan have published their research on *tanci* fiction, arguing the existence of *tanci* as an important aspect of a women's literary tradition during the Qing. With the rise of gender studies and feminism, more and more scholars have started studying this special genre of women's literature.

It is the norm in *xiaoshuo* studies to have scores of lengthy and detailed monographs dedicated to a mainstream masterwork such as *Honglou meng*. Although some articles have looked closely at *Zaisheng yuan* and *Tian yu hua*, there is no book-length study that focuses on a specific *tanci*. I believe the field of literary studies has matured to the point that literary *tanci* fiction can be an object of the same level of scrutiny as *xiaoshuo* fiction. Current research on female-authored *tanci* mostly focuses on tracing a women's literary tradition. There has been no discussion of women's perspectives on desire and sexuality so far, while there is a lot of research on desire in Ming and Qing masterworks, such as *Jin Ping Mei* (金瓶梅, Plum in the Golden Vase, also known as Golden Lotus) and *Yesou puyan* (野叟曝言, A Country

Codger's Words of Exposure).[6] I believe my study on *Feng shuangfei* will contribute to the research area in terms of gradually remapping female writers' works and perspectives during the Qing.

Women's Learning and Writings during the Qing

During the Ming and Qing, growing numbers of women got involved in intellectual and literary pursuits. While courtesans inherited and developed a tradition of literary production, gentry women also created their own culture of literary creation. The *guixiu* (闺秀), or talented gentlewomen, tradition expanded rapidly thanks to the literary production of the elite *guixiu* women. They, as a new literary circle, shared the same background of literary education and training, which modern scholars, such as Dorothy Ko, Susan Mann and Ellen Widmer, have started to rediscover and reveal.

The flourishing of women poets during the Ming and Qing probably was largely thanks to support by the leading culture figures. Scholars, such as Li Zhi 李贽 (1527-1602), Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716-1797), and Chen Wenshu 陈文述 (1771-1843), encouraged women to learn reading and writing, and their controversial actions, including taking female disciples, resulted in enormous changes in the opportunities for women's literary education and publication. Hu Wenkai's 胡文楷 *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao* (历代妇女著作考) recorded over 3000 female writers during the Qing,

[6] See Ding Naifei, *Obscene things: the sexual politics in Jin Ping Mei* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), Keith Mc Mahon, *Causality and Containment in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Fiction* (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1988), etc.

who produced *shi* poetry and *ci* lyrics.[7] There gradually developed a *cainü* (才女, talented women) or *guixiu* (闺秀, gentlewomen) tradition. In the Qing, led by Yuan Mei, who was famous for his patronage of his female disciples who were called Suiyuan nü dizi(随园女弟子, female disciples of the Sui Garden), intellectuals advocated for women's *cai* (才, talent), along with *de* (德, virtue). Parallel to the *cainü* tradition, there was also a *mingji* (名妓, famous courtesan) tradition during the late Ming and early Qing. These courtesans were usually both beautiful and literary. The most famous among them were Liu Rushi 柳如是 (1618-1664) and Dong Xiaowan 董小宛 (1624-1651).

Unlike the famous educated women in the past, literary women during the Ming and Qing also produced literary works other than poetry. Women writers consciously compiled anthologies of both male and female poets, among which the most well-known ones were Wang Duan's 汪端 (1793-1839) *Ming sanshi jia shixuan* (明三十家诗选, Selected poems of thirty Ming authors) and Yun Zhu's 恽珠 (1771-1833) *Guochao guixiu zhengshi ji* (国朝闺秀正始集, Correct Beginnings: Women's Poetry of Our Dynasty).[8] Meanwhile, female-authored plays, such as Ye Xiaowan's 叶小纨 (1613-1657) *Yuanyuan meng* (鸳鸯梦, Dream of the Mandarin Ducks), and Wu Zao's 吴藻 (1799-1863) *Qiaoying* (乔影, Silhouette in Disguise), marked their contribution in drama. Similar to Zhen Daya in *Feng shuangfei*, Liang

[7] Hu Wenkai's 胡文楷, *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao* 历代妇女著作考 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008).

[8] See details in Ellen Widmer, *The Beauty and the Book: Women and Fiction in Nineteenth-Century China* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006).

Xiaoyu 梁小玉 (Ming, date unknown) wrote a history of women, *Gujin nüshi* (古今女史, A History of Women From Ancient Times to the Present). The first involvement of female writers in fiction was in their prefaces to novels, such as the four female endorsers of Li Ruzhen's 李汝珍 (1763-1830) *Jinghua yuan* (镜花缘, Flowers in the Mirror). Later on, women writers stepped into the field of *xiaoshuo* fiction—Wang Duan's *Yuan Ming yishi* (元明佚史, Lost History of the Yuan and Ming) and Chen Yichen's 陈义臣 (1873-1890) *Zhexian lou* (谪仙楼, Tower of the Descended Immortal) are not extant, but we are still lucky enough to have Yuncha Waishi's 云槎外史 (penname of Gu Taiqing 顾太清, 1799-1877) *Honglou meng ying* (红楼梦影, Shadows of *Dream of the Red Chamber*). Last but not least is the *tanci* fiction introduced at the very beginning of this chapter.

Women's literary tradition during the Ming and Qing was also marked by these female authors' connections and networks with each other. From the Ming on, elite families increasingly supported and promoted the literary culture of their daughters and wives. During the late Ming, several families of female poets emerged in the *cainü* tradition, including Liang Desheng and Wang Duan who were aunt and niece, the Zhang 张 family from Wujin 武进, the Shen-Ye 沈-叶 family led by Shen Yixiu 沈宜修 (1590-1635) from Wujiang 吴江, the Shang-Qi 商-祁 family led by Shang Jinglan 商景兰 (1605-1676?) from Shanyin 山阴, and the Fang (方) family (1580s-1670s) from Tongcheng (桐城). Not only were women writers connected by blood and marriage, they were also related by certain famous figures, like the

interchanging relationships among Wang Duan, the daughter-in-law of Chen Wenshu, and the disciples of Chen Wenshu including Wu Zao and Gui Maoyi 归懋仪. Even though some of the talented women never met, they still considered themselves in the same literary circle because of their shared interests in some literary works. For example, female writers respond to *Zaisheng yuan* by rewriting the *tanci* and to *Honglou meng* by writing poems on it.[9]

With the support of some leading intellectuals and their families, it was no longer exceptional for women to publish their works. In order to support the talented women as a social capital for their families, private and family publishing houses were the first to publish literary women's works, including the writings of Wang Qiong, Jin Ruolan, Wang Duan, and Yun Zhu. Seeing the commercial value of

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[9] Susan Mann has recently published a book, *The Talented Women of the Zhang Family* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California, 2007), exclusively on the Zhang family. Ellen Widmer also did detailed research on women writers' connections in her *The Beauty and the Book.* Bao Zhenpei also briefly reviewed the familial tradition of female writers in her *Qingdai nü zuojia tanci xioshuo lungao* (57-58).

Also see Chinese research on these family traditions: Wang Airong 王爱荣, Duan Xiaohua 段晓华, "Lun Zhangshi siying ji ci ji yu Changzhou cipai de guanxi 论张氏四英词及与常州词派的关系," *Nanchang daxue xuebao* 南昌大学学报(Renwen shehui kexue ban 人文社会科学版)40, no.3 (May, 2009): 117-21; Zu Xiaomin 祖晓敏, *Qingdai Tongcheng nüxing wenxue chuangzuo de wenhua neihan* 清代桐城女性文学创作的文化内涵, Anhui daxue shuoshi xuewei lunwen 安徽大学硕士学位论文(May. 2006); Nie Zuyu 聂祖玉, *Shen Yixiu de decaise yu Ye Shaoyuan de nüxing sanbuxiu—WanMing xinxing cainü ji cainüguan ge'an yanjiu* 沈宜修的德才色与叶绍袁的女性三不朽——晚明新型才女及才女观个案研究, Shoudu shifan daxue shuoshi xuewei lunwen 首都师范大学硕士学位论文(May, 2007); Zhang Qinghe 张清河, *WanMing Wujiang Yeshi nüxing wenxue yanjiu* 晚明吴江叶氏女性文学研究, Wuhan daxue shuoshi xuewei lunwen 武汉大学硕士学位论文(May, 2005); Cai Jingping 蔡静平, *MingQing zhiji Fenhu Yeshi wenxue shijia yanjiu* 明清之际汾湖叶氏文学世家研究. Fudan daxue boshi xuewei lunwen 复旦大学博士学位论文(April, 2003); Chen Shuiyun 陈水云, Wang Zhuo 王茁, "Wenxue nüxing cong guinea dao guiwai—yi Shanyin Qishi jiazu nüxing wenxue qunti weili 文学女性从闺内到闺外——以山阴祁氏家族女性文学群体为例," *Hunan wenli xueyuan xuebao* 湖南文理学院学报(shehui kexue ban 社会科学版) 33, no.4 (July, 2008): 1-6; Hao Lixia 郝丽霞, *Wujiang Shenshi wenxue shijia yanjiu* 吴江沈氏文学世家研究, Huadong shifan daxue boshi xuewei lunwen 华东师范大学博士学位论文(April, 2004); Shi Min 石旻, "Luanli zhong de yunü—Mingmo cainü Shang Jinglan jiqi hunyin yu jiating 乱离中的玉女——明末才女商景兰及其婚姻与家庭," *Zhongguo dianji yu wenhua* 中国典籍与文化, no.38: 118-124; Chen Shulu 陈书录, "'De, cai, se' zhuti yishi de fusu yu nüxing qunti wenxue de xingsheng—Mingdai Wujiang Yeshi jiazu nüxing wenxue yanjiu'德、才、色'主体意识的复苏与女性群体文学的兴盛——明代吴江叶氏家族女性文学研究," *Nanjing shifan daxue xuebao* 南京师范大学学报(shehui kexue ban 社会科学版), no.5 (Sept., 2001): 132-37.

women's writings, commercial publishers soon joined the market. The Jiangnan region had been a cultural center and therefore a publishing center which contained major private and commercial publishers, and Shanghai gradually became the heart of the commercial publishing market. These private and commercial publishers published various genres of women's writings, including poetry, *xiaoshuo* fiction, *tanci*.[10] It was in this context that the Shanghai shuju published the complete version of *Feng shuangfei* in 1899.

This rich literary context inspired and informed the writings of many women who wrote poetry, *tanci* and critical works. Moreover, from the ideology in their works, it is safe to assume that the talented and well-educated women who wrote *tanci* were trained within the so-called *nüjiao* (女教, the curriculum for the education of women) tradition. In addition to some basic classics, such as the *Lunyu* (论语, Analects) and the *Xiao jing* (孝经, Classic of Filial Piety), other common texts include the *Nü sishu* (女四书, Four Books for Women), composed of Ban Zhao's 班昭 (45-125) *Nü jie* (女诫, Admonitions for Women), Song Ruoshen's 宋若莘 (??-820) *Nü lunyun* (女论语, Analects for Women), Empress Xu's 徐皇后 (1362－1407) *Neixun* (内训, Domestic Lessons), and Lady Liu's 刘氏 (late Ming, ??-??) *Nüfan jielu* (女范捷录, Sketch of a Model for Women). The standard curriculum for women would likely also contain the famous Yan Zhitui's 颜之推 (531–591) *Yanshi jiaxun* (颜氏家训, The Family Instructions of Master Yan), Lady Zheng's 郑氏 (Tang, ??-??)

[10] For more details, see Widmer, *The Beauty and the Book*, 161-73.

Nü xiaojing (女孝经, Classic of Filial Piety for Women), Empress Zhangsun's 长孙皇后 (601－636) *Nüze* (女则, Examples for Women), etc. As suggested by the two of these texts that date from the Ming, the curriculum for women was still evolving during the Qing. Qing additions include Lan Dingyuan's 蓝鼎元 (1680-1733) *Nüxue* (女学, Women's Scholarship) and Chen Hongmou's 陈宏谋 (1696-1771) *Jiaonü yigui* (教女遗规, Endurius Principles for Teaching Daughters). The continuing composition of instructional manuals for women during the Qing was dedicated to women's education. This indicates that teaching daughters orthodox values was an important source of social and cultural capital for scholars and their families during the Qing.

In addition, women who wrote *tanci* would likely have been familiar with the masterpieces and values of the dominant male-authored literary traditions of poetry, drama and fiction. Ellen Widmer's recently published book, *The Beauty and the Book: Women and Fiction in Nineteenth-Century China*, has convincingly shown scholars that after the mid-eighteenth century literary women were all acquainted with *Honglou meng* and earlier *tanci* works and many were inspired to write poems or sequels in response to them. It is presumable that women writers having read *Honglou meng* and perhaps other *xiaoshuo* novels were influenced by the major thematic and aesthetic concepts in these works of fiction. The important intellectual and cultural trends in fiction include: the cult of *qing* 情, a notion that includes, but is not limited to passions, emotions, sentiments, and feelings, and also contains the idea of authenticity, aesthetics and so on; an interest in thinking about new roles for women,

in marriage, society and the world of letters; connoissseurship (as opposed to academic success in the examination system) as a basis for social prestige.[11] These themes appeared in male-dominated literature so frequently that it is assumable that literary women's tastes were shaped by this larger context.

Feng shuangfei: The Author and the Text

Feng shuangfei is a *tanci* fiction by the female writer Cheng Huiying from Changzhou (常州). Although we know very little about the author and the text because female writers and their writings were outside the mainstream literature and have received little scholarly attention, everyone who mentions this *tanci*, including the preface writers and Cheng's contemporaries, claims Cheng Huiying's authorship. Despite the paucity of information about Cheng, we can still try to perceive a general picture of the author's life and the background of the *tanci* from some scattered records and Cheng's own works.

First of all, her birth place, Changzhou, actually gives us some clues about her likely literary training. Cheng was heir to the golden age of Changzhou's intellectual and literary importance during the Qianglong and Jiaqing reign periods (1736-1820).

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[11] Analyzing *Mudan ting*, *Honglou meng* and Xiaoqing, Judith Zetlin, Li Wai-yee, Maram Epstein and Ellen Widmer all argue that *qing* (情, emotions), rather than *li* (礼, rituals), was appreciated and pursued by literati and there appeared the cult of *qing* during the Ming and the Qing. See Li Wai-yee, *Enchantment and Disenchantment: Love and Illusion in Chinese Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses: Orthodoxy, Authenticity and Engendered Meanings in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001); Judith Zeitlin, "Shared Dreams: the Story of the Three Wives Commentary on the Peony Pavilion," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 54 (1994): 127-79; Ellen Widmer, "Xiaoqing's Literary Legacy and the Place of the Woman Writer in Late Imperial China," in *Late Imperial China* 13, no. 1 (1992): 111-55.

We can assume that that must have given Cheng Huiying a luxuriant legacy of literary training and pride. As Susan Mann has demonstrated in her studies, Changzhou produced a dazzlingly large group of male scholars and "was second only to Suzhou as a home to female writers: Changzhou boasted 281 women writers and listed 330 separate works by women in its various gazetteers, catalogues and literary collections."[12] Changzhou is also the area that developed an emphasis on women's family-centered learning, the so-called "*mujiao*" (母教, instruction by the mother) and "*jiaxue*" (家学, family learning) tradition.[13] Although Cheng Huiying lived after Changzhou's greatest days, we can still assume that this rich history and culture of women's literary learning provided an encouraging environment for her as a talented woman to become part of the historical and cultural tradition. Her works demonstrate her confidence as a female writer, as well as her literary tastes, skills and ambitions to differentiate herself from others and pass down her words.

Some of Cheng Huiying's contemporary scholars did realize the literary value of her works. From the preface dated 1899, it can be deduced that Cheng finished this book during the Guangxu reign (1875-1908). Xu Ke's 徐珂 (1869-1928) *Qingbai leichao* (清稗类钞) records briefly her life and works. Since *Feng shuangfei* was first printed in 1898, Xu Ke can be considered a contemporary of Cheng Huiyin, and his book can be taken as a reliable source on Cheng and her works. "She wrote *Feng*

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[12] Mann, *The Talented Women of the Zhang Family*, 45.
Also see the research works mentioned in footnote No.9.

[13] Mann, *The Talented Women of the Zhang Family*, 47.

shuangfei tanci. Her talent was so overflowing that paper became expensive at the time" (曾作《凤双飞》弹词，才气横溢，纸贵一时。).[14] Although claims of the scarceness and high price of the paper were a standard exaggerated expression, Xu's comment still successfully conveys the idea of how popular the *tanci* was. Deng Zhicheng 邓之诚 (1887-1960), a younger contemporary of Cheng, also ranked *Feng shuangfei* highly for its literary merit in his *Gudong suoji* (骨董琐记, first edition published in 1926), "Its structure and wording are much better than *Tian yu hua* and *Zaisheng yuan"* (结构遣词远在天雨花、再生缘之上).[15] In comparing *Feng shuangfei* to the most famous and valued *tanci*, Deng's comments point to the literary quality of this work, a feature which has been overlooked for more than a century.

In the tradition of introducing authors and their works, scholars also talked about Cheng Huiying's life. One of the preface writers, Huanzhishi zhuren 浣芝室主人 (Master of the Ganoderma-Washing Study), writes about her, "The lady is from a famous family and loves writing" (女士系出名门，性耽翰墨).[16] This short line established a typical image of a talented woman during the Qing. Xu Ke's records are more detailed, "Cheng Huiying, whose style is Chenchou, from Yanghu, wrote *Beichuang yingao* (Draft Chantings From the North Window). Her family was poor and she worked as a teacher in a private school for girls" (阳湖程蕙英茝俦，着有《北

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[14] Xu Ke 徐珂, *Qingbai leichao* 清稗类钞 (Taibei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuju, 1966), vol.8, 160-61.

[15] Deng Zhicheng 邓之诚, *Gudong suoji* 骨董琐记 in *Minguo congshu* 民国丛书 diwu bian 第五编 84 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1996), vol. 5, 15.

[16] Cheng Huiying 程蕙英, *Xinbian Feng shuangfei* 新编风双飞 (Beijing: Renming wenxue chubanshe, 1996), preface.

窗吟稿》。家贫，为女塾师。).[17] Xu Ke revealed that Cheng was first a female poet, as most talented women were, and a teacher of the inner chambers. This reveals her multiple roles as a female intellectual and leads us to expect that she had more life experiences than standard *guixiu* writers. As suggested by Dorothy Ko, Grace Fong and Susan Mann in their respective works on the lives of some female poets and teachers of the inner chambers, Cheng Huiying probably also had opportunities to travel, to struggle for a living and to deal with different kinds of relationships outside the women's quarters -- to express her own agency in figuring out how to survive on her own.[18] These experiences presumably gave her inspiration for her writings.

These writers also paint a concise picture of the person of Cheng Huiying and of her style of writing. Another preface writer, Yongshang yedaoren 甬上野道人 (Wild Daoist Priest from Ningbo) comments on Cheng's literary training and talents, "When young, the lady had extraordinary ambitions. She is also good at writing. She has long read the books by Ban Gu and Fan Ye, and her writings have become more skillful" (女士妙年有奇志，且善翰墨，长读班范书，而文益工).[19] Not only does this comment create an image of a talented woman, but also of an unusual female scholar by referring to her "extraordinary ambitions." Instead of reading the typical

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[17] Xu Ke 徐珂, *Qingbai leichao* 清稗类钞 (Taibei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuju, 1966), vol.8, 160-61.

[18] See Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); Grace S. Fong, *Herself an Author: Gender, Agency, and Writing in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008); Mann, *The Talented Women of the Zhang Family*.

[19] Cheng Huiying, *Feng shuangfei*, (Yiyixuan edition, 1898), preserved in the National Library of China 中国国家图书馆.

Ban Zhao and Fan Ye are two of the most famous historians who wrote the *Book of Han* 汉书 (Hanshu) and the *History and the Later Han* 后汉书 (Houhan shu) respectively.

scholar-beauty romances that we assume women liked to read, the preface emphasizes that Cheng Huiying liked to read historical works. The preface further stresses Cheng's interest in historical works, "Every time when the moon rose in her boudoir, [Cheng] lit a candle and read history books. When she read that deceptive ministers bewitched emperors and trapped the loyal and the good, she could not help stopping reading and sighing" (每深闺月上，一灯荧然，展诵史鉴，见有奸回惑上、屈害忠良处，不禁废书长叹。).[20] From the commentator's descriptions, Cheng's "extraordinary ambitions" and her interest in history and justice make a perfect link to her interests in the protagonists' political achievements in her *tanci*. Xu Ke, who had apparently read Cheng's poetry collection, comments on Cheng's poetry, "The poems she writes are purely the words from one who has seen through the world (*yueshi zhiyan*). It is also not what a common *guixiu* is capable of writing" (所为诗，纯乎阅世之言，亦非寻常闺秀所能。).[21] The *yueshi zhiyan* in Cheng's poetry is possibly related to her personal experiences and might also remind readers of the acute problems she raises in her *tanci*, such as male homoeroticism and women's poverty.

In addition to these succinct records, Cheng Huiying's works also tell us something about her readings and personal traits. Her poetry collection, *Beichuang*

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[20] Ibid.

The reference to Lian Po 廉颇 and Lin Xiangru 蔺相如 in *Feng shuangfei* (2194) also suggests that she reads history books like *Shiji* 史记(The Records of the Grand Historian).

[21] Xu Ke, *Qingbai leichao*, 161.

Jiang Ruizao 蒋瑞藻(1891-1929) also has the same comment on Cheng Huiying in his *Xiaoshuo kaozheng* 小说考证(Taipei: Wannianqing shudian, 1972), 182. As he references, his quote should be from *Queming biji* 缺名笔记 (This book is not available in any major library in China, so I believe it is not extant).

yingao, is likely no longer extant. However, one poem is preserved in these records about her. Given that poetry is typically read as more self-referential in comparison to *tanci* and *xiaoshuo*, it seems reasonable to read this poem as related to her writing of *Feng shuangfei*:

自题凤双飞后寄杨香畹	Personal Inscription at the back of *Feng shuangfei*, to Yang Xiangwan
半生心迹向谁论？	Who can I talk to about the traces of my heart in my life?
愿借霜毫说与君。	I would like to tell you with my brush.
未必笑啼皆中节，	Laughter and crying are not necessarily all appropriate,
敢言怒骂亦成文。	[But] The courage to speak and criticize in anger can also become literature.
惊天事业三秋梦，	Heaven-surprising achievements are a dream of three years.
动地悲欢一片云。	Earth-shaking sorrow and happiness are wisps of cloud.
开卷但供知己玩，	The opened volume is only for friends who understand me to read.
任教俗辈耳无闻。	Let alone the mundane people who have never heard of it.[22]

Similar to *Zaisheng yuan*, Cheng Huiying stresses in her poem that her work is for *zhiyin/zhiji* (知音/知己, friends who understand her).[23] This seems to be a common point that female *tanci* writers mention in their works. However, Cheng Huiying demonstrates an unusual pride in her work. Claiming the trope of madness from Chinese literary history, she does not care whether *subei* (俗辈, mundane people) like her work or even hear of it.[24] Her "madness" echoes that of the great Song scholar writer, Su Shi 苏轼, who is famous for his "merry laughter and angry criticism can

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[22] This quoted poem can be found in all the records mentioned above, including *Qingbai leichao*, *Xiaoshuo kaozheng*, and *Gudong suoji*. We can see how these compilers of records of fiction consider this an important poem that reveals Cheng Huiying's talent, personality, and writing style.

[23] *Zhiyin* and *zhiji* actually mean the same thing in this case. While *zhiji* is used here, Chen Duansheng seems to prefer the word *zhiyin*. See Chen Duansheng 陈端生 and Liang Desheng 梁德绳, *Zaisheng yuan* 再生缘, ed. Zhao Jingshen 赵景深 (Henan: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1982), 1, 976, etc.

[24] The madman from Chu is a very famous literary image in Chinese literary history and a frequent point of reference in literate writings. Also see footnote 41.

both be writings (嬉笑怒骂，皆成文章)."[25] Unlike most female *tanci* writers who eagerly try to claim a position of their propriety to legitimate their writings, Cheng Huiying boldly declares that her writings "are not necessarily all appropriate." Apparently she also seems very proud of her capability of turning her angry criticism into literature. Moreover, though clichéd and as unreal as a dream or cloud, the story she is interested in telling tells of "heaven-surprising achievements" and "earth-shaking sorrow and happiness," momentous passions that are not expected to be the topic of a female writer, who, instead is supposed to focus on the trivia of daily life. In this poem, Cheng Huiying establishes herself as a different female writer, one who desires to write according to the standards of mainstream male literature.

In addition to her training in poetry, which is not only revealed in her poetry collection but also in the opening and ending poems in some chapters in *Feng shuangfei*, Cheng Huiying also displays her familiarity with popular literature in her *tanci*.[26] First, she is very familiar with the writing conventions of drama. Some of the characters, especially negative ones such as Zhang Cai 张彩 and Zhang Qihu 张起鹄, interrupt the narrative flow to introduce themselves in a monologue. They give their names, family backgrounds, jobs, personal traits, bad habits and even evil conducts,

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[25] The phrase is from Huang Tingjian 黄庭坚, "Dongpo xiansheng zhen zan 东坡先生真赞," in *Huang Tingjian quanji* 黄庭坚全集, ed. Liu Lin 刘琳, Li Yongxian 李勇先, Wang Ronggui 王蓉贵 (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 2001), 557-558.

Lu Xun, one of the greatest writers later, is also famous for 嬉笑怒骂，皆成文章. As we all know, Lu Xun is also very famous for his portrayal of the image of a "madman" in his literary debut, "*Kuangren riji* 狂人日记(The Diary of a Madman)." And later scholars also comment on his works as "merry laughter and angry criticism can both be writings 嬉笑怒骂，皆成文章."

[26] For examples of opening and ending poems, see Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 115, 165, 258, 351, 395, 487, 757, 1277, 1382, 1481, 1532, 1719, 1856, 2339, 2436, etc.

etc.[27] Moreover, the *tanci* contains direct references to *Xixiang ji* (西厢记, Romance of the West Chamber) and *Mudan ting* (牡丹亭, Peony Pavilion).[28] Second, Cheng Huiying seems to have been familiar with the convention of *xiaoshuo* fiction. Characters and plots drawn from *Sanguo yanyi* are mentioned frequently in the *tanci*.[29] Furthermore, the narrator mentions the legendary characters Longgong san taizi 龙宫三太子 (the third princess from the Dragon Palace) and Erlang shen 二郎神, so presumably the author knows *Xiyou ji* (西游记, Journey to the West) and possibly *Fengshen yanyi* (封神演义, The Investiture of the Gods). Although these mythical characters are also common in traditional oral storytelling and drama, it is very likely that Cheng learned of these characters from novels, considering her familiarity with the writing techniques, aesthetics and common motifs in *xiaoshuo* novels.[30] Last but not least, from the fact that Cheng Huiying used the form of *tanci* to write fiction, we can assume that she knew the genre and the works very well.

Little is known about the production of the text. The earliest edition was published in 1898 by Yiyi xuan (怡怡轩) and contains 42 chapters. A second edition was published in 1899, the very next year, by Shanghai shuju (上海书局) and it contains 52 chapters. The commentator of the Yiyi xuan edition was aware of the

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[27] For examples, see Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 91, 167, 247, 488, 818, 954, 1956, etc.

[28] Reference to *Xixiang ji*, Cui Yingying and Hongniang, see Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 247, 1120; reference to Du Liniang, see Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2318.

[29] It is hard to tell whether she is familiar with *Sanguo* and other fiction mentioned from the books or from the plays. Considering that she is a literary woman, there is a good chance that she had read the books.

For reference to *Sanguo* characters and plots, see Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 664, 999, 1505, 1640, 1652, 1784, 1945, 2146, 2194, 2319, etc.

[30] Chapter III to VI of my dissertation are devoted to Cheng's adoption and recreation of writing techniques, aesthetics and common motifs in *xiaoshuo* fiction.

52-chapter edition and wrote in the preface, "Some recent bookshop edition extended it to 52 chapters. This is a crude version augmented by some busybody" (近时坊刻或增至五十二回，此亦好事者之截长补短敷衍成篇。).[31] However, considering that these two versions were published in such quick succession, we cannot help pondering the motivation for such a claim. It is likely that Yiyi xuan got an incomplete manuscript of *Feng shuangfei* through some means, such as stealing it from the other publisher, and rushed it to market in order to make fast money although they were fully aware that their version was incomplete. Since the Yiyi xuan edition came out first, the commentator should not have known about the future 52-chapter edition unless he was intentionally trying to defend his version in advance. This assumption is made plausible because we know that the commercial publication market was already mature and competitive in the 1890s. My study of *Feng shuangfei* is based on the complete 52-chapter edition, edited and republished by Zhongzhou guji chubanshe (中州古籍出版社) in 1988.[32]

The *tanci Feng shuangfei* is about the political achievements and romantic lives of the talented and loyal Guo Lingyun 郭凌云 and Zhang Yishao 张逸少, who have the nicknames of "two male phoenixes flying together (双凤齐飞)." The *tanci* is set during the Ming dynasty. As is common in many *tanci* authored by women, the two heroes are the reincarnations of two immortals, who are sent down to earth to

[31] Cheng Huiying, *Feng shuangfei* (Yiyixuan edition, 1898), preserved in 中国国家图书馆 the National Library of China.

[32] A comparison of the two editions will not be possible until I can get access to the manuscript editions in the National Library of China.

reestablish morality among humans. The fathers of Guo and Zhang are friends, and they therefore grow up together and become best friends. Since Lingyun is born with two pupils in each eye, an auspicious sign usually said to be only found in princes and sages, the Ming emperor eagerly adopts him as a son. After the death of Lingyun's parents and the completion of his mourning period, the emperor summons him to the capital to be the crown prince's study companion. Lingyun, as a loyal minister, repeatedly admonishes the prince for his addiction to sex, especially his attraction to beautiful boys. The evil eunuch, Liu Jin 刘瑾, makes the prince believe that Lingyun's motivation behind his critique is to take the beautiful boy Bai Ruyu 白如玉 for himself. The prince turns against Lingyun, and when he becomes emperor he sends Lingyun away from the capital to Guizhou 贵州 as a general.

In the meantime, Yishao, after studying with the *kungfu* master He Shiwei 何世威, earns the title of *wu zhuangyuan* (武状元, the number one in the national examination of martial arts), comes to the capital and becomes a good friend of the heir apparent. He too believes, mistakenly, that Lingyun is obsessed with Ruyu and male same-sex practices, and the two friends drift apart. In reality, it is Yishao's father, Zhang Jing 张景, who indulges in sex with Ruyu. Zhang Jing is so indulgent of Ruyu that Ruyu's "practical joke" causes him to be demoted to Yunnan 云南. In Yunnan, Zhang Jing encounters a rebellion of the Tufan 吐番 and is captured. His friend General Mu Lei 沐雷 and son Yishao lead an army from the capital to pacify the rebellion and rescue Jing. However, their troops meet a monk who uses black magic,

and Yishao and the Chinese army are badly defeated and seriously hurt. They have to call for help from Lingyun, who is a master of heavenly magic. In this way, the two friends reunite, rescue Zhang Jing and together win the war.

Back at Beijing, the emperor awards both Lingyun and Yishao for their glorious achievements. However, they discover the huge changes at the capital that occurred in their absence. The evil eunuch Liu Jin rules the court and the emperor follows his leadership. At home, Zhang Feixiang 张飞香, Yishao's elder sister and Lingyun's fiancée, is lost when she and her adopted sister He Danyan 何淡烟 try to escape from the malevolent scholar and minister Zhang Cai. Failing to get rid of either the evil eunuchs or Zhang Cai, Guo Lingyun is again sent out of the capital to Shandong 山东. On his way, while he is searching for Feixiang, Lingyun meets and helps a poor but talented girl, Zhen Daya 真大雅, who later is officially titled "*nü boshi* (女博士, female scholar/erudite)" and marries Lingyun as one of his concubines. In the capital, Yishao marries General Mu's daughter, Qionghua 琼花, and falls in love with Zhen Xiaoya 真小雅, Daya's younger sister. Meanwhile, Bao Xiang'er 鲍香儿, Liu Jin's adopted daughter, falls in love with Yishao. Knowing how dissolute Yishao is, Qionghua, loving Xiaoya, arranges for Xiaoya to become Yishao's concubine and rejects Xiang'er's entry into the household. Yishao, who is attracted to Xiang'er, hides her in General Mu's garden and secretly marries her.

Five years later, Lingyun's subordinates finally find Feixiang and Danyan on the island kingdom, Three Immortal Island (三仙岛). Feixiang and Danyan,

cross-dressing as men, have been living as, respectively, the son-in-law and the adopted son of the king, Murong Tao 慕容韬. In order not to hurt the feelings of Murong Zhu 慕容珠, her "wife," Feixiang asks Tao to become a vassal state of the Ming. In response to Lingyun's request, the emperor sends an envoy to establish a relationship between the two kingdoms. However, Liu Jin secretly bribes the envoy and destroys any hope of a diplomatic relationship by having the island king murdered. After the death of her father, Zhu declares war against the Ming empire. Zhu allies with the queen of Double Peak Island (双峰岛), who happens to be a dragon spirit. The villain Zhang Qihu, the husband of the dragon spirit, another student of He Shiwei and sworn enemy of Zhang Jing and Yishao, believes that this war against the Ming is his best chance to achieve his military and political ambitions. Although Murong Zhu even surrenders to Lingyun because of her feelings for Feixiang, Lingyun has to defeat Qihu and the dragon spirit to defend the Ming empire.

When Lingyun returns to the capital to report his victory, Liu Jin frames Lingyun as a usurper. The story reaches its climax when Yishao, who still enjoys the emperor's favor, stabs his own heart to prove Lingyun's innocence. With He Shiwei's help, Yishao finally uncovers evidence of Liu Jin's many plots and crimes. The emperor has Lingyun called back to the court and has Liu Jin executed. Meanwhile, Danyan, Shiwei's daughter, and Murong Zhu chase down the remaining confederates led by Jin's adopted son, winning for themselves the military title of "*nü guanjun* (女冠军, female champions)."

The story ends with domestic harmony in both the Guo and Zhang households. After discovering that she gets along with Lingyun, Murong Zhu agrees to marry Lingyun as his concubine in order to stay together with Feixiang. Although Qionghua is furious about Yishao's secret marriage to Bao Xiang'er, her father resolves the problem. Lingyun ends up with four wives and Yishao ends up with three wives and plenty of maids. The families live side by side, their men and womenfolk maintain close relationships, and both families produce many sons and daughters. At the end, the two immortals ascend back to the heavens.

Multiple Layers of Voices: Constructing the Gendered Subject

Female writers during late imperial China were self-conscious writers because, first and foremost, they constructed the image of a female self, who stands apart from the male writers in a male tradition of literature, by using multiple layers of voices. As Maureen Robertson argues, "spoken for" by men for so many centuries, female poets during the Ming and Qing periods established their own female literary subjects, who were eager to express themselves and pass down their words, through rewriting some image codes, marking new topical territory, etc.[33] Female *tanci* writers made the same effort. As Hu Siao-chen has demonstrated, female *tanci* writers contrived a tradition of incorporating the authors' own lives and writing experiences into the text

[33] See Maureen Robertson, "Changing the Subject: Gender and Self-inscription in Authors' Prefaces and 'Shi' Poetry," in *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*, ed. Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 171-217; and "Voicing the Feminine: Constructions of the Gendered Subject in Lyric Poetry by Women of Medieval and Late Imperial China." in *Late Imperial China* 13, no.1 (1992): pp. 63-110.

of the *tanci* in order to build an image of female writers who enjoyed reading and writing and who worked very hard although they were frequently disturbed by women's obligatory duties.[34]

Cheng Huiying is no exception to this tradition of constructing a female subject. In the male-dominated literary world, Cheng not only inherited the male mainstream fiction conventions of storytelling, but also continued the self-referential custom of female *tanci* writers. By adopting both traditions, Cheng managed to create multiple layers of voices in *Feng shuangfei*. Applying Maureen Robertson's theories and model of three subjects, the existential (or historical) subject, the authorial (or writing) subject, and the textual (or speaking) subject, I will argue that the multiple layers of voices in the *tanci* are all dedicated to constructing the female subjectivity of the author or the authorial subject that the existential subject, to whom the readers can never have access in his/her texts, chose to present.[35] Because of the "traditional, shared belief in 'self'-expression through texts in which the 'I' who speaks is in some sense autobiographical or non-fictional," the constructed image of a literary, hardworking and proud female author may also serve as circumstantial evidence to suggest the female authorship of the *tanci*.[36]

The very first layer to be constructed is the fictional author's voice, or the authorial/writing subject's voice. This gendered voice in *Feng shuangfei* is in many

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[34] Hu, *Cainü cheye weimian*.

[35] Robertson, "Changing the Subject: Gender and Self-inscription in Authors' Prefaces and 'Shi' Poetry," 177-79.

[36] Ibid, 177. This belief also explains the modern editors' interpretation of Zhen Daya as a self-referential character of Cheng Huiying herself in the postscript of the book. See Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2499-2500.

ways consistent with other *tanci* writers or writing subjects. Like other *tanci* writers, the fictional author indicates that the story she writes is fictive, "The language mostly has no base, talking nonsense like a mirage" (文词大抵无凭据，海市蜃楼尽妄谈。).[37] But all the fictional authors in female-authored *tanci*, including the one in *Feng shuangfei*, also have a strong motivation to pass down their writings, an act which is considered one of three routes to immortality.[38] The fictional author of *Feng shuangfei* writes, "I am suffering by myself during ten years of writing. Who can pass it down for tens of thousands of years?" (十载著书自苦，千秋万岁谁传？)[39] As a female writer who values her own work as the equivalent of that by male writers, Cheng Huiying here not only displays her ambition to reach immortality through writing, but also adopts the concept that writing is associated with bitterness which will lead to great works, a concept first expressed by Sima Qian.[40]

Moreover, similar to other female *tanci* writers who ascribe a didactic function to their works, the fictional author claims that this *tanci* is allegorical: "The characters

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[37] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2495.

[38] This ideology is embedded in the thought of both male and female writers of the premodern period. This concept is first expressed in the Confucian classic, *Zuozhuan* 左传 (The Zuo Commentary on Annals of Spring and Autumn) which every literary person had to read as their basic reading. See Zuo Qiuming 左丘明, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan* 春秋左传, in *Wenbai duizhao shisan jing* 文白对照十三经, ed. Li Hanwen 李翰文 (Beijing: Jiuzhou chubanshe, 2001), 485, "The great sages established virtues, people next to them established meritorious deeds, then people next to them established words. These will not be abandoned for a long time, so they are called immortality. 大上有立德，其次有立功，其次有立言，虽久不废，此之谓不朽。"

[39] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 933.

[40] Sima Qian, in his *Taishigong zixu* (Self-Narration of the Gentleman Grand Astrologer) and *Bao Ren Shaoqin shu* (Letter in Response to Ren An), built the famous theory of *fafen zhushu*(发愤著书), which can be interpreted as great writings derived from great frustration.

A detailed discussion of these two texts and the idea of *fafen*, translated as "expressing frustration," can be found in Stephen Durrant, *The Cloudy Mirror: Tension and Conflict in the Writings of Sima Qian* (Albany: State University of New York, 1995), 1-29.

in my mind and the events in my heart are lighthearted fun constructed into allegory" (意中人物心中事，游戏成文聊寓言。).[41] It is very important to note that the author, similar to other *tanci* writers, also mentions that her writing is playful, not serious. This statement conforms to the Confucian standards for women's work, which prioritizes household chores, so that writing can in no way be serious, but something women do in their leisure time. In order to legitimate their writings, the fictional authors in female-authored *tanci* usually declare a didactic function no matter how unorthodox or transgressive their works are or tend to be. This is especially true in the case of *Feng shuangfei*, since it deals with various forms of sexuality and desires, topics which were never considered appropriate for women to talk or writer about in late imperial China.

However, the constructed image of the author in *Feng shuangfei* is also presented very differently from those in other female-authored *tanci*. Instead of establishing an image of an appropriately modest and meek woman, who only writes to entertain and caution her own female community, Cheng Huiying produces an image of her author as a scholar with typical attributes: she is emotionally sad, psychologically mad (*kuang*), and proud of her own literary work. In terms of literary composition, the constructed author, compared to other authors presented in other female *tanci*, identifies herself more with famous great writers in Chinese literary history. Just as she alludes to Sima Qian, the authorial subject also identifies herself

[41] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, p. 2495.

with the classic image of the madman from Chu 楚狂人, which is also referred to by Li Bai.[42] The fictional author presents such an image of herself at the very beginning of the *tanci*, "I am so happy that I shout madly to please myself, not caring if others are laughing at me" (狂呼自遣快如何，莫管旁人笑我。).[43] Like these "mad" great writers, the fictional author is very proud of her own work, "I have revised my manuscript three times, and this has been the best. The dried hair from my writing brush fell out, gradually becoming a mound. This manuscript should encounter an auspicious place to be its bookcase, in order to recognize my twenty years of hardwork" (易稿三番此最优，枯豪落处渐成丘。应逢福地为书箧，慰我辛勤二十秋。).[44] From these two couplets in the final poem which concludes the *tanci*, Cheng Huiying boldly creates an image of a female writer who, no longer modest, is proud of her own work and suggests that her work should be recognized and valued.

These unusual claims for her writing may be related to the brief self-referential sections in the *tanci*. As the fictional author states in the opening poem of the *tanci*, "I have tried to choose extraordinary (*qi*) events to compose a new (*xin*) song of flowers and the moon" (试简古今奇事，编为花月新歌。).[45] The key words of this couplet are *qi* and *xin*, as they express the author's literary ambitions. Although Cheng Huiying

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[42] The madman from Chu refers to the famous recluse of Chu, Jie Yu 接舆, who pretends to be mad in order to avoid service in court. Li Bai identifies himself with the madman from Chu in his poem, "Lushanyao ji Lu shiyu Xuzhou 庐山谣寄卢侍御虚舟" (in Qu Tuiyuan 瞿蜕园, Zhu Jincheng 朱金城 comments, *Li Bai ji jiaozhu* 李白集校注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980), 863), which starts with the famous couplet, "I was originally a madman of Chu, singing the song of phoenixes to laugh at Kong Qiu (我本楚狂人,凤歌笑孔丘)."

[43] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1.

[44] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2495.

[45] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1.

continues the tradition of talking about her own writing experience, she does not spend as much time on it as earlier female *tanci* writers, such as Chen Duansheng and Qiu Xinru, do. The only place where she briefly mentions her own life is in the ending poem of Chapter 20 after she had already spent ten years writing but was still suffering poverty:

> The last flicker of the candle faintly shed light on my disheveled hair. I have completed half of my work, but I am ashamed of its lack of delicacy. Having made everything up, I freely think of pursuing richness and nobleness, in order to ignore my poverty for the moment. You can decorate your bookcase with hawksbill; I don't have coral to make a brush-holder.
> [残灯隐影照飞蓬，半面装成愧未工。乌有漫思求富贵，子虚聊且送愁穷。君能玳瑁装书箧，我乏珊瑚制笔筒。愿假金盘荐华屋，胜他墙上碧纱笼。][46]

The only clue to the author's life from the poem is that she is very poor and wishes to have more money in order to support her writing. After ten years, the fictional author both complains about her poverty and associates her act of writing with Sima Qian's literary legacy. There are only three passages of any length that are in the voice of the author, although there are also scattered short passages of one or two sentences presented by the authorial subject.[47] This rejection of completely following her forerunners is probably accordant to her claim of being new and different.

Although her self-depiction of madness and suffering follows the topoi found in the tradition of male literati, the sorrow, which is usually the origin of madness in male-authored works, is exclusively feminine. At the very beginning of the opening

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[46] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 932

[47] For example, see the end couplets of Chapter 16 and pp. 35, 756, 1673, where the fictional author states that she has to end the chapter because she is too tired to continue.

poem, the fictional author explains her sorrow, "Days always pass by without return, and my youth will not last long in the future. A slim waist and slender wrist are easily worn out, so how can you blame me for frowning sadly?" (白日长去不返，青春来者不多。纤腰长腕易消磨，怪底愁城深锁。).[48] Unlike male writers who are sorrowful usually due to their political failure, the constructed author, like the pretty and sensitive women in *xiaoshuo* fiction and *shi* poetry, is concerned about the evanescence of youth. While male writers, in their sorrow, complain about their frustrations and bad luck in their official career, the authorial subject, in her *chou* or worries, writes to entertain herself, "I want to expel my anxiety and amuse myself, so this new *tanci* [that I write] will perform a story of old and new" (欲破愁城开笑口，新词演出古今文。).[49] Giving a different reason for being sad, the fictional author establishes a literary female subject who is so devoted to writing that she takes it as entertainment and also shows some of the concerns common to the ideal literary women that are constructed by male and female writers.

Like the authorial subject, the textual/speaking subjects, who can be both male and female characters in the *tanci*, also indicate the legacy of the male-dominated literary tradition and Cheng Huiying's endeavor to speak for women. The very first voice above all other textual subjects is the one of the storyteller, which sometimes is indistinct from the one of authorial subject in the text. Earlier female-authored *tanci*, such as *Tianyuhua*, also use this form of storytelling to organize the story and involve

[48] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, p. 1.

[49] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, p. 1.

the audience. It can be presumed that female *tanci* writers adopt the medium of storyteller from mainstream male-authored fiction. It is very common to see an omniscient storyteller in long novels, such as *Sanguo yanyi*, *Shuihu zhuan*, and *Honglou meng*, and in short stories, such as the ones by Feng Menglong, Li Yu and Ling Mengchu. However, the gender of the storyteller is obscure. Although there was a male storyteller tradition on the street and in taverns, there was also the tradition of blind girl *tanci* performers. Since *Feng shuangfei* is written as a *tanci* only for reading, instead of performance, by a woman, we are unclear with which tradition the author most identifies her storyteller.

Frequently used, the voice of a storyteller developed multiple functions in written texts. The storyteller in *Feng shuangfei* fulfills all the functions. First of all, the storyteller propels the storyline, especially serving to make transitions between two characters, events, and chapters. Each chapter starts with a typical imitation of oral lead-in phrases, such as *huashuo* 话说 or *queshuo* 却说 (both mean "talking about"), and ends with suspense in order to keep the audience reading/listening. Once in a while, similar to short stories, there will be an opening poem to a chapter to foretell the content of that chapter.[50]

Secondly, the storyteller guides the readers on how to morally interpret the events by commenting on the plot. This aspect of narrator's voice often appears in Li Yu and Feng Menglong's stories and sometimes creates an intriguing conflict to the

[50] The opening poems of this function can be found in Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 115, 165, 258, 351, 395, 487, 757, 1277, 1382, 1481, 1532, 1719, 1856, 2339, 2436.

values presented by the plot itself, leaving space for the readers to think independently. In *Feng shuangfei*, some comments explicitly use allegorical means to refer to the author's contemporary time. For example, the storyteller comments on the lascivious fashion of male same-sex practices, "淫风大行，就与本朝无二,"[51] and on Lingyun, "This is exactly a minister who would not betray the emperor's order. I'm afraid there is none like him in our contemporary world" (这便是不负君命的大臣，只怕当今之世料也没有。).[52]

Another important function for the storyteller's comments in this *tanci* is to point out the unfair treatment that women were receiving at the time. One of the hot topics among and about female writers was whether *cai*, or talent, was as important as virtue for a woman during the Ming and Qing periods when talented women became a phenomenon. The storyteller extends the idea of *cai* 才 into women's domestic roles and its utility in a family. When Feixiang governs the servants and maids in the inner chambers with generosity, Murong Zhu helps her with discipline. The storyteller comments, "This is exactly so-called the cooperation of power and virtue... Don't say that women only call for virtue, but after all their talent and skills have to be strong too"(正所谓威德并行.....莫若妇女惟求德，到底才能也要强。).[53] Unlike previous literati, men and women, who promoted women's literary talents, Cheng Huiying, using the voice of the storyteller, argues that even if women work only within the

[51] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 4.

[52] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1939.

[53] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2367.

family, they need talent, skill and power, too. This subverts the traditional idea that a woman only needs to be virtuous to be successful as the head of a household and may positively defend Wang Xifeng, the powerful and skillful household manager of *Honglou meng*.

Moreover, the storyteller relates women's talent and beauty to their lives, arguing that neither talents nor beauty should cause an unfortunate destiny for women. The following comments seem to leave the question open to debate by the readers on this issue:

> There is such a saying, "As long as a woman in this world is ugly and stupid, she can entrust herself to be stable for her whole life; if she has some talents and beauty, it is misfortune. Those who have achieved their ambitions are able to destroy their country and family; those who have not achieved their ambition will end up adrift, having no one to rely on. This is an absolute rule." Others say, "That is not true! According to what you have said, were all those ladies, mistresses, queens, imperial consorts, from ancient times to present, ugly and stupid? There were plenty of them with talent and beauty. It all depends on their late established previous lives! Those who had a sound fate naturally enjoy prosperity in this life; those who did not will end up in oblivion." This point of view makes sense too. However, in my perspective, there is a flexible way. [People] should not just stick only to one opinion.
> [有一等讲究说："世间女子只要丑陋痴愚，便是终身安稳的福相；若有些才色，倒是命运不祥。得志者，竟能败国亡家；失时者，便至飘零失所。此乃一定之理。"又有一人说："不然！若依这等讲，难道自古及今，那些夫人、太太、皇后、妃嫔都是痴愚丑陋的？有才有貌者，原也极多，只在前生根本何如耳！根气厚者，自然一世荣华；根气薄者，方至终身埋没。"这话却也是个道理。然而据在下想来，还有一个活变之法，彼此都不可执一而言。][54]

This comment refers specifically to Feixiang since she, as a beautiful and talented girl, first experiences misfortune but then ends up with a happy marriage. But it also refers more generally to the relationship between women's destiny and their talent and

[54] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 762.

beauty. Although the storyteller is heavily influenced by the Buddhist theory of reincarnation, s/he also strives to argue against the common sayings of "Women without talent are virtuous" (女子无才便是德) and "Beauty brings disastrous water" (红颜祸水). The storyteller, as the speaking subject, suggests that women's beauty and talent have nothing to do with their fate, nor is it necessarily determined by their previous life. The narrator holds up Feixiang's example to disprove these two theories. It is interesting that the storyteller only indirectly suggests "a flexible way" to make sense of the difference in viewpoint between these two sayings, since it forces readers to think about the problem by themselves. As a talented literary woman, Cheng Huiying not only rejects common beliefs, but encourages her assumed female readers to consider the validity of these common but unfair and wrong judgments on women, by utilizing the speaking subject, the storyteller, to raise the issue.

Marriage is another topic that all people care about. Although both the male protagonists live in a polygamous arrangement, the narrator still expresses her preference for monogamy. Describing the marriage between Chu Lingxiao and He Danyan, the storyteller cannot help eulogizing it as an ideal one:

> This is so called a relationship between one husband and one wife. When young, they can completely enjoy the good days. Women are not jealous by nature, and men are originally not henpecked either. As long as my heart is not distracted, even if Xi Shi and Wang Qiang appeared, they would seem unrelated to me in any way. In this, [the couple] can stay harmonious for long. [Chu Lingxiao] did not take any maid or concubine as partner during his life time, much better than the two busy noblemen.

> [所谓一夫并一妇，少年消尽好春光。闺人虽不真由妒，夫婿原非畏妇强。但是此心无二用，凭他西子共王嫱，看来终觉无关我，以此和谐岁月长。终世未尝收婢妾，胜如多事两侯王。][55]

In this passage, the storyteller tells the readers that it is polygamy that causes the problems, such as jealousy and henpecked husbands, in the Guo and Zhang families and all families in general. If there were only one husband and one wife, such as Lingxiao and Danyan, there would be no cause of jealousy or fear of one's wife. The storyteller also points out that the solution to the problem lies with men. If they could be loyal to their wives and not distracted by other beautiful women, a harmonious family would not be hard to get. In this sense, the storyteller is establishing monogamy as the ideal form of marriage and promoting it to women to achieve family harmony, instead of the modern conception of gender equality.

One last function undertaken by the storyteller is to explain the moral logic of the story. This is a very common feature in Ming-Qing fiction which adopts the rhetorical address of the readers as "Dear readers" (看官) from the storytelling tradition. When something unlikely happens to a character or goes against common logic, the omniscient storyteller will jump in to explain. For example, when it does not make sense that an orthodox man like Lingyun may have feelings for Ruyu, the storyteller explains that Prince Jin, Lingyun's previous life as an immortal, had made a sympathetic promise to rescue Shui Bailian, Ruyu's previous incarnation, from his mistakes.

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[55] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2260.

Another layer of speaking subject is created through the characters in the *tanci*. It was not uncommon that women were constructed as individual subjects in male-authored *xiaoshuo* fiction. For example, Cao Xueqin successfully portrays all the female characters as individuals who speak, act and write with their own subjects in *Honglou meng*. As is discussed, female writers tend to take a more conservative point of view in their works. Although the main ideology expressed in *Feng shuangfei* conforms to the traditional patriarchal ideology, certain female characters in many places also speak from women's perspectives. The female speaking subject, Feixiang, points out that women are treated like objects by men. When Lingyun suggests that Feixiang should marry Yishao, Feixiang complains, "Do you know that women are so pitiable because [people] send them as gifts and take it for granted [that they will accept the marriage proposal]" (可知妇女真堪怜，相送宜乎是理然。).[56] In another example, a female character comments on the marginal and inferior status of wives. When Qionghua, Yishao's wife, discovers that Yishao has secretly taken Bao Xiang'er as his concubine, she becomes enraged and leaves the household. Her refusal to forgive Yishao or return to the Zhang household appears to be more inappropriate and a larger problem than Yishao's transgression. Qionghua is very aware of her moral disadvantage: "No matter whether relative or friend, everyone helps him as if they were a single person. They are just taking advantage of a woman who is on her own"

[56] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2036.

(无论亲朋共友朋，个个帮他如一体，单欺妇女是伶仃。).[57] The unfair double standard for men and women is so obvious that even Yishao's mother "thinks, 'All men are the same. Everyone is biased and helps Yishao, and after all the one who suffers is the woman'" (暗想男儿一样心。个个欺偏帮逸少，吃亏到底是裙钗。).[58]

It is not odd that the female characters should stand up for themselves, but it is striking that even the main proponent for orthodoxy, Lingyun, speaks for women.[59] Commenting on Yishao's behavior, Lingyun warns his wives, "But men are mostly dissolute—flowers at home are not as fresh as wild ones. Even though Lady Mu, my sister-in-law, is ferocious and jealous, she cannot restrain her wild husband. You peers, watching this, should understand that it is hard for couples in the world to keep their passions" (但是男儿多放荡，家花不及野花鲜。沐家弟妇绕凶妒，难把狂夫两足监。卿辈旁观宜悟省，世间夫妇有情难。).[60] Reading this passage without a context, readers would assume that the speaker is an old woman who has experienced and seen many unhappy women in unfortunate marriages and is therefore warning the younger generations not to indulge in or expect too much in their marital life. The speaking subject, Lingyun, apparently steps out of his role as an exemplar of Confucian orthodox men and becomes a vehicle to caution women readers of the *tanci*.

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[57] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2400.

[58] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2397.

[59] Although in some male-authored fiction men also valued women, it mostly originated from the cult of *qing*, in which it is believed that women have purer and more authentic passions than men do. *Honglou meng* is one of the best examples, but Baoyu values women mostly on an aesthetic level, never fighting for their practical needs. This level is never as realistic as the problems raised in female-authored *tanci*.

[60] Cheng, *Feng huangfei*, 2417.

By employing Lingyun as a speaking subject, the author not only comments on women's disadvantages in marriage, but also on the reasons for their lot being worse than that of men. When Lingyun sees Daya's unfortunate life, he thinks to himself:

> Men's lives are in the world of offices, where there are many opportunities for pleasure and ambition. Even if their marriage is unhappy, it can only be counted as one loss among everything else, so it is still tolerable. Women stay only in the inner chambers. If they meet a terrible husband, they will suffer. Their extraordinary talents will be useless, and they have to end up dying full of regrets. Moreover, her marriage is not her own will. If she is forced to get married, she is all the more pitiful. How can she right this injustice as deep as the sea? Don't say that only women help women. Thinking of this, even I, as a man, am furious.
> [男儿身在官场，乐事多端志四方，纵使婚姻不遂意，只算是千中一失尚能当；女人只在闺房内，一遇庸夫便受殃，盖世奇才无用处，竟只好终身饮恨至于亡。况乎许配非情愿，若被他逼勒成婚更可伤。海底沉冤何日雪？莫说到女人只把女人帮。我为男子思想到，也要冲冠怒满腔。][61]

Using a male character, the author thoroughly describes the "injustice" that women are experiencing and directly points out that the origin lies in the unfair social roles and status enforced on women. As Lingyun suggests, the ultimate reason for women's tragedy is the social norm that women belong to the inner chambers and have no right to decide their own marriages. This double restriction results in misfortune for women, especially when they are talented. At least men have options for happiness other than marriage. Having the most orthodox man tell this truth and feel sympathy for and anger on behalf of women, the author possibly suggests that women's problems should be seriously considered when evaluating mainstream practices and that women's social roles need to be changed.

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[61] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1114.

Issues of Allegory:

Self-Referential Characters and Metaphorical Social and Political Criticism

There are two major traditions of interpreting Chinese literature: the tradition of autobiography and the tradition of political allegory. Therefore, when a scholar has a literary text in his/her hand, he/she has to ask two questions: First, is this text autobiographical and are there any self-referential characters in this text? Second, does this text allude to any political issues in the author's time? The same questions must also be asked of *Feng shuangfei*. Although there is no strong internal evidence for a positive answer to either of the questions, both are worth exploring.

Since the association between writing and self expression in the Chinese literary tradition is strong, it is a fair assumption that long works of fiction may reflect something about the authors, even if the text is in no direct way autobiographical. In the Chinese literary tradition, scholars can assume poetry is an expression of the real feelings of the poet. Since the literati had been trying to elevate *xiaoshuo* fiction as serious literature during the Ming and Qing, it became normative to read lengthy works of fiction as autobiographical or self-referential. Thus *Honglou meng* is commonly read as a fictionalized autobiography and some scholars suggest that Shen Fu's *Fusheng liuji* is also read as an autobiographical novel. The scholar novels during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including *Yesou puyan*, *Qilu deng*, *Rulin waishi* and *Jinghua yuan*, are also read as self-referential.

Although not autobiographical, the depiction of female characters in *Feng shuangfei* may reflect some aspects of Cheng Huiying's life and ambitions. Based on our limited knowledge of the author, one of the most possible self-referential characters is Zhen Daya. Daya, like Cheng Huiying, is born into a scholar family and loves reading and writing. However, the Zhen family becomes impoverished, and Daya's father, who sojourns away from home as a scribe for local officials, cannot support the household. The descriptions of Daya and her mother worrying about food are so vivid and realistic that they call to mind Cheng's own background, "Her family was poor and she worked as a teacher in a private school for girls." Daya is also very talented, famous for her poetry, calligraphy and painting. She is a morally proper girl who keeps her virginity until marriage, and in an echo of Ban Zhao, composes a *History of Women* (女史).

Daya is also a dignified girl who keeps her moral integrity. When the Yu family, which is locally rich and powerful, forces Daya to marry Yu Bocai (俞伯才), whose given name is a pun on *bucai* (不才, no talent), Daya fights back with a dagger even though she knows nothing about martial arts. Daya's morality can be considered an ideal that Cheng creates. In appreciation for Lingyun's help, Daya falls in love with him and swears to be his wife and stay chaste for him even though more powerful men, including the emperor and his brother-in-law, wish to marry her. The emperor rewards her with the title of a "female erudite," and gives her a house and farms in appreciation of her extraordinary talents and knowledge, so she is thus able to support

herself without having to get married. The character Chu Lingxiao (楚凌霄) comments, "Although she is a girl, it is exceptional in the world that she can even establish her own family and glorify her ancestors. She really does not waste her talents in this life. What need is there for her to be someone's wife?" (虽然是个女孩儿，竟能自把门楣立，耀祖荣宗世上奇。一世才情真不枉，何消再去作人妻。)[62] Speaking though this male voice, the narrative suggests that marriage is the only way for women to support themselves. If a woman could be financially independent, she would not need to marry or depend on a man. In this sense, the narrator is consciously pointing out a key to gender inequality at the time.

However, we should keep it in mind that Daya is a concubine. We do not know whether Cheng Huiying herself or any of her relatives were concubines. If that was the case, this piece of work can also be considered a rectification of concubines. It is also possible that women, following the expression of modesty expected from them, might have projected themselves into secondary characters, instead of heroines, in *tanci.* This may be the reason why Cheng Huiying created Daya, instead of Feixiang, as a self-referential character.[63] Although neither of these assumptions can be proved right or wrong, it is definitely safe to say that Daya is a self-referential character in the sense that Cheng interweaves some of her own experiences into the *tanci.*

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[62] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1455.

[63] In her play, *Qiaoying*, Wu Zao distances herself from her fictional representation by splitting self-referential elementals into different self-identities and the twist of genders in the play.

In addition to being self-referential, the *tanci* can also be read as a political allegory. It is a common literary trope to criticize current political problems with comparisons of similar events from previous dynasties.[64] *Feng shuangfei* fits this tradition in that the narrative is set during the Ming. While the fictional Ming government is corrupt because it was under the control of eunuchs, depicted as an evil *yin* force, the actual late Qing government was controlled by the Empress Dowager Cixi, who was also depicted as an evil *yin* force. The protagonist Lingyun's persistent call and fight for a political cleansing of corrupt *yin* powers coincides with the contemporary needs of the author's times.

Furthermore, the *tanci* depicts a fictional Ming government under attack by foreign forces, ranging from the Tufan in the southwest to the island kingdoms from the eastern sea. Again, Cheng Huiying's China was also under attack from a variety of foreign and local forces. The Taiping assault on Changzhou and the devastating fight between the Qing army and the rebels during the 1860s must have been part of Cheng's collective historical memory, even though we are unclear of the date of her birth. Despite the total absence of Westerners or foreign technologies in the *tanci*, Cheng is very likely to have heard of the wars in which the Qing had been defeated by the British, the French and the Japanese. In these wars, the Qing government ceded Hong Kong to Britain, the Yunnan border with Vietnam to France, and the Penghu islands, Taiwan and the eastern portion of the bay of Liaodong Peninsula to the

[64] During the spring and autumn, it was already a court tradition to give suggestions to the king on contemporary political situations by means of *Shijing* or its stories, which were much older.

Japanese. Geographically, the Tufan rebellions at the Yunnan border echo the French challenge there, and the naval battles against the rebellions on Hainan Island, literally Qiongzhou and Danzhou in *Feng shuangfei*, parallel the late nineteenth -century battles with the Japanese for control of Taiwan and the Penghu islands.

Due to the historical background of China's military engagements and the time in which *Feng shuangfei* was written, it is noteworthy that among the outstanding features of the heroes in *Feng shuangfei* are their skills in martial arts and military strategies. Yishao studies under the best master of martial arts and becomes the *wu zhuangyuan*, or first in the national examination of marital arts, of the country, and Lingyun is born with martial abilities. They establish their careers by repeatedly defeating border rebellions and as a result are rewarded with the most important governmental ministers. Although they are acquainted with the classics and poetry, they never spend much time developing their literary interests or skills. They, together with other *wu* (martial/military) figures such as Mu Lei and Chu Lingxiao, ensure that the empire is safe, peaceful and morally in order. In contrast, the scholar figures in the *tanci* all show some degree of defect or flaw and never become powerful or reliable sources to imperial support.[65] It is possible that Cheng Huiying, facing national crises during her life time, creates these ideal *wu* figures as her projected solution to her the problems of China at the time.

[65] I will discuss this specific issue in detail in Chapter IV.

The main body of my dissertation contains five chapters. Chapter II, "The Dawning of 'Free Love': Women's Role in Marriages," studies various means by which female characters determine their own marriages. This chapter centers on case studies of the concubines in the Guo and Zhang families. Zhen Daya, who marries Lingyun, builds an individual identity as a chaste, talented and determined "career woman" through her pursuit of a self-determined marriage. Zhen Xiaoya, Yishao's concubine, establishes her subjectivity by following the cult of chastity, mocking the conventions of scholar-beauty romances and rethinking the author's contemporary tradition of romance and marriage. The last case is the author's strikingly sympathetic treatment of an unchaste girl, Bao Xiang'er. Although the multiple layers of voices all agree that Xiang'er is totally inappropriate and immoral according to traditional Confucian values, she, instead of being punished, still ends up incorporated into Yishao's family and is granted a son. These cases allow us to reevaluate Cheng Huiying, a female writer, and her views of women's autonomy in determining their own marriages. They anticipate, either through fantasy or some level of reality, the concept of "free love"(*ziyou lian'ai*) so central to the May Fourth conceptions of modern women.

Chapter III, "Self-Conscious Writing: The Aesthetics of *Feng shuangfei*," lays out the aesthetics of the *Feng shuangfei* from three aspects as a serious work of fiction. I will study the structural techniques borrowed from traditional *xiaoshuo* narratives used in this *tanci* to argue that the author treats the aesthetic value of her work as an

organic whole. Last but not least, I will analyze characterization in the *tanci*. Comparing it to *xiaoshuo* novels, I will argue that the writer intentionally creates relational characters for readers' appreciation on an aesthetic level. This chapter is a "defense" of *tanci*, showing that *Feng shuangfei* deserves to be taken seriously as a literary composition.

Chapter IV, "Disastrous Beauty and Upright Friend: Male Same-Sex Eroticism and Homosociality," focuses on the relationships between the men in *Feng shuangfei*. Depicting "the Incomparable" Bai Ruyu as the embodiment of male same-sex eroticism, the author suggests that the practice of male same-sex eroticism may be the most toxic relationship in its ability to jeopardize orthodox Confucian relationships. By contrast, Guo Lingyun's relationships with men in which he is an upright friend who gives forthright admonitions are highly advocated. Ruyu's fall and Lingyun's achievements symbolize the overall victory of healthy and sound male homosociality over unhealthy and deleterious male same-sex desire.

Chapter V, "Lover-Sister: Female Same-Sex Desire and Agency," deals with the ambiguous female same-sex desire and the female agency in this *tanci* fiction. Studying the common *tanci* themes of cross-dressing and fake marriage as developed in *Feng shuangfei*, I argue that the same-sex relationship between Zhang Feixiang and Murong Zhu exceeds the boundary of female friendship. Consciously or not, the author depicts a lively picture of ambiguous female relationships. With *qing* or

passions highly valued in female same-sex relationships, the text reveals women's desires and agency for staying together forever through their limited sphere of power.

Chapter VI, "Virtuous Women and Shrews: The Negotiation of Desirable Women," looks at two stereotypes of women, virtuous women and shrews. Feixiang is a virtuous girl and generous wife, a perfect match for the orthodox man, Lingyun. But *Feng shuangfei* indicates that it is the unconventional and unrestrained side of Feixiang that makes her an ideal wife. In comparison to Feixiang, Qionghua fulfills most of the standards of the stereotype of shrews in *xiaoshuo* fiction, but the *tanci* suggests that it is exactly her shrewish values that shape her as an ideal match for a dissolute husband like Yishao. Through a close reading, I demonstrate how a female writer conceives of and reassesses the standards of ideal women established by classics and male writers.

Conclusion

This introductory chapter lays out the background of the dissertation, which looks at Cheng Huiying and her *Feng shuangfei* as part of the "talented women" culture and part of the female-authored *tanci* tradition. It also provides the background of the author as an individual, who strived to distinguish herself within a larger background. In her writing, Cheng Huiying established an image of a female writer who is different from her peers, fully aware of her female gender identity but having male ambitions literarily and politically. Meanwhile, the constructed female

author is still conscious of gender inequality. By creating multiple layers of subjects in the text, the constructed female author actually speaks for women from a female perspective. The Introduction ends with an attempt to interpret the text with two methodologies, reading the piece as political allegory or self-referential text, the traditions which have been commonly used to read mainstream male-authored literary works. While not the main concern of my dissertation, this attempt offers an alternative view for reading this *tanci*.

Not only does this chapter introduce the background, but it also grounds the methodologies of my dissertation. The methodologies I use in this dissertation are a combination of gender studies and traditional interpretation of mainstream male-authored *xiaoshuo* fiction. This chapter has established the foundation of using both methodologies because the text is a production influenced by mainstream ideology and aesthetics in *xiaoshuo* fiction and the author's gendered self-awareness. Therefore, the major task in my dissertation is to discover how Cheng Huiying adopts and reinterprets the mainstream ideologies and literary conventions from her perspective as a female writer.

This dissertation is the first extended work of research on a single *tanci* authored by a woman. I hope that my dissertation will pique the interest of readers in this work of fiction by a previously unknown female writer and in the whole understudied genre of female-authored *tanci*. Although most of these works are extremely long, I hope my research may bring this individual example of a

female-authored *tanci*, as well as the entire genre, into the sight of academia in the twenty-first century. I want to demonstrate with my research that although *Zaisheng yuan* is well-known thanks to Chen Yinke's studies and recognition, that work is only one single example of a *tanci* while many other valid but unrecognized pieces of *tanci* exist, which may have even greater meanings to convey.

CHAPTER II

THE DAWN OF "FREE LOVE": THE NEGOTIATION OF WOMEN'S ROLES IN HETEROSEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

Introduction

About fifteen years after *Feng shuangfei* was published, *free love* became a popular concept supported and promoted by mainstream intellectuals, male and female, during the New Culture Movement. The term *free love* broadly referred to such concepts as free courtship, free marriage, free divorce, and free remarriage. It changed the whole ideology of heterosexual relationships and marriages in China. Since then, the ideals of *free love* gradually replaced the traditional norms of arranged marriage and have become the standard mechanism for pursuing sexual or romantic relationships. The concepts of self-determination associated with *free love* not only benefited men, but, more importantly, freed women from having no control over their own destiny.

Although the notion of *free love* in China is usually associated with the translation of the concept of individual rights from the European west, *Feng shuangfei* demonstrated that the concept was already rooted deeply in women's thought by the late Qing. The *tanci* depicts a variety of female characters who use different means to try to take control of their own lives, especially their marriage destinies. This chapter

will look at the concubines of Guo Lingyun and Zhang Yishao as a form of case study to analyze how the female author and readership were imagining forms of self-empowerment. This case study includes three female characters, Zhen Daya, Zhen Xiaoya and Bao Xiang'er, in this *tanci* because of their different means to achieve autonomy. Daya, who appears to be a ritually appropriate talented woman, in fact manipulates the ritual codes to serve her own will and needs. In contrast, her younger sister, Xiaoya, establishes her self-esteem and identity by willingly following the rituals, especially the cult of chastity. The most extreme case is Bao Xiang'er who totally goes against the rituals to pursue her own marriage and happiness. As we can see, these three women have different levels of identification with the traditional ritual codes, probably representing various women's opinions on rituals in reality. However, the narrator emphasizes that no matter what attitudes women hold, they are all able to find their own way to empower themselves, instead of following the restraints that men subject them to, within the system.

It is noteworthy that the women granted the highest degree of agency in their marriages are the concubines. In this way, the *tanci* avoids a direct challenge to the orthodox emphasis on women's compliance with chastity and filial piety during the Qing, while allowing *guixiu* women a safe outlet to imagine other possibilities. As a form of fantasy, *Feng shuangfei* introduces multiple yet plausible alternatives to arranged marriage, showing how the female protagonists in the *tanci* gain a high degree of autonomy when making decisions for themselves. Regardless of whether

the female characters choose to follow or go against orthodox values, the narrator emphasizes that it is their own choice and does not blame them either way. In this sense, the celebration of the characters' personal choices in the *tanci* can be considered a precursor of the concept of free love.

Zhen Daya: The Pursuit of an Individual Identity

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the characterization of Zhen Daya 真大雅 has drawn critical attention because of the possibility that it might be self-referential. Although all of the female characters in *Feng shuangfei* are compelling, Daya stands out. Through various sufferings, Daya proves her abilities as a female individual and builds her own identity as a female scholar. Daya's identity combines aspects of the typical talented girl, which stresses literary talents, and female Confucian scholar, which highlights feminine virtues. In this sense, Daya encompasses both *cai* (才, talents) and *de* (德, virtues), the controversially essential features of an intellectual woman. Her painstaking pursuit of an individual identity and her fruitful achievements in both the public and private spheres set a model for the female audience.

Although Daya is also depicted as a beauty, the narrator, when introducing her, highlights her literary talents as her most outstanding characteristic. As the narrator indicates to the readers, the family name Zhen, with its literal meaning "truly," emphasizes that the literal meanings in her given name are "true." Her given name,

Daya, refers to the "Daya" or "Greater Odes" section of the *Shijing* (诗经, Book of Songs), which is sung at solemn court ceremonies, thus suggesting her decorous personality. Her style, Miaocai 妙才, literally meaning "wonderful talents," foreshadows her outstanding literary talents that are revealed later in the story.

Similar to other important characters in the *tanci*, Daya is given her own biography when she is introduced; hers stands out due to its mythic framing. Because her parents had not been able to give birth to a child for ten years before she and her sister Xiaoya were born, the girls are treated "like sons" (原与儿子一般).[66] This detail ensures their interest in literary studies and production. Moreover, the omniscient narrator cedes her place to the goddess Magu 麻姑, who informs the readers that in their previous lives the sisters were arrogant scholars. Magu not only explains to the girls the reason for their unusual interests and talents, but also promises them that despite what they will suffer she will help them find husbands and instructs them not to give up their literary training. It would not be odd if the goddess who appears in their dreams had been Guanyin 观音, the popular and benevolent Bodhisattva patronized by women and non-elites, but Magu is not known for a connection with women or girls, especially in terms of marriage destinies. Magu is a goddess associated with longevity, and she is often portrayed carrying peaches, another symbol of longevity, to the birthday party of the Queen Mother of the West. This strange and inappropriate representation of the goddess in this scene strongly

[66] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1069.

suggests that she is being used as a narrative tool to legitimate the improper and willful behavior of the two sisters. In this sense, I read Magu as a mask, or alter ego, of the Zhen sisters' subjectivity. The first indication of the sisters' strong will is their improper preference for literary studies, a male occupation, over women's work:

> At that time they were still young, not doing women's work. And they still had servants work for them, so they did not need to make tea, cook, or enter the kitchen. Leisurely sitting in their boudoir, they took only reading and writing as their primary occupation.
> [其时年纪尚小，不做女工；也还有几个下人服事，并不要烧茶煮饭，上灶看厨。闲坐闺中，只把这看书写字做了正务。][67]

Due to the goddess's instructions and promises, their absence from engaging in women's domestic chores seems excusable. As a result, Daya ends up the equal of any talented scholar: "[She] often read the various schools of thought, her poetry was dignified when she first learned writing, her calligraphy was as good as that of Zhong Yao 钟繇 and Wang Xizhi 王羲之. She was also good at painting. (百家诸子频翻阅，诗词初学便轩昂。字比钟王兼善画)"[68]

As a female scholar, Daya initially distinguishes herself from others with "relaxed style in the mode of the Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove " (林下之风).[69] The term, *linxia zhi feng*, was used to describe the famous talented woman, Xie Daoyun 谢道韫 in *Shishuo xinyu* (世说新语, A New Account of Tales of the World):

> Xie E valued his elder sister [Xie Daoyun] highly. Zhang Xuan often praised his younger sister [Zhang Tongyun 张彤云], wanting to compare the two women. There was a nun from Ji who had visited both the Zhang and Xie families. People asked her who between the two was better. She answered,

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[67] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1069-70.

[68] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1071.

[69] Cheng, *Feng Shuangfei*, 1071, 1393.

> "The look of Mrs. Wang [Xie] is leisurely and carefree, so she thus has the syle of the Seven Worthies of the bamboo grove. Mrs. Gu [Zhang] has a pure heart which can be reflected by jade, so she naturally is a flower in a boudoir." [谢遏绝重其姊，张玄常称其妹，欲以敌之。有济尼者，并游张、谢二家，人问其优劣，答曰："王夫人神情散朗，故有林下风气；顾家妇清心玉映，自是闺房之秀。"][70]

By connecting Daya to Xie Daoyun, who is famous for her "talents of eulogizing catkin"(咏絮之才), the narrator conspicuously attempts to give the audience a first general impression of Daya as a talented girl.[71] Moreover, in the original anecdote, after comparing the two prominent talented women, the nun's conclusion contrasts one as natural and free, *linxia* (under the woods), while the other is constrained and proper within the boudoir *guifang*. *Linxia* is a reference to the seven well-known scholars, the Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove (竹林七贤) of the Wei and Jin, who are famous for their "abandoning the classics and upholding (the philosophy of) Laozi and Zhuangzi, despising rituals and advocating unconventionality" (弃经典而尚老庄，蔑礼法而崇放达).[72] In this sense, while Zhang Tongyun is characterized by her typical feminine virtues, Xie Daoyun is singled out for her unrestrained temperament. This comparison in *Feng shuangfei* suggests that Daya's nature is not confined by the rituals, foreshadowing her later invitation to Lingyun to enter her

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[70] Liu Yiqing 刘义庆, *Shishuo xinyu yizhu* 世说新语译注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1996), 588.

[71] The story is from the *Lienü zhuan* in Pang Xuanling 房玄龄, *Book of Jin* 晋书 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974, vol.4), 2516. When Daoyun's uncle Xie An asked the children to describe the snow, Daoyun's cousin thought it like salt. When Daoyun made metaphors to catkin, An was very pleased. Later, "the talent of singing catkin" was used to describe girls' literary talents. One of the famous examples is in the *Honglou meng*. In Chapter Five, the quatrain in the Main Register referring to Baochai and Daiyu reads, "It is deplorable about the one's virtues of stop weaving machine; it is adorable of the other's talents of eulogizing catkin" (可叹停机德，堪怜咏絮才). See Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 and Zhiyan zhai 脂砚斋, *Zhiyan zhai chongping Shitou ji genchen jiaoben* 脂砚斋重评石头记庚辰校本 (Beijing: Zuojia chubanshe, 2006), 154.

[72] Gu Yanwu 顾炎武, *Rizhi lu* 日知录 (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1963), vol.13, 306 .

house. Additionally, Xie Daoyun is also known for her honor and courage when confronting dangers and emergencies, qualities that Daya also shares when confronting extreme situations.

The comparison between Daya and Xie highlights Daya's outstanding yet unconventional qualities. Within the fictional world of *Feng shuangfei*, Daya is famous for her extraordinary literary talent. Lingyun, the perfect man who excels at everything, including the aesthetic appreciation of good poetry, cannot resist trying to lure Daya to appear in order to check out her appearance after he has admired her painting and poetry.[73] While it is ironic that the ultimate orthodox man is here doing something inappropriate, the scene indicates how excellent Daya's talent is if it makes even the most orthodox man forget about ritual propriety. Her literary talents are not only refined, but also quick. She can write a good responsive *ci* lyric right after she sees one and can write a spontaneous poem on a given topic at parties.[74] Both the exquisiteness and speed of her writings help her fame spread quickly, particularly after she finishes writing and compiling the *Nüshi* 女史 (History of Women) and earns the official title of *nü boshi* (女博士, female erudite), "As for today, her reputation grows even higher. The ministers in court fight for a piece of work from her, which determines their honor and disgrace" (及至今日，声价益高，朝廷之臣争他片纸，便有荣辱之分。).[75]

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[73] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, chapter 25.

[74] For examples, see Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1166-67, 1393-94.

[75] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1408.

It is noteworthy that it is Daya who actively practices and improves her literary skills in order to gain and keep a high reputation, a practice which solidifies her public identity. Magu, who as I mentioned can be read as her alter ego, gives her a piece of important advice when she is twelve, "Since you love reading, you should not give it up. Instead, you should study harder wholeheartedly and make sure your talents and skills are outstanding. Do not consider it vain because you are a girl. You will have some opportunities in the future" (既喜读书，不可中道而废，更宜潜心力学，务使才艺出群，勿谓女子徒劳也，日后自有一番际遇耳。).[76] Although it happens when Daya is young, it can be interpreted as Daya's resolution to herself. As we read later, her hard work pays off. After she becomes famous for her literary talents, she keeps polishing her skills in order to retain her status as a female scholar. Other women, including Feixiang admire Daya's exceptional skills in calligraphy and painting, "[Her] calligraphy and painting are both without women's style, having clear spirit and strong essence as cold as autumn" (字画俱无脂粉气，神清骨健冷如秋。).[77] Lingyun further explains to Fexiang, who is by now his wife, "[Her] reputation is high as an erudite. She knows by herself that she cannot change the situation, so she must work harder, afraid of losing face. Therefore, her recent calligraphy and painting are learned to be adept, washing away her immaturity. Her style is amazingly like that of a virtuoso" (望重名高为博士，自知局面已难收，必然更把工夫用，唯恐当场脸面

[76] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1070.

[77] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1999.

丢。所以近来诸字画，习成老练洗轻柔。居然像个名家体).[78] From both Feixiang and Lingyun's admiring comments, we are informed that Daya's self-driven hard work has resulted in her outstanding reputation and has solidified her identity as a talented woman.

Furthermore, Daya does not let herself be restrained by rituals when pursuing her marriage. Lingyun chooses to rent Daya's house, trying to find the talented girl whose painting has so impressed him. After failing to entice Daya to show up by working through Bai Ruyu 白如玉 and Hanmei 寒梅, who are Daya's maids, or by playing *qin* (琴, zither), Lingyun decides to play *sheng* (笙), the wind musical instrument at which he is best. Daya is, as expected, attracted and thinks to herself, "Let me open the window to take a look, so that I know whether he is good or bad" (待我推窗亲一望，方知人品优还劣。).[79] This decision contradicts her original thought that she should not meet the male guests as is dictated by the rituals. Once again, the immortal Magu, her alter ego, gives her a perfect reason to meet him—Daya receives a prophecy in a dream that she believes is from Magu. "Once you meet the guest playing the *sheng* under the moon, do not consider him as a stranger to avoid suspicion. Your cursed fate will dissolve and the injustices you have suffered will be redressed. Remember my words; they will determine your marriage" (但逢月下吹笙客，莫为嫌疑当路人。魔劫可消冤可雪，好将此语定终身。).[80] Daya

[78] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1999.

[79] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1130.

[80] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1102.

immediately takes these words as Goddess Magu's instructions even though she does not even see the goddess or verify the identity of the voice in her dream. Although premodern Chinese did believe in dream prophecy and direct communication from the gods, it is possible to think of this voice in Daya's dream as an expression of her own desires. Equally concerned with the difficulties she is experiencing and her future marriage, Daya gives herself a seemingly legitimate excuse to meet the man to whom she is attracted. Furthermore, she invites Lingyun into the guest hall to thank him for his part in driving away the local bully who wants to trick her into marriage. Then, when Lingyun offers to save Daya's mother who is seriously sick, she invites him into the private area of the bedroom. Both of the situations seem to be extreme, but she could have avoided directly meeting this stranger by going through her male and female servants. She turns the pressing circumstances and the advice of the goddess Magu into excuses for her to meet this man to whom she is attracted.

In meeting and communicating with Lingyun, a total stranger to her family, Daya is actually choosing a husband for herself. What is amazing about Daya is that she alone in the *tanci* has total determination of her marriage fate. The narrator creates the perfect conditions for Daya's legitimate expression of agency: her father is away from home and is not even able to support the family financially; her mother is physically and mentally weak and relies on Daya's advice. Hearing from her uncle that Yu Bocai 俞伯才 is actually a local bully, Daya is the one who strongly disagrees

when her mother arranges the marriage between him and herself.[81] When the Yu family tries to take advantage of the Zhens in their poverty and force the marriage, Daya bravely wields a sword to protect herself and her family.[82] After meeting Lingyun who is morally outstanding and generous in helping her through these trying times, it is Daya who decides to marry him. This is later shown when she rejects the offers from both the Princess Heyang (河阳公主) and the emperor to marry into their families as a concubine/ consort, although she is fully aware that she will also be a concubine if she marries Lingyun. It is worth noting that in both these cases, the "matchmakers" go directly to Daya for her approval. These actions strongly confirm Daya's love for Lingyun to a modern reader. When refusing the Princess Heyang, Daya stresses her subjective agency in the decision: "This *zhujian* (opinion) is originally a *si* (private/selfish one) of my own… I will repay him by maintaining my jade-like chastity" (这条主见原是臣妾一己之私……自圭自守将他报).[83] She states that her actions are *si* (in this case, meaning both private and selfish), never a legitimate reason during the Ming-Qing period. When explaining her decision to her younger sister, Daya is more sincere about her *si*, "Not thinking of marriage is a sign of righteousness; Being sad when thinking of [Lingyun] is a sign of passion" (不思婚配者，义也；触绪生悲者，情也).[84] Parallel to how Lingyun frames his relationships

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[81] The given name of Yu is Ren 仁, a pun on *yuren* (愚人, stupid person); the style, Bocai, is a pun on *bucai* (不才, untalented). Therefore puns indicate his personal traits and suggest that he is not a good match for Daya.

[82] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, chapter 24.

[83] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1426.

[84] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2019.

with Yishao, Daya also frames her feelings for Lingyun with *qing* and *yi*. Both *qing* and *yi* are considered in the *si* spheres.[85] Daya then introduces the excuse of serving her old mother because there is no son in the family, as Princess reveals, "[You] are willing to forgo marriage for your whole life, so that you and your mother can depend on each other" (情愿终身不嫁，母女相依。).[86] Here Daya uses the seemingly orthodox excuse of filial piety in order to take control of her own marriage.

Daya's honor, principles and courage to fight in extreme situations actually reinforce her identity as a female scholar in the mode of the Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove and Xie Daoyun. As we know, Ji Kang 嵇康, one of the best known figures among the Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove, is not only famous for his literary talents but also for his martyrdom when he refused to serve the illegitimate Sima government. Xie Daoyun, inspired by their unconventional ways, also has a similar story recorded in the *History of Jin*:

> Encountering the disaster of Sun En, [Daoyun] behaved naturally. Not until hearing that her husband and sons had been killed by the bandits then did she ask the maids to carry the sedan chair and bring along several swords as they were leaving. When the rebel army came, she killed several people and then was captured. Her grandson, Liu Tao, was only several years old at the time. The bandits wanted to kill him as well. Daoyun said, 'This concerns the Wang family and has nothing to do with other families! If you have to kill him, I'd rather be killed first.' Although En was extremely cruel, he was taken aback by this and so did not kill Tao.
> [（道韫）及遭孙恩之难，举措自若，既闻夫及诸子已为贼所害，方命婢肩舆抽刃出门，乱兵稍至，手杀数人，乃被虏。其外孙刘涛时年数岁，贼

[85] For a more detailed definition of and discussion on *qing* and *yi*, see Chapter IV on male homosocial relationships.

[86] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1424.

> 又欲害之，道韫曰：‘事在王门，何关他族！必其如此，宁先见杀。’恩虽毒虐，为之改容，乃不害涛。][87]

Following the model of her literary predecessors, Daya is also willing to sacrifice her life for her own beliefs and ambitions, in this case her determination to marry Lingyun, the man with whom she is in love. When the emperor, the highest power in late imperial China, asks her to be an imperial consort, an honor which would have been impossible for women in late imperial China to reject, Daya responds, "The sage (emperor) is of course vastly compassionate. If he understands my naïve and foolish sincerity, he will issue a benign edict to stop this… If, in the end, however, his majesty does not understand, how could my life be any more substantial from a tuft of grass, I would prefer to die with my three *chi* body to repay his years of kindness" (圣人定有宽宏量，若鉴痴愚儿女诚，恩诏宠颁停此举……若果龙心终不悟，妾身何异草茅轻，愿将三尺微躯死，以报年余禄养恩。).[88] Although her real motivation is her desire to wait for Lingyun, Daya's speech, with its moving excuse of filial piety, reads as very honorable. She even presents the same argument for rejecting an imperial marriage to the empress, the emperor's mother, and resolutely wins freedom for herself.

Moreover, Daya is also distinguished for her "air of being a Confucian scholar" (儒者之风), a quality related to Ban Zhao 班昭, who is famous for both her *cai* and *de*.[89] Although in Xie Daoyun's case, *cai* mainly refers to her literary talents, Ban

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[87] Pang, *Jinshu*, 2516.

[88] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1520.

[89] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1301, "[Daya] is really worthy of the wind/style of a scholar, exactly like Ban Zhao from the Han who continued writing the History of Han" (儒者之风真不愧，俨然续史汉班姬。). Also see Cheng,

Zhao's *cai* refers to her knowledge of history and classics, the quality she shared with Confucian scholars. Amazingly, Ban Zhao was one of the writers and compilers of the *Hanshu* (汉书, History of Han). After her elder brother Ban Gu 班固 died, Ban Zhao continued and finished his work of writing and compiling the *Hanshu*. Ban Zhao also wrote the *Nüjie* (女诫, Admonitions for Women), the first instructional manual on feminine behavior and virtue. She also served as an adviser on state matters to Empress Deng and served as an imperial teacher to the princesses. As a female scholar, Ban Zhao set a model for later female Confucian scholars: she had vast knowledge of the classics and histories and, at the same time, emphasized feminine virtues.

Daya follows Ban Zhao's model in that she writes and compiles a *History of Women* (*Nüshi* 女史). This act of compiling a *Nüshi* demonstrates Daya's interest in women's education and lives. Moreover, since the empress initiates the project, readers are assured of the work's orthodox value. Both Daya's personal interest and the state's interest, symbolized by the Empress, in compiling a *History of Women* indicate the author's attention to and interest in women's lives as a different and separate category from the lives of men. As we know, Chinese histories are written by, for, and about men, so women only occupy a small section in them called "Lienü zhuan" (列女传, Bibliography of Exemplary Women). Due to the rise of the *cainü* culture in the Ming and Qing, female intellectuals started to be aware of themselves as

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Feng shuangfei, 1393, the phrase is slightly altered with the same meaning, "[Her] clothes and behaviors are both different [from other girls], with a whole style of Confucian standards" (衣装举止皆殊异，一派儒家体段文。).

a distinct group.[90] I believe that Cheng Huiying, as a successor of the *cainü* tradition, also inherited a consciousness of women's intellectual and historical agency as the writers and subjects of history. Her design of the subplot of writing an individual history of women suggests her concern for women as a category of being/subjects in history that is separate from men and worth recording and being known.

To reinforce her identity as a female scholar, Daya intentionally exhibits her concern for the welfare of the emperor and the country as if she were a scholar official. Although it was not required for male and female literati to be concerned about the state of the empire or people, it was definitely appropriate for scholar officials to worry about *tianxia* (天下), "all under Heaven."[91] When Princess Heyang invites local women to a celebration at her palace to give thanks for the clear good weather, Daya says, "How can you face Heaven with these words? It is considered fortunate to

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[90] The fact that women started to compose anthologies of female poets can be considered a sign. See my detailed discussion on the female literary tradition and *cainü* culture in Chapter 1.

[91] It is a long tradition that Confucian scholars take *tianxia* 天下 as their responsibility.

Early in the *Daxue* 大学 chapter in the *Liji* 礼记 which was compiled from the Warring States period to the Eastern Han, there is already the famous line, "Through the investigation of things, one's knowledge is extended; once one's knowledge is extended, his will can be stabilized; once one's will has been stabilized, his mind can be rectified; once one's mind has been rectified, one's self can be cultivated; once one's self has been cultivated, one's family can be ordered; once one's family has been ordered, the state can be properly ruled; once the state is properly ruled, the entire world can be kept in harmony." (物格而后知至，知至而后意诚，意诚而后心正，心正而后身修，身修而后家齐，家齐而后国治，国治而后天下平) See Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Sishu jizhu* 四书集注 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1997), 2. The translation is from Andrew Plaks's book, *Four Masterworks of Ming Novel: Ssu ta ch'i shu* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 158. For Confucian scholars, *Daxue* has been one of the *Sishu* 四书, the basic Confucian classics since the Song Dynasty.

Fan Zhongyan from the Song writes in his famous essay, "*Yueyanglou ji* 岳阳楼记," in *Fan Zhongyan yanjiu ziliao huibian* 范仲淹研究资料汇编, ed. Wang Xinjun 王心均, Zhu Gui 朱桂, Ke Jiliang 柯基良 (Taipei: Xingzhengyuan wenhua jianshe weiyuanhui, 1989), 209-210, "先天下之忧而忧，后天下之乐而乐。"

During the Ming, Gu Xiancheng 顾宪成 wrote the famous *duilian* 对联 (antithetical couplet) for the private school he opened, "The sound of the wind, the sound of the rain and the sound of reading books all come into my ears; The events of the family, the events of the country and the events of the world all under my care. (风声雨声读书声声声入耳；家事国事天下事事事关心)"

The famous Qing scholar, Gu Yanwu, says in his *Rizhi lu*, 307, "Even as negligible as an ordinary person shares the responsibilities to protect the world!" (保天下者，匹夫之贱，与有责焉耳矣!)

have seasonable weather. If there is no rain in the autumn, there will be a famine. If you asked the opinion of someone ignorant like me, I would wish that there were no famines caused by excessive water or drought" (此语何堪对上苍。雨顺风调方是福，秋来原早定年荒。若叫依妾愚人算，但愿全无水旱荒。).[92] Similar to the unconstrained temperaments of Xie Daoyun and the Seven Worthies of the Bamboo, Daya's abrupt and heartfelt criticism of the princess reinforce her identity in this *tanci* as a *nü boshi*, a female erudite.

Not only does Daya show concern for *tianxia*, she also behaves like a loyal minister who admonishes the emperor without thinking of her own safety. Later, when his favorite consort dies, the emperor summons Daya to the palace to paint a spirit portrait of the consort to be used in calling her spirit back. However, instead of doing what the emperor orders, Daya sends the emperor a written reply in which she suggests that neither practicing shamanism nor taking a girl into his palace are appropriate for the emperor . Even Hanmei, Daya's maid, knows that the report will only irritate the emperor, but Daya defends herself as an officer of the government:

> Now that the government is paying me a salary, I can be considered an official. The emperor has made mistakes now. If I were not aware of this, I would have done nothing; however, since I am aware of it, how can I not admonish him? [我既受了朝廷俸禄，也就算个官员，人君有过，不曾知道也就罢了；既已知道，怎不规谏？][93]

Apparently, Daya considers herself as a true official, given her official title of "Female Erudite" and her salary from the government. So, as do other loyal ministers,

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[92] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1412.

[93] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1516.

she considers it her responsibility to point out the emperor's mistakes. Not only does Daya give advice concerning propriety as is done by other loyal ministers in history, but, in the mode of all famous loyal ministers, she also risks her life to admonish the emperor, "I risk my life to show my stupid loyalty, not afraid of death" (臣昧死尽愚忠不辞斧钺). [94]

With an official title of *nü boshi* and having established identities as a talented woman and a female scholar, Daya gains much more autonomy for herself than other women. She is the only woman who obtains an income from the court and owns land and properties in her own name:

> Miss Zhen stayed in the imperial palace for two months and completed the *History of Women*. The Empress highly praised her, considering her as good as Ban Zhao and better than Xie Daoyun, and so granted her the title of "Female Erudite"... [The emperor] bestowed her a thousand *mu* of farmland and a house from the government. This had never happened in ancient or present times.
> [这真小姐在宫两月，女史告成，太后大加赞赏，以为不逊班姬，尤胜道韫，故赐号女博士.....赐她官田千亩，官宅一区，这也是古今未有之事。][95]

Apparently, the fictional empress and the emperor value Daya's talents and virtues over those of Ban Zhao and Xie Daoyun, although these two highest authorities consider feminine virtues and classic training more important than literary talent. In

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[94] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1517.

There are many famous stories in Chinese history about loyal ministers who admonish emperors, such as Bi Gan 比干 (who is famous partially due to the novel, *Fengshen yanyi* 封神演义) during the Shang and Wei Zheng 魏征 during the Tang. Even though they know that they will irritate the emperor to the point that the emperor may kill them in his fury, they consider it their responsibilities to point out the emperors' problems and help him back to the right track.

On the other hand, it is also an emperor's job to be able to take appropriate advice. An emperor who can take suggestions is usually considered a good one, such as Tang Taizong 唐太宗 who takes Wei Zheng's advice; and an emperor who punishes or even kills the officials who give admonishments is often considered corrupt, such as King Zhou 纣王 who executes Bi Gan.

The author of *Feng shuangfei* here is obviously referring to these conventions and ideals.

[95] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1296.

this way, Daya officially has a job title, properties and land, and therefore steady income from her official post and lands. With this power and money, Daya is able to do what she wants. First, she frequently invites her younger sister, Xiaoya who had been adopted by their uncle as a child, to her house so that the sisters can often stay together. Second, despite her fame and wealth, Daya establishes herself as a calligrapher and painter to serve the ladies in the capital. This job role keeps her so busy that she hires her uncle to repair the family tombs and then work as her assistant in order to repay his kindness for helping her in her poverty.

Moreover, she is very good at using existing moral standards to ensure her agency. As has been mentioned, she wisely makes use of the concept of filial piety, one of the basic Confucian virtues in late imperial China, to avoid marriages she does not want. However, when she is finally able to marry Guo Lingyun, the man she loves, she does not want to give up her career as a well-networked artist and her properties, as would be expected of a married woman. Again, when talking to the empress, Daya uses serving her mother as a legitimate excuse to reject marrying into the Guo household:

> My widowed mother is old, but with no son. She actually depends on me to support her; I serve her medicine in the morning and at night as a son. If I marry into another family, I really cannot be master of my own affairs... Filial piety ranks at the top of the hundred good deeds, so we need to judge the priority among the five relationships.
> [寡母年高子息稀。实赖微臣为奉养，晨昏医药当男儿。倘然出嫁于他姓，举动皆难自主持……百行之中惟孝首，五伦还要辨高低。][96]

[96] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2176.

In this short passage in which Daya defends of her decision not to marry into the Guo household, the key point is that she will not be able to *zi zhuchi* 自主持 (be master of herself) if she enters a traditional marriage. She emphasizes the importance of filial piety, which is above the husband-wife relationship according to her rankings of moral obligations. During the Ming and Qing, some girls who did not get married in order to serve their parents were recorded in some local gazetteers as filial daughters.[97] Despite this, their legitimacy as unmarried women was still questionable in late imperial China according to traditional Confucian standards, which define women's social roles as subordinate to men, father, husband and son, according to the "Three Obedience (*sancong* 三从)". Although "filial piety is the first one among the hundred good deeds" (百善孝为先) was a popular idiom during the Qing, it does not contradict the basic Confucian feminine virtue, *sancong* -- settled in the early Confucian classic, *Liji* 禮記 (Book of Rites), and developed by all later women's teachings -- that a woman's filial piety should be directed to her parents-in-law after her marriage.[98] In this sense, normative Qing expectations still required a woman to marry into her husband's house, taking the job of serving her parents-in-law as her priority, while still allowing her to take care of her mother if she were widowed and

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[97] Maram Epstein, *Orthodox Passions: Narratives of Filial Piety in Eighteenth-Century China*, forthcoming.

[98] The idea of "filial piety is the first one among the hundred good deeds" (百善孝为先) can be found inWang Yongbin 王永彬, *Weilu yehua* 围炉夜话 (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 2007).

Janet M. Theiss also talks about the contradiction between women's relationships to natal and marital families in her book, *Disgraceful Matters: The Politics of Chastity in Eighteenth-Century China* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2004), 84. As she points out, late imperial morality hand books and fiction "all reiterated and elaborated on the notion that filiality to parents-in-law was the heart of the 'wifely way' (*fudao*)."

without a son. In this passage, we can see Daya playing with the relative status of moral values in order to gain full autonomy.

Since *tanci* is a form of fantasy for women, Daya becomes an exception to the traditional marriage system. Her cunning strategy is totally successful, and her not-so-legitimate excuse is officially legitimized. It is worth noting that it is again the empress, a woman as well as the matriarch of the country, who exempts Daya from traditional marital duties:

> [You] can be considered extremely filial among women… I will grant you [the exception] of returning to your own house after you get married for a month… This first fulfills your filial piety, second, allows you to consummate your marriage, and third lets you keep your own household, freeing you from the worry of being limited by others. It really attains three objectives in a single move.
> [可谓女中至孝……老身便赐你于归满月之后，仍归本宅……此乃首全孝道，次遂终身，兼且留着自家门户，不忧受制于人，实为一举三得之事。][99]

In this *tanci*, the women seem to help each other to enhance each other's agency and autonomy. Princess Heyang, who suggested a similar arrangement when she earlier asked Daya to be her husband's concubine, also fosters this opinion, "Just say that [the emperor] bestows both the property and the person to Yongzhong as his external wife" (竟说连产连人赐与永忠做个外宅就是了。)[100] The empress's words demonstrate her full understanding of Daya's insistence on autonomy. Although the three objectives here are listed in the order of filial piety, marriage and keeping her own household, the most important objective is probably the last one. The true purpose is "freeing yourself from the worry of being limited by others." It means that

[99] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2176.

[100] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2176.

Daya is both financially and physically independent, unrestrained by her husband or domestic duties, and that her husband needs to go to her home to consummate their marriage. This can be considered the highest level of autonomy a woman could imagine gaining during late imperial China.

Daya, as the very first exemplary female character the narrator establishes, achieves true agency and autonomy by establishing her own identity as a talented woman and female scholar. Although the process of achieving autonomy is difficult, the narrator seems to suggest its worthiness by the fruitful outcomes. Reading this *tanci* as a women's fantasy, we actually see the female writer's imagination of an ideal of women's autonomy within the social and ideological limitations of her time.

Zhen Xiaoya: A Follower of the Cult of Chastity

If Daya is characterized by her talents as her style Miaocai suggests (literally "wonderful talents"), Xiaoya is also distinguished by her style, Miaorong 妙容 (literally "wonderful appearance"). Although Zhang Yishao, the dissolute protagonist, is crazy for her beauty, she is portrayed as a persistent follower of the cult of chastity. As scholars have argued, chastity was not only a gender norm for women in late imperial China, but also a component of women's identities.[101] It is also true that in

[101] See Janet M. Theiss, *Disgraceful Matters: The Politics of Chastity in Eighteenth-Century China*; Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century* (Stanford, Calf.: Stanford University Press, 1997), and "Widows in the Kinship, Class, and Community Structures of Qing Dynasty China," in *Journal of Asian Studies* 46, no. 1 (1987): 37-56; Weijing Lu, *True to Her Word: the Faithful Maiden Cult in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); Katherine Carlitz, "Shrines, Governing-Class Identity, and the Cult of Widow Fidelity in Mid-Ming Jiangnan," *Journal of Asian Studies* 56, no. 3 (1997): 612-40, and "The Daughters, the Singing Girl, and the Seduction of Suicide," in *Passionate Women: Female Suicide in Late Imperial China*, ed. Paul S. Ropp, Paola Zamperini, and Harriet T. Zurndorfer (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001), 22-46; Dorothy Ko, *Teachers*

this story although the clichéd subplot follows the conventions of male-authored scholar-beauty romances, the emphasis on Xiaoya's willing choice to keep her chastity indicates both a respect and celebration of her subjectivity.

Unlike her elder sister, Xiaoya's beauty is distinguished by her charm, which refers not only to her beauty but also her enchanting air, so that everyone is immediately attracted to her when seeing her. As Daya's younger sister, Xiaoya is always compared to Daya in the *tanci*. The fairest judge would be their mother, "Her graceful and charming spirit is even harder to portray on a painting. Sometimes when an unearthly breeze blows, she tends to fly to the heavens" (更有那风神绰约画描难。偶然一阵仙风起，便欲飞扬上九霄).[102] The maids and servants in Daya's household also agree that "she is more ethereal than her elder sister" (他比方姊姊更飘飘).[103] When talking about a girl who can be blown away by wind, the very first image that comes to mind is Lin Daiyu, an immortally beautiful girl in *Honglou meng*, who is described as "a fairy from the other world" (世外仙姝) and "When [Daiyu] comes out, if the wind blows, she will fall" (出来风儿一吹就倒了).[104] The connection between the two here definitely emphasizes Xiaoya's beauty. Xiaoya is so attractive that even a woman, Qionghua, falls in love with her beauty, "What is wonderful is that [she is] gentle and serene, with a different kind of dashing, and that [she is] charming and

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of Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994); T'ien Ju-k'ang, *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity: A Comparative Study of Chinese Ethical Values in Ming-Ch'ing Times* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988).

[102] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1306.

[103] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1306.

[104] Cheng, Cao, *Honglou meng*, Chapter 5, 65.

tender, naturally graceful" (妙在幽娴贞静，别有风流，妩媚温柔，自然玉立).[105] Again, she is marked by her *fengliu*, another distinguishing quality of Daiyu, "having a dashing manner" (有一段风流态度).[106]

Then the narrator turns to directly depict Xiaoya's *qing*, making a strong and explicit reference to Lin Daiyu. As many scholars have pointed out, Lin Daiyu is the highest embodiment of *qing* in *Honglou meng*, so it is safe to say that Xiaoya is also an incarnation of *qing* in this *tanci*. Daiyu, a girl full of *qing*, is often related to sickness and sorrows.[107] Likewise, when Xiaoya is adopted by her uncle and aunt, she is also sad and sick, "Her feelings are blue, harming the spleen more. Who knows that [she] has many sorrows and eats little? A sickness of the heart surely cannot be remedied by medicine" (情怀抑郁愈伤脾。愁多食少谁人识？心病原无药可医。).[108] Her reasons for being sorrowful *chou* (愁) and being sick at heart *xinbing* (心病) are that she lives in someone else's house, another resemblance to Lin Daiyu. Moreover, like Daiyu, Xiaoya is physically weak and easily gets sick. When there is a shower on a summer night, Xiaoya "felt hot all over her body like she was on fire. She was also thirsty, had a headache and asthma… The rain was pattering on the plantains… The environment evoked her sadness. Weeping, she did not know the reason herself" (遍身发热浑如火，口渴头疼气哮喘……雨声淅沥洒芭蕉……触绪生愁惟滴泪，自家

[105] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1391.

[106] Cao, *Honglou meng*, Chapter 3.

[107] See Footnote 11. As Zhiyan Zhai mentions in his/her commentary to *Shitou ji*, Lin Daiyu is finally judged as *qingqing* (情情, passions for passions), Chapter 19.

[108] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1299.

也不识根苗).[109] Her hot sickness in cold weather, the image of rain pattering on plantains, and even her sadness for no reason all closely relate to Daiyu's passions and sensations in similar weather and environment. The last, but not least, similarity is of course Xiaoya's worries about her marriage. "The Miss was really depressed at the time" (小姐此时委实满心气闷), when she thinks that her adopted mother plans to marry her to a relative in the countryside, who she does not know but expects to be vulgar.[110]

Making a perfect parallel to Daiyu in terms of *qing*, Xiaoya's literary talents are an essential quality. Like her elder sister, Xiaoya is also capable of writing poetry, which is the best venue for a girl to display her literary talents and personal traits. During the party for women which Qionghua hosts, Princess Heyang orders the women to write a poem on *qixi* (七夕), the seventh day of the seventh month, a festival when two lovers, Niulang 牛郎 (the Herd Boy) and Zhinü 织女 (the Weaving girl), are able to meet for one day each year; it is also the date when women pray for feminine skills. After Daya and Xiaoya finished their poems, the princess comments that Daya's work is "tender and serene" (温和简静) and Xiaoya's poem is "very delicate and graceful, but it feels that *qing* overcomes language" (虽极清婉，但觉情过于文).[111] Not coincidently, Zhang Yishao also has a similar comment after reading and comparing their poems, "Although the taste of Female Erudite's poem is very

[109] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1365-66.

[110] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1345.

[111] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1394.

high, her poem feels too cold… not as flamboyant and passionate as Xiaoya's" (女博士诗品虽高，但觉过于冷淡……不若小雅之作艳丽有情).[112] Although their preferences for the poems are different, the princess and Yishao share a consistent opinion. Both point out that Xiaoya's poem focuses on *qing*, while Daya's poem emphasizes literary techniques. This scene again recalls a similar comment made by Li Wan on Baochai and Daiyu's poetry: "If talking about passions and uniqueness, it is definitely this one [by Daiyu] that is better; if talking about contained meaning and intensity, it finally has to be Baochai's that wins" (若论风流别致，自是这首，若论含蓄浑厚，终让蘅稿).[113] In spite of the comment, Baoyu, the man who values *qing* and loves Daiyu, favors Daiyu's poem.

After all, the idea of *qing* cannot avoid the inclusion of romantic love in the *tanci*. Like Daiyu, Xiaoya is also in love with a man who is involved with many women but whose love for her is authentic. The narrator portrays Yishao's courtship of Xiaoya as falling into the cliché of scholar-beauty romance. This setting of the subplot of Yishao's romantic life is a variant of the "chaste and erotic scholar-beauty romance" defined by Keith McMahon: there is no explicit descriptions of sex between the licentious male protagonist, Yishao, and women related to him; but Yishao is in other ways a typical male protagonist in an erotic scholar-beauty romance because he is "a benevolent polygynist around whom women willingly gather";[114] he has more

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[112] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1395.

[113] Cao, *Honglou meng*, Chapter 37.

[114] Keith McMahon, *Misers, Shrews and Polygamists: Sexuality and Male-Female Relations in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Fiction* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1995), 126.

than two wives and concubines and several maids as his sexual partners. His two primary wives do not engage in premarital sex; his wives have fewer superior qualities than the heroines in its chaste counterparts, in this case Lingyun's wives. The storyline of Yishao and Xiaoya's romance also follows the conventions of scholar-beauty romances: they fall in love with each other as soon as they see each other. Yishao, similar to many male scholars in scholar-beauty romances, tries every means to pursue her, including reconstructing his garden to view her, writing love poems to her, bribing Dame Meng 孟嫂子 as his go-between, climbing to Xiaoya's bedroom, and sending her jade and stealing her hairpin as keepsakes. Yishao and Xiaoya also encounter difficulties from the villains Liu Xiangui 刘仙桂 and Zhang Qihu 张起鹄, who try to take Xiaoya by means of their political or physical powers.[115]

Having and experiencing the same *qing* as Daiyu, Xiaoya's reactions to Yishao's pursuit are totally different from Daiyu's to Baoyu. Although Xiaoya to some extent is physically and morally modeled after the outstanding female protagonists in scholar-beauty romances, it is very interesting to see how the female author indicates that the notion of chastity opens a space for women's subjectivity. Given Yishao's persistent and propelling pursuit, Xiaoya displays her resolute belief in the notion of "chastity" and therefore shows strong resistance to the opportunities of gaining a good marriage by compromising her female virtues. Although she is such a traditional female character, it is through her insistence on her chastity, including

[115] See the detailed definitions of "chaste and erotic scholar-beauty romances" in McMahon, *Misers, Shrews and Polygamists*, 103-106, 126-31.

committing suicide, that she builds her subjectivity, finds her agency and establishes her self-identities and self-respect.

The narrator allows a secondary character, Dame Meng, to indicate that Xiaoya has plenty of chances to break the rules of chastity with excuses that would appear reasonable in most literary works. Yishao asks Dame Meng, who works for Xiaoya's family, to be his secret go-between. Dame Meng, considering herself as doing a good deed, tries to persuade Xiaoya to meet and marry Yishao:

> Her adopted father and mother don't love her much. And her family is not a noble one, so she won't necessarily marry into a noble family. If she marries a mediocre husband, it is really a mistake for a whole life for a pretty girl. She might as well take control of it as a matter of expediency, enjoying pleasures while she is still young.
> [继父干娘少疼爱。又且门楣非显要，将来未必与高亲。倘然嫁着庸夫婿，原是红颜误一生。确不如应变从权先自主，及时行乐趁青春。][116]
> Now that your marriage brings anxiety to you, why don't you take control of it as a matter of expediency?
> [终身既是生烦恼，何不从权自主持？][117]

Using the exact same word, *zizhu*(*chi*) (自主[持]) to be the master of herself, as Daya, Feixiang and Murong Zhu all do in their fight for autonomy, Dame Meng seems to support the idea that women should have the right to choose their husbands freely and tries to convince Xiaoya of it as well. Another word she uses is "*congquan*" (从权) or "to follow expediency," an ancient rule in extraordinary conditions, which is also a common notion in scholar-beauty romances that permits young lovers to act boldly. But it is mentioned here that the circumstances are neither extreme nor urgent, so it is "the extraordinary circumstances of their absolutely perfect match" that motivates

[116] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1330.

[117] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1346.

Dame Meng to urge her to follow expediency.[118] It is a powerful expression to allow women to realize their own will to meet with a man and decide her marriage in extreme occasions, such as Daya's cases. Interestingly, in both of Daya's cases, *congquan* is never mentioned. So in this sense, *congquan* here is used in a sarcastic way.

Xiaoya's response to Dame Meng here is strong and determined. When Xiaoya rejects Yishao's request through Dame Meng, everything she says follows *li* or rituals:

> Although I, Zhen Xiaoya, am born in the wrong time, I haven't lost my authenticity. How would I be willing to be such kind of a lascivious woman who loses her reputation and integrity? ... Although he is rich, noble, talented, and handsome, I am also born in an official family. I have learned the cardinal principle of righteousness. The ritual that I should follow my father cannot be changed. If there are no parents and matchmakers, it is always inappropriate to get married.
> [我真小雅虽然生不逢时，然而本真未失，岂肯做这等丧名失节的淫贱之人吗？……他虽富贵多才貌，我亦名门宦室裔。大义曾通非草木，在家从父礼难移。若非父母并媒妁，匹配婚姻总不宜。][119]

According to Xiaoya, chastity is essential to her marriage. In late imperial China, Xiaoya understands that loss of chastity will result in not only loss of a chance to make a good marriage, but also loss of her integrity. Comparing herself and Yishao, Xiaoya is very clear about their different living conditions and social status. However, in spite of and because of these differences, what she emphasizes in her speech is that she does not want to surrender to the superficial advantages of Yishao and be "a lascivious woman who loses her reputation and integrity." As Janet Theiss points out, "For women, chastity was not simply about moral reputation or social status but also

[118] McMahon, *Misers, Shrews and Polygamists*, 122.

[119] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1346.

about dignity and self-respect."[120] Apparently, Xiaoya believes that it is her reputation and integrity that define her individuality. Quoting the ritual codes, Xiaoya is actually making use of these notions to establish her integrity and therefore gain respect from Yishao. Although she does like Yishao, Xiaoya places greater value on ensuring her self-identity and future happiness of her marriage.

As it turns out, Xiaoya is wise enough to keep her integrity by preventing Yishao from taking advantage of her. What Yishao actually wants from Xiaoya is, as Xiaoya detects, a secret sexual relationship, "Since I am a man, you must know that I have an official marriage and therefore a first wife. If I want to take another girl from an official family as my concubine, how can I mention it to people?" (我为男子须知道，自己明婚有正妻。再想娶个官宦闺娃为侧室，如何出口对人提？).[121] This absolutely indicates Yishao's selfishness. He knows the rituals well enough that he should not attempt to marry a noble girl as his concubine, but his solution is to have a secret sexual relationship, which only satiates his own desires. Even Dame Meng who earns money from him by being his go-between is irritated:

> It is fortunate that Miss Zhen has some opinions [*zhuyi*] and did not fall into your tricks. If it were someone else who did not have her own plans and trusted you, having a secret affair with you, she would finally end up with no results, losing her chastity and leaving a notorious reputation into the future. As expected, people's true nature appears in the long term, so I won't mention this from now on.

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[120] Theiss, *Disgraceful Matters*, 202.

[121] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1348.

> [亏真小姐有些主意，不曾上你的骗局。倘逢别个无谋辈，信你甜言竟属私。日后终于无结果，徒然失节臭名遗。果然日久人心见，我也从今再不提。][122]

Dame Meng here points out all the possible bad results if Xiaoya had agreed to have an illicit relationship with Yishao. She stresses that Xiaoya has her own opinions (*zhuyi*), compared to those who do not have plans (*wumoubei*). Dame Meng's words suggest that Xiaoya's subjectivity is expressed through her commitment to preserving her chastity.

It is also interesting that Dame Meng's opinions all support Xiaoya's perspective. Although Dame Meng in a sense falls into the stereotype in male-authored fiction of a go-between who helps further illicit affairs, she is still portrayed as having a conscience. Despite her ritually inappropriate function, her goal is always to help Xiaoya pursue real happiness for her lifetime. In this sense, Dame Xue can also be looked upon as an alter-ego with whom the ritually appropriate Xiaoya debates. The physical withdrawal of Dame Meng after this event can be viewed as Xiaoya's determination to maintain her chastity, integrity and self-respect after the debate. In contrast, Yishao fails to consider the future happiness of Xiaoya, the girl he claims he loves most, and actually only objectifies her, showing no respect to her as a person. Janet Theiss also points out in her research that "to insult a woman's chastity was to deny her humanity."[123] Xiaoya's insistence on chastity and rituals is definitely a strong sign of resistance to him. As a result, Xiaoya successfully

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[122] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1348.

[123] Theiss, *Disgraceful Matters*, 203.

wins Yishao's respect, pushing him to make an effort to pursue an official marriage with her.

Xiaoya's belief in chastity is so consistent and persistent that she is portrayed as the only example of a woman in the *tanci* who is actually prepared to commit suicide in order to keep her chastity. Her suicide is not coincidentally intertwined with political chaos, so her act of committing suicide not only publicizes her chastity to her fiancé, but also her loyalty to the state.[124] When Zhang Qihu leads a rebellion that defeats Qiongshan county 琼山县, Xiaoya is still in the mourning period for her adopted parents. As she learns of the news, she sews all her clothes together and prepares a white silk cord to commit suicide. When she fails to die by hanging herself, she jumps out of the building in another attempt to kill herself. In Xiaoya's extreme situation when requital can be in no way provided to her, killing herself is the ultimate act that Xiaoya can take to resist the potential humiliation of losing both her body and her land. In this sense, Xiaoya's suicide aims to publicize her self-respect and her physical, moral, and social integrity.

It is noteworthy that Xiaoya deliberately chooses forms and venues for her suicide. The narrator describes in detail her preparation for her suicide, "[She] is not willing to go out of the yamen, but would rather sit in there waiting. She takes off her

[124] It is common in Ming-Qing fiction, especially during the transition of the Ming and the Qing, that a woman's suicide is celebrated because women's chastity is taken as a metaphor of a scholar's loyalty. In this sense, chastity and loyalty were both considered essential qualities of a moral person's integrity. Therefore, Xiaoya is portrayed as virtuous and respectful in both aspects.

mourning garment made of hemp" (不肯出衙甘坐守，脱除孝服与麻裙。).[125] Instead of escaping with other people when the rebel army approaches, Xiaoya does not believe that she is able to escape. Therefore, the venue in which she chooses to die is the yamen where her adopted father worked when he was alive. Yamens are the central public places where people can go to search for justice legally and are also the dwellings of the local governor and his family, members of local elites. Xiaoya's choice of the yamen as the place she will end her life indicates that she wants her suicide to be viewed as noble and unjust in public. Although the narrator does not clarify why Xiaoya has to change her mourning clothes, it is suspicious that wearing normal clothes to hang herself is also her careful choice to magnify the "emotive and even supernatural impact" of her death that she may come back as a vengeful ghost to haunt these rebels.[126] Therefore, Xiaoya's choices of the form and venue of her death reinforce the glory of her public suicide and promise her autonomy during and even after her death.

Interestingly, the narrator seems not to agree with Xiaoya's determination to commit suicide although her agency in the decision is celebrated. Neither of Xiaoya's suicide attempts is successful. When she tries to hang herself, she suddenly loses her strength to carry or move the ladder; when she jumps out of the building, there is a

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[125] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1675.

[126] For details, see Theiss, *Disgraceful Matters*, 204. She argues that it was a popular belief during the Ming and Qing that a suicide, especially one who hung herself, would come back as a malevolent ghost to haunt the people who pushed her to death. In Chinese popular belief, people who commit suicide due to injustice, wearing red, will become malevolent vengeful ghosts. The color of her clothes is not mentioned, so it is possible that the narrator follows the convention to let Xiaoya die prettily in normal dress, but it is also likely that the narrator leaves the possibility of her return as a vengeful ghost to the imagination of the readers.

purple cloud that breaks her fall. As the narrator explains, gods help and protect her secretly. The intervention of powerful gods in this fantasy narrative can only be interpreted as the narrator's opinion that a girl should not commit suicide in any seemingly extreme situation. As it turns out, although she is abducted by Zhang Qihu as she had feared, Xiaoya does not get raped, due to her own resistance and Qihu's wife's jealousy. The designed failure of Xiaoya's suicide attempts seem to suggest to female readers that suicide is not the only option in many cases to keep their dignity and integrity. Meanwhile, Xiaoya's successful struggle against rape after abduction indicates that it is a woman's active actions, instead of passive death, that determine the real value and identity that she establishes for herself to the public. In Xiaoya's case, her identity is defined by her chastity.

Bao Xiang'er: Going Against the Cult of Chastity

While the majority of female characters in the *tanci* are chaste, there is an exception -- Bao Xiang'er. In contrast to Xiaoya, a willing follower of the cult of chastity, Bao Xiang'er is her exact opposite. She is portrayed as and viewed by other characters as a "lascivious" girl, in the sense that she pursues her own marriage and happiness. Although the narrator and the speaking subjects, namely the characters in the *tanci*, seem to all believe in the cult of chastity, Bao Xiang'er unexpectedly does not get punished for her transgressions, but instead is rewarded with a good ending. Compared to the famous lewd woman Pan Jinlian, the ending Xiang'er is given

suggests the author's tolerance of women's "unchastity" and acceptance, or even celebration, of women's will to pursue their own happiness.

Bao Xiang'er fits every stereotype of a ritually inappropriate girl who is not from a noble family. Her father is Bao Wen, an evil and licentious scholar, who practices black magic in order to help his nephew Zhang Cai have sex with young beautiful boys and girls. Xiang'er's older brother Bao Zhen'er is a beautiful singer who has sexual relations with his guests. Zhen'er later is adopted by Liu Jin, the evil eunuch who is the source of corruption in the imperial court, where his name is changed to Liu Xian'gui. Xiang'er is adopted along with her older brother. Born and raised in these two families, Xiang'er is barely educated or exposed to Confucian values and rituals. As one character explains, "The venerable Liu (Liu Jin) has ordered that it is useless for girls to read these classics, so [Xiang'er] only reads around in novels and poetry" (这是刘千岁吩咐，说女孩儿家看这些大书无用，所以只看些传奇小说、今古诗词。).[127] Even though she may still learn some Confucian ideology from novels and poetry, Xiang'er does not seem to absorb any of it because of the twisted plots in novels and the lack of role models in her real life.[128]

As it turns out, Xiang'er's behaviors are in no way appropriate. However, it is interesting that Xiang'er's lack of propriety infuses her with the vitality and vision to seek true control of her own marriage and happiness. Yishao once tries to ask Liu Jin

[127] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1312.

[128] As we have read, the plots of some novels focus on improper behavior as a warning. Similarly here, Bao Xiang'er is a young girl without guidance in her reading, so it is easy to follow the attractive plot and neglect the warnings. Her "inappropriate" ideas, which I will discuss below, are largely learned from the romantic plots in fiction.

for Xiang'er as his concubine. Liu Jin initially agrees but later comes up with the condition that Yishao needs to give up his friendship with Lingyun. As Lingyun's sworn brother and closest friend, Yishao immediately rejects the idea of marrying Xiang'er. However, Xiang'er is very satisfied with this potential husband and resents her adoptive father for placing obstacles in the way of their union. As a result, Xiang'er decides, "What women care about is marriage, so how can I wait for others to decide for me?" (女人所重婚姻事，何待他人做主张。).[129] As a result, she finds every opportunity to visit and stay with her cousin, Zhang Liyu, who is married to Lingyun as a concubine, in order to meet, talk and flirt with Yishao in person.

If the processes by which Daya and Xiaoya gain autonomy are subtle and deliberate, Xiang'er's will to power in terms of controlling her own life is frank and straightforward. When Xiang'er requests an official marriage from Yishao, she tells him her opinions on ritual propriety:

> I read novels and anecdotes from old and new. There are so many famous and beautiful girls who have poorly matched marriages due to the restraint of the rites and their desire for a reputation for chastity that places on them. They cannot escape from the prison and it is sad that they die in their boudoir. How can they be compared to Zhuo Wenjun and Hongfu who decided their own marriages? Although I am young and without much knowledge, I swear that I am not willing to die with regret. Even though the gate of an official is as deep as the sea, I am willing to be like that Lady Zhuo and carry a zither case for you.
> [曾见那古今小说奇传类，多少名娃美娇娘，只为着立法拘牵名节重，姻缘错配不相当。不能逃出牢笼去，闷死闺中实惨伤。怎如那卓氏文君、红

[129] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1312.

拂女，婚姻自主效鸾凰。奴虽年幼无知识，誓不甘心饮恨亡。哪怕侯门深似海，愿为卓女负琴囊。][130]

As we can see, Xiang'er's perspectives on marriage are all derived from novels and stories, but she develops her own ideas on them. As she suggests, the consideration of rites and reputation becomes a mental and physical prison for women; in her view, these women are sad and miserable. In contrast, she prefers and wants to follow those women who take control of their own marriage, such as Zhuo Wenjun and Hongfu who picked the men they love and elope with them with no regard for their own reputation. What Xiang'er considers as ideal is "to be master of her own marriage' (婚姻自主), a modern idea from our perspective. We are unclear how popular or widespread of the idea of free love was in Cheng Huiying's time, twenty years before the May Fourth movement, but Xiang'er's subjective voice does speak for it ahead of that time. Although this voice is labeled as unorthodox in the text, it indicates women's awareness of the sufferings caused by arranged marriage.

In her relationship with Yishao, Xiang'er is the one who takes full initiative and control. In order to gain control of her marriage, Xiaoya engages in a long-term effort to get Yishao to elope with her. If she is still referring to other women the first time, she becomes more direct about her own desires thereafter: "I don't want to be officially honored. I am willing to follow you for my whole life… I often make plans in my heart. This time I come without consideration of my reputation" (不愿花封并

[130] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1314.

紫诰，甘心随你托终身……我也心中常打算，此来原不顾声名。).[131] It is apparent that Xiang'er does not care for anything but her emotional happiness in her marriage. We can also see how she "makes plans" (打算) all the time for her own marriage. Compared to Daya who uses ritually appropriate excuses to manipulate her own marriage, Xiang'er gives us a clearer and more straightforward picture of a woman's desires and will to control her marriage. Later, when Liu Xiangui discovers a letter from Yishao to Xiang'er and then suspects that Xiang'er is pregnant with Yishao's child because of her mysteriously enlarged stomach (in reality due to sickness) and decides to kill her, Yishao, having enjoyed physical contact with and admiration from the woman, has no choice but to rescue her and finally marries her in secret. In this sense, Xiang'er's desires and efforts ultimately win her her ideal marriage partner, albeit not exactly as she planned in that their relationship gets publicized and Yishao is pushed into a corner.

Although morally the narrator does not seem to agree with Xiang'er, s/he does accept and value Xiang'er's subjectivity and agency. Instead of punishing the ritually inappropriate woman as a reader would expect in a male-authored novel, Xiang'er is greatly rewarded for her actions. Not only does she get to consummate the marriage that she had always wanted, but she also gives birth to a son. It is common that infertility is used as a punishment for "lewd" women and having a good son is a

[131] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1384.

reward for virtuous women in mainstream male-authored fiction.[132] After giving birth in secret to Yishao's son, "Bao Xiang'er is really carefree and she becomes even healthier and stronger" (鲍香儿真是无忧无虑，身子也更加强健。).[133] Moreover, the son seems to have potential for a good fate: "This boy looks exactly like Yishao. Although he is a little too skinny, he is beautiful and has a high spirit. It is likely he will be successful when he grows up" (此子全然如逸少，身虽略瘦欠丰肥。眉清目秀精神好，日后成人也不低。).[134] In this sense, Xiang'er gets to enjoy the fruits of her success in her struggle to take control of her own marriage and happiness. Although Yishao's wife Qionghua initially refuses to accept Xiang'er as a member of the Zhang household, the presence of this lovely son eventually wins over Qionghua's support. Towards the end of the *tanci*, everything that Xiang'er did that was ritually improper turns out to benefit her and creates no disasters for her or the Zhang household. Therefore, instead of warning against Xiang'er's unorthodox behaviors, a common motif in mainstream male-authored fiction, this female-authored fiction, by granting such a happy ending to Xiang'er, subtly encourages female readers to pursue their own marriage and happiness.

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[132] For the punishment, I have a more detailed discussion in Chapter 6. In terms of the rewards of sons, there are various examples, such as Li Wan's son in *Honglou meng*.

[133] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1332.

[134] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2451.

Conclusion

This chapter is a case study of women's ideal agency and subjectivity on their own marriages, as perceived by the female author, Cheng Huiying. The three women's cases are greatly varied. While Xiao'er's case is the extreme one which places personal happiness and fulfillment above Confucian rituals, the Zhen sisters' cases appear to legitimately follow the rituals, but in fact subtly subvert them. The narrative constructs Daya as an example of a woman who has a job and therefore does not need to rely on a man through marriage. Although Daya seemingly follows Confucian values, such as chastity, loyalty and filial piety, she actually pursues and gains a great degree of autonomy to decide on her own marriage and to bargain for her agency in her marriage by manipulating the interpretations of these values. Due to her financial independence, her voice has to be respected in the fictional world. The last case, Xiaoya, seems to be the most conservative among the three because she strictly and willingly follows the Confucian values required for women, especially the cult of chastity. However, instead of portraying her as a victim of Confucian rituals, the narrator alters the value of chastity from Xiaoya's perspective to be a means to demonstrate her subjectivity and to gain respect. In this sense, the three women all find their own way to obtain their autonomy although they involve very different beliefs and situations. Yet all these paths to their individual self-realization are portrayed as equally valid.

The typical courting relationship between Lingyun and Murong Zhu best supplements the three cases, which do not involve much interaction between the lovers.[135] When Zhu lives in the Guo household to stay with her fake husband Feixiang, who had already married Lingyun, Zhu and Lingyun experience the whole procedure of courtship, from admiration of each other, to misunderstanding, to feeling out each other's love, and finally to certainty of each other's love and devotion to the relationship. Although Lingyun usually takes the initiative in the courtship, Zhu is the one who finally determines where the relationship goes. The progression of their relationship is exactly the same as in any modern romance.

In this way, Cheng Huiying creates a late imperial fictional world where women can always find their agency in diverse individualized ways. As I have argued, the three cases discussed in this chapter are likely a fantasized reflection of the social reality of the gender inequality of women, especially in marriages which determined their whole lives. These women, in this sense, try their best to find their voice within the limited space of gender conventions in late imperial China. Meanwhile, Zhu's case can be considered a prototype of the later concept of free love as represented in *Feng shuangfei*. In this sense, a late nineteenth-century text becomes a perfect link to the early twentieth-century movement for women's liberation and we can unsurprisingly

[135] Because I will talk about Murong Zhu and her agency in detail in Chapter 5, I did not include her in this chapter. However, her relationship with Lingyun should be undoubtedly considered as belonging to the topic of this chapter.

understand how the idea of free love could be accepted and spread so fast in only about ten years.

CHAPTER III

SELF-CONSCIOUS WRITING: THE AESTHETICS OF *FENG SHUANGFEI*

Introduction

Xiaoshuo fiction had been considered a minor genre of literature for a long time until the Ming-Qing period. The phrase *xiaoshuo*, literally "small talks," indicates its marginal status in literature. However, the literati, especially fiction writers and commentators, worked very hard to incorporate this genre into serious literature during the Ming and Qing. They argued that *xiaoshuo*, especially the novels written by literati, demonstrated a high degree of intricacy and artistic sophistication. The commentators used various methods of commentaries, such as *zonglun* (总论, general treatises), *huiping* (回评, chapter comments), *jiapi* (夹批, interlinear comments) and *meipi* (眉批, marginal comments), to point out the aesthetic, as well as moral, values of *xiaoshuo*. These aesthetic techniques include but are not limited to a constructed self-conscious narrator, multiple layers of speaking subjects, a well-designed structure based on symmetry and *yin-yang* numerology and various types of relational characters.

Although *xiaoshuo* finally rose into scholars' sights as one of the most important genres of literature, *tanci*, similar to *xiaoshuo* before the Ming, has never been considered as a genre of serious literature even until the present day.[136] *Tanci*

[136] Modern scholars since the May Fourth Movement have paid attention to *xiaoshuo* not only because of the efforts of writers and commentators of traditional novels by literati, but also probably because novels are a major

have always been considered as a genre of popular literature whose only function was to entertain its audience. Therefore, there have been no studies of *tanci* that discuss them as literary works. However, upon reading *Feng shuangfei*, I realized that the author also uses the common writing aesthetics of *xiaoshuo*, including numbered structure and relational characters. Since *xiaoshuo* fiction is considered a serious literary genre because of the artistic sophistication, I will argue that this *tanci* is also a conscious production of a serious piece of literary work parallel to *xiaoshuo* fiction. My goal in this chapter is to discuss *Feng shuangfei* in that light.

The Magic Numbers: Structure and Numerology in *Feng shuangfei*

As self-conscious writers, outstanding novelists during the Ming and Qing periods usually had a well-designed big picture of their works, which can be most obviously seen in the structure of the novels. Commentators, such as Zhang Zhupo 张竹坡 on *Jin Ping Mei* (金瓶梅, Plum in the Golden Vase), and Zhang Xinzhi 张新之 on *Honglou meng* (红楼梦, Dream of the Red Chamber), called readers' attention to the overall structure of the novels and/or the symbolic *yin-yang* numerology in the novels. Based on these commentators' observations and on their own research, recent scholars have offered some important theories on the aesthetic design of the structure of the novels. Andrew Plaks closely analyzes the structure of 100-chapter novels, such as *Jin Ping Mei* and *Xiyou ji* (西游记, Journey to the West). As Plaks argues, these

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genre in world, especially Western, literature.

novels are considered self-conscious writings because they have shown a deliberately designed structure: their overall structure can be read for symmetry (for example, 1 and 99, 10 and 90) with the peak around chapter 50; they can be divided into 10-chapter basic units, which Plaks terms as decades; each individual *hui* chapter can be divided into two balanced halves; the chapter numbers, especially those ending in "nine," also bear symbolic significance for the novels; the heat and coldness work as a self-conscious structuring device.[137] Maram Epstein furthers Plaks's studies on *yin-yang* symbolism, especially in terms of numerology. As she argues, many Ming-Qing fictional texts play not only with the *yin-yang* imagery, but also *yin-yang* numerology. Six and nine respectively represent *yin* and *yang* at their peak power according to *Yijing* and appear in significant chapter numbers and characters' names.[138]

Similar to these canonical works, the structure of *Feng shuangfei* also makes use of *yin-yang* symbolism. *Yin-yang* theories originate from *Yijing* (易经, Book of Changes) and present a cosmology which informs all aspects of life. For example, the *yang* force is represented by the heaven, the sun, the male, fire, and brightness, and the *yin* force is represented by the earth, the moon, the female, water, and darkness. The forces of *yin* and *yang* are opposite but complementary to each other and can fluidly transform into each other. In the Daoist reading of *Yijing*, the theories of *yin*

[137] For details, see Andrew Plaks, *Four Masterworks of Ming Novel.*

[138] For details, see Epstein, *Competing Discourse*.

and *yang* are merely descriptive of the nature of things in the world.[139] Beginning in the Han dynasty, Confucianism had become a dominant school of philosophies and Confucian scholars had applied new interpretations to the *yin-yang* theories laid out in the *Yijing*. Dong Zhongshu, the most influential Confucian scholar during the Han dynasty, created a system of moral values related to *yin-yang* forces, in which *yang* stands for the good (*shan* 善) and *yin* stands for the evil (*e* 恶).[140] Cheng Huiying's writings reflect the influence of the world view of both schools.

The 52-chapter *Feng shuangfei* is roughly divided into three parts based on the rise and fall of *yin* and *yang* powers in the work. This large framework is loosely based on the moral value of *yin* as evil and *yang* as good. However, in this *tanci*, the evil *yin* force is represented by men who are abnormally feminine, namely catamites and eunuchs, while the good *yang* force is embodied by the morally orthodox males Guo Lingyun and Zhang Yishao, the male phoenixes named in the title. The three parts of the story roughly tell the fall of evil *yin* powers, including male same-sex practices, treasonous eunuchs and foreign invasions, and the rise of a positive *yang* force, namely the triumph of Guo Lingyun against the *yin* powers.

It is noteworthy that the evil *yin* force is represented by men, instead of women. In male-authored fiction, the evil *yin* force always concentrates on women. For example, in *Jin Ping Mei*, a typical male-authored fiction that uses *yin-yang*

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[139] For details, see Zeng fanzhao 曾凡朝 comments, *Yijing* 易经 (Wuhan: Chongwen shuju, 2007).

[140] For details, see Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒, *Chunqiu fanlu zhuzi suoyin* 春秋繁露逐字索引, ed. D. C. Lau (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1994).

numerology, the most negative *yin* people are two women, Wang Liu'er (Wang the Sixth) and Pan Jinlian (referred to as Pan the Sixth in the novel), on whom Zhang Zhupo comments, "Six is a *yin* number. Pan Liu'er and Wang Liu'er are combined to be a double *yin* number, therefore *yang* completely wanes. How can [Ximen] escape from death?" (六者，阴数也。潘六儿与王六儿合成重阴之数，阳已全尽，安得不死？).[141] Similarly, in *Xiyou ji*, the most dangerous and disastrous *yin* demons transform into women, such as the Baigu jing (白骨精, Demon of the White Skeleton), who can be considered double *yin* (dead and female). However, Cheng Huiying seems to intentionally avoid the topos, subverting the demonized stereotype of women. Instead, the major female characters she creates all represent positive *yin* energy; in contrast, the negative *yin* characters are designed to be males.

The first third of the novel is mainly about Guo Lingyun's first achievement, conquering one manifestation of *yin* gone awry, infertile male same-sex practices, in the distorted overwhelmingly *yin* society. It is symbolically significant that no major female characters appear in this section of the *tanci* to indicate a *yin-yang* imbalanced universe. At the very beginning of the *tanci*, the narrator paints a picture of unbalanced *yin-yang* forces by stating "the popularity of lewdness 淫风大行,"[142] especially in "the way of male homosexual eroticism that is risible, hateful, shameful and frightening" (男色一道，更为可笑可恨，可羞可惧。).[143] The *yin* energy in this

[141] Lanling Xiaoxiaosheng 兰陵笑笑生, *Gaohe tang piping diyi qishu Jin Ping Mei* 皋鹤堂批评第一奇书金瓶梅 (Changchun: Jilin daxue chubanshe, 1994), 522.

[142] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 4.

[143] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 28.

section of the *tanci* is embodied in Bai Ruyu 白如玉, whose nickname is "the Incomparable 无双." Bai Ruyu is so irresistible that no man who meets him is not affected. Bai Ruyu, portrayed as a femme fatale, plays a female role in male same-sex relationships, indicating that the natural *yin-yang* balance is broken. As a symbol of the imbalance, Ruyu attracts all men in the *tanci* and sleeps with all kinds of men, including the martial villain Zhang Qihu 张起鹘, the scholar officials Zhang Cai 张彩 and Zhang Jing 张景, the military general Mu Lei 沐雷, the barbarian generals and the crown prince. From villain to crown prince, these people cover a wide range of men's social status, indicating the degree to which the perverse *yin* power has spread through the whole empire. Ruyu also destroys the five relationships including that between emperor and minister, father and son, brothers, and friends.[144] The disorder in these five relationships, the central Confucian relationships for men, reinforces the toxic imbalance brought by the chaotic *yin* force, symbolized by Ruyu.[145]

But the spread of perverse *yin* energy is not limited to the Middle Kingdom. The Tufan (吐蕃), people considered subordinate and therefore in a positive *yin* in relationship to the Ming, rebel against Chinese rule. Moreover, the whole royal family of Tufan is dominated by the evil *yin* force and is corrupt and lascivious. The queen Wei Luan 卫鸾 kills the king for her secret lover; the general Wei Xiong 卫熊, who is

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[144] The relationship between husband and wife is not discussed in detail in this part of the novel because it all centers on the abnormal male world. Although we can assume that Zhang Jing's relationship with his wife becomes somewhat problematic when he falls in love with Ruyu, Jing's travel to the capital in the absence of his wife provides an excellent excuse to avoid this problem at the moment. Furthermore, catamites are usually not taken as threatening to the wife because of their unofficial status.

[145] I will discuss in detail the toxicity of Ruyu in the five relationships in Chapter IV, which is exclusively devoted to male relationships. For details, please see Chapter IV.

the queen's brother, kills his father and brother out of jealousy over Ruyu since all of them are having sex with him. Ruyu is circulated among the men from the provinces to the capital, to the border and finally to a rebellious foreign country. By following his circulation, the narrative, in the first third of the *tanci*, displays how corrupt *yin* subjugates the empire in such a way that Ruyu can be read as a symbol of all the sexual and political *yin-yang* disorders.

The first turning point is in Chapters 16 and 17, approximately one third of the way through the novel. The turning point, as expected, is also symbolized by Bai Ruyu. Instead of indulging in the corporeal pleasures of male same-sex desires as before, Ruyu, under the moral instruction of Guo Lingyun, sacrifices his own body to destroy the Tufan's rebellion against the Ming, and the Ming army finally defeats the Tufan in Chapter 16. After Lingyun's moral admonishment of Ruyu at the end of Chapter 7, Bai Ruyu finally understands what Lingyun has told him. Like other famous femmes fatale, such as Diaochan 貂婵 and Xishi 西施, Ruyu utilizes his sexual powers as a weapon to serve the country. In this sense, Lingyun's first achievement is gained by transforming the lethal *yin* force to help the righteous *yang* power.

If the first third of the *tanci* can be considered dominated by the *yin* force struggling to overpower a rising *yang* power, the second third is the central battleground of the two with the consolidation of the *yang* force and the balanced healthy *yin-yang* powers. From Chapter 17 on, the protagonists, Guo Lingyun and

Zhang Yishao, reach marriageable age and they and their wives-to-be, symbols of positive natural *yin* forces, start to appear in the narrative. In Chapter 17, Zhang Cai 张彩, who during the first third of the *tanci* dominated by improper *yin* forces is interested in having sex with feminized beautiful boys, is now attracted to Zhang Feixiang 张飞香, Yishao's elder sister and Lingyun's fiancée, and tries to abduct her. Although Zhang Cai is still depicted as an lewd scholar official, the change of his sexual attention symbolically indicates that Lingyun has already purged the "abnormal" fashion of male same-sex practices on a large scale and that *yang* power is becoming ascendant.

In this sense, we enter the world of sound orthodox heterosexual relationships, representing the ideal of naturally balanced *yin-yang* forces. All the important female figures are introduced in this middle part of the *tanci*. While Feixiang, Lingyun's fiancée, is missing due to Zhang Cai's abduction of her, Lingyun receives Cai's younger sister as his concubine. As a loyal husband, Lingyun refuses to consummate this relationship, travels around the country to look for his fiancée and is rewarded with another concubine-to-be, Zhen Daya. At the same time, Yishao, another of the two phoenixes, takes Mu Qionghua 沐琼花 as a wife, secretly arranges for Bao Xiang'er 鲍香儿 to be his concubine, and falls in love with Zhen Xiaoya 真小雅.

Not only is a balanced *yin-yang* relationship established in this part of the *tanci*, but so is a positive *yin* female relationship. In the second third of the *tanci*, the cross-dressed Feixiang starts her journey, meets the island princess Murong Zhu and

marries Zhu on her island kingdom. Their mutual appreciation of appearance and talent imitates that of the scholar-beauty novels, thus implying an ambiguous tension of female same-sex desires. Parallel to the intimate relationship between Lingyun's future wife and concubine, Yishao's wife, Mu Qionghua, also initiates a close relation with another woman and Yishao's concubine-to-be, Zhen Xiaoya, based on her appreciation of Xiaoya's appearance and talent. Both of these ambiguous relationships involving female same-sex desires can be read as a reflection of the male same-sex desires in the first third of the *tanci*. While male same-sex desires are considered dangerous and disastrous, female same-sex desires are presented as not threatening to the Confucian order. Therefore, female same-sex desires are treated lightly and are considered as positive *yin* flows and interactions, seasoning the narrative.

Bai Ruyu, formerly the embodiment of the deadly *yin* power and male same-sex practices, also changes symbolically and physically in this part of the *tanci*. Ruyu is masculinized, in terms of his physical strength, after taking two magic pills that Lingyun gives him. He is also able to use newly gained strength to resist men who make advances on him. To reinforce Ruyu's ability to protect himself against male same-sex eroticism, the magic pills also turn him into a blue-faced monster when he is fighting off sexual aggressors.[146] Moreover, Ruyu is bold enough to point out the corruption of Liu Jihua 刘际华, Liu Jin 刘瑾, the evil eunuch's nephew, and to physically fight with Jihua's servant who tries to shut him up. Because he cares about

[146] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, Chapter 21, 23, 27.

social problems and fights for them, Ruyu here is portrayed as socially masculine, after he regains his physical masculinity.

Reacquiring his social identity as a man, Bai Ruyu now sexually desires women, a change from enjoying male same-sex practices in the first third of the *tanci*. Being captive in Zhang Cai's household, Ruyu successfully resists Cai's request for sex, but is not able to resist the seduction from his concubines. According to Ruyu's logic, his sexual relationships with Cai's concubines are karmic retributions for Cai, "Before you took advantage of me, now I commit adultery with your concubines. It is how karma makes you pay for your fault. How strange is that?" (你当初讨我的便宜，我如今偷你的小妾，也是一还一报，何足为奇？).[147] Ruyu's desires for sex are still uncontrollable, but now he argues for the legitimacy of his desires for women instead of men with karma. This change of Ruyu's sexual interests is symbolically important in terms of reclaiming his masculinity because Cai was the first man with whom Ruyu started enjoying same-sex desires and eroticism. Ruyu's emblematic change serves as a metaphor of the fight between *yang* and *yin* forces in the *tanci*—the "sick" male same-sex practices can no longer survive in society and men are back to their correct natural and social *yin-yang* dominance.

In this middle section of the novel, the *yin* power, after Bai Ruyu's transformation, is now concentrated in the eunuchs and inner court. The prince claims the throne when the emperor dies, and he places those eunuchs whom he likes and

[147] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1280.

trusts in positions of power. Similar to male-authored novels, the castrated and therefore feminized eunuchs who teach and then seduce the crown prince with various physical pleasures in the first third of the *tanci* symbolize the evil *yin* powers. After a failed attempt by Lingyun and some loyal officials to eliminate these evil eunuchs led by the historically notorious Liu Jin 刘瑾(?-1510), the emperor, the ultimate *yang* force, is further pushed away from his normative *yang* position and the court is thrown into chaos.[148] The eunuchs corrupt the emperor by encouraging him in all sorts of entertainments, forcing the loyal ministers to retire, and even writing imperial rescripts for the emperor.[149] The slanderous behavior of the eunuchs causes the emperor to be blind to his normal role and therefore the *yang* heroes suffer. Lingyun is practically exiled, being sent to a remote area, and Yishao, the emperor's friend, is estranged from the emperor.

Another turning point, echoing the first one, falls exactly two-thirds of the way through the *tanci* in Chapters 35 and 36 and shows the second victory of the *yang* force, represented by the two male phoenixes. Zhang Cai and the eunuchs, led by Liu Jin, accuse Lingyun of rebelling against the emperor. The story reaches its climax towards the end of Chapter 35 when Yishao tries to cut his own heart out to prove Lingyun's innocence. At the beginning of Chapter 36, He Shiwei 何世威, Yishao's

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[148] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, Chapter 21-22.

[149] Writing imperial rescripts(批奏折) is solely the emperor's prerogative. In rescripts, the emperor responds to the ministers' suggestions and makes decisions on governmental issues. They represent the highest governmental power in imperial China.

martial arts master, finally produces evidence that turns the emperor against the eunuchs. At this point, proper political *yang* order is reinstated and reinforced.

In the last third of the *tanci*, *yang* power steadily reaches its peak and an ideal social and political balance of *yin* and *yang* is established and celebrated. In this part, the *tanci* is dominated by the eight-chapter narrative of the largest war against the allied rebel forces led by Murong Zhu, the princess of the foreign Three Immortal Island, and Zhang Qihu, the martial villain who used to be He Shiwei's disciple and the husband of the Dragon Queen of the Double Peak Island. While barbarians from the north and the west, including Tufan, are usually considered *yang* because of their extraordinary martial and military skills, the barbarians from the south and the east are viewed as *yin* because they are from the sea. It is especially true in this case considering that the rebelling leaders of the Tufan are men and the rulers of the island kingdoms are Princess Murong Zhu and the Dragon Queen. In this sense, winning the war against the Tufan suggests more of a victory over *yin* moral corruption; in contrast, the conquest that Lingyun gains in this war purely symbolizes a political triumph over submissive *yin* barbarian countries.

Lingyun's "taming" of Princess Zhu is not limited to the battleground, but extends to domestic life. Although Zhu hates Lingyun as a military enemy and a rival lover, Lingyun finally wins her love and domesticates her as one of his concubines. The taming on two levels also indicates an overall conquest of the central *yang* power of the Middle Kingdom over the barbarian *yin* power, which is always supposed to be

submissive to the center. Tamed as a natural counterpart of the *yang*, Zhu, now representing a positive *yin* force, eliminates the rest of the negative *yin* forces when she quells the rebellion led by the adopted son of the evil eunuch Liu Jin.

The *tanci* concludes with a proper order and a balanced union between *yin* and *yang* after the symbolic fight between the positive and negative *yin* powers. In terms of domestic life, the family lives of Guo Lingyun and Zhang Yishao and their wives turn into a harmonious model, and thereafter their family members, friends and inferiors all get married. In terms of public political order, the emperor trusts and promotes loyalty and runs a benevolent government. The advantage of the balance of *yin-yang* is proved by the ensuing prosperity of the Guo and the Zhang families, their fecundity with seven sons and three daughters for Lingyun and five sons and two daughters for Yishao, and the peace of the empire.

Yin-yang symbolism not only shapes the overall design of the structure, but also applies to the use of numerology. As Zhang Zhupo comments on *Jin Ping Mei*, he indicates that chapter numbers containing 6 usually represent *yin*.[150] Interestingly, the 6-related chapters in this *tanci* also feature symbolic *yin* figures, namely Bai Ruyu and Murong Zhu, who are converted from representing the negative to representing the return of proper order. Chapter 6 centers on Ruyu: General Mu storms Zhang Cai's residence in order to take back Ruyu whom Cai had kidnapped; Mu then starts a sexual relationship with Ruyu and tricks Zhang Jing into sleeping with the boy; Liu

[150] For example, see Lanling Xiaoxiaosheng, *Gaohe tang piping diyi qishu Jin Ping Mei*, 522.

Jin sends Ruyu to the heir apparent as a sexual gift and therefore the prince gets involved in male same-sex practices too. Ruyu is considered femininely *yin* here not only because physically his appearance is femininely beautiful and he plays a female role in his sexual intercourse with men, but also because he is socially cloistered in the inner chambers like women by these men. In this sense, Chapter 6 is dominated by the feminized *yin* boy, Ruyu, who is entrapped and then lures men into the *yin* 淫, or lewdness, which is considered one of the ultimate negative *yin* qualities. Chapter 16 continues this chain of using Ruyu to symbolize *yin* 阴 and *yin* 淫, but at this point Ruyu's meaning is also beginning to shift. He, using sex, works as a spy and tricks Wei Xiong, the barbarian rebellious leader, to make wrong decisions so that he can help Lingyun win in the war. Chapter 26 and 27, still focusing on Ruyu, complete his transformation. As previously argued, Ruyu's social caring about corruption and his physical strength and courage to fight against it result in the death of the servant of Liu Jin's nephew. Moreover, when he is charged for murder, Ruyu is able to make a masculine and heroic move to take full responsibility for the death. This event follows Ruyu's other important symbolic change from *yin* to *yang* as I have mentioned before, symbolized by his resistance to the sexual harassment from Zhang Cai and adultery with Cai's concubines. These three 6-related chapters crystallize the whole process of Ruyu's change from negative to positive and reinforce the value of Ruyu as the symbolic embodiment of *yin*, which is proved by his later self-castration.

Likewise, Chapters 36 and 46 are dominated by Murong Zhu, another model *yin* transformation from undermining the proper order to realizing it. In Chapter 36, Zhu is the rebellious leader and princess of the Three Immortal Island who challenges the rule of the Middle Kingdom. Being a woman from a subordinate barbarian and marginal island country, Zhu embodies the personal and political meanings of negative *yin*. However, in Chapter 46, Zhu has become a general who pacifies a rebellion led by the adopted son of the evil *yin* eunuch Liu Jin. She then wins herself an amnesty and the chance to legitimately marry Lingyun. This portrayal of Zhu, in this 6-related chapter, concentrates on her positive *yin* qualities, including her adoption of Confucian values and submission to both the Middle Kingdom and her man, Lingyun. As in the depiction of Ruyu, these "6" chapters present a condensed version of the narrative of Zhu's transition from negative *yin* to positive *yin*.

It is noteworthy that the classic negative *yin* images of women appear in Chapters 38 and 39, instead of Chapter 36. These two chapters center on the battle between the Chinese army led by Yishao and the barbarian army led by the Dragon Queen. The Dragon Queen is a *jiaojing* (蛟精, a *jiao* spirit) who transforms into a woman. The definitions of *jiao* in Chinese legends are varied: some say that *jiao* is a female *long* (龙, dragon); some say that *jiao* is a kind of animal which will possibly become a dragon after five hundred years. But in general, *jiao*'s status is inferior to *long* in terms of the hierarchy of the gods; *jiao* is generally in charge of rivers and lakes. In most legends, *jiao* are presented as cruel animals/gods and bring floods. In

this sense, the Dragon Queen is obviously a negative female *yin* image associated with disastrous waters.

Moreover, the black magic she uses is also associated with negative *yin*. Since the Chinese army is too strong, the Dragon Queen has to rely on her black magic to win the battles. Two of her black magic spells are to summon floods, as expected, and to summon clouds to cover the sun.[151] The magic treasure she uses to defeat Yishao is a pearl that is "bright as the moon"明如月.[152] The worst magic of all is the one practiced by a group of women whose lower part of the body is naked.[153] Using women to perform the *yin* 陰/淫 magic, none of the men in the army, except for Guo Lingyun, can avoid being lost and captured in this battle. It may be significant that the narrator decenters the classic female *yin* images to the chapters after Chapter 36, where traditional readers may expect them, indicating that they are the minority of women. This may emphasize that Cheng Huiying intentionally subverts the stereotypes of negative *yin* women by presenting positive *yin* images in the usual Chapter 36.

In contrast, the 9-related chapters, the utmost *yang* number, all focus on the two male phoenixes, Lingyun and Yishao, and their healthy relationships with others. In Chapter 9, Yishao righteously rejects the prince's request for sex and kills a group of lascivious monks he encounters in a temple. In Chapter 19, Yishao and Lingyun are

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[151] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, Chapter 38-40.

[152] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1809.

[153] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1848-1850.

promoted after their victory in war, and Lingyun has a mysterious dream about his future concubine, Zhang Liyu 张丽玉. Chapter 29 centers on Yishao's romantic relationships with Xiaoya and Xiang'er. In Chapter 39, Yishao gains help from both Xiaoya and Lingyun, overcoming the extreme *yin* enemy in the war. Chapter 49 concentrates on Yishao's family life, marked by the birth of two sons. Although these 9-related chapters do not feature particularly noteworthy moral or political achievements compared to the 6-related chapters, the two phoenixes' vigorous heterosexual relationships, which reject the abnormal and the immorality symbolized by Yishao's fertility, still promote the value of orthodox *yang* and suggest the benefits of a natural and proper balance between *yin* and *yang*.

The Relational Characters: The Aesthetic Design of Characterization

One of the symbols of the maturity of *xiaoshuo* fiction during the Jiajing and the Wanli periods (1522-1620) of the Ming dynasty is that novelists began to focus more on aesthetic design, especially in terms of characters, and not merely on the plot. Characterization gained more and more attention from both the novelists and the commentators. In his comments on *Shuihu zhuan* 水浒传 (Water Margin, also known as Outlaws of the Marsh), Jin Shengtan 金圣叹 highlights the writer's emphasis on constructing meaningful relationships between the characters. For example, he points out that Song Jiang 宋江 and Li Kui 李逵 demonstrate precisely opposite

personalities in order to more clearly express their characters.[154] Under the influence of Jin Shengtan, novelists and commentators of fiction, especially the masterworks such as *Xiyou ji* 西游记 (Journey to the West), *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅(Plum in the Golden Vase) and *Honglou meng* 红楼梦(The Dream of the Red Chamber), all devoted a great deal of attention to aesthetic patterns of characterization. Later commentators considered characterization an organic part of the aesthetics of *xiaoshuo* fiction.

In *Feng shuangfei*, we see the deployment of all techniques of characterization that male authors used in their works. Among these "relational" characters, as termed by David L. Rolston, one of the most prominent characterization techniques in *Feng shuangfei* is the use of paired characters. Studying the theories of the commentators, Rolston summarizes that characters can be arranged in contrastive pairs (*fandui* 反对) or analogous pairs (*zhengdui* 正对): the former means their differences outweigh their similarities, forcing readers to compare their moral worth, such as Li Kui and Song Jiang as suggested by Jin Shengtan; the latter means "their similarities are greater than differences, which is useful for fine-tuning the comparative ranking of characters of nearly similar stature," such as Qingwen 晴雯 and Daiyu 黛玉 in *Honglou meng*.[155] It is worth noting that the definition of "contrastive pairs" needs

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[154] For details, see Jin Shengtan 金圣叹, *Guan hua tang di wu cai zi shu Shui hu zhuan* 贯华堂第五才子书水浒传, in *Jin Shengtan quanji* 金圣叹全集(Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1985), vol. 2, 125-26.

[155] David L. Rolston, *Traditional Chinese Fiction and Fiction Commentary: Reading and Writing Between the Lines* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 212.

some adjustment because it focuses only on differences such as personal traits or abilities, but does not involve moral judgments in *Feng shuangfei*.

As expected from the title, the *tanci* first and foremost creates a pair of male protagonists, the so-called pair of male phoenixes. Guo Lingyun and Zhang Yishao represent two complementary ideals from the perspective of women's fantasies. Guo Lingyun is a typical Confucian orthodox man, who is depicted with words such as "solemn and just 严正" and "elegant 端凝."[156] In all five relationships, he strictly follows Confucian teachings and all his behaviors accord with *li* or rituals. In his relationship to the emperor, he is always loyal no matter whether the emperor trusts him or misunderstands him. He has the nickname of "The one who dares to lose his head 拚杀头," which is given by the evil eunuch Liu Jin, and he falls into the stereotype of a loyal minister who remonstrates with the emperor and risks his life (known as 死谏).[157] Due to Lingyun's persistent loyal advice, the emperor finally gives up the "bad" habit of homoeroticism and executes the evil eunuchs who try to manipulate and corrupt the court. Although his father dies when he is seven, Lingyun is still presented as a perfectly filial son by the way he obeys his father when alive and shows deep sorrow after his father has died, as marked by his crying faintly and refusing to smile during the three-year mourning period. Lingyun is also a ritually proper husband, always treating wives as "a guest and a friend 如宾如友."[158] He

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[156] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 46.

[157] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1598, 1615, etc.

[158] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1999.

shows moderate *qing* (or passions) and respect toward his wives, but never gets attached to or obsessed with any of them; indeed, he seems indifferent to whose bedroom he stays in. Being a single child, Lingyun does not have a real brother, but he does have an adopted elder brother, the emperor, and an elder cousin, Guo Chenglong 郭成龙, to whom he never fails to show respect. He is emotionally attached to his sworn brother and best friend, Zhang Yishao, and yet morally corrects him. In every single aspect of the five relationships, he is a model of Confucian orthodox values, but this degree of propriety seemingly made him fall short of romantic ideals.

In contrast, Zhang Yishao stands for the *fengliu* (风流, romantic, sensual) man who is "sexually and emotionally more 'open' to women and who has a sharp eye for subtleties.'"[159] As a typical *fengliu* young man, he is not restrained by the strict Confucian rules. The words most commonly used to describe fit the stereotype of a *fengliu* scholar; he is referred to as "*shusan* (疏散, loose)," "*qingyang* (轻扬, flighty)," "*renxing* (任性, spontaneous)," "*fengliu* (风流, romantic)."[160] He is good at socialization, marked by his ability to make friends with all kinds of people regardless of their class and morality. He is always popular because he is good at making jokes, arguing with people, and playing all sorts of sports and games. As long as he is having fun, he does not consider the consequences even though he might be making a bad friend (such as Zhang Cai) or his behavior may cross the boundary of propriety (such

[159] McMahon, *Causality and Containment*, 51.

[160] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 46, 47, etc.

as staying with the emperor overnight).[161] Yishao is such a typical unrestrained *fengliu* type that these personal traits remain the same even in his relationships with women. Unlike Lingyun who sticks to the strict Confucian rules and keeps a proper distance from women, he is too romantic and attracted to women to behave appropriately. For example, he peeks at Mu Qionghua, which results in their marriage; he climbs the garden wall and sneaks into Zhen Xiaoya's bedroom when he is in love with her; he secretly meets Bao Xiang'er and arranges a marriage without the consent of his parents or first wife; he flirts with all the maids and eventually sleeps with them. It is also noteworthy that although he does not care about minor behavioral issues in terms of rituals, he is very clear about the core Confucian values and never makes significant mistakes after getting advice from Lingyun, who is the only person he fears.

These two male protagonists therefore form an interesting pair with almost opposite characteristics who flesh out each other's characteristics because they always appear together. However, they are also similarly extraordinary. They often appear together in the *tanci*: they are each other's "*zhixin* (知心, soul mate);" they grow up together; they both have a remarkable appearance; they have similar literary and martial talents; they both succeed in their political careers and get similar official titles and ranks at a young age; and they finally end up living next door to each other

[161] Staying with the emperor is considered having crossed the boundary in the *tanci* because it may result in a rumor that Yishao is a catamite as well as from the fact that Yishao lures the emperor into spending too much time having fun, instead of working.

with their prosperous and large families.[162] Although people gave them the nickname of "two male phoenixes flying together" due to their exceptional appearance when they were young boys, their image as a pair is reinforced by their political and domestic successes and the way their two households are joined together at the end of the *tanci*. Although contrastive pairs in male-authored novels usually draw readers' attention to their moral values, this contrastive pair of Lingyun and Yishao instead provides a pair of complementary ideals who, like Lin Daiyu and Xue Baochai in *Honglou meng*, form a perfect two-in-one pair that appeals to both orthodox and romantic sensibilities.

Parallel to the complementary pairing of the men, Lingyun and Yishao's wives also complement each other in a way. Lingyun's wife, Zhang Feixiang 张飞香, is an exemplary virtuous wife. Being especially meek, she does not show off her extraordinary literary talents.[163] Without parents-in-law, her only familial responsibility in the household is to maintain domestic order. She allows and even encourages her husband to take a concubine; as a result Lingyun ends up having three concubines, Zhang Liyu, Zhen Daya, and Murong Zhu. Feixiang even willingly works as a matchmaker between Lingyun and Zhu. Her generosity causes Lingyun to praise her, such as "your generosity is surely like the amount of water in the sea" (海量宽宏信不差) and "your degree of virtue is rarely seen even since ancient times" (夫人贤

[162] *Zhixin* is mentioned in Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 47.

[163] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 759-62. When the emperor asks for paintings from her, she politely rejects him and implicitly points out the moral problems with the emperor's request. See my Chapter 6 for a detailed discussion.

惠，真是亘古希逢).[164] Moreover, she is very good at dealing with problems in the household, which is exactly a virtuous woman's job. When Murong Zhu, the only one of Lingyun's wives who is non-Han and impetuous, fights with Lingyun or competes with Daya, everyone turns to Feixiang for help. She runs her household with "*renhou* (仁厚, leniency)"and therefore she successfully gains the respect of servants and maids and is able to resolve their issues with their trust. One example is the case of Wan Caifang who is mistakenly accused of adultery by Zhu and tries to kill Zhu.[165] To complete the image of Feixiang as a perfectly virtuous wife, the *tanci* ends with Feixiang giving birth to a son, allowing her to fulfill the ultimate duty of a good wife.

In contrast, Yishao's wife, Mu Qionghua 沐琼花, is a stereotypical shrew. She is so jealous that she tries every means to prevent her husband from associating with other women, including both women outside of their household and the maids in the household. While talking about his wives, Yishao tells Lingyun, "Your wife and concubines are all virtuous, but my wives are all sharp. They are all jealous, and then there is the issue of Qionghua's ferocity" (你家妻妾人人淑，我的浑家个个尖。妒忌之心人尽有，琼花凶狠不须言。).[166] Jealousy and ferocity are two characteristics which Yishao identifies with Qionghua; they are also the two essential qualities of a shrew.[167] On the surface then, Yishao appears to be a henpecked husband although it

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[164] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1998, 2002.

[165] Feixiang is referred as *renhou* in Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2342, 2344, etc.

Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, chapter 48-50.

[166] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, p. 2033.

[167] The description of the stereotype of shrews in male-authored fiction can be found in McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists*, 55-57.

is because of his improper interactions with women. Yishao has to argue with Qionghua every time he wants to take a concubine. Qionghua's fierce jealousy goes to an extreme when she finds out that Yishao has secretly married Bao Xiang'er. Qionghua's wrath cannot be pacified until her father intervenes.[168] Qionghua seems to fit perfectly into the category of shrew; however, as a typical shrew, Qionghua nonetheless validates her status as a good wife by her chastity to her husband, her vigorous ability to manage the household and by giving birth to a son. Instead of being destructive and getting the household in an uproar as is typical of most shrews, Qionghua is presented as the best kind of wife for a wastrel husband who has no control over his sexual desires, because she can correct and improve him.[169] In this way, Qionghua and Feixiang create another contrastive pair designed for the two male protagonists, a virtuous wife and a shrewish wife.

While the male protagonists have a perfect combination of both literary and martial skills, none of the female characters in *Feng shuangfei* is good at both *wen* 文, literary, and *wu* 武, martial, qualities.[170] In terms of literary and martial qualities,

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I will go into further detail in Chapter VI.

[168] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, chapter 50-52.

[169] A similar pairing also occurs in *Lin Lan Xiang* 林兰香. Instead of an overly virtuous woman, the desirable wife for a wastrel in *Lin Lan Xiang* is the one who can correct and improve men. For details, see McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists*, 234-50.

A detailed reading on the author's values on these two stereotypes of women, virtuous wives and shrews, will be discussed in Chapter VI.

[170] As in a clichéd saying, "be well versed in both fine letters and martial arts" 文武双全,

Guo Lingyun and Zhang Yishao are considered literary because both can enjoy and write poetry (Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 125, 423-424, 1373-1374, 2472-2473, etc.); they are considered capable of martial arts and military strategies because both of them have been generals leading the Chinese army to conquer foreign rebellions.

However, it is noteworthy that *wu* is valued over *wen* in this *tanci*, as I mentioned in the Introduction. It is probably related to the author's contemporary social and political background.

women in *Feng shuangfei* cannot be complete or perfect on their own, but are placed in complementary *wen-wu* pairs. For example, Feixiang, the ideal talented girl, never shows up alone, but instead is coupled with He Danyan or Murong Zhu. Feixiang, as I will discuss in detail in Chapter VI, is not only a perfectly orthodox and virtuous wife for Lingyun, but also is depicted as a female counterpart of an ideal *fengliu* scholar. While the male literary scholars, such as Zhang Cai and Zhang Jing, are all to some extent morally corrupt and obsessed with excessive improper sexual desires, Feixiang, a talented literary girl, becomes the incarnation of positive *fengliu* values. Similar to all the desirable talented women who are considered the embodiment of pure *qing* in male-authored fiction, Feixiang has pure and strong feelings for Murong Zhu and she is good at calligraphy, painting and writing poetry.[171] Therefore she physically, emotionally and intellectually fits into the aesthetic of *qing* and creates a female version of the positive *wen* model.[172]

Paired with Feixiang, Danyan and Zhu are the two most extraordinary female martial figures in the *tanci*; they are officially entitled *guanjun* (冠军, champion) by the empress. Growing up as an adopted sister to Feixiang, Danyan accompanies Feixiang until Feixiang meets and "marries" Zhu. Since her childhood, Danyan has been a martial girl—as the daughter of He Shiwei who is the best martial master in

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[171] *Honglou meng* is the best example to illustrate how girls in the Grand View Garden are portrayed as the pure embodiment of *qing*.

"Pure" in this case not only indicates that Feixiang's *qing* for Zhu is not corrupted by the material world, but also suggests physical chastity. Physical purity in the late Qing period seems also to be an essential of pure *qing* and *Pinhua baojian* is a typical text of this kind of values.

[172] For a detailed discussion of Feixiang's *fengliu* and androgynous qualities, please see Chapter VI of this dissertation.

Feng shuangfei, she is raised as a boy and learns martial arts from her father, and she even kills the evil Bao Wen, who had both used black magic and climbed into General Mu's garden to abduct Feixiang, without hesitation or fear at sixteen.[173] When Feixiang decides to travel back home from the capital, Danyan volunteers to accompany her as a bodyguard and suggests that both of them dress as men. When dressed as a man, "although [Danyan] hasn't learnt the habits of *jianghu* from her father, she is just like a pretty young boy on the battleground for knights-errant" (虽不曾父风传习江湖气，却像个游侠场上美少年).[174] And when she uses her sword, "[people] only heard the sound of the wind blowing on the ground, but they saw only a pool of light, instead of either her body or the sword" (但闻刮地风声响，人剑俱无光一团).[175] Here, Feixiang's uncle, watching two girls in men's dress, clearly praises them as a perfect *wen* and *wu* pair, "Excellent! Excellent! This is truly a scholar and a warrior" (妙极！妙极！一文一武，端的不差).[176] For a long time, Danyan willingly dresses, lives and fights as a young man.[177] With her exceptional martial skills, Danyan likes to dress as a male warrior not only because she was raised as a boy and trained with martial arts until she was ten, but also because she identifies herself with knights-errant, who are usually males. Danyan's *wu* -- with

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[173] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, chapter 17.

[174] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 809.

[175] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 809.

[176] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 809.

[177] She is the only one who suggests the cross-dressing to Feixiang and, for five years on Three Immortal Island, serves as the king's adopted son. Although Danyan and Feixiang dress as women after they return to China after five years, Danyan is still happy to dress and fight as a man in war (Chapter 46). She also takes the responsibility for continuing the family line of the Murong family, having her second son surnamed Murong.

her masculine courage and forthrightness -- and Feixiang's *wen* -- with her feminine gentleness and meekness -- create a remarkable *wen-wu* contrastive but complementary pair.

After her fake marriage with Murong Zhu, Feixiang appears more frequently together with Zhu as a couple. The text often identifies Zhu, a non-Han princess, as a military figure who leads her own army. She is more than any other woman in the *tanci* involved in most battles, including her fights with Lingyun. Her remarkable martial qualities are highlighted by the narrative when it compares Zhu with Danyan, describing them as "[they are] exactly the same in skill and bravery."[178] Unlike Danyan who often fights in men's dress, Zhu often appears with her "*luan*-engraved blades 绣鸾刀" in women's fighting dress.[179] *Luan* are considered female birds, especially when paired with the mythical male *feng*. Zhu, the foreign princess who exists outside the system of Chinese stereotypes, is presented as a complete female *wu* figure. Moreover, it is important to notice that she, as another female barbarian rebel leader, is also an embodiment of a positive female *yin* martial figure in contrast to the Dragon Queen, who represents a negative female *yin* martial figure. Zhu's *wu* qualities -- her feminine irritable temper and capriciousness -- and Feixiang's *wen* qualities -- masculine calmness and stability -- form another contrastive but complementary *wen-wu* pair. Noteworthy is the complex distribution of gender qualities between the two women.

[178] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 850.

[179] *Luan* is a mythical bird believed to be the privileged conveyor of heavenly gods.

As for the definition of *wen* and *wu* values, it is noticeable that *wen* and *wu* in *Feng shuangfei* not only refer to these girls' skills and personal traits, but also are culturally marked. Danyan and Zhu train the soldiers on her island kingdom while Feixiang sets the rites on it, functioning perfectly in terms of *wen* and *wu*. Both Zhu and Danyan's martial images are reinforced by their military, and therefore political, achievements in the wars between the Chinese army and foreign and national rebellions.

While Feixiang, Danyan and Zhu make up congenial complementary pairings, Guo Lingyun's two concubines, Zhen Daya 真大雅 and Murong Zhu 慕容珠, make up another *wen-wu* pair marked by their competition. Unlike Feixiang and Danyan who are both to some extent fluid in their gender, Daya and Zhu are a pure female pairing in terms of their gender identification. As was previously argued, Zhu's *wu* qualities are clearly feminine; Daya's gender identification is also associated with womanly virtues and talents. The characters' names suggest their qualities. Daya's style suggests that she is a virtuous talented woman. "Daya" is directly from the title of the "Daya (Great Odes)" section of the *Shijing*, the songs played in solemn court ceremonies. Her adherence to ritual and propriety gives her an air of solemnity and respect. Her given name is Miaocai 妙才, literally "wonderful talent," which again reinforces her image as a talented girl.[180]

[180] Her younger sister's style is Xiaoya. Xiaoya is directly taken from the title of the "Lesser Odes" collection in *Shijing*, the less formal songs played at court festivities. As expected, Xiaoya is not as rigid as Daya, but still virtuous and chaste. Xiaoya's given name is Miaorong 妙容, "wonderful appearance." As the name suggests, Xiaoya is truly prettier than her elder sister.

Daya appears as a talented woman who is stereotypically adept at calligraphy, painting and poetry. Unlike Feixiang whose subject position in literary works is as a *fengliu* scholar who appreciates beautiful women, Daya directly claims her identification as a talented woman by signing her penname, Penglai nüshi (蓬莱女史, literally "female historian from Penglai, the immortal island"),[181] on her paintings. While Feixiang paints a beautiful woman, Daya paints plum blossoms and Guo Lingyun, the man who helps her and with whom she fell in love; while Feixiang's poetry mostly addresses Zhu, her beautiful wife, Daya's poetry collection has a typical feminine title, *Lüchuang xiaocao* (绿窗小草, Trivial Manuscripts beside the Green Window), putting her into the *guixiu* (闺秀, talented girl) group and tradition.

What more explicitly identifies Daya with orthodox female literary virtues is that she writes women's history; for this work she is awarded the official title of *nüboshi* (女博士, female erudite).[182] Parallel to Zhu's barbaric *wu* and Daya's cultivated *wen* qualities, their official titles of *nüboshi* and *guanjun* reinforce the fact that the narrator views them as the ideals of female *wen* and *wu*.

The contrastive pairing of Zhu and Daya is further highlighted by their competition as two concubines in Lingyun's polygamous household. Although the competition is always initiated by Zhu, the competition itself demonstrates their comparable qualities. The fact that they marry Lingyun on the same day reinforces their opposite but equal characteristics, which are further demonstrated in their

[181] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1103.

[182] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1296.

competitive show of womanly virtue, namely sending their husband out of their own bedroom to sleep with his other concubines. It is noticeable that the motivations for this behavior also display their differences in terms of feminine *wen-wu* qualities: Daya does it because a literary virtuous woman is not supposed to be too attached to her husband or sex; Zhu, in contrast, does it merely in order to show that she is as good as Daya. When confronting this turn of events, their orthodox husband Lingyun has a very interesting comment:

> It is very strange that Miaocai, the *boshi*, has been famous for her talent for a long time, but she is impractical and foolish in her heart. This implicates the heroic female king into abiding by Neo-Confucianism... Neo-Confucianist and Hero, both please withdraw.
> [只可怪妙才博士名久扬，如何内里偏迂拙，并累英雄女大王，也要循循从道学.....道学、英雄请散场。][183]

Lingyun, the symbol of ultimate moral judgment, clearly classifies Daya and Zhu with two opposing *wen-wu* categories, neo-Confucianism and heroism. This speech in front of his concubines follows his thought that "the barbarian girl is pretty but too irascible, but Miaocai is a bit too dignified" (蛮女娇容终躁暴，妙才未免太端庄).[184] As Lingyun indicates, Zhu and Daya represent two extreme examples of well-educated women (*wen*) and uncivilized wild women (*wu*). Their divergence stands out in their competition, making them an obvious *wen-wu* contrastive but complementary female pair.

Feng shuangfei also makes use of other forms of characterization, especially in the grouping of characters. Similar to the way the characters in *Xiyou ji* and

[183] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2261-2.

[184] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2262.

Honglou meng are associated with five-elements (*wuxing* 五行) symbolism, Cheng Huiying also creates a suite of female characters who are associated with the four seasons.[185] In Lingyun's happy polygamous family, Zhu suggests that Daya paint the four wives of Lingyun, fitting them into the four seasons. Many male authors during the Ming and Qing periods concluded their novels with a list of characters, for example, the one hundred and eight heroes in *Shuihu zhuan*, the promotion of the gods in *Fengshen yanyi*, and the presumed *qingbang* (Roster of names ranked according to *qing*) in *Honglou meng*. As expected, Daya's paintings and Lingyun's poems appended to them appear in the last chapter of *Feng shuangfei*.

Amazingly, Lingyun's four wives fit perfectly into a four seasons and four virtues scheme. Feixiang, the first wife, is in the spring scene, with the poem titled "Drinking wine and appreciating the flowers" (酌酒观花). The image of Feixiang in the painting and poem emphasizes her characteristics as a female *fengliu* scholar doing the typical aesthetic activities of the *fenglong* literati. Liyu, the second wife, is in the summer scene, with the poem titled "Embroidering in the wind" (临风刺绣). Since she is only a secondary female character, the portrayal of Liyu in the *tanci* only stresses her feminine virtues and lack of any kind of talents, so doing embroidering becomes the best symbol of her virtues. Daya, the third wife, is in the autumn scene, with the poem titled "Chanting poems under the moon" (月下吟诗). Along with her

[185] In his study on characterization, Andrew Plaks points out the phenomena of grouping the characters by the frame of the five-elements (*wuxing* 五行) scheme in *Honglou meng* and *Xiyou ji*.

In *Yesou puyan*, the four concubines of Wen Suchen clearly fall into the four categories of traditional skills -- mathematics, medicine, poetry and military science -- which are at the same time Suchen's interests. For a detailed discussion about this topic, see McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists*, 53, 150-75.

official title of "Female Erudite," this self-portrayal and Lingyun's poem again reinforce her image as a talented woman. Zhu, the fourth wife, is in the winter scene, with the poem titled "Hunting in the snow" (雪天行猎). Consistent with her *wu* imagery throughout the fiction, this hunting image of her indicates her identity as a foreign martial woman.[186]

After looking at the paintings and reading the poems, Yishao points out the delicate and artistic design of the picture. He says,

> The scenes are spring, summer, autumn and winter; the rhymes are *feng*, *hua*, *xue* and *yue*; the themes of your poems are virtue, beauty, talent, and skills... [景是春、夏、秋、冬，韵乃风、花、雪、月，你的诗意又取德、容、才、艺……][187]

It is an intentional design of the author to weave four seasons, four virtues and the settled idiom *feng hua xue yue* into the titles and rhymes of the poems. "*Feng hua xue yue*" literally means "wind, flowers, snow and moon," referring to the typical natural scenes in the four seasons: flowers in the spring, breeze in the summer, moon in the autumn and snow in the winter. Because these are considered beautiful and pleasant scenes, it, as a settled phrase, also works as a metaphor for romantic lives. Relating the four wives to this phrase indicates Lingyun's happy polygamous love and marriage life. Moreover, the narrative seems to indicate that Lingyun's happy domestic life is due to the four feminine virtues associated with his wives. It is noteworthy that the traditional *side* (四德, four feminine virtues) are *de* 德, *rong* 容,

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[186] Considering the *tanci* was written during the Qing period, we can believe that the cultural stereotypes of Han Chinese and Manchu/foreign fit into the literary and martial/military. Actually, Manchus, including their emperors, were famous for and proud of their skills in riding and hunting. Therefore, such a painting by Zhu probably indicates her non-Han identity.

[187] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2473.

yan 言, *gong* 工, which refer to propriety in behavior, speech, demeanor and employment. However, the narrator purposefully alters the definition of *side*: instead of proper countenance, Lingyun, the speaking subject, praises the beauty of Feixiang; instead of proper speech, he appreciates the literary talents of Daya; instead of proper feminine work, he compliments Zhu's martial skills. The subtle change of the definitions indicates a larger space that the narrator allows for women. The perfect positioning of the four wives in four seasons with four virtues, according to their characteristics, can be no coincidence, but a deliberate design of the author.

Conclusion

By evaluating its aesthetics, this chapter suggests that *Feng shuangfei* should be considered as serious a piece of literary work the equal of mainstream male-authored *xiaoshuo* fiction. Although the narrative does not adopt the common structure of two halves in *xiaoshuo* fiction, the deliberately designed three parts marked by the rise and fall of *yin* and *yang* energies indicate that the writer was very conscious of the aesthetics of the overall structure of her work. Moreover, like *xiaoshuo* fiction, the characters in this *tanci* are not merely plot devices, but also aesthetic devices. I argue that these characters are deliberately designed to be pairs or groups, so that aesthetically they correspond to each other in the whole work.

This chapter not only proves the literary value of *Feng shuangfei*, but also provides a guideline to read the following three chapters. Echoing the three parts into which the text is divided according to *yin* and *yang* energies, the next three chapters will also focus on *yang* energies, *yin* energies and the balance between the two. Like this chapter, the following three chapters will also take *xiaoshuo* fiction as a large background and parallel. Each chapter will deal with a common motif in *xiaoshuo* fiction, male same-sex eroticism and homosociality, female same-sex desires and subjectivity, and stereotypes of women.

CHAPTER IV

HOMOSOCIAL *YANG*:

A NEW TWIST ON CITY-TOPPLING BEAUTY AND MALE FRIENDSHIP

Introduction

As scholars have pointed out and studied, there was a vogue of male same-sex practices among the literati during the Ming and Qing dynasties.[188] This vogue is supported by rich textual materials, such as poetry, notation books (*biji* 笔记) and fiction.[189] Although Sophie Volpp argues that interest in and acceptance of writings about male same-sex practices was mostly because of strangeness (*qi* 奇) rather than actual practice, Matthew Sommer's studies, which document the banning of sexual intercourse between males beginning in the Ming dynasty, actually demonstrate that the phenomenon of male same-sex practices had become so popular and visible that the government had to establish new laws to discourage and prohibit this kind of infertile non-Confucian behavior.[190] While we cannot tell for sure how widely

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[188] See Brett Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); James Gough, "Deviant Marriage Patterns," in *Normal and Abnormal Behavior in Chinese Culture*, ed. Arthur Kleinman and Tsung-yi Lin (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publisher Co., 1981); and Vivian Ng, "Homosexuality and the State in Late Imperial China," in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, Jr. (New York: Penguin Books, 1990).

[189] For example, the anonymous writer, Lanling Xiaoxiao Sheng's 兰陵笑笑生 *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 (Plum in the Golden Vase), Cao Xueqin's 曹雪芹 *Honglou meng* 红楼梦 (Dream of the Red Chamber), the poems on Xu Ziyun 徐子云 by Chen Weisong 陈维崧 and his friends literati, Shen Defu's 沈德符 *Bizhou zhai yutan* 笔帚斋余谈 (Casual Conversations of the Worn Brush Studio), Li Yu's 李渔 short story "Nan Mengmu jiaohe sanqian 男孟母教合三迁" (A Male Mencius's Mother), Ling Mengchu's 凌蒙初 *Pai'an jingqi* 拍案惊奇(Slapping the Table in Amazement), the anonymous writer, Zui Xihu xin yue zhuren's 醉西湖心月主人 *Bian er chai* 弁而钗 (Cap and Hairpins as Well), etc.

[190] Sophie Volpp, "Classifying Lust: The Seventeenth-Century Vogue for Male Love," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studie* 61, no.1 (Jun., 2001): 77-117.

Matthew Sommer, "The Penetrated Male in Late Imperial China: Judicial Constructions and Social Stigma,"

practiced and accepted it was, the promulgation of new laws and the increasing number of literary works referring to male same-sex practices did indicate the literati's attention to and interest in the actual practice among intellectual circles.

To legitimate their desires for beautiful young boys, scholarly writers advocated the aesthetics of *qing* 情 in their literary works.[191] One of the most extreme examples is the first story, "Qingzhen ji" 情贞记(Records of Virtuous Love), in *Bian er chai* 弁而钗 (Cap and Hairpins as Well), in which one of the male protagonists, Feng Xiang 风翔, defends himself when asking another male scholar, Zhao Wangsun 赵王孙, for sex, "The place where *qing* concentrates is exactly people like us. The thing that happened today is inappropriate in terms of principles. But in terms of *qing*, then men can become women and women can become men too" (情之所钟，正在我辈。今日之事，论理自是不该，论情则男可女，女亦可男。).[192] As Feng Xiang suggests, in the case of male same-sex practices, *qing* is a medium that allows for this cultural transgression, where men are willing to be the penetrated for *qing*. Giovanni Vitiello also concludes in his research, "the notion of *qing* is predicated upon the erasure of all boundaries."[193] Therefore, with the presence of *qing*, the men who are involved in same-sex sexual behaviors are acceptable, understandable, and even admirable. The narrative logic proves his argument by presenting a happy ending for

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Modern China 23, no.2 (1997): 140-80.

[191] See Footnote 11.

[192] Zui Xihu Xin Yue Zhuren's 醉西湖心月主人, *Bian er chai* 弁而钗(Zhonghe: Shuangdi guoji, 1996), 78.

[193] Giovanni Vitiello, "Exemplary Sodomites: Chivalry and Love in Late Ming Culture," *Nan nü* 2 no.2 (2000): 214.

the two men—Zhao saved Feng from a death sentence, and then they both quit their jobs and established marital relationships between the two families for generations.

Another central concept of *qing*, aesthetic connoisseurship, is also highly valued in the culture of male same-sex relationships and through the acknowledged connoisseurship of beautiful young boys, the literati established a homosocial community. This is especially obvious in the fashion of boy-actors who played the *dan* 旦, female lead, roles in dramas. In the famous late Qing novel, *Pinhua baojian* 品花宝鉴 (A Precious Mirror for Ranking Flowers), Chu Nanxiang 楚南湘 introduces Mei Ziyu 梅子玉 to the beauty and aesthetics of the *dan* actors, "Women are surely beautiful, but they cannot avoid applying powder and rouge. How can they be compared to men who are naturally bright without makeup?" (那女子固美，究不免些粉脂涂泽，岂及男子之不御铅华，自然光彩。).[194] Instead of the claim on the purity and authenticity of girls made in *Honglou meng* 红楼梦 (Dream of the Red Chamber), Nanxiang adopts Baoyu's 宝玉 logic and argues for boys' authentic beauty, which is one of the core standards of *qing*. However, taking the *dan* actors as the center of their gaze, these literati actually consider the passive same-sex partner as an object of connoisseurship although writers and readers of these novels appear to assume a certain degree of equality when a scholar and an actor are together alone.[195] Echoing the novel *Pinhua baojian*, in which the literati as a whole cultural circle enjoy and

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[194] Chen Sen 陈森, *Pinhua baojian* 品花宝鉴 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990), 12.

[195] Keith McMahon, "Sublime Love and the Ethics of Equality in a Homoerotic Novel of the Nineteenth Century: *Precious Mirror of Boy Actresses*," *Nan nü* 4, no.1 (2002): 70-109.

appreciate the beauty of *dan* actors, the historical group of literati around the early Qing *dan* actor Xu Ziyun 徐子云, as Sophie Volpp suggests, appreciated his beauty and celebrated the *qing* between him and Chen Weisong 陈维崧 by writing poems. They created a homosocial literary community around the two by identifying themselves with the cult of *qing*.[196] As can be seen from both real and fictional examples, establishing a relationship with a same-sex partner was both a symbol of the cult of *qing* values and a medium to establish homosocial relationships.

Contrary to her contemporary male writers, throughout *Feng shuangfei*, Cheng Huiyin does not view *nanse* (男色, male love, male homoeroticism, male beauty) as a symbol of *qing*, but one of decadence. The desire for beautiful boys, symbolized by Bai Ruyu, is depicted as a mere sexual act, not as an expression of taste. Male same-sex desire is frequently abusive; and instead of leading to the restoration of proper social harmony, as is the clichéd norm for the cult of *qing* narratives, it undermines the five canonical social relationships (emperor-minister; parent-child; husband-wife; older sibling-younger sibling; friend-friend). Through depictions of a *femme fatale* figure Ruyu circulating around the empire, male same-sex desire is portrayed as one of the destructive *yin* powers in traditional Confucian society.

Meanwhile, the narrative is still under the influence of the cult of *qing* when depicting the homosocial relationships between Lingyun and his friends. As we have seen in other *tanci* fiction, female *tanci* writers held a much more conservative

[196] Sophie Volpp, "The Literary Circulation of Actors in Seventeenth-Century China," *Journal of Asian Studies* 61, no.3 (2002): 949-84.

perspective than most male novelists in order to legitimate their writing, an act which by itself already carried hints of transgression by establishing women's identity in the public male sphere.[197] This is especially true in discussions of sex and relations. Cheng Huiying is not an exception. Although the narrator depicts male same-sex practices as bringing chaos, whether sex is involved between men seems to be the only standard for her to determine the nature of relationships. Even though the relationships between Lingyun and Ruyu and between Lingyun and Yishao are unusual and sexualized, the text celebrates them as true friendships and presents them as ideal homosocial relationships. Consistent with the late Qing view on authentic *qing*, *Feng shuangfei* advocates this kind of "love devoid of lust" parallel to that in *Honglou meng* and *Pinghua baojian*.[198]

The clearly presented views of these two kinds of similar male relationships provide an example of a female author's perspective on the contemporary fashions and events among men, especially the literati, and a fantasized ideal of male homosocial relationships.

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[197] *Tanci* authored by female writers commonly contain much more conservative moral values than those in male authors' works. The best example of this is the fact that Qiu Xinru rewrote and Hou Zhi edited and wrote a sequel to the story of *Zaisheng yuan*, the most famous *tanci* among women at the time, in order to correct the moral problems in it. Like them, most female *tanci* writers tried to display the didactic functions which were specifically the promotion of Confucian values, especially those concerning their female protagonists in their *tanci*.

[198] See Martin Huang, *Negotiating Masculinity in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 153.

Male Same-sex Eroticism and Practice:

Disastrous Beauty, Corrupted Scholars and Disordered Country

Male homosexual desire is a central, if not *the* central, theme of the first third of the *tanci*. However, unlike many male-authored works, male same-sex desires are not framed within the cult of *qing* aesthetics. The depiction of sexual behaviors between men in the *tanci* is usually very direct and cruel, without any implication that hearts consent or are committed. "The Incomparable" Bai Ruyu, the willing victim of these cruel sexual acts of consumption, becomes a symbol of the destructive power of male same-sex practices. His movement around the empire stands for the disordered moral and political state of the empire.

In order to build a foundation to discuss the toxicity of male same-sex practices, the narrator uses a lengthy monologue by the exemplary moral character Guo Hongying 郭宏殷. As the introduction to the main plot, his speech establishes the basic attitude towards male homoeroticism in the *tanci*. Explaining "Lewdness is the top of all evils" (淫者，乃万恶之首也),[199] Guo Hongyin's comments on male homosexuality follow those on improper heterosexuality:

> The way of male homosexuality (*nanse zhi dao* 男色之道) is more risible, hateful, shameful and frightening. Please think carefully: The beasts are the most contemptible, but even male animals don't have sex with each other; We are human beings covered with heaven above and earth below, so how can we embrace men as women? The fundamental relationships will be disordered (*luan* 乱), and the pairing is especially abnormal. This is really ridiculous! It is a source of shame for three generations if a woman loses her chastity; if a man is contaminated, it shames his whole family; passersby will laugh and his wife

[199] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 28.

> will be ashamed. If you have sex with the young, how is it different from having sex with your son or grandson? Even if the boy is a bit older, how is it different from having sex with your younger brother and nephew? Those who are called to "serve as father or brother" cause remorse such as this. This is the most hateable. Being close to young actors and intimate with handsome servants, your heart will be made chaotic by your desires and you will be unable to distinguish inner and outer. Since I channel water into the wall, he definitely will set fire with the help of wind. Qin Gong goes into the Liang household, Chifeng enters Empress Zhao's tower. It starts from not separating men and women, and ends with men and women competing to be the favorites. When notoriety spreads, it is often all like this. It is most shameful! Emperor Wu of the Han doted on Han Yan and it resulted in his neglect of his relatives; the Filial Emperor Ai of the Han favored Dong Xian and even wanted to follow the example of Yao in yielding throne to Shun; Lord Jing of the Song loved Huan Tui, but Tui did not care about his lord's tears and schemed to rebel; Fu Jian of the Qin adored Murong Chong, but Chong did not consider their pleasures in bed and dispatched rebellious troops instead. This is what is most to be feared."
>
> ["男色一道，更为可笑可恨，可羞可惧。君请细思：禽兽至贱，尚不雄与雄交，我辈乃戴天履地之人，岂可拥男为妇？纲常既乱，匹配尤乖，此大可笑也。女人失节，已为三代之羞；男子被污，真乃宗亲共辱，路人耻笑，妻子怀惭。淫其幼者，何异乎子孙？其稍长者，何异乎弟侄？父事兄事之谓，何而丧心至此？此最可恨也！狎优童，昵俊仆，心因欲乱，内外不分。我既引水入墙，彼必乘风纵火。梁家宅里秦宫入，赵后楼中赤凤来。始因男女不分，终致夫妇争宠。丑声出户，往往皆然。此最可羞也！汉武宠韩嫣，以至目无亲藩；孝哀嬖董贤，直欲法尧禅舜；宋景公爱桓魋，而魋不思肿目之泣，潜蓄逆谋；秦苻坚幸慕容冲，而冲不念枕席之好，举兵即反。此最可惧也。"][200]

This long moral lecture illustrates the impropriety of *nanse*, male same-sex desires. As Guo Hongyin argues, the very first argument against *nanse* is that it is "unnatural," which specifically means that it will not produce descendants. Moreover, the core of the harm of *nanse* is that it perverts (*luan*) relationships 纲常, the foundation of the Confucian socio-ethical system. The "messy" relationships caused by *nanse*, usually an elder man with a younger boy, imitate incest in blurring the boundaries of proper

[200] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 28-29.

relationships, and therefore destabilize Confucian society. *Nanse* also destabilizes Confucian society by blurring the boundary between the inner and outer. Giving plenty of historical examples, Guo argues that incorporating another man into the inner chambers will cause illicit sexual relationships between the young boys taken in and the women in the household and therefore would ruin the reputation of the family. Last but not least, Guo suggests that young male lovers tend to usurp or abuse the elder's status.

In this speech, readers can see that Cheng Huiying, a female writer, suggests that the male same-sex practices and eroticism in *Feng shuangfei* belong to destructive sexual desires. However, just preaching the idea is not enough, so she creates a didactic story to illustrate the destructive power of male same-sex eroticism and practices. Unlike male-authored works, which typically use the figure of a beautiful but domineering shrew as a catalyst to illustrate a world gone topsy-turvy, *Feng shuangfei* features the boy Bai Ruyu 白如玉"White as Jade," as the sign of *yinyang* imbalance. Bai Ruyu's nickname is Wushuang 无双, "the incomparable one"; he is so sexually irresistible that almost all the men who catch sight of him want to have sexual relations with him. All of the problems that Guo Hongyin mentions in his lecture are lived out by Ruyu. By borrowing the theme of "city-toppling" beauty and applying it to a beautiful young boy, Cheng Huiying deconstructs and satirizes the popular culture of male same-sex practices and eroticism "disguised" by *qing* during the late Qing period.

Although Cheng Huiying's perspective on sex is quite conservative, she does not shy away from depicting the "disgusting" and destructive sex between men in order to display its lethality. To give an idea of how explicit the text is in its treatment of male homosexual practices, here is a partial translation of the scene in which Zhang Qihu instructs Wei Xiong in the pleasures of male sex:

> "Since, after all, you were born in this barbarian territory, all you know is how to fool around with women. How would you know that Chinese males are even more fragrant than women? All you need is a presentable young boy to accompany you when you sleep, and then why would you bother to get married? "
>
> Even though he heard the words, how could Wei Xiong believe it? "Don't take advantage of the fact that I am an inexperienced barbarian. How could two men fool around with each other? What thing did you say they use to become a couple?" [Qihu] doubled over with laughter... and said "Since the little Commander has never experienced it of course you do not understand, once I explain, it will be as though I have given you something extraordinary."
>
> Wei Xiong said: "Please teach me, please teach me! Hurry up! C'mon, hurry up."
>
> Readers, you must understand that there was nothing Qihu was not willing to show him or say. Naturally, doing this and that he instructed him thoroughly in such and such a way, just like a village teacher lecturing on how to spur on a horse, he mounted a bench and modeled it for him. "Is this clear?" ["你出身到底在番邦，只知女子堪取乐，那晓得中国男人比女更香。只要有标致小官陪着睡，何消费力娶妻房。"卫熊听了何曾信："你不要骗我番人见不长。那里有两个男人能取乐，你且说将何物件去配成双？"冲霄笑得几乎滚.....便说："小元帅未曾做过，自然不得知，小将说出来，还你一样绝妙的对象便了。"卫熊道："请教！请教！快说！快说！"列位须晓得起鸽有甚么事情做不出，甚么话儿讲不出。自然就如此如此，这般这般的指教了一个透彻，还要像村学先生讲那策其马一般，骑在板凳上做了个势子与他看看，"可也明白也否？"][201]

Wei Xiong is so excited by his new-found knowledge that he grabs Qihu, throws him on the bed and strips off his clothing. Qihu frantically finishes his lesson on male homosexual sex by explaining that a man can only fool around with a young

[201] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 557-58.

teenage boy and "that is why it is called doing a young master. Once a boy reaches the age of twenty, then it is absolutely impossible"(所以叫做弄小官。一到满了二十岁，就断断不可的。).[202] Qihu goes on to explain why:

> "Most boys have weak bodies when they are children; since they have not yet begun to produce *yang* essence, they are still like girls and are good at taking a woman's role. Once they reach 20, they become powerful men and if they were to do that kind of business with someone, it would be as if two *yang*s were struggling with each other or two tigers fighting; it might be that both would get hurt."
> [大凡孩子家年轻体弱，阳气未升，原与女人一般，便好做那女人之事。一到年交二十，便是个伟然丈夫，若再与人做起这勾当来，是谓两阳相斗，二虎相争，未有不两败俱伤者也。][203]
>
> Throughout, the *tanci* is clear that it is unmanly to be a penetrated male.

Although Zhang Qihu's reasoning seems to make sense in terms of Chinese medical theory of *yin-yang* cosmology, the main purpose of Qihu saying this, made up or not, is to avoid being penetrated by Wei Xiong, another man. Enjoying male same-sex practices with young boys himself, Qihu, as a masculine military/ martial figure, will only take the role as the penetrator in his sexual relationships with men once he has grown up and has the strength to defend himself. The ultimate reason for Qihu to reject being penetrated by Wei Xiong is his self-esteem as a masculine man, who is unwilling to play a female and therefore the inferior, penetrated role in male same-sex relationships.

In this sense, consistent with other fictional depictions of male same-sex sexuality, male relationships, from Cheng Huiying's perspective, maintain and create

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[202] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 558.

[203] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 558-59.

strict gender, age and class distinctions.[204] Being a penetrated male means social inferiority and therefore inevitably brings dishonor to a man's social status and family reputation. The same situation is also played out when Yishao is asked to engage in male same-sex practices as the penetrated when he is a young boy. When Zhang Cai, whose argument is surprisingly similar to that of Feng Xiang in *Bian er chai*, entreats Yishao to consent under the name of *qing*, "You only know that it [male-male sex] should not be due to reason, but how do you know that it cannot be according to *qing*?" (你但知理之所必无，安知情之所必有).[205] However, the result is totally opposite to that in *Bian er chai*.[206] Even though Yishao is relatively unrestrained by the rites, he rejects Cai, citing Confucian rites, "Since you are not benevolent, I won't be righteous" (你既不仁我不义).[207] In this argument, fighting his way out, Yishao's stance of "righteousness" indicates the author's conservative choice of *li* over *qing*. Similarly, when the heir apparent makes a similar request, Yishao refuses on the grounds that "doing this improper thing will humiliate my ancestors and violate cardinal principles. This is not what human beings do" (做这苟且之事，辱没煞祖先，亏煞了大体，非人类所为).[208] Again, *li* wins out even though the person who is making the request is the heir apparent, Yishao's social and political superior. But, as

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[204] See Wu Cuncun, *Ming Qing shuihui xing'ai fengqi* 明清社会性爱风气 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 2000), 282; also see Huang, *Negotiating Masculinity in Late Imperial China*, 149.

[205] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 109.

[206] After Feng Xiang's defense of male-male sex according to *qing*, Zhao Wangsun agrees to have sex with him. See Feng Xiang's argument above in the introduction.

[207] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 110.

[208] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 359.

a result, Yishao gains respect from the prince. In the narrative logic of *Feng shuangfei*, propriety is the ultimate value that everyone should follow. While *qing* has become an expedient force that allows certain writers to blur the boundaries of propriety, Cheng Huiying subtly demonstrates her reevaluation of the limits of *qing*.

Cheng Huiying makes use of every possible cliché to describe Wushuang as a "city-toppling" physical beauty. He is femininely beautiful. The narrator describes his beauty from the perspective of Zhang Qihu 张起鹄, the lewd villain who is having an affair with Wushuang's mother. When Qihu first hears his voice, the narrator describes, "Entering the ears, the voice is not annoying, but instead lovely [Qihu's thought]. It was probably from a girl next door who is reading aloud" (入耳不烦真可爱，疑是那邻家诵读有红妆).[209] At the age of twelve, Wushuang still has a child's voice, which is closer to that of a girl. When Qihu sees his appearance, he thinks:

> His pretty face cannot be molded by rouge, embellished by powder, or be carved. It cannot be sketched or painted, and his long eyebrows and pretty eyes are beautiful and bright. His red lips are small, hiding his white teeth. His delicate appearance is just like the tender crabapple flowers in the spring. His ten fingers are slender like jade bamboo shoots, and his low but clear voice is better than the sound of *sheng* and *huang*.[210] He is as gentle and mild as a charming girl, but without mincing or contrived manners. He is exactly like a flower which understands human language or a jade which produces fragrance. I have seen so many beauties, but how can they be compared to him, who monopolizes amorous feelings and surpasses all other beauties? [211]
> [脂难捏，粉难装，难刻难雕的俏面庞。描不成而画不就，修眉俊眼最清扬。朱唇一点藏犀齿，好颜色宛似春初嫩海棠。十指尖纤如玉笋，轻清言语赛笙簧。一身温柔宛转如娇女，却又是并没妖娆扭捏腔。真个似花花解语，果然比玉玉生香。美人见过多多少，怎及他占断风情压众芳。]

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[209] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 177.

[210] Two Chinese traditional pipe musical instruments.

[211] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 178.

All the descriptions of Ruyu here are precisely what literati use to describe an extraordinary female beauty. Rouge and powder are the cosmetics that ancient Chinese women used, so from the very beginning his face is connected to femininity. The words used to describe his lips and teeth are common terms, which can be traced back to *Shijing* 诗经 (Book of Poetry) and *Chuci* 楚辞 (The Songs of the South) to describe beauties, especially beautiful women.[212] The tender hands and slim fingers of women are eulogized as early as in *Gushi shijiu shou* 古诗十九首(Nineteen Old Poems), and the metaphor for women's fingers as jade bamboo shoots appears in *Ting zheng* 听筝(Listening to the Zither), a poem by the Tang poet, Zhang Hu 张祜.[213] Moreover, female beauties are commonly compared to flowers and jades in Chinese literature, as seen in the *Xixiang ji*, *Jin Ping Mei* and *Honglou meng*.[214] It is likely

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[212] *Zhuchun* is seen as early as the "Dazhao"大招 in *Chuci* to describe the red lips of the beauties. It is an important factor of a beauty, although it does not necessarily aim to describe female beauties.

Xichi is seen as early as the "Shuoren"硕人 in James Legge trans., *The She King or the Book of Poetry* 诗经 (Taipei: Wenzhi chubanshe, 1982), 68-69. The original sentence is "Her teeth were like melon seeds 齿如瓠犀," which describes the white teeth of a female beauty, who literally refers to the wife of Lord Zhuang of Wei 卫庄公.

[213] In "Tiaotiao qianniu xing 迢迢牵牛星" in *Gushi shijiu shou* 古诗十九首, the line describing the tender fingers and hands is "She stretches her pale and delicate hand, clacking, she whiles away time with the shuttle.**纤纤**擢素手，札札弄机杼." Translation from Stephen Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: From Beginning to 1911* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), 257.

Zhang Hu 张祜 uses the metaphor "jade bamboo shoots" in his poem, "Tingzheng 听筝," in *Quan Tangshi* 全唐诗, ed. Peng Dingqiu 彭定求(Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1996), vol. 511, 3187, to describe the fingers of the zither player. The original line reads, "Ten fingers are slender like red jade bamboo shoots, flying like wild geese and lightly pausing among the emerald strings 十指纤纤玉笋红，雁行轻遏翠弦中." Considering that the fingernails of the person playing the zither are dyed in red, we can assume the player is a woman.

[214] Wang Shifu 王实甫, *Xixiang ji* 西厢记 (Tianjin: Renming wenxue chubanshe, 1995), 31, "The shy flower understands human language, and the tender jade has fragrance (娇羞花解语，温柔玉有香)."

Lanling Xiaoxiaosheng, *Gaohe tang piping diyi qishu Jin Ping Mei*, 146, "Her pretty appearance is as enchanting as a flower that understands human languages; her beautiful appearance is as fair as a jade that produces fragrance. (玉貌妖娆花解语，芳容窈窕玉生香)"; 1091, "[Aiyue'er is] white jade produces fragrances and flower understands human language (白玉生香花解语)"; 1329, "[Lady Lan] can be compared to flowers which understand human languages; [she] can be compared to jade that produces fragrances (比花花解语，比玉玉生香)".

Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 and Gao E 高鹗, *Honglou meng* 红楼梦 (Changchun: Changchun chubanshe, 2006), 129, the

that the usage of these two parallel metaphors in *Honglou meng* had already settled their connotations of describing female beauties by Cheng Huiying's time. All these clichéd terms used to depict Ruyu suggest his exceptional feminine beauty and also indicate his overflowing *yin* power as discussed in Chapter 2.

In the Chinese literary and historical tradition, someone who is unusually beautiful is often dangerous and destructive to men. The boy Ruyu is exactly this kind of beauty. It is no coincidence that the author uses the exact same terms used for demonic female beauties to name Ruyu. One of the most frequently seen terms is the "fox fairy," used in this text as "demonic fox woman 妖狐女," "demonic fox 妖狐," "with fox-like allure 狐媚," etc.[215] As Rania Huntington points out, fox spirits had been associated with the term "*mei* 媚, seduction, which carries strong connotations of deception and loss of will" over the literary history.[216] Related to the stereotype of the sexually fiendish fox fairy, Ruyu is also referred to as a demon, as in the term, "demonic woman 妖女," "little demon 小妖," "monster 怪物," "soul sucking demon 吸魂妖," "demonic miscreant 妖孽," etc.[217] Both fox fairies and demons are often related to the image of evil spirits who use their supernatural powers to transform into beautiful women and suck up the *yang* essence from men, thus indicating Ruyu's extraordinary beauty and his destructive power. Huntington also suggests that "as the

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couplet of the chapter title of Chapter 19 reads, "Earnestly a Flower Understands Human Languages by Night; Endearingly a Jade Produces Fragrances by Day (情切切良宵花解语 意绵绵静日玉生香)."

[215] See Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 227, 297, 330, etc.

[216] Rania Huntington, *Alien Kind: Foxes and Late Imperial Chinese Narrative* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), 11.

[217] See Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 301, 329-30, 400, etc.

most sensitive violation of human boundaries, sexual illusion aroused the most anxiety and exerted the greatest fascination."[218] The recurrent use of phrases related to the fox spirit by the narrator to describe Ruyu reinforces his image as an evil and dangerous "city-toppling" beauty and suggests the anxiety caused by his sexual powers.

Male homoeroticism, as embodied in the bewitching Ruyu, is shown to be toxic in that it destroys the boundaries that are foundational to the Confucian moral order. Unlike girls and women, who for the most part are cloistered and therefore properly contained in this *tanci*, beautiful boys circulate freely and undermine the boundaries between the idealized homosociality of the male outer (*wai* 外) spaces of friendship, brotherhood, study, government and warfare, and sexuality.[219] Beautiful boys are repeatedly entrapped and victimized by men who desire them as sexual objects. Even the young Zhang Yishao, the most formidable military figure in the empire, is not exempt from being sexualized; at various times he is the sexual target of Zhang Cai, the future Zhengde emperor (r. 1506-1522), and a monk who has already kidnapped a number of other boys. Catamites pose a particular challenge to boundaries, since as sexualized members of the household they should be properly contained within the household; much to everyone else's consternation, Zhang Jing

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[218] Huntington, *Alien Kind*, 11.

[219] When Zhang Qihu rapes Ruyu, he alludes to the intimacy socially tolerated between men in order to persuade the boy to stop pushing him away: "This is bizarre; you and I are both men, moreover since we are brothers we should be able to engage in horseplay; since you are not a sequestered girl, why are you trying to avoid suspicion like this?" (真奇了，我与你双双男对男，况是弟兄该戏谑，你又不是闺房小姐，何须这等避嫌疑) (Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 182).

introduces the adolescent Ruyu into the inner domestic spaces to sleep in his concubine's chambers.[220]

The freely circulating young boy Ruyu, who moves effortlessly between "inner" (*nei* 内) and "outer," literally functions as an "empire-toppling beauty," a role usually played by a woman. Perfectly fit into this stereotype, Ruyu behaves exactly as a demonic destructive beauty who is fully aware of his advantage and makes use of it for his own sake regardless of Confucian virtues. As remarked by Yishao, a beauty like Ruyu is able to "ruin a country and destroy a family" (败国亡家).[221] Ruyu moves from the imperial palace to the edges of the empire, from the outer male sphere to the inner women's quarters. He is responsible for both the wasting disease that threatens the life of the crown prince and the fall of a garrison city in Yunnan.[222] After a guard tries to force himself on Ruyu when he sees Ruyu going to the bathroom, a brawl breaks out between the Han soldiers and civil leaders within the garrison, allowing the Miao army to take advantage of the commotion to storm the city walls.[223]

In addition to blurring the proper boundary of "inner" and "outer," *nanse* is so ruinous in this *tanci* that Ruyu is able to destroy the proper hierarchy of the cardinal male relationships. First and foremost, his presence incites distrust between the

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[220] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 906-908.

[221] See Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 400, 424.

[222] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 292-294

[223] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 523.

See McMahon, *Causality and Containment*, on male urination as a narrative device.

emperor and his minister. Although Liu Jin, the evil eunuch, abducts Ruyu and presents him as a gift to the crown prince, Ruyu willingly sleeps with the prince because, as is typical for sexually destructive beauties, "his sexual desires are all over the place and are hard to restrain" (欲情紊乱难收束).[224] Because of their excessive indulgence in sex, the prince falls ill. When Lingyun rebukes Ruyu and Ruyu decides to accept Lingyun's warnings, Liu Jin tricks the prince into believing that Lingyun is planning to elope with Ruyu. The furious prince fights with Lingyun, but he has to let Ruyu follow Lingyun out of the palace because Ruyu does not have official status in his imperial palace. After this falling out, for a long time the prince does not trust Lingyun. Even though Lingyun leads the Chinese army to defeat foreign rebellions, the emperor believes Liu Jin and his clique that Lingyun plans to take the throne with the army.

What is more, the father-son relationship, parallel to the emperor-minister relationship at the center of the five relationships, is also undermined by the noxious male homoeroticism. Sleeping with Zhang Jing, Ruyu disparages Jing's son, Yishao, and provokes Jing to turn against his only son. Ruyu scolds Jing disrespectfully when he quarrels with Yishao. When Yishao hears Ruyu curse his father and mother, Yishao cannot bear it and beats Ruyu. As a result, to teach him proper manners, Jing pulls out a blade and chases Yishao to kill him and then later rejects an invitation to move to Yishao's house. The ideal relations of kindness from the father and filial piety from

[224] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 255.

the son are ruined completely by Ruyu's misbehavior. The tension between Yishao and his father is not resolved until Ruyu finally gives up his practice of male same-sex eroticism and becomes Lingyun's attendant.

As could be expected, Zhang Jing's obsession with Ruyu creates huge problems in his relationship with his wife. When he returns home, his wife greets him angrily with a recounting of his faults.[225] Once he acknowledges his moral defects, Jing then has to defer to his wife about everything. Although this does not cause moral issues because Mrs. Zhang is so virtuous, Jing does build an improper and unhealthy familial structure in terms of neo-Confucianism. His wife takes control of the household and Zhang Jing loses all his rightful authority in his family to his wife.

Last but not least, *nanse* significantly impacts the relationships between brothers and friends. Although these two relationships are not at the top of the five relationships, they are one of the central concerns in this *tanci*. As mentioned, the relationship between the crown prince and Lingyun who are adopted brothers is ruined because of Ruyu. The central relationship of the *tanci* between Lingyun and Yishao who are sworn brothers and friends is also threatened. Misbelieving that Lingyun and Ruyu have a sexual relationship, Yishao fights with Lingyun and cuts their friendship off for a whole year (Chapters 11-15). In this way, the stereotypical city-toppling beauty, Ruyu, stands for destructive male same-sex practices and causes disorder in all five relationships in the neo-Confucian world.

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[225] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 964, "The lady has been angry for a long time, so she digged out her husband's old problems at this moment. (夫人久已心中怒，到此刻就把夫君旧事搜)"

The web of relationships spun around Ruyu is so tangled that the threats of symbolic and real incest are always present.[226] In a clever plot twist, Ruyu eventually harnesses his destructive sexual power to help the besieged Han forces when he realizes that he can use his sex appeal to set the rebel leaders against each other. Zhang Qihu, Ruyu's god-brother and symbolic father, now a rebel general, has established a timeshare with the Tufan general Wei Wu 卫武—Qihu possesses Ruyu for 30% of the time, and Wei Wu possesses Ruyu for 70% of the time; Wei Wu's two sons are also secretly engaging in sexual relations with Ruyu. Obsessed with Ruyu's beauty, Wei Xiong 卫熊, Wu's son, is mad at his father's unwillingness to share Ruyu. Blinded by his fury, Xiong kills his father, his younger brother and his father-in-law and assumes the position of chief general in the army, replacing his father. The death of Xiong's father-in-law impels his wife to surrender to Yishao's Chinese army in order to avenge her father. Smitten by Ruyu's beauty and sexual appeal, Xiong tolerates all the intentional "mistakes" Ruyu makes in his army. Xiong's spoiling of Ruyu leads to his final defeat when Ruyu learns the secret of the magic spells used by the army and informs the Han troops. In this example of symbolic incest, Ruyu purposefully destroys the five relationships among the enemy forces to help Lingyun and the Chinese army: the Miao army led by the general fails, the son kills the father,

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[226] The first man to have sexual relations with Ruyu, Zhang Qihu, is his symbolic brother/ father because Qihu is the adopted son of Ruyu's mother but has an illicit sexual relationship with her (Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 182, 189); General Mu is like a father to him; the crown prince and Lingyun are symbolic brothers; Ruyu is frequently mistaken for Zhang Jing's son; Wei Wu and his two sons all have sexual relations with Ruyu. Moreover, Yishao introduces Zhang Cai's half-brother to him as a catamite (Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 346). For the importance of incest as a theme in *xiaoshuo* literature, see Andrew Plaks, "The Problem of Incest in *Jin Ping Mei* and *Honglou meng*," in *Paradoxes of Traditional Chinese Literature*, ed. Eva Hung (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1994), 123-46.

husband and wife become enemies, the elder brother kills the younger brother, and the disciple betrays the master who is also at the same time his only friend. Ruyu's destructive sexual power, in this sense, spreads outward from the Middle Kingdom to the borders and even beyond the foreign territories.

In order to understand how thoroughly the narrative embeds male homosexual desire into the world of male culture, the narrator also depicts the problem of *nanse* culture as not merely due to the beauty of young boys. Central to this narrative is the moral implosion of Zhang Jing, the representative of male literati culture. Zhang Jing himself was a beautiful boy and a victim of unwanted sexual attention from men and initially seems impervious to improper sexual desire. He prides himself on not having taken any concubines while away from home in the capital. When his close friend General Mu 沐 first introduces him to Bai Ruyu who is his catamite, Zhang lectures Mu that he should not be sleeping with his protégé but giving him a strict moral education. General Mu had been raising the fatherless Ruyu, but after Ruyu had been raped by Zhang Qihu 张起鹄 and then kidnapped and kept as a catamite by the official Zhang Cai 张彩, Mu initiated a sexual relationship with the boy. Somewhat shamed by the lecture, General Mu asks Zhang Jing to tutor the boy, but Mu also decides to play a trick on his friend and sends Ruyu into his bed in order to "see whether he is truly able not to withstand sexual desire" (看他真有那见色不迷的手段否).[227] This test is Zhang Jing's downfall; he becomes so infatuated with Ruyu that

[227] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 232.

the two become "like husband and wife." Eventually, Zhang Jing becomes so infatuated with the boy that he willingly sacrifices what should be the most important relationships in his life: those with his only son and with the emperor. Zhang Jing repeatedly turns against Yishao and eventually drives him out of the house because Yishao is critical of how Ruyu abuses his status as favorite.[228] When a practical joke played by Ruyu ends in the public humiliation and dismissal of Zhang Jing from the imperial court, Jing cannot bring himself to discipline Ruyu and instead comforts the boy who is crying from shame and guilt.[229] After Zhang Jing is sent to Kunming as a magistrate, he and Ruyu grow even closer than before.

Given that all the other male characters in the *tanci*, with the exception of Lingyun and Yishao, actively attempt to get access to Ruyu, resorting to either violence or deception, Zhang Jing stands apart morally in that he is a passive recipient of *nanse*. Zhang Jing, who is famed for his calligraphy, sees Ruyu as more than a sexual object and tries to give the boy an aesthetic education and in this sense their relationship comes closest of all to the aesthetic male-male relationships based on scholar-beauty ideals common in male-authored homoerotic novels. Zhang keeps the boy in his household, and everyone, including his young daughter, refers to Ruyu as his lover (爱人).[230] But theirs is not a "scholar-beauty" romance: the two immediately get down to sexual business without any exchanges of poetry or romantic

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[228] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 377-82, 386-87.

[229] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 453.

[230] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 417.

longing and despite living as "husband and wife" the relationship is not morally ennobling for either.

Strikingly, unlike most fiction authored by male writers, the narrative of *Feng shuangfei* holds a negative view of the morality of civil *wen* male scholars. It seems significant to the construction of civil and military figures in this *tanci* that Zhang Jing, alone of the positive loyalist characters, is unable to resist Ruyu's sexual allure. General Mu gives up on Ruyu once he realizes that the boy has no emotional loyalty. He Shiwei 何世威, a classic mature *wu* military figure who trained both Zhang Yishao and Zhang Qihu, has had sexual relationships with both boys and women, but is fully in control of his own desires and helps protect several of the beautiful boys in the novel from becoming sexual victims. The two Phoenixes, both of whom circulate widely through the extended web of male homoerotic relations, are perfect embodiments of combined *wen* and *wu* talents and restrict their sexuality to their polygamous marriages. Therefore, consistent with the mainstream male-authored fiction, the *wu* figures are shown to be sexually resistant, with both boys and women.[231] In contrast, the two exclusively civil *wen* literati in the novel, Zhang Cai and Zhang Jing, have the least control over their sexual desire.

The narrator also indicates a negative perspective when commenting on these figures. When Zhang Cai asks Yishao for sex, Yishao scolds him, "Apparently you are an ignorant ne'er-do-well, an idiot who has read the classics in vain" (分明是个无知

[231] See Kam Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China* (Cambridge; Oakleigh, Vic.: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 28-30.

贼，枉读诗书烂草包).[232] The narrator obviously takes Yishao's side in judging Zhang Cai. Later, when commenting cynically on Zhang Jing's moral downfall in General Mu's house, the narrator no longer tends to hide his/her own opinions by borrowing another character's voice, but directly mocks Zhang Jing, "It is really laughable that Licentiate Zhang (Zhang Xiaolian) derides others with casual remarks... in his middle age, his reputation and virtue are impaired" (真堪笑，张孝廉，信口嘲人弄舌尖.....名伤德损在中年。).[233] It is extremely ironic in this sexual scene that the narrator refers to Zhang Jing by his official title, *xiaolian*. *Xiaolian*, "filial and incorrupt," was originally an official title to which virtuous people were recommended during the Han dynasty, and it was still in use in the Qing period to refer to the provincial graduates (also known as *juren* 举人) who had passed the county level of civil service examination. Since Zhang Jing is engaging in illicit sex, the choice to refer to him as "filial and incorrupt" is intentionally ironic.

When Zhang Jing's moral downfall reaches its apogee while he is serving as a magistrate in Yunnan in the war between China and the Tufan 吐番, the satirical view of the narrator on Zhang Jing also reaches a climax. When the Shenhu Pass 神护关 is taken by the rebel army, the local governor, Zhang Jing, is having sex with Ruyu. The narrator gives a detailed description of this sex-addicted scholar when his subordinates find him in bed with the boy:

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[232] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 110.

[233] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 234.

> What abilities can be detected in such a mad scholar who plays around with brushes? Just as he was reaching the height of happiness, he became so scared that his three heavenly souls drifted to Huaxu Kingdom and his six earthly souls flew to Juku Island. He was in a wild sweat from top to bottom and almost unable to breathe. He was unable to respond with his mouth and unable to move his body, just like a cooked bent loach in a penholder.
> [[一个弄笔狂生，看得见能有几多本事？正在非凡快乐之时，又被这非凡一吓之下，只吓得]三魂飘上华胥国，六魄飞归叙寇洲。上下淋漓浇冷水，几乎气脉断咽喉。口难对答身难转，好一似笔管之中煮曲鳅。][234]

The narrator's attitude towards scholars who can only write is clearly negative as shown by the description of their lack of abilities in war, especially by illustrating Zhang Jing's bewilderment. As a local governor, it is his responsibility to protect the people in an emergency, but frightened, Zhang Jing even loses his abilities to react, acting as if he is dead. By picturing Zhang Jing's discomposure here, the narrator is displaying a very incapable *wen* scholar facing real crisis in the country. It is even more humiliating to Zhang Jing when the narrative uses the metaphor of "a cooked bent loach" to describe his incapability of reaction, because it is not only a metaphor of his paralyzed body but also one of his penis. Being seen naked having sex, Zhang Jing loses his reputation, honor and authority in front of his subordinates.

Captured by rebel forces, his first thought is neither for the empire nor his family, but for Ruyu. Instead of praising his *qing* for Ruyu, the narrator comments, "He is a book-fool for sure" (果然十足是书颠).[235] It seems that in the narrator's perspective Zhang Jing's *qing* for Ruyu is not real, but an illusion of desire. He then willingly becomes the kept lover of the foreign queen who is holding him prisoner.

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[234] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 519.

[235] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 369.

Zhang Jing adjusts quickly to his new status in the harem and takes on one of the queen's maids, Babao'er 八宝儿, as his lover. Noteworthy is Zhang Jing's sole gesture toward the traditional acts of political loyalty -- he threatens to starve himself to death. The motivation for this grand performance of self-sacrifice, however, is to ensure that the queen allows him to keep Babao'er as his lover (13.585). The narrator comments on the scene where all three are sleeping together in a bed, "Since he cannot commit suicide to fulfill loyalty... being a dissolute ghost whose soul is decayed and bones are melted is, anyway, better than drinking swords and eating blades. Therefore when the literati ancient and present encounter difficulties and disasters, it is not strange this always becomes a norm" (既不能自家裁决全忠烈.....做一个魂消骨化风流鬼，到底比那饮剑餐刀却好些。所以那古今文人遭困厄，总是这一家常态不为奇。).[236] The narrator is very sarcastic here when s/he compares death from excessive sex with that from battlegrounds and concludes that Zhang Jing prefers the former. Taking illicit sex and captivity as a norm, the narrator totally subverts the ideal of loyal *wen* scholars that the literati established throughout history. The culminating act of humiliation in Zhang Jing's moral fall is when Yishao, who has triumphantly led Han troops into the rebel palace to rescue his father, finds him naked in the queen's bed with Babao'er beside him (14.629).

[236] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 589.

Male Homosociality: Upright Friends and Ambiguous Brothers

Although the narrator successfully delivers the message that the culture of same-sex practices and eroticism in the literati circle is destructive to Confucian society, s/he does offer a vision of a healthy male homosociality to correct those excuses. The relationship between Lingyun and Yishao fits into the concept of "homosocial desire," which is "a continuum between homosocial and homosexual," as suggested by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.[237] What connects the bipolarity of homosociality and homosexuality as a continuum are the concepts of *qing* (情, passions) and *yi* (义, righteousness) in their relationship, consistent with relationships in male-authored fiction.[238] Both *qing* and *yi* underpin a male homosociality that is based on equality, instead of hierarchical relations.[239]

The narrator frames *qing* and *yi* in terms of *gong* 公 (public) and *si* 私 (personal), as in Lingyun's phrase, "personal feelings and public righteousness"(私情公义).[240] In this sense, *qing* can be read as creating spiritual bonds between men in terms of private feelings, while *yi* brings Confucian order to friendship in terms of

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[237] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 1.

[238] As is argued in Chapter I, Cheng Huiying was very familiar with *Sanguo yanyi*, a novel exclusively devoted to relationships between men, as discussed in Chapter II. *Yi*, as an important positive value of friendships, is highly advocated in that work.

[239] Scholars have argued that *qing* is an equal value between lovers (See footnote 191 above).

Some scholars' research suggests that the definition of *yi* has not been stable throughout history, unlike *zhong* or *xiao*. Therefore, it developed two different connotations, one hierarchical and the other equal. Cheng Huiying here apparently emphasizes the latter. I will talk about the definition and subcategories later.

[240] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 412. This phrase is suggested by Lingyun when he talks about his own relationships with Ruyu and Yishao, but it is unclear which is *siqing* and which is *gongyi* referred to by him. This again proves the ambiguous nature of both relationships. Actually, talking to Yishao, Lingyun himself admits his relationship with Ruyu as an "ambiguous relationship" (暧昧之交).

propriety. Scholars have theorized *qing* as a notion that includes, but is not limited to, passions, emotions, feelings, authenticity, and aesthetic connoisseurship, so it is obviously a concept in the private sphere that the narrator promotes here.[241] In contrast, *yi* had been considered a public value until the Song era. As early as in *Liji*, *yi* is interpreted as, "*yi* is *yi*, to be appropriate" (义者，宜也).[242] *Liji* further elaborates *yi* in terms of human relationships:

> What are "the things which men consider right"? Kindness on the part of the father, and filial duty on that of the son; gentleness on the part of the elder brother, and obedience on that of the young; righteousness on the part of the husband, and submission on that of the wife; kindness on the part of elders, and deference on that of juniors; with benevolence of the part of the ruler, and loyalty on that of the minister; --these ten are the things which men consider to be right.
> [何谓人义？父慈，子孝，兄良，弟弟，夫义，妇听，长惠，幼顺，君仁，臣忠，十者谓之人之义。][243]

Liji established the Confucian ideal of *yi*, which is later referred to as *dayi* 大义(major *yi*) by scholars. As we can see in the *Liji*, the Confucian ideal of *dayi* is actually hierarchical and emphasizes the responsibilities of everyone's social roles, which is consistent with the concept of *zhengming* 正名, the rectification of names.

However, during the turn of Song and Yuan when the *Sanguo yanyi* 三国演义 story also came into shape, popular and folk culture produced another private subcategory of *yi*, which orthodox Confucian scholars called *xiaoyi* 小义 (minor *yi*). While *dayi*, advocated by elite literati, became another term of *zhong* or loyalty,

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[241] See footnote 191.

[242] "Zhongyong 中庸," in *Liji* 礼记, in *Wenbai duizhao shisan jing* 文白对照十三经, ed. Hanwen 李翰文 (Beijing: Jiuzhou chubanshe, 2001), 523.

[243] James Legge, trans., *Li Chi: Book of Rites* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1967), pp. 379-80

xiaoyi, promoted by common people and folklore, incorporates brotherhood, faithfulness and honor and emphasizes an equal and mutual relationship between friends.[244] Some scholars also argue that the whole concept of *xiaoyi* is also based on *qing*, and therefore is exclusive.[245] Due to the continuum from *qing* to *yi*, homosocial desire in *Feng shuangfei* is as ambiguous as expected.

Sanguo yanyi is the best canonical example of popular fiction that promotes *yi* because of the suggestive title of the novel which points to the novel an illustration of *yi* (演义) and Cheng Huiying's familiarity with it.[246] In *Sanguo*, the three major characters, Liu Bei 刘备, Guan Yu 关羽 and Zhangfei 张飞, swear to be brothers, "We dare not hope to be together always but hereby vow to die the selfsame day" (不求同年同月生，只愿同年同月死).[247] After they become sworn brothers, they "sleep together in the same bed and love each other like brothers" (寝则同床，恩若兄弟).[248] But as Kam Louie points out, their relationship is ambiguously exclusive because Guan Yu and Zhang Fei show jealousy when Liu Bei "shares the same bed" (同榻)

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[244] For more detailed discussions about *yi*, see Liu Shangsheng 刘上生, "*Sanguo yanyi* yi wenhua xinli jiegou zhi xitong kaocha《三国演义》义文化心理结构之系统考察," *MingQing xiaoshuo yanjiu* 明清小说研究, no.02 (1990): 69-82; Ma Jianhua 马建华, "Guan Yu 'yishi Cao Cao' de wenhua mima—jian tan 'taoyuan jieyi' zhi 'yi' 关羽'义释曹操'的文化密码——兼谈'桃园结义'之'义'," *Fujian shida Fuqing fenxiao xuebao* 福建师大福清分校学报 (zonghe ban 综合版) no. 15 (1991, no.2): 97-99, 29; Zheng Futian 郑福田, "Lun *Sanguo yanyi* he *Shuihu zhuan* zhong de 'yi' 论《三国演义》和《水浒传》中的'义'," *Neimenggu shida xuebao* 内蒙古师大学报 (zhexue shehui kexue ban 哲学社会科学版), no.1 (1992): 83-90; Liu Tingqian 刘廷乾, "*Sanguo yanyi* he *Shuihu zhuan* zhong 'yi' de bijiao《三国演义》和《水浒传》中'义'的比较," Linyi shifan xuebao 临沂师范学报 23, no.1 (Feb. 2001): 67-70, etc.

[245] Liu, "*Sanguo yanyi* yi wenhua xinli jiegou zhi xitong kaocha," 70.

[246] See Chapter II for the discussion of Cheng's familiarity with *Sanguo*.

[247] Luo Guozhong, *Three Kingdoms: A Historical Novel*, trans. Moss Roberts (Beijing, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: Foreign Language Press; University of California Press, 1999), 8

[248] Chen Shou 陈寿, *Sanguo zhi* 三国志, vol. 36.

It is very interesting that this phrase is mentioned in the official history *Sanguo zhi*, instead of the novel *Sanguo yanyi*.

with other officials.[249] Meanwhile, the three brothers are also emperor and ministers, fulfilling the major and minor expressions of *yi* at the same time. However, when *dayi* and *xiaoyi* are in conflict, the *Sanguo* narrative, as one developed from folklore, favors *xiaoyi* over *dayi*.[250] Considering Cheng Huiying's familiarity with the *Sanguo* stories, I believe Cheng Huiying adopts the usage of *yi* in *Sanguo yanyi*, intentionally blurring the boundaries between *dayi* and *xiaoyi*, promoting the popular version of *xiaoyi* by identifying it with *dayi*. In this way, the narrative suggests that the bonding between Lingyun and Yishao is an ideal one that incorporates both positive private and public values.

Cheng, as a female writer, is more conservative than some male fiction writers who preceded her or who were contemporary with her during the Ming and Qing dynasties. As Sedgwick suggests, "'obligatory heterosexuality' is built into male-dominated kinship systems, or that homophobia is a *necessary* consequence of such patriarchal institutions as heterosexual marriage."[251] Living in a patriarchal Confucian society, Cheng Huiying is unable to avoid the rejection of physical sex in

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[249] Kam Louie, "Sexuality, Masculinity and Politics in Chinese Culture: The Case of *Sanguo* Hero Guan Yu," *Modern Asian Studies* 33, no.4 (Oct. 1999): 835-59.

[250] Some famous examples are Liu Bei's emotional revenge against Wu when Guan Yu is killed by the Wu when the Han army is not ready, Guan Yu's *yi* release of Cao Cao at Huarong Pass which allows Cao to reestablish his kingdom, etc.

Besides the articles mentioned in footnote 244, also see the discussion of the favor of *xiaoyi* in *Sanguo* in Wang Lijuan 王丽娟, "Wenren zhi 'zhong' yu minjian zhi 'yi'—taoyuan jieyi gushi liangzhong xushi de bijiao 文人之'忠'与民间之'义'——桃园结义故事两种叙事的比较分析," *MingQing xiaoshuo yanjiu* 明清小说研究, no.81 (2007, No.1): 50-61; Li Bingqin 李炳钦, "Lunli yu shenmei de tongyi—lun *Sanguo yanyi* zhong 'yi' de shenmei pin'ge 伦理与审美的同一——论《三国演义》中'义'的审美品格," *Hubei daxue xuebao* 湖北大学学报 (zhexue shehui kexue ban 哲学社会科学版), no.1 (1993): 37-41; Zhang Zhihe 张志合, "*Sanguo yanyi* suoyan shi 'yi' erfei 'zhong'《三国演义》所演是'义'而非'忠'," *He'nan daxue xuebao* 河南大学学报 (shehui kexue ban 社会科学版) 36, no.2 (March 1996): 43-47; etc.

[251] Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 3

an ideal homosocial relationship. Similar to the female same-sex relationships that I will discuss in Chapter 5, intimate male-male relationships are encouraged as long as they do not involve physical sex. The narrative considers it fully acceptable to promote a concept of friendship and maintain a certain sexual tension wherein the friends are able to help each other correct moral defects.

The narrative highly values friendships between men, and therefore it is important to the narrator to convey the idea of a healthy and correct homosocial relationship. Parallel to the treatment of male same-sex practices, the narrator sets up a standard to talk about male homosocial relationships. Guo Hongyin's son Lingyun, the other exemplary orthodox character, gives another long lecture on a proper and ideal male friendship:

> In life, the four relationships are those with emperor, parents, and older and younger brothers. Beyond these four, friendship takes pride of place, while marital relations with wives and concubines are last. If I become friends and sworn brothers with someone like Brother Zhang, then in the future our friendship can bring wealth and mutual improvement; when we are tired we can rest together, when we go out we can travel together; as officials, we can look for models from near and far, when relaxed we can converse, drink tea, and play chess; there is nothing on earth more pleasurable than this. As for wives, you cannot be together with them when sitting or traveling, and it is even more necessary that the distinction between inner and outer be maintained. A man's ambitions fill the four seas, while a woman's sense of propriety should not extend beyond the inner quarters; the only place in which [husband and wife] can be near and intimate is limited to their sleeping mats. [人生在世，君亲兄弟为之四义，四者之外，便以朋友为先，妻妾末耳。若张贤弟这般人品，我与他既为朋友，又算自家兄弟，将来谊可通财，道勘砥砺；倦可同息，出可同游；正则求古论今，暇则清谈饮弈，世间之乐事无过于此。若说妻子，则行坐不可常同，内外更谊有别。勇子志存乎四海，妇人礼不出闺门，所亲所近不过衽席之间耳。][252]

[252] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 43-44.

In Lingyun's opinion, a representative of the narrative's most orthodox view, all five relationships are considered *yi* which is public and proper as is defined in *Liji*; however, friendship is valued over marriage. Lingyun's preference for friends over wives is consistent with a popular definition of heroes who are supposed to resist sexual temptation, as epitomized in the canonical worlds of Ming-Qing fiction, *Sanguo yanyi* 三国演义 (Romance of Three Kingdom) and *Shuihu zhuan* 水浒传 (The Water Margin).[253] In his speech, Lingyun legitimizes his unusual intimacy with Yishao by pointing out the physical limitations of conjugal relationships. As he suggests, since male friends are economically, morally, spiritually and physically more accessible than women, those relationships are more intimate.

The narrative then indicates that all ambiguous male-male relationships are based on *qing*. As scholars have argued, appreciation of beauty is essential in the concept of *qing*, so the special bonding between men all starts with the shock of the beautiful appearance at these men's first encounter with each other. As an introduction to the main plot line, the story of the official Guo Hongyin foretells the destiny of his son, Lingyun. Guo Hongyin is so virtuous that he is chosen by the Jade emperor to be the father of the human incarnation of Prince Jin 王子晋. However, upright as he is, he is still dumbstruck the first time he sets eyes on the sixteen-year-old Zhang Jing, who is working as a scribe in his yamen. In a long description explicitly focalized

[253] See Kam Louie's example of Guan Yu in his *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*, 28-30; also see Huang,, *Negotiating Masculinity in Late Imperial China*, 94-94. Huang gives several important examples of heroes resisting sexual temptation from *Sanguo Yanyi* text, with which Cheng Huiying was very familiar.

through Guo's point of view, we see the older man checking him out from head to foot:

> [Guo] saw he had on a black gauze hair wrapper and earrings that appeared to be silver. The color of his blue robe looked attractive and his silk shoes and white socks were spotless. He was delicately thin with a slender waist and appeared to be under twenty. His face was as smooth and white as polished jade, and his refined nose complemented his red lips. His long graceful eyebrows were the color of spring mountains and his eyes were pools of autumn water. His plain silk clothing and cap were utterly striking, like the flowering plum there was nothing common about him; he was like a flawless jade. Unless you said he was a banished immortal, how else could someone like you appear on earth?
> [见他头戴黑纱巾，耳后双环似白银。蓝布袍儿颜色好，丝鞋白袜净无尘。身材纤瘦腰肢细，大约年华未二旬。面似凝脂浑玉琢，鼻如悬胆配朱唇。长眉秀拂春山翠，凤目光含秋水明。布素衣冠偏有致，梅花无俗玉无痕。若言不是神仙谪，世上如何独见君？][254]

It is noteworthy that the narrative changes the pronoun from *ta* (他, he) to *jun* (君, you) when depicting Zhang's appearance from Guo's perspective. At first, the usage of *ta* indicates a distance when Guo views Zhang's beautiful appearance. Towards the end, the abrupt change of the pronoun to *you* indicates intimacy and suggests Guo has already involved his personal feelings with their public relationship. This exclusive focus on Zhang's physical beauty directly influences Hongyin's judgments on Jing's abilities. Guo Hongyin's first instinct is to promote the boy, but when he recalls that Mao, the former magistrate, had filled the yamen with sexual favorites, he suspects that the boy might have been an intimate of Mao. He further worries that if he chooses his own staff based on appearance and then treats them with favor that it will give rise to gossip.

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[254] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 3.

Although Guo Hongyin is attracted to Zhang Jing in terms of the values of the cult of *qing*, he is able to control his own desires according to propriety. Likewise, he also warns people against male homosexuality in terms of *dayi*. Hongyin is known for his *daoxue* (道学, neo-Confucian) values, so he tries to promote Zhang Jing by cultivating his literary talents.[255] The narrator reveals this procedure, "[Hongyin] was also worried that Jing would get involved in illicit sex due to his extreme beauty, so he inculcated him with many books which admonished people about illicit sex, hoping him to be an upright person"(又为他风姿太美，恐涉淫邪，把许多戒淫书谆谆教戒，只要他做个正人。).[256] One of Hongyin's most important *daoxue* teachings is the previously discussed sermon he delivers to Bai Jinzhong declaring that the "way of male homosexuality" is "more risible, hateful, shameful and frightening."[257] Able to keep himself from a physical relationship with Jing, Guo Hongyin transforms his desires into a righteous friendship. This model of friendship, initially based on physical attraction, can be assumed to be the kind of healthy homosocial relationship the author favors and, to some extent, promotes.

Later in the main story line of the *tanci*, Guo Hongyin's son Lingyun, who is otherwise morally incorruptible, confronts the same challenge to differentiate the bonds of friendship from sexual attraction. Throughout the *tanci*, Lingyun's relationships with other men give rise to rumors about his homoerotic motivations that

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[255] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 5, 7.

[256] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 8.

[257] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 28.

threaten to destroy his most important bonds to emperor and family. The true nature of his relationships with Ruyu and Yishao is always ambiguous in the *tanci*, even as his relationships are framed with *qing* and *yi*, the ideal qualities of erotic and platonic love. Both passionate and righteous, Lingyun, like his father, acts as an upright friend, correcting the moral mistakes of both Ruyu and Yishao in the Confucian notion. In this sense, the moral need to question the nature of these relationships is blunted, as Lingyun models applaudable male homosociality.

The very first suggestion that Lingyun is inappropriately involved in a male same-sex relationship occurs due to his ambiguous relationship with Ruyu, the "city-toppling beauty." Lingyun is caught up in the scandal that he has seduced Bai Ruyu who at that time is the favorite of the imperial heir who also happens to be Lingyun's adoptive brother. The exact nature of Lingyun's attraction to the beautiful Ruyu is left ambiguous in the narrative. He too is struck speechless the first time he sees Ruyu:

> Others looked at Lingyun. They saw that he did not ogle [the boy], but in fact he was looking in all directions... He saw that Wushuang's coiled hair was hanging down, wearing a blue shirt with small sleeves, a white belt, and red shoes with pink soles embroidered with flowers. Although he dressed as a common servant in the imperial palace, his face was luminous. Lingyun couldn't help looking at him again. Who knows that it was this gaze that left Lingyun dumbstruck for a long time.
> [[别人看他目不邪视的模样，其实的，]四面八方皆在眼.....见他髻挽乌云发乍披，小袖青衫拴素带，红鞋粉底绣花枝；装来虽是宫奴样，只觉得面上光华满处飞。不免将他重一看，[那知不看犹可，只因这一看，竟把个]重瞳呆了半周时。][258]

[258] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 276.

Mu bu xieshi (目不邪视) originates from the famous book of family teachings, "*The Family Instructions of Master Yan* 颜氏家训" authored by Yan Zhitui 颜之推 (531-591CE), which follows "The Great Learning" and promotes self-cultivation.[259] It literally means that the eyes see but do not look at what is improper. The phrase can also be written as *mu bu xieshi* (目不斜视), which means the eyes do not look astray. In both versions, the phrase conforms to the ideal of a Confucian moral figure, whose orthodox morality is symbolized by his ability to see but without looking astray at anything improper. Apparently, Lingyun ironically only superficially maintains such an image, but actually cannot resist gazing at the extremely beautiful boy who is in his sight. This passage is especially cynical in terms of Confucian propriety, since Lingyun who is referred to as *Chongtong* (Double-pupil) looks at Ruyu for double the time (*chong yikan*). The character *chong* 重 (again, double) seems to indicate that Lingyun is a hypocritical man with double sides—the outer side of an orthodox image who seems to do everything properly and the inner side of an average man who cannot resist sexual desires.

It is important to the moral economy of the narrative that the narrator explain Guo Lingyun's interest in Ruyu because he recognizes Ruyu from their previous life but he does not know why.[260] This explanation excuses all of Lingyun's unusual

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[259] Yan Zhitui 颜之推, *Yanshi jiaxun jijie* 颜氏家训集解, commented by Wang Liqi 王利器 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980), 25.

It is funny that Yan Zhitui uses this phrase to set up rules for pregnant women to teach their children beginning in early pregnancy.

[260] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 276.

behaviors that maintain his moral integrity even as he repeats his father's ambiguous actions. Even though we as readers are privy to the knowledge that the immortal Prince Jin took pity on the Daoist nun Shui Bailian before she was reincarnated as Bai Ruyu and promised to help reform her if they crossed paths on earth and that Lingyun is working from an altruistic motive, it is striking that Lingyun, the reincarnated Prince Jin, also is swept up in the language of male same-sex eroticism. *Qing* is, therefore, the overwhelming quality here when the narrator intentionally parallels the ambiguous meeting of Lingyun and Ruyu to that of Hongyin and Zhang Jing.

Lingyun maintains an intimate relationship with Ruyu despite the fact that it threatens to destroy the bonds of trust between him, the heir apparent and his sworn brother Zhang Yishao. However, Lingyun legitimates their relationship by applying *qing*, the force that crosses boundaries as suggested by Vitiello, onto it. When Yishao accuses Lingyun of taking Ruyu away from the heir apparent as a lover, Lingyun argues for his own behavior from the perspectives of both *li* propriety and *qing* passions:

> If I care and favor him, he will also follow me wholeheartedly and will not be close to others; if I cut off relations with him, he will have no one to return to and he will end up roaming about. It is really pitiful!
> [我若是顾恋他，他也是死心随我，就不去亲近别人了；我若与他断绝，他无所归，必至于流荡忘返，情实可怜。][261]

In terms of *li* propriety, Lingyun argues that if he makes Ruyu follow him, Ruyu will not be close to others and therefore will not destroy them; in terms of *qing* passions, he anticipates how pitiful Ruyu will be if Ruyu has nobody to rely on. Although

[261] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 410.

Lingyun's argument for *li* sounds, to some extent, dignified and even self-sacrificing in that it would save many men, including the crown prince, from indulging in male homosexuality, his reasoning for *qing* is actually more moving and persuasive. Moreover, his *qing* for Ruyu is more evidently undeniable when he is even willing to proceed with his debate with Yishao for Ruyu because Yishao is the one to whom Lingyun is spiritually attached. Taking Yishao's relationship with the heir apparent as a comparison, Lingyun justifies himself saying, "It is obvious that you want to get along with him regardless of what it does to [the crown prince's] reputation. Then my love for Ruyu is the same human feeling. Why shouldn't I!" (可见你这个人也就不顾他声名好歹，总要与他相处的了。则我之见爱如玉也是一样人情，有何不可！)[262] Established as a Confucian moral paragon, Lingyun is supposed to care about his reputation in the society. However, *qing* in this case apparently overpowers *li* and becomes the basis of his self-justification. As we can see, the narrative promotes male same-sex bonds infused with *qing*, but stripped of sexual contact.

From his *qing* for Ruyu, Lingyun develops *yi*, a value between equal friends, towards Ruyu and painstakingly corrects Ruyu's moral defects. It is his insistence on helping Ruyu morally that establishes Lingyun as an upright friend, instead of a lover, to Ruyu. When Ruyu indulges in male same-sex practices that threaten the health of the heir apparent, Lingyun summons a god to punish his addiction to sex and lectures

[262] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 411.

him to "return to the orthodox wholeheartedly" (一心归正).[263] Thanks to Lingyun's righteous efforts, Ruyu suddenly understands his faults and determines to follow and learn proper behavior from Lingyun. To be a true and complete upright friend, Lingyun helps Ruyu by restoring his masculinity, giving him the magic pills to restore his strength and give him a horrifying appearance so he will be able to resist sexual requests from men.[264] This restoration of masculinity is crucial for Ruyu in his relationships with other men, because it restores him as an equal male friend to others, instead of a socially feminine, and therefore inferior, catamite.

Lingyun's relationship with Yishao is even more suspicious and ambiguous than that with Ruyu. If Ruyu merely represents physical attraction to Lingyun, Yishao can be considered his soul mate. As Lingyun defines their friendship, "The names between brothers are equal. What is valued is *qing* and *yi* that they entrust each other with heart and can entrust each other with sincerity" (兄弟之间名份齐。只贵在情义相投肝胆托。).[265] The predestined meeting and intimacy between the two boys reads exactly the same as that between Baoyu and Daiyu, the most famous soulmates in Qing fiction. Lingyun has always been lonely until he meets Yishao when Lingyun is ten, "As soon as Lingyun saw Yishao, he was happy from his heart, forgetting his boredom… Although the bodies are different, their hearts are the same. They want to talk about their three lives of karmic connections, but were afraid of the grief of losing

[263] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 302.

[264] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, Chapter 21, 23, 27.

[265] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 136.

each other" (重瞳一见张郎面，喜出真心闷已忘……此身虽异心如故，欲话三生恐断肠。).[266] Although the readers know that they had been friends in their previous lives, Lingyun is described as falling in love at first sight. The reference to their karmic friendship is especially weird because it sounds like a clichéd description of a reunion between two lovers after a long and difficult separation. The familiarity between the two echoes the one between Baoyu and Daiyu on their first meeting. This textual similarity immediately sets up their relationship into the category of *qing*.

Among all the relationships between Lingyun and Yishao, the most suspicious is that Lingyun insists on maintaining a physically intimate relationship with Yishao whenever the two are together. They always stay and sleep together, unwilling to separate for even a short while, before their heterosexual marriages. This intimacy between sworn brothers apparently imitates the one between the three brothers in *Sanguo yanyi*, which is ambiguously full of sexual tensions. Meanwhile, it also echoes the close heterosexual relationship between Baoyu and Daiyu in *Honglou meng*. Since their first meeting, like little Baoyu and Daiyu who sleep together in Grandmother Jia's bedroom, the two boys also sleep, study, eat and play together. The omniscient narrator tells readers, "They were not willing to separate if it could be helped. Even if they were only apart for a short time, it felt long to them" (等闲不肯分居处，片刻相离便觉长).[267] This kind of relationship can in no way be considered friendship since it involves a sense of possession of the other. After the death of

[266] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 42.

[267] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 45.

Lingyun's parents, Zhang Jing offers to let his son stay in order to accompany Lingyun, "Lingyun can't be without you. You'd better stay here and accompany him" (凌云少你不得，且在此陪伴他).[268] As Jing expects, Yishao is the only person who can comfort Lingyun in his sadness during the three-year-long mourning. This echoes the closeness between Baoyu and Daiyu after her father's death.

Even after Lingyun and Yishao have grown up and become officials, they continue sleeping together until they marry. When they fight, Yishao refuses to sleep together (10.410-12), and their reconciliation is marked by their sleeping together again (15.686). More curiously, the "small finale" (*xiao tuanyuan* 小团圆) in chapter 20, the conventional gathering of characters on stage used to mark significant structural or episodic junctures, features Guo Lingyun, Zhang Yishao and Bai Ruyu reunited in the same bed.[269] As the narrator suggestively describes:

> The beauty still lies deep in the fragrant bed, the two phoenixes fly together through the magnificent bed curtains. Neither reaching nor leaving unlimited pleasure, what need is there to go to the south terrace for clouds and rain? [美人仍卧沉香榻，双凤齐飞入绮帏。不即不离无限趣，云雨何必到阳台？][270]

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[268] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 84.

[269] Since the earliest print version of *Feng shuangfei*, published in 1898, is 40 chapters long, chapter 20 may have been conceived as a halfway point, a conventional place to stage a "small finale."

[270] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 932.

The famous *yunyu* (云雨, clouds and rains) euphemism for sex is from Song Yu, "Preface of the Rhapsody on Gaotang" in *Selection of Refined Literature*, Vol. 19, "In the past, King Xiang of Chu and Song Yu traveled on the Terrace of Yunmeng. They looked at the scenery of Gaotang. Above it, there were only clouds rising up steeply. The clouds changed their shapes suddenly and took on a limitless number of shapes. The King asked Yu, 'What is this *qi*?' Yu answered, 'These are the so-called dawn clouds.' The King asked, 'What are dawn clouds?' Yu answered, 'In the past, the previous King (King Huai of Chu) visited Gaotang and stayed there for two days. He dreamed of a woman who said, "I am the Lady of Mount Wu and a guest of Gaotang. I heard that you will traverse Gaotang and I am willing to serve at your pillow and mat." The King favored her [with sexual relations]. When she left, she said, "I am at the south side of the Mount Wu at the peak. In the morning I make clouds, in the evening I make rain. Day and night, I am under the terrace." The King looked at the mountain and it was exactly as the Lady had described, so he built a temple called Dawn Clouds.'"

[《文选·卷十九·宋玉·高唐赋·序》："昔者楚襄王与宋玉游于云梦之台。望高唐之观，其上独有云气，崒然直

Even while providing this highly suggestive description, the narrator tries to desexualize the sexual scene, marked by bed curtains and clouds and rains, the euphemism for sex, by claiming that there is no need to "go to the south terrace," which may be interpreted as to consummate physical sex. In this case, readers can infer that physical intimacy does not involve sex in contrast to the direct depictions of those men who sleep together and have sex in other scenes. However, the sexual tension in the description is undeniable. Moreover, sleeping together whenever possible goes beyond the norms of a regular friendship, which does not require intimate physical contact.[271] With the sexual tension unexplained, the boundary between male same-sex desire and male friendships again seems to be intentionally blurred.

Moreover, like other romantic love relationships, the relationship between Lingyun and Yishao seems to be exclusive in that one becomes jealous when the other gets close to other men, just like the relationship among the three brothers in *Sanguo yanyi*. As was commonly believed, jealousy appears only because *qing* is too deep. This point is made by Zhang Jing in a comment on the jealousy of Yishao's wife, Qionghua 琼花, "her jealousy comes only from their lingering love" (妒心只为爱缠

上，忽兮改容，须臾之间变化无穷。王问玉曰：'此何气也？'玉曰：'所谓朝云者也。'王曰：'何谓朝云？"玉曰：'昔者先王曾游高唐，怠两昼寝，梦见妇人，曰："妾巫山之女也，为高唐之客，闻君游高唐，愿荐枕席。"王因幸之。去而辞曰："妾在巫山之阳，高丘之岨，旦为朝云，夕为行雨，朝朝暮暮，阳台之下。"旦朝视之如言，故为立庙，号曰朝云。]

[271] There are quite a few common sayings in China to describe spiritually close but physically distant friendships. Two quotes from Zhuangzi are among the most popular ones, "The friendship between gentlemen is as light as water, and the friendship between petty men is as sweet as wine" (君子之交淡若水，小人之交甘若醴。) and "To moisten each other with saliva is not as good as to forget each other in rivers and lakes" (相濡以沫，不如相忘于江湖。).

绵).[272] Since this comment from the perspective of a character in the *tanci* refers to a heterosexual relationship, it suggests a parallel meaning for the jealousy between two men. When Lingyun takes Ruyu with him, Yishao becomes furious. Yishao insists that Lingyun abandon Ruyu, saying "If you side with the Incomparable, then don't talk to me; if you side with me, then don't talk to him" (要认无双休认我，认予不许认无双).[273] Lingyun is astonished by this overreaction and gently asks if his friend is acting out of jealousy, "[others] will only consider you as being jealous and trying to subdue me" (只当你吃醋争风把我降).[274] However, when the situation is reversed, Lingyun's "jealousy" is no better than that of Yishao. Toward the end of the *tanci*, Yishao mourns the corrupt Zhang Cai, who had earlier tried to have sex with him and died together with the rebellious eunuch Liu Jin. Lingyun is enraged and mocks Yishao for his "ambiguous relationship" (暧昧) with Cai. But Yishao also makes fun of Lingyun's overreaction saying, "[you are] not only jealous of him alive, but also jealous of him dead" (非但妒生兼妒死.)[275] Both recognize the other's jealousy and both realize that it has crossed the line of platonic friendship. The jealousy here demonstrates that their *qing* for each other is so deep that it blurs the boundary between friendship and romantic love. However, the author does not treat their jealousy as negative, but instead considers it as an acceptable joke at which people

[272] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2398.

[273] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 411.

[274] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 412.

[275] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2299, 2300.

can laugh, because like similar female same-sex desire without physical sex, it does not threaten the Confucian patriarchal order.

The author treats the ambiguous relationships between the two male protagonists playfully in a way that spices up her fiction. One of the interesting rhetorical moves in the *tanci* is that Lingyun and Yishao sometimes knowingly transgress the role of mere friends and seem to enjoy the resulting sexual tension, but then intentionally depreciate it as a joke. When Lingyun has the strange dream after he loses Feixiang in which he marries a different girl, Yishao makes fun of him. Lingyun loses control of his temper and replies, "If I can't have Feixiang in this life, I swear that I will not marry again. The one who should fill in during this crisis should of course be you, accompanying me for a hundred years" (今生若没飞香女，我誓终身不续弦。应急填空该是你，百年伴我理当然。).[276] Without thinking clearly in his rage, Lingyun probably has blurted out his real hope. While the two do not think anything is amiss, He Shiwei 何世威, Yishao's martial arts master, immediately laughs at them. Shiwei's laughter both signifies the impropriety of the comment and downgrades the sexual tension to a joke that is funny precisely because the situation will never happen.

Yishao's feelings for Lingyun are also resolved in a joke. On Lingyun's wedding night with his concubines, Zhen Daya 甄大雅 and Murong Zhu, Yishao accepts a bet from Mu Mengxiong 沐梦熊, his brother-in-law, to sleep with Lingyun.

[276] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 888.

Mengxiong's challenge is explicitly sexualized. Mengxiong comments on his own bet, "[it] will not only make the brides suffer a lonely night, but it will also cause the groom to not lose the pleasure of sleeping with somebody" (既叫新妇耐孤眠，新郎不失双栖乐).[277] The sexual connotation is obvious in that Mengxiong requires Yishao to take the place of the two brides who are supposed to have sexual intercourse with Lingyun on their wedding night. But the whole sexual tension is simply resolved by Yishao's actions. Since they have always slept together since their childhood as a habit, Yishao is happy to take the bet for fun, pretending that he does not comprehend its sexual connotation. Diminishing the homoeroticism to a joke, the narrator again indicates that the ambiguous boundary between male friendship and same-sex desire is not dangerous to the Confucian system and therefore is acceptable.

Others in the *tanci* frequently comment on the unusually close relationship between Lingyun and Yishao; it seems that no one in the *tanci* is ignorant of their close ambiguous friendship. Lingyun's cousin, Guo Chenglong 郭成龙, is the first person who is fully aware of their uncommon intimacy. When Lingyun and Yishao meet for the first time, Chenglong murmurs, "[Lingyun] never smiled seeing others, but he unexpectedly laughed today" (见了别人从不笑，今朝也有笑开场).[278] Witnessing how they keep each other company all the time, including sleeping together, Chenglong then starts to question the nature of their relationship. He makes fun of Lingyun, "Today it would be better to take off the male clothes from this pretty

[277] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2224.

[278] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 43.

Ruiguan and dress him as a girl. You can keep him beside you as a wife" (今日莫若就把这位美貌的瑞官，脱了男衣扮女娘。留在身边为养媳).[279] In Chenglong's eyes, taking into account the different status between the two in terms of their age and appearance, the relationship between Lingyun and Yishao clearly imitates that between husband and wife.

Feixiang 飞香, Lingyun's first wife and Yishao's elder sister, who herself is involved in an ambiguous female same-sex relationship, also does not miss the awkwardness between these two men. When Lingyun decides to marry Murong Zhu 慕容珠, Feixiang's beloved sworn sister, to Yishao, Feixiang is unwilling and therefore mad at her younger brother because of the way he teases Zhu.[280] But Lingyun anxiously swears that it has nothing to do with Yishao, but is his own decision. Watching his anxiety, Feixiang mocks her husband, "You only know your feelings for Yishao. When his name is mentioned, you get agitated and are even willing to swear an oath to heaven" (你只知将逸少怜，说到他时心就急，也能立誓与呼天。).[281] As Feixiang points out, Lingyun typically stands up for his calm, cold and rational disbelief in superstition. This anxious response to Yishao, to the point of swearing to heaven, is definitely unusual. Sensitive to the attraction of same-sex desire herself, Feixiang is acutely aware that Lingyun "has no response, and so has to

[279] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 43.

[280] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, Chapter 44.

[281] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2036.

admit [his feelings for Yishao]" (重瞳无对答，算来只好竟承担).[282] Lingyun's behavior suggests his feelings of *qing* for Yishao over anyone else and also echoes his earlier statement of valuing male friends over women.

The most significant labeling of their relationship as same-sex eroticism is made by Zhang Cai. After failing to initiate a sexual relationship with Yishao, Zhang Cai is jealous of his intimate relationship with Lingyun. He then composes a piece of doggerel called "A Pair of Male Phoenixes Flying Together" (凤双飞), "A pair of phoenixes flies together under the Phoenix Terrace. Why does the pair flying together necessarily need to be a male and a female?... Double-Pupil loves the beauty of catamites..." (凤凰台下凤双飞，双飞何必雄与雌？……重瞳偏嗜龙阳色……).[283] This poem on the surface eulogizes the elegant demeanor and beautiful love of the young couple, but *longyang*, a euphemism for homosexual lover, suggests that their relationship goes far beyond common friendship. Lingyun is enraged by the poem. Since this poem uses the phrase of "a pair of male phoenixes flying together," from which the *tanci* takes its title, it leaves open the meaning of the epithet.

Since there is no physical sex involved and all the sexual tensions are properly dissolved, the unusually close relationship stays in the safe realm of homosocial desires. Furthermore, the narrative promotes a proper homosociality between Lingyun and Yishao in that they regulate their *qing* according to *yi*. As an upright friend, Lingyun always corrects Yishao's mistakes in terms of Confucian moral values; in

[282] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2036.

[283] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 151.

turn, Lingyun is the only one to whom Yishao listens and of whom he is afraid. Lingyun does everything possible to keep Yishao on track whenever Yishao makes mistakes, such as when he has a close relationship with the lascivious Zhang Cai, disobeys his father, and marries Bao Xiang'er 鲍香儿 in secret. For this reason, Yishao often refers to him as Big Brother Guo 郭老大. Since all these instances of moral help and correction are based on Confucian propriety, *dayi*, or public/greater righteousness, is the central value that the author is advocating for between the friends.

Moreover, as devoted righteous friends, they willingly risk their own lives in order to save the other. As a public moral value, *yi* is often associated with *zhong* 忠, or loyalty to the emperor, and the concept of "valuing righteousness and treating life lightly" (重义轻生) is promoted.[284] Lingyun has always been a loyal minister, known as "Willing to risk a beheading" (拚杀头) to his political enemies and friends alike, and is an upright friend, universally known as the Big Brother.[285] He is always fearless and powerful, using his extraordinary martial arts and magic to save Yishao from danger in the wars against foreign countries.[286] By helping his sworn brother Yishao, Lingyun both fulfills his moral commitment to loyalty toward the emperor and righteousness toward his friend Yishao.

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[284] This concept can be seen in history books as early as the *History of Jin* 晋书, and it is mentioned in the "Biographies of the Loyal and Righteous."

[285] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1425, 1598, 1615, 2073, etc.

[286] See Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, Chapter 15, 39.

However, the best example of combining the public moral values of *zhong* and *yi* and the private values of *yi* is acted out by Yishao, who is usually the more unconventional of the two, which further proves the benefit of their friendship. One of the most impressive demonstrations of *yi* in the whole book is when Yishao stabs himself in the heart in order to prove the innocence of Lingyun, who has been framed as a usurper. This extreme act of Yishao conforms to the stereotype of the loyal minister who risks his life to remonstrate the emperor; but more importantly, it is also consistent with the ideal friendship in which friends are willing to give their lives for each other. As Yishao indicates:

> The relationships between emperor and minister and between friends are both among the five relationships. Although I receive your honor's boundless grace, it is hard for me to abandon this friendship... Your humble minister should remonstrate in front of the emperor. Even if you ordered axes on my neck, how could I lower my head and keep silent?
> [君臣朋友，总在五伦之内，虽受君恩深似海，难将友谊半途捐……微臣应得谏君前。便叫斧钺加臣颈，岂肯低头默默然。][287]

In Confucian morality, the order of five relationships, starting with the one between emperor and minister and ending with the one between friends, is deliberately designed in terms of their social importance. Friendship is never considered of equal significance in a Confucian society. However, since *yi* between friends is considered more important than *zhong* to common people in popular literature, such as *Sanguo yanyi* and *Shuihu zhuan*, the narrative apparently inherits this ideology here. Therefore, in this *tanci*, Yishao claims that *yi* between friends and *zhong* to the emperor are equal virtues. As in *Sanguo yanyi*, the priority order of *zhong* and *yi* are

[287] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1626.

resolved tacitly—true loyalty here is achieved through being a *yi* friend. In this sense, although *yi* between friends is already considered a public value due to its position within the five relationships, it is transformed into a traditionally much more important public moral value by associating with loyalty to the emperor, the ultimate public moral value in Confucianism. By advocating this publicly beneficial aspect of the friendship between Lingyun and Yishao, the ambiguity in their relationship can be easily overlooked.

Conclusion

This chapter, which talks about how the female author thinks of and portrays male homosociality, contains two contrary parts, negative male same-sex eroticism and practice and positive male friendship, from the female writer's perspective. While male authors of novels supported male same-sex eroticism because of *qing*, Cheng Huiying, as a female writer, believes that it destabilizes the normative social orders. It is interesting that the narrator uses a beautiful young boy, a male counterpart of the female *femme fatale*, as an embodiment of toxic male same-sex eroticism. This twist of characterization not only supports the opinions, but also deconstructs the stereotypes of disasterous women.

In contrast, the narrator advocates male friendship based on *qing* and *yi*. Although the friendships discussed in this chapter are in many ways ambiguously similar to male same-sex desires, the narrator's disclaimers of sexual contacts

categorize these relationships into the safe and positive zone. By emphasizing *qing* and *yi*, the narrator seems to try to reestablish a healthy male homosociality although whether it is successful is questionable, given so many details of male intimacy involved in the male relationships. However, paralleling this part to the theme of the next chapter, female same-sex desires, we can easily tell the logic of the narrative. As long as sex is not involved, the relationship is not threatening to the Confucian order. Therefore, the author is able to easily insert her own values and opinions into the text without worrying about moral judgement or the inability to publish.

CHAPTER V

YIN RULES:

FEMALE SAME-SEX DESIRE AND AGENCY

Introduction

In contrast to the negative depiction of male homoeroticism in *Feng shuangfei*, the treatment of female homoerotic desire conforms to the cult of *qing* ideals.[288] The emphasis in the female same-sex relationships depicted in the *tanci* is on love and the appreciation of beauty rather than sex; women's shared feelings of love are morally ennobling in that they promote sexual and political loyalty; and the female same-sex relationships are based on companionate equality rather than status/age differentiation. The text is ambiguous about the exact nature of the relationships between women. Although there are no descriptions of explicitly sexual acts, the narrator does not deny the possibility of sexual intimacy between women as she does for the relationship between Guo Lingyun and Zhang Yishao.[289]

Very few male writers touched on the topic of female same-sex desire in Ming and Qing fiction. There are several short stories by Li Yu 李渔 (1611-1680) and in Pu Songling's 蒲松龄 (1640-1715) *Liaozhai zhiyi* (聊斋志异, *Liaozhai's Tales of the Strange*) that deal with female-female love, among which the most famous ones are

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[288] See Footnote 11.

[289] See my previous chapter, Chapter IV, for details.

"Lianxiang ban 怜香伴" and "Feng Sanniang 封三娘."[290] In the scholar-beauty novel, *Lin Lan Xiang* 林兰香 (a.k.a. The Six Wives of Wastrel Geng, earliest extant edition dated 1838), the anonymous author portrays a couple of female servants who have same-sex sexual relationships. Because the stories that refer to female same-sex desires are so few and so marginalized within the corpus of fiction written by men, scholars have paid little attention to this topic.[291]

Female homosociality is another theme that is of little interest to traditional male writers of fiction. While female poets during the Ming and Qing established communities of women poets and socialized through poetry, male fiction writers usually portray female homosociality as poles, either universal sisterhood, as with the hundred flower spirits in *Jinghua yuan* (镜花缘, Flowers in the Mirror) and the wives in *Yesou puyan*, or as jealous competition, as in *Jin Ping Mei* and *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* (醒世姻缘传, The Story of a Marital Fate to Awaken the World). Male writers rarely depicted close and exclusive friendships between women, preferring to depict

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[290] Li Yu 李渔, "Lianxiang ban 怜香伴," in *Li Yu quanji* 李渔全集 (Taibei : Cheng wen chu ban she, Min guo 59 [1970]), 2807-3030.

Pu Songling 蒲松龄, "Feng the Third 封三娘," in *Liaozhai zhi yi* 聊斋志异 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2005), 198-201.

[291] Suiyuan xiashi 随缘下士 ed., *Di'er qishu Lin Lan Xiang* 第二奇书林兰香 in *Sijia micang xiaoshuo baibu* 私家秘藏小说百部, ed. Jin Chengpu 金成浦, Qiming 启明, (Huhehaote: Neimenggu daxue chubanshe, Yuanfang chubanshe, 2001), vol.53.

Keith McMahon, in his *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists* (205-220), discusses the sexual relationships between women in *Lin Lan Xiang*.
Laura Wu's article "Through the Prism of Male Writing: Representation of Lesbian Love in Ming-Qing Literature" (*Nan Nü: Men, Women, and Gender in Early Imperial China* 4, no.1 (2002): 1-34) discusses the theme of female same-sex desire in Ming-Qing literature.
Sang Tze-lan's *The Emerging Lesbian: Female Same-Sex Desire in Modern China* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003) devotes a chapter (37-95) to the discussion of female same-sex desire in premodern China.

the pillar extremes of universal friendship or jealous power struggles.[292] Women's friendship and socialization seem to always be imagined in extreme ways in male authors' novels.

In contrast, Cheng Huiying, as do many female authors of *tanci*, creates exclusive female bonds. Female same-sex desire and homosociality are common themes in female-authored *tanci* fiction, since most of the *tanci* contain cross-dressing and polygamous family life as important subplots. Both *Zaisheng yuan* 再生缘 (The Destiny of Rebirth) and *Bi sheng hua* 笔生花 (Flowers Growing from Writing Brushes) contain cross-dressed female protagonists who marry women and end up taking their "wives" to their betrothed husbands' households as secondary wives. Their enduring bonds with their "wives" entwine their desire for another beautiful woman with an ideal solution to the potential problem of jealousy in polygamous families. So they take matters into their own hands and start to arrange a marriage that will include both of them. Cheng Huiying, in her *tanci*, portrays the strong desires of the women to stay forever with another woman they love and the efforts they make to realize their desires. Through their ambiguous same-sex relationships in *Feng shuangfei* women actually are, to some extant, able to claim and execute their agency in their contemporary patriarchal system.

[292] There are quite a few scholars who have already studied women poets during this period and pointed out the existence of the community of the women poets. See Ko, *Teachers of Inner Chamber;* Widmer, *The Beauty and the Book*; Grace Fong, *Herself and Author*; etc.

Cross-Dressing, Fake Marriage and Beyond:
The Ambiguous Boundary between Female Same-Sex Desires and Homosociality

As in earlier *tanci* written by women, narratives about female same-sex desire are interwoven with the theme of cross-dressing. Cross-dressing is not as important to the plot development of *Feng shuangfei* as it is in earlier *tanci* such as *Yuchuan Yuan* 玉钏缘 (The Destiny Connected by Jade Hairpin), *Zaisheng yuan* 再生缘, *Jinyu yuan* 金鱼缘 (The Destiny Connected by Golden Fish), and *Bi sheng hua* 笔生花, but it is still a notable feature of *Feng shuangfei*. It is essential to the subplot where Zhang Feixiang 张飞香 and Murong Zhu 慕容珠 consummate their fake marriage and develop their desires for each other.

When fleeing from Zhang Cai 张彩 who is attempting to abduct her, Feixiang, Guo Lingyun's 郭凌云 fiancée and Zhang Yishao's 张逸少 sister, leaves the capital with her adopted sister He Danyan 何淡烟. The two dress as men in order to travel more safely. En route, they meet Murong Zhu, the daughter of a non-Han bandit who has established himself as a king of an island off China's southern coast. Feixiang is so obsessed with the princess's beauty that she cannot help staring at her, although Danyan keeps reminding her that since Feixiang is a "man" her behavior is highly inappropriate. After a long passage describing Murong Zhu as focalized through Feixiang's gaze, the omniscient narrator let us overhear her musings:

> [The judgment of Miss Feixiang] was never wrong and had always surpassed others. On meeting this city-toppling beauty, she was so pleased that she forgot everything else. She forgot that she was dressed as a man, and stayed there in a stupor, admiring [the woman]: "There are few such women in the

> world. She must be an immortal that descended to earth. Looking at her, I know that I cannot compare with her. If she encounters that Zhang Cai from Shanxi,[293] I don't know what he would do. He would certainly go crazy without having a way to approach her. I don't even know whether there will be a man lucky enough to marry such a beautiful wife."
> [这飞香小姐的眼力，]从来不错最高强。一朝遇着倾城美，喜极真叫万事忘。不记自家男子扮，呆呆立定暗称扬：这般女子人间少，必是仙姬降下方。我见自知千不及，若然遇着陕西张，不知又待如何了，无计钻求定发狂。更不知可有男儿曾种福，将来娶着这美妻房。[294]

It is not uncommon in fiction for a woman to appreciate another woman's beauty. However, Feixiang's admiration for Murong Zhu goes beyond common appreciation. Feixiang is so overwhelmed by Murong Zhu's beauty that she throws caution to the wind; she is dressed as a man to insure her own safety and needs to make sure that she can continue to pass, physically and ritually. Immediately after evaluating Zhu's beauty, Feixiang wonders whether she is engaged and thinks to herself how "lucky" her husband will be. Since marriage was the only legitimate way for proper women to be sexually intimate in late-imperial China, the "luck" to which Feixiang is referring implies sexual possession. Moreover, given that within the norms of this particular *tanci*, same-sex friendships are much more emotionally, and in the case of Bai Ruyu sexually, intimate than any of the marriages depicted, it is especially striking that Feixiang does not wonder about how she could become friends with this beautiful woman. Up until this point in the narrative with the one exception of playing on a swing in the garden, Feixiang has shown herself to be orthodox in her concern with

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[293] In the self-introduction of Zhang Cai, he mentions that he is from Guanzhong 关中, which is part of Shanxi 陕西 (Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 91).

[294] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 822.

her own and the household's sexual virtues. And given that Feixiang was so recently the object of a very similar gaze from Zhang Cai, her fascination with Murong Zhu can in no way be interpreted as fully innocent. Feixiang's sexualization of Murong Zhu may be a result of her adoption of a male stance: when passing as a man, she is no longer morally responsible for upholding the ideals of chastity and is freed to romanticize women and the institution of marriage rather than think of them as agents of orthodox order. Indeed, Feixiang is so oblivious to the need to protect Murong Zhu's virtue that the two arrange to eat together while Zhu's father is absent.

Zhu's father, Murong Tao 慕容韬, discovers them together and forces the two to marry in order to avoid a scandal. He then returns with them to his island kingdom. In a plot device that is common to other cross-dressing stories, Murong Zhu falls in love with her fake husband. And Feixiang, despite being held captive in a forced marriage and unable to go back home or even contact her family to reassure them that she is alive and well, is oddly not anxious at all. In response to He Danyan's worrying before the marriage, Feixiang laughs:

> "Don't bring it up! Since both father and daughter are blind and have chosen me, I have come to be the groom. Since her father is rich and powerful, he must have chests of gold and pearls to give us. I haven't needed to pay a cent and get to marry a beautiful wife for free. When I go back home wearing a crown, it will only make people laugh. This is a wonderful romantic tale that can be passed down for thousands of years, not something that will dishonor me."
> [飞香笑道"休提起！既然他父女齐齐眼尽盲，看中人头偏要我，我身落得做新郎。乃翁既是多豪富，定有金珠赠满箱。我不花消钱半个，白娶得如花似玉好妻房。冠乎其冕回家去，纵使人知笑一场。恰正是佳话风流传万古，并不算下风之事减威光。"][295]

[295] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 834.

It is astonishing that Feixiang, a well-educated gentry woman, does not think of Murong Zhu's situation at all since this marriage to a fake man would jeopardize her ability to take a real husband in the future. A second marriage was considered dishonorable for women during the Ming and the Qing; and a woman without a husband was socially incomplete. Nor does Feixiang think about the morality of her own actions: she is the one who is passing herself off as a fake man who has improperly seduced a noble woman and is herself betrothed to Guo Lingyun. It seems she does not feel that this marriage to another woman has any implications for either woman's chastity or social honor.

Feixiang's fantasizes this marriage between her and another woman within the framework of the aesthetics of *qing* and scholar-beauty romances. Feixiang is clearly willing and pleased to marry Murong Zhu. Although she mentions the wealth and power of the Murong family, her lack of concern for contacting her own family reveals that she does not think of this marriage as a ritual arrangement between two families, but as an affair of the heart between her and her "beautiful wife." The affair of the heart is exactly what the notion of *qing* focuses on.[296]

Also worth noting is that at no point does Feixiang think to herself that a relationship with Zhu as sworn sisters could be equally fulfilling and without any of the complications of marriage; she is intent on fulfilling her romantic

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[296] In *Honglou meng*, while Baoyu and Daiyu express their feelings for each other, they both say, "I am for the sake of my heart 我为的是我的心." (Cao and Zhiyan zhai, *Zhiyan zhai chongping Sitou ji gengchen jiaoben*, 409.)

"scholar-beauty" fantasy of being coupled with a beauty. Feixiang is as equally enamored of the beautiful girl as of her new-found agency that allows her to express legitimate sexual desire—something otherwise impossible for a proper woman. Since it was common in Qing fiction to apply the scholar-beauty formula to male same-sex romances within the scheme of the aesthetic of *qing*, such as in *Pinhua baojian*, it raises the possibility that Cheng Huiying knowingly evoked female homoerotic desires in this *tanci*. An example of this can be seen in Feixiang's regret that she is unable to have sex with her beautiful wife on their wedding night.

> Feixiang was also a little drunk. She bowed to her father-in-law and took her leave. Maids on the left and right moved the huge candles and led her into the wedding chamber. She sat on the golden chair and scrutinized the beauty. [Murong Zhu] was swathed in jade and gold and her wedding outfit made her more enchanting than an immortal. [Feixiang thought to herself:] "It would have been a sad injustice if she had married an ugly barbarian. It is regrettable that she had the bad fate to meet me and that we are both the same. How can I immediately change into a man's body so that I can enjoy this incomparable beauty? At least there is no reason to be ashamed in that we are well-matched in terms of talent and appearance, so she need not sigh over her misfortune."
> [飞香也有三分醉，再拜相辞岳父前。左右丫鬟移巨烛，依然引入洞房天。金交椅上将身坐，再把多娇仔细观。玉裹金妆穿吉服，愈加夺目似神仙。若叫误嫁番奴丑，原是伤心大屈冤。只恨偏偏逢着我，一般身份又无缘。安能速变男儿体，消受无双绝世娟。才貌相当原不愧，免叫薄命叹红颜。][297]

Feixiang's regret is not that she has lied to her wife and must come clean, but that she is not a man who can take full corporeal pleasure (*xiaoshou* 消受) in his new wife. Again, Feixiang, playing the role of a talented scholar, puts herself into the frame of scholar-beauty romances, which usually emphasize the pairing of men's talent and women's appearance (郎才女貌). Feixiang's regret and self-positioning reveal her

[297] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 840.

strong desire for Zhu, another woman. Since the text does not shy away from describing sexual relations between men in other sections of the narrative, the references to Feixiang's unrealizable desire to have sexual relations with Zhu suggests the phallocentric nature of traditional Chinese understandings of sexuality and the absence of language that could be used to describe or realize female same-sex desires. In the following passage, Feixiang acknowledges the linguistic and cultural erasure of lesbian sexuality as something that could not threaten the code of female chastity:

> If I were a real man, it would naturally be improper for me to look at her; or if she were a man, it would be even more inappropriate for me to stare at her; even if we were both men, people nowadays would also have something to talk about. Fortunately we are both women, so I can be bold enough to look at her.
> [我若真男子，看他自然不该；或者他是男子，我看他更加非礼；就使两下都是男子，目今世道也有话说的。幸是多是女人，所以好放胆看看。][298]

On their second night together, Feixiang reveals her real identity of a woman. Although Zhu is surprised, she does not show any anxiety or anger towards the fake husband, but instead she orders her maids to be quiet and displays total understanding of Feixiang's disguise, "Now that you are a woman pretending to be a man, there must be a reason for it" (既然是女装男子，必有情由在内边).[299] Moreover, she makes fun of Feixiang's staring at her, acknowledging their mutual attraction, and considers their meeting as *yuan* (缘,destined), which is a Buddhist term always used to describe romanticized heterosexual marriage. If she did not love Feixiang, Zhu would have thought of herself being decieved and unable to marry in

[298] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 824.

[299] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 843.

the future again. In this case, Zhu's love for Feixiang is motivated by Feixiang's talent and appearance, regardless of her gender.

After this interestingly peaceful scene of disclosing the truth, the narrator coyly allows the readers to watch the two women undress before giving the couple their privacy. Zhu reassures Feixiang that she is comfortable with their relationship:

> "From today on, we shall be husband and wife in public and sisters in private. Our feelings (*qing*) will be like that between flesh and blood and we will not doubt each other. You don't need to pretend to be drunk like yesterday. You can take off your clothes and sleep without worry." Feixiang happily replied: "As you order! It is just that I am unworthy of your beauty—I carry the name [of husband] in vain without reality. Don't feel resentful after you reconsider things." The Princess spat, then grabbed [Feixiang's] shoulder with hands, forced her to sit on the bed, and then took off [Feixiang's] lotus shoes and put them on her own feet. They fit perfectly, as if they were made for her. The Princess was even more delighted and kept saying, "Marvelous!" Both took off their undergarments and slept peacefully side by side under a single quilt, closing the door and dismissing both maids.
> ["从今后公则夫妻私姊妹，情同骨肉少嫌疑。不须诈醉仍如昨，尽可宽衣放胆眠。"小姐欣然称"领命！只是万分辜负了美红颜。虚耽名号浑无实，不要仔细思商腹内烟。"公主一声兜面啐，便将玉手挽香肩，拖来捺住床沿坐，脱下他足下弓鞋自己穿。恰好无差真合式，犹如一手做来般。更加欢喜连称妙，然后方宽衬里衫，一被两头安睡了，关门退出二丫鬟。][300]

Although Zhu now desexualizes their relationship as *gurou*, which usually refers to direct blood kinship and here especially means "sisters," the narrator does not give readers a longer break from the sexual tension between them. Feixiang's response that she "carries the name [of husband] in vain without reality" again reminds readers of the sexual nature of the marital relationship between the two. Moreover, this tension is

[300] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 844.

not released by Zhu's spit, but instead strenlgthens when they both sit and sleep in the same bed, sharing the same quilt.

It is also noteworthy that before sleep, Zhu takes off Feixiang's shoes, wears them by herself, and is obviously pleased by the fact that the shoes fit her well too. As is suggested in Dorothy Ko's *Teachers of Inner Chambers*, women during the Ming and the Qing constructed their own culture of foot-binding and shoes for bound feet were part of the culture in which women socialized with each other.[301] This scene is exactly a reflection of this women's culture and indicates that such a homosociality is established between these two women. But we cannot overlook the fact that the bound feet and the shoes for them are also highly erotic in male-authored fictions. In *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅, Pan Jinlian 潘金莲 and Song Huilian's 宋蕙莲 small bound feet are sexual metonymies to the lascivious Ximen Qing 西门庆 and their shoes work as sexualized identities.[302] Considering the erotic depictions of men's relationships, the narrator of *Feng shuangfei* may have entirely innocent intentions when displaying this private intimate scene in the bedroom.

The blissful interlude of these two women's fake marriage as husband and wife, which lasts for nineteen long chapters, is emotionally and romantically fulfilling for both women. Enjoying their time accompanying each other, both of them express their satisfaction with the arrangement. To describe their happy fake marriage, Feixiang writes a *ci* lyric and they read and comment on it together:

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[301] See Ko, *Teachers of Inner Chambers*.

[302] See Lanling Xiaoxiaosheng, *Gaohe tang piping diyi qishu Jin Ping Mei*.

> Palaces and pavilions are exquisite, / rosy clouds are dimly discernible, / Three thousand li of weak water surrounds Penglai Island. / The immortals on the jade tower meet each other smiling, / Shuangcheng is graceful and Feiqiong is young.
>
> Although the good dream is connected, / King Xiang is vexed in vain,/ my heart wants to pray to Heaven for myself. / I wish my body would immediately become a man, / I am willing to get old in this hometown of tenderness.
>
> ----To the Tune of "Tasuo xing"
>
> When she finished, she handed it over to the Princess. After reading, the Princess smiled, "If you really wish to spend your remaining years here until death, why do you have to be a man? Even if I can be your fake wife for a whole life, it would be a source of happiness."
>
> [殿阁玲珑，云霞缥缈，三千弱水周蓬岛。玉楼仙子笑相逢，双成绰约飞琼小。　好梦虽通，襄王空恼，私心欲向天公祷。此身立变作男儿，温柔乡里甘终老。
>
> 右调《踏莎行》
>
> 写完了递与公主。公主看了，微笑道，"若果愿终老于此，何必定要真是男儿，就与你做一世假夫妻，也是人生乐事了。"][303]

At the beginning of the lyric, Feixiang portrays the island as distant and hard to reach. Clouds cover the island, and the weak water that cannot hold a boat prevents people from approaching it. *Ruoshui*, or weak water, not only refers to the seclusion of the island, but is also a metaphor of love.[304] The famous saying, "Even though there is three thousand *li* of weak water, I only drink a ladle" (凭弱水三千，我只取一瓢饮), which also appears in *Honglou meng*, means one's exclusive love for another.[305] Therefore, by using the word *ruoshui*, Feixiang depicts this island as surrounded by an otherworldly and romantic atmosphere. On this island, Feixiang identifies herself and Zhu with two female immortals, Dong Shuangcheng 董双成 and Xu Feiqiong 许

[303] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 849.

[304] In ancient times, Chinese believed that if a boat cannot float on water, it is because the water is too weak. So it is very common to describe a distant place, which is hard to reach by water, as surrounded by weak water.

[305] Cao and Gao, *Honglou meng*, 698.

飞琼. In Feixiang's metaphor, being immortals seems to refer to the happiness two women are enjoying and the fact that both are playing pipe wind instruments may indicate that they are *zhiyin* (知音, people who know each others' music) intimates.[306]

The second stanza of the lyric traditionally turns to the emotions of the writer. This stanza begins with the erotic reference to King Xiang's story and then expresses regret that sex cannot happen between two women.[307] While their relationship is highly sexualized in this stanza, Feixiang pushes it even further. She uses *sixin* to indicate that her wish is *si* (私), for herself, and it is to turn her body into a man so that they can consummate a real marital relationship. She also suggests her willingness to spend her whole life with Zhu, another woman. This whole stanza is erotic in tone. Although women during the Ming and the Qing often use the language of romantic love to describe the intimacy between female friends, it is unusual for a woman to repeatedly regret her inability to have sex with another woman as a way of describing the depth of their friendship.[308]

In response to Feixiang's passion for her, Zhu also shows her dedication to the relationship. She argues that sex does not matter to their relationship and that what is

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[306] This is an alternative for *zhiji*, a person who knows me, and refers to the mutual understanding between two friends and soul mates. The most famous story of *zhiyin* is no other than the one between Yu Boya 俞伯牙 and Zhong Ziqi 钟子期, in which Boya breaks his zither when Ziqi dies because no one else will understand his music after Ziqi's death.

[307] See the *yunyu* story in footnote 270.

[308] This borrowing of the language can be seen everywhere in women's poetry, prose and even folksongs. Maureen Robertson, in her "Voicing the Feminine, Constructions of the Gendered Subject in Lyric Poetry by Women of Medieval and Late Imperial China" (*Late Imperial China* 13, no.1: 63-110), talks about how women use lovers' voices to express friendship; Cathy Silber, in her "From Daughter to Daughter-in Law in the Women's Script of Southern Hunan" (*Engendering China: Women, Culture and the State*, ed. Gilmartin et. (Harvard University Press, 1994), 47-68), points out that in nüshu, female authors use the metaphor of *yuanyang*, a common metaphor of a married couple, to describe their relationships of *laotong*.

important is that they can grow old together. Obviously she is more satisfied with their current relationship than Feixiang is, because she considers herself to be happy enough even though they are merely a fake couple. As an exotic foreign girl who is not nurtured and restrained by neo-Confucian propriety, Zhu's opinion probably touches the true nature of their relationship, the *qing* and sexual tension between them.

Their happy marriage comes to an abrupt end when Feixiang's fiancé, Guo Lingyun, leads an attack by Chinese forces on Three Immortal Island (三仙岛). The king is killed, Lingyun defeats the enemy army which is now lead by Murong Zhu, and he "rescues" his fiancée and returns her to China. Zhu's longing for Feixiang reveals the extent to which she considers themselves to be "husband and wife." Zhu directly express her attachment to Feixiang when Feixiang is taken away from her:

> [The princess] felt bitterness on account of Feixiang, "We have been as intimate as if we were one body for many years. Yesterday, we were still laughing and talking together, but today we are suddenly separated and it is as if my shadow has left my body. By now she must be in Lin'gao County and has removed her men's clothes and is wearing skirts again. How did that nasty jailbird get so lucky? I really can't stand thinking about it."
> The maids standing beside her said: "In the end, your husband was a woman. How could she really count as your spouse all along? She has been missing her own family. Today, she has escaped the bitterness of that trap, and we can expect she is enjoying real happiness now. There is no point in dredging up these memories, so why bother continuing your foolish infatuation (*chiqing* 痴情)?"
> The Princess shouted, "This is the opinion of fools—that people who love each other (*xiang aizhe*) can only be husband and wife, and that two women therefore shouldn't love each other. It's for this reason that that bitch Wuhe lost her life on account of a man[309]. I have seen through the ways of the world,

[309] Wuhe is one of Murong Zhu's maids. When Murong Zhu is fighting off the Chinese army, she does not let Feixiang return to the Chinese side. Because Guo Lingyun is unwilling to attack them with full force, he uses Bai

> and I don't think of men as a precious treasure. Instead, I made my life with a woman; I lived with her and yielded to her for five springs. Although she often missed her homeland, her love (*ai wo zhi xin*) for me was also true. Now that we have been unexpectedly separated, even if she leaves, takes a husband, changes her heart and gives me up, there is no possibility that I could give her up. If we can't meet again in this life, even if I kill Guo Lingyun, capture the territory of the Ming, kill the emperor and minister, and establish myself as empress over all, it still will not be enough to wipe out my sense of injustice." [（娘娘）一心又为飞香苦，数载浑如手足亲。昨日犹然同笑语，今朝忽地影离形。此时想在临高县，脱了男衣再着裙。万恶囚徒何造化，算来实在不甘心。丫鬟又在旁边劝："驸马终须是女人。岂算娘娘真配偶，向来只是想家庭。如今脱了牢笼苦，可想而知正喜欣。未必还将谁记忆，娘娘何必再痴情。"[公主唱（喝）道："你们愚人之见，总相爱者只有夫妻，两个女人就不该相爱的，所以那贱人舞鹤把性命都送在男子手内了。]我须看得人情透，不把男儿当宝珍。偏与女人多契合，同居屈指五年春。他虽常把家乡念，爱我之心也是真。一旦分离于意外，纵然他去有夫君，前心顿变丢开我，我要丢他万不能。若是今生无再会，莫言手刃郭凌云，就把那大明一统江山夺，杀尽朝中君与臣，自做官家登九五，这场冤气也难伸。"][310]

The attempt to desexualize their relationship fails again. The narrator, describing Murong Zhu's perspective, starts portraying Zhu's longing for Feixiang as sisters, using the term *shouzu qin*, a word that usually describes the intimacy between brothers. However, this depiction of pure friendship is immediately destabilized by Zhu's jealousy toward Lingyun. When Zhu thinks of Feixiang dressing as a woman, she cannot help cursing Lingyun. Moreover, she considers Lingyun as having *zaohua*, luck or fortune, because he may legitimately accompany and own Feixiang. In comparison to her "misfortune" of losing Feixiang, she is definitely envious of

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Ruyu as his secret weapon. Lingyun thinks the reason Zhu does not let Feixiang leave is that, as a barbarian woman, she must be lascivious and unwilling to part with the most handsome and talented "man" she has ever seen. Zhu does not fall for the even prettier man. Instead, Bai Ruyu seduces Zhu's maid, Wuhe, to try to get access to Zhu. Once Zhu realizes what has happened, she has her executed. See Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1750-61.

[310] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1771-72.

Lingyun, a feeling which cannot be viewed as asexual due to Lingyun's special status as Feixiang's fiancé.

Her strong desire for another woman, wavering between erotic desire and friendship, is further confirmed by her conversation with the maid. While the maid tries to persuade Zhu to give up her *chiqing* or foolish obsession, the word often used to describe the romantic love between men and women, because both of them are women, Zhu's statement of her understanding of love between her and Feixiang is astonishing. She overturns the common belief that only men and women are able to *xiang'ai*, love each other, and claims that she, unlike other women who consider men precious, only favors a woman. Again in spite of the borrowed eroticized language, this statement goes beyond the norms of expression of love between women. Instead of using metaphors such as mandarin ducks and butterflies to describe close relationships, the narrator, through Zhu, draws direct parallels between a woman's love, *xiangai* or *ai*, for another woman and other women's love for men and claims there are no differences between the two. Zhu's unusual statement clearly gives us a clue that her relationship with Feixiang is definitely more than friendship although physically they may be virgins.

The attachment between Feixiang and Zhu is not one-sided. For her part, although she has returned to China, Feixiang cannot forget her life with Murong Zhu. Her sworn-sister Danyan tries to encourage her to forget the past and focus on her present happiness:

> Feixiang sighed and frowned, saying: "Even I am unclear about my feelings. Ever since I was captured [by Murong Zhu's father], my unhappiness has been as deep as the sea and I hated that I could not escape, return home and enjoy good health and peace. Who would have thought that as soon as I had gained my freedom that I would feel so thoroughly uneasy? I think about us sharing the same bedroom for many years; although we only borrowed the name of husband and wife, her love for me was truly deep. The feelings between blood sisters could not surpass it. ... It was all because of me that her country fell and her family was destroyed, but she did not harbor any feelings of resentment toward me. Since you and I separated, she was even more solicitous in looking after me day and night. The night before last, I happened to catch a cold and she personally prepared the medicines and repeatedly came to visit me. Yesterday at dawn when she was about to leave the room, she turned around to cover me with clothes and quilts. Who could have foreseen that after she left she would not return, and we separated as easily as the shadow of waves and the traces of duckweed? We are now as distant as the states of Qin and Yue, and I do not think that we will be able to meet again in the future. When I remember the past when we were together talking happily, it is as if I have awoken from a dream. I can still see her smile, her voice and her face before me, and the bedding is still neatly arranged. But who knows where the beauty has gone? The rain has dispersed and the clouds have flown off far into obscurity. Coming to this juncture, people are not wood or stone; how can I not feel pained when I see her things?" As she talked about her grief, Feixiang's tears fell like rain and soaked her clothes.
> [飞香叹息双眉促："连我心中也不明。一向被他牵缚住，愁如海水一般深。恨不得登时洒脱回家去，永享安康乐太平。谁料一朝身得脱，满心又觉不安宁。想他数载同居室，夫妻虽然是借名，待我之情其实厚，同胞姊妹不能胜。.....国亡家败皆由我，他尚毫无怨我心。自与你身（何淡烟）分散后，晨昏照管更殷勤。前宵偶感风寒疾，汤药亲煎致问频。昨日清晨将出外，犹然回复我衣衾。岂知一去无回转，浪影萍踪片刻分。咫尺便为秦与越，想来无路再相亲。追思往日同欢叙，恰是罗浮一梦醒。笑貌音容犹在目，房惟（帷）枕席尚铺成。美人一去知何所，雨散云飞入杳冥。人到此间非木石，焉能睹物不伤情？"飞香说到悲哀处，泪湿青衫似雨倾。][311]
>
> This passage makes it clear that Feixiang does not see theirs as a bond

between sisters, but as a bond between husband and wife. Her memories of her final days with Zhu are as a husband gratefully receiving the subservient care a wife owes her husband: Zhu serves her medicine during her sickness, makes sure she is dressed

[311] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1773.

warmly enough, and keeps their bedroom orderly. Feixiang misses Zhu from an eroticized perspective that focuses on the face of her beloved and on the bed they shared: "I can still see her smile, her voice and her face before me, and the bedding is still neatly arranged." Feixiang then uses the suggestive image of "clouds and rain" to refer to her lover's absence: "The rain has dispersed and the clouds have flown off far into obscurity." "Clouds and rain" is a common euphemism for sexual intercourse, based on the story of King Huai of Chu 楚怀王 who had sex with the female immortal who was in charge of the rain and clouds on Mount Wu 巫山.[312] Although the expression "the rain has dispersed and the clouds have flown off" (*yusan yunfei* 雨散云飞) refers to separation, its placement here, immediately after Feixiang's visualization of the bed curtains, pillows and mat (*fangwei zhenxi* 房帷枕席) recalls the willingness of the immortal on Mount Wu "to serve at King Huai's pillow and mat" (*yuan jian zhenxi* 愿荐枕席). Even though there is no description of actual sexual contact between Feixiang and Zhu in the *tanci*, the sexualized nature of their desire for each other is consistently brought out.

The obsession and attachment between Feixiang and Zhu are so recognizable that the characters in the *tanci* do not miss it either. After reading the poetry Feixiang wrote to express how she misses Zhu in Lingyun's camp, Lingyun comments, "She is still bitterly missing the barbarian girl and totally forgets that she

[312] "Clouds and rain" is used throughout *Feng shuangfei* to refer to Bai Ruyu's sexual relations with other men (see Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 190, 274, etc). The *locus classicus* for the expression "clouds and rain" is also found in the story of King Xiang. See footnote 270.

was a fake husband" (苦苦犹将番女念，浑忘身是假儿夫。).[313] He Shiwei 何世威 and Bai Wushuang 白无双 make fun of them, "They are really a good couple" (实然是对好夫妻。).[314] And He Danyan follows, "My elder sister is truly very spoony" (果然姊姊十分痴。).[315] Zhang Yishao, although not in this scene, comments later too, "although my elder sister is smart, tolerant, polite and virtuous, her infatuation is worse than that of men. She loves Murong Zhu at the cost of her own life" (我家姐姐虽聪慧，万事通和礼貌娴。独有那痴性比男还较胜，生生死死把他怜。).[316] It seems everyone in the fiction realizes that their unusual relationship mimics that of husband and wife and is aware of Feixiang's abnormal *chi* or infatuation for Zhu. However, none of them considers their relationship serious or dangerous. Having kept their virginity without approaching the boundary of sexual intercourse, the relationship between Feixiang and Zhu is not a threat to the patriarchal system and therefore is acceptable and even a source of fascination for other people, orthodox or not, in the *tanci*. As Laura Wu also observes, within the patriarchal social background during the late Qing, "a woman's love for another woman is not a serious matter, only an odd and perhaps slightly repulsive taste that a man could afford to laugh at and very well ignore."[317] In this sense, the female writer, Cheng Huiying is still conservative when dealing with this ambiguous relationship.

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[313] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1774.

[314] Ibid.

[315] Ibid.

[316] *Feng Shuangfei*, p. 2033.

[317] Laura H. Wu, "Through the Prism of Male Writing: Representation of Lesbian Love in Ming-Qing Literature," *Nan Nü* 4, no. 1 (2002), 27.

Qing and Women's Agency: The Desire to Stay Together Forever

Because of readers' acceptance of her work thanks to its conservative attitude, Cheng is able to manipulate and create a space of agency for these women in love. When two people are in love, one desire will be to stay together forever, which is exactly what these women want in *Feng shuang fei*. But this was almost a "mission impossible" in patriarchal imperial China, because women could only identify themselves through men, namely their fathers, husbands and sons. The women with ambiguous desires for each other in the *tanci* therefore think of another way to stay together for a life time which is to marry the same man. This is not a new plot device for either male-authored literature or *tanci* works.[318] The authors treat it naturalistically as if it could be achieved easily. It is interesting to see in this *tanci* the details with which the author portrays the effort that the women exert to achieve their own will by manipulating their own marriages within a context of silent male acceptance of their ambiguous relationships.

It is significant that the text consistently uses the words *ai* (爱, love) and *qing* (情, feelings, passion) to describe the relationship between Feixiang and Murong Zhu.[319] Even though they do not necessarily imply a sexual relationship in this work,

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[318] The same story also happens in the male-authored novel, *Lin Lan Xiang*. In most *tanci* works that involve a cross-dressing subplot, the cross-dressed protagonist and her "wives," who at the same time are her best friends, always marry the same man.

[319] For example, when speaking to her brother Yishao about Zhu, Feixiang says: "I won't wait for others to ask to speak about our feelings (*qing*). I am still not able to bear abandoning her because of the depth of the feelings from our sworn bond." (若说起此情不待旁人问，我也为结义情深未忍抛) (Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1975). Feixiang also quotes Zhu, repeating, "Although we are sisters, we say we love each other..." (虽然姊妹相称爱...) (Cheng,

the terms *qing* and *ai* place their relationship firmly within the passionate values of the cult of sentiment (*qing*) and give their relationship moral legitimacy within the cult of *qing* values.[320] This legitimation of the strong and intimate connection between the two women establishes their relationship as the moral equivalent of the idealized male homosocial bonds between Lingyun and Yishao. This insistence on the legitimacy of their relationship, sexual or not, is important because of the ritual mandate that women place their obligations to the patrilineal family (be it defined though father, husband, or son) ahead of any personal desires. Orthodox discourse did not recognize the possibility of friendship for women, for women's lives were to be fully circumscribed within their obligations to the family. Moreover, although friendship was idealized within the cult of *qing* values as more authentic than other relationships, in actual practice friendship was also problematic for men since they too were expected to prioritize family and political obligations.[321] Current research on women writers is showing how important female friendship networks were to the development of women's writing during the Qing; however, these relationships were

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Feng shuangfei, 1975) Another of Lingyun's wives comments: "The love between the first wife [Feixiang] and [Zhu] is truly deep," (大夫人相爱实深) (Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2234) He Danyan also remarks: "Although you are a fake couple, your love for each other is real" (夫妇虽虚情义深) (Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1989).

And there are further examples in the passages quoted in first part of this chapter.

[320] Bai Ruyu is referred to as the "lover" (*airen* 爱人) of the crown prince (Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 411) and of Zhang Jing (Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 419). Guo Lingyun also refers to his feelings of love (*ai*) for Ruyu (Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 411) and Yishao (Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 409, 2224); the narrator explicitly comments that these relationships are not sexual even though Lingyun insists that they sleep together. Lingyun spends his wedding night holding Yishao (Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 914).

[321] See Norman Kutcher, "The Fifth Relationship: Dangerous Friendships in the Confucian Context," *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 5 (Dec., 2000): 1615-29.

not defined or defended as the equivalent of marriage.[322] Feixiang and Murong Zhu are unapologetic about their pursuit of personal (*si* 私, meaning without social sanction) commitment to each other.

Before meeting Zhu, Feixiang is merely a standard proper talented girl. When the emperor asks for more of her paintings, she, as a gentry woman, does not want her talent to be spread outside, so she writes a poem instead to insinuate the required virtue for him. When the girls, including Danyan and the maids, in her household are playing on the swing in the spring she is the only one who stays away from it. Playing on a swing in the spring is a typical plot device in male-authored fiction to incite a romantic affair,[323] so her choice of not joining them is also considered appropriate and virtuous. As for killing Bao Wen, who intends to rape the girls, and suggesting cross-dressing, they are both Danyan's plans and actions, although Feixiang is present on Danyan's side.

However, we can see how Feixiang and Zhu create autonomous agency for themselves through their shared passionate relationship after they meet. As we saw earlier, in her role as a cross-dressed man, Feixing constructs agency for herself: first in her eroticized gaze and pursuit of a beautiful woman, and then in her role as the husband whose place is to be served. Murong Zhu, with full consciousness of being a

[322] See Widmer, *The Beauty and the Book*. In fact, as we can see from the common excuses made by the authorial persona in *tanci* for taking time away from household duties to devote to writing, elite women felt they needed to be defensive when their private interests took them away from family responsibilities. See Hu, *Cainü cheye wei mian*.

[323] Cheng Huiying uses a series of clichéd plot devices, including swinging in the spring, voyeurising the beautiful girl over the wall, passing poems between lovers, and flirting through music, to satirize the impropriety of seemingly romantic scholar-beauty stories. While a love affair actually happens after these scenes, the characters involved are Zhang Cai and the maid Yuzheng, both of whom are portrayed and considered evil and lascivious.

woman, is thoroughly aware that the person she loves is another woman, yet she insists on her right to determine her own marriage. However, her willingness to marry a fake cross-dressing husband does not stem merely from love. As she explains to Feixiang:

> If we make it public now, two bad things will happen. First, even though my father is old, if he sees how beautiful you are, I am afraid he won't let you go; second, without a son-in-law, he will go back on his word and marry me to that barbarian and that would be terrible! Things being what they are, I beg you to consider our fortune in meeting and to deceive him and assume the name of husband and wife. If we can all avoid disaster and return to my island kingdom, I am willing to plan again to send you back [to China].
> ["此时若声张起来，还有两件不妙：一者父王虽然年老，若见了你这等佳人，只怕也有些舍不过；二者没了女婿，必定打了退缩，算要把俺嫁与这番奴，如何了得？] 如今俺倒央求你，也看相逢情一番，且把父亲瞒过了，原将夫妇外名担。若能够大家免祸同归岛，情愿的再作商量送你还。"][324]

Murong Zhu's initial motivation for marrying Feixiang is to escape marriage to an ugly barbarian husband. She does not justify their relationship in terms of *qing*, but in terms of her desire to resist an unwanted arranged marriage even if it means deceiving her father and consigning herself to a sterile marriage. Her immediate decision to plan her own fake marriage indicates her desire to take control over her own marriage.

However, as soon as the two are married, Zhu frames their relationship in terms of *qing* and her right to be master of her own emotions. When Feixiang later suggests that Zhu should also marry Guo Lingyun and move into his household so that the women can be together, Zhu refuses since Guo is not only her rival in marriage but her military enemy.

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[324] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 844.

> Feixiang was shocked: "Then you are decided. You certainly do not feel close to Lingyun, and it is not important if you do not marry him. But it's just that you and I have lived together for five years, and our *qing* has been so deep! How can we all of a sudden separate again? Wouldn't that make our struggles up until now meaningless?" After she finished speaking, her tears began to fall. The Princess laughed, "That is so foolish (*chi* 痴)! Since you are used to living with me, how can you be so unclear about my feelings? Just because we are women does not necessarily mean we need to be paired with a man! To be honest, even if you marry into a neighboring house, I will consider only you as my husband. Although I won't marry Guo Lingyun, I will of course follow you into [your husband's household]; all it will take is for you to take control (*zuozhu* 作主) and decide to let me stay and provide food. Both my parents are dead, so I can be master (*zizhu* 自主) of my own life. Who can force me to remarry? I will be happy to be carefree and unrestrained and stay close to you forever. Not only do you not need to worry about being lonely, but no one will dare look down on us. Isn't this a great plan superior to yours? "
> [[飞香听罢，不觉呆了道："这等说来，你是决意的了。]凌云固未相关切，不嫁伊家事亦轻。但只是我你相同过五载，当初何等最情深。终不然一朝撒手重分别，却不是枉费心机为甚因？"说罢眼中珠泪落，娘娘笑道"甚痴形。既然与我同居惯，心事如何尚不明？难道身躯为女子，必然就要配男人？如今老实和盘说，你便为妻过隔邻，我只认为亲驸马，虽然不嫁郭凌云，此身原要相随过，只要你作主相留有饭吞。父母俱亡堪自主，谁能逼我去重婚！乐得个逍遥自在无拘束，地久天长两下亲。你既不愁多寂寞，旁人又不敢相轻。岂非一等高强策，比你还须胜几分。"][325]

When they are discussing Zhu's marriage, *qing* is in the center of their conversation. Feixiang concludes their five-year relationship with the word *qingshen* (*qing* is deep). Consenting to Feixiang's definition of their relationship, Zhu points out the *chi* or foolishness of Feixiang's behavior, another central term in the cult of *qing*. Zhu again attacks the common conception that *qing* and marriage have to be between men and women and insists that her attachment is to Feixiang regardless of their sex.

As Zhu twice emphasizes, the intensity of their feelings for each other morally empowers them to take agency and assert control over the situation. She not only

[325] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1990.

claims her own authority (*zizhu*) over her marriage due to the death of her parents, but also encourages Feixiang to take control (*zuozhu*) over their relationship. *Zhu* 主 in Chinese usually means "master, authority, main," with which women were hardly associated in neo-Confucian late imperial China. According to *Daxue*, men were the masters of all five relationships and men are the ones who are supposed to take control of these relationships by establishing a moral exemplar. This conception is reinforced by the "Three Followings," according to which women never had anything to do with control of themselves and their lives were determined by the men, their fathers, husbands and sons. Under this cultural background, women who intended to take control of their own lives were usually taken negatively. But the narrator in *Feng shuangfei* shows a compassionate positive view of this decision made by the two girls.

The celebration of the girls' *zuozhu* and *zizhu* is mostly from Zhu's perspective. Zhu's status as non-Chinese makes it morally tenable for her to reject orthodox patriarchal family structures in a way that Feixiang may not. Her identity as non-Chinese further opens up a space to fantasize about female agency; it is harder to imagine the scene being sympathetic to readers if it were about a proper Chinese woman making such a radical claim to her right to self-determination. Ultimately, close to the end of the *tanci*, Feixiang's conventional phallocentric view wins out and the two women become co-wives in Lingyun's polygamous household, but it is still noteworthy that Zhu's marriage to Lingyun is also her own decision.[326]

[326] This is also her agency, as well as the author's fantasy, in terms of heterosexual relationships and marriages, which I have talked about in Chapter III.

It is probably not a coincidence that in another *tanci*, *Bi sheng hua*, the female protagonists, Jiang Dehua 姜德华 and Xie Xuexian 谢雪仙, face a similar situation to that of Feixiang and Zhu. After Dehua's true gender identity is revealed, everyone expects that Xuexian, Dehua's "wife," would marry Wen Shaoxia 文少霞, Dehua's fiancé together with Dehua, but Xuexian is unwilling to do so because she has her own agenda of practicing Daoist immortality. Finally, the problem is solved so that Xuexian goes back to the Jiang household and stays in the garden, without marrying Shaoxia. Exactly parallel to Zhu, she does not have formal status in the family but is only considered the "wife" of Dehua. Although Xuexian's relationships with the Jiang family do not fit into neo-Confucian propriety, the narrator also seems to consider it acceptable due to the *qing*, which is realized by Xuexian's parents as *qingshen yizhong* (feelings are deep and righteous duty is heavy 情深义重), between Dehua and Xuexian regardless of their sex.[327] While persuading her "husband" Dehua, Xuexian also emphasizes that this time she should be in charge, *youwo* (由我), after the first marriage when she "could not take control of myself," *nan zhucai* (难主裁).[328]

Feixiang and Zhu are not the only couple of women who desire to stay together forever as a couple and decide their own marriages in this *tanci*. While readers may be highly suspicious of the ambiguous nature of the relationship between Feixiang and Zhu, the narrator confuses us more by giving another couple as an

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[327] Qiu Xinru 邱心如. *Bi sheng hua* 笔生花, ed. Zhao Jingshen 赵景深 (Henan: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1984), 1049.

[328] Qiu Xinru, *Bi sheng hua*, 1048.

example, Mu Qionghua 沐琼花 and Zhen Xiaoya 真小雅. When meeting with Xiaoya for the first time at a gathering for women only, there is also a depiction of Qionghua's gaze at Xiaoya:

> Although people's predestined relationship is connected in their previous lives, Lady Mu's gaze was more insightful. As soon as she saw Xiaoya, she liked her and thought happily, "Everyone praises the good appearance of the Erudite (her sister Zhen Daya), but this girl is even more beautiful. She doesn't put on heavy makeup, nor is she dull like a sculpture made of earth or wood. No matter how you view her, she is without flaw, and is the only person who can be considered a beauty. Not only I can't be compared with her, but even Wang Zhaojun and Yang Guifei would be left in the dust if they stand beside her. Who says that Xishi is the only city-toppling beauty? If even I am intoxicated when facing her, then if my wild husband sees her, he will be infatuated and lose his mind and would certainly die from lovesickness. Our unexpected meeting today must be due to karma from our previous lives. My sister-in-law, the Heyang Princess, has always liked her elder sister, but in my heart I feel close to the younger sister.
> [人缘虽是前生结，沐氏夫人眼更明，看了不由心便中，满腔欢喜暗思寻：群称博士容颜好，此女犹加胜几分。既不浓妆并艳抹，又非泥塑木雕成。八面看来无玷缺，此人方可算佳人。莫言我辈难相仿，便是皇（王）嫱与太真，并立也应难压倒，谁言西子独倾城。同俦相对犹心醉，若使狂夫见影形，不知怎样情迷并意失，相思一染定消魂。今朝不意来相会，也是前缘夙世因。嫂嫂素心怜彼姊，我心却与妹相亲。][329]

Similar to Feixiang's gaze at Zhu, Qionghua's appreciation of Xiaoya is also eroticized by the use of the language of romantic love. By claiming a predestined relationship from their former life, Qionghua uses the conventions of scholar-beauty romances to frame their relationship. Qionghua then compares Xiaoya to the famous beauties in Chinese history, Wang Zhaojun, Yang Guifei and Xishi, a model of parallelism often used to depict the scholar's perspective in scholar-beauty romances. Qionghua's intoxication (*xinzui*) for this same-sex beauty is further eroticized by her

[329] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1389-90.

imagining her husband's possible reactions to Xiaoya, setting herself up as parallel to a man in her *qing* and desire for Xiaoya. Unable to explain her own obsession with another woman, Qionghua can only make sense of her feelings as a karmic bond established in previous lives, again, echoing the predestined relationship so common to scholar-beauty romances. Karmic power in women's writings in late imperial China often seems to be a convenient and useful means for women to legitimize their unorthodox thoughts. In her prose, "Record of Past Karma," Ji Xian 季娴 (1614-1683) also gives a similar religious excuse, karma from her previous life and Buddhist practice to make up for her sin, to reject her husband in her bed.[330]

Though both of them are dressed as women, Qionghua's quick and direct response to her feelings for Xiaoya displays her strong opinion on this issue and her will to manipulate their relationship. She initiates a plan to swear sisterhood before the moon. Furthermore, in so doing, she abruptly asks Xiaoya to stay with her forever:

> The lady said, "The White Maiden is above. Your disciple Mu Qionghua now swears to the Heavens that I and Zhen Xiaoya will be sisters although we have different surnames. We agree to three conditions: First, we will always help each other in difficulties; Second, we will be honest with each other and never hide anything; Third, we live together when we are alive and share the same tomb when we are dead. If I break this pledge at any time, the Heavens and the earth shall know it and ghosts and gods shall kill me."
> [夫人便道："素娥在上，弟子沐琼花今与真小雅结为异姓手足，对天立誓。其约有三：第一患难相救，始终如一；第二披肝露胆，有事不瞒；第三生只同居，死只同穴。如有阴怀异志，有始无终，天地皆知，鬼神共戮。"][331]

[330] The story is translated by Grace Fong, in *Under Confucian Eyes: Writings on Gender in Chinese History*, ed. Susan Mann and Yu-yin Chneg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 135-46.

[331] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1403.

The first two promises she makes here are quite common among sworn brothers and sisters. However, the third is unusual among sworn sisters, because women all know that they have no control over their destinies since they will ultimately marry a man and belong to another family. Xiaoya also realizes that staying together, alive or dead, is impossible for two married women unless they marry the same man. This action is very unexpected for Qionghua because she is such a shrewish wife who until this point has prohibited her husband from having any relationship, sexual or not, with another woman. Furthermore, it was not considered proper to ask a girl from a scholar's family, although her family is poor, to be a concubine, a status far below primary wife. This is also Xiaoya's concern for herself. Throughout the process of pledging to each other, Qionghua is the initiator who pushes Xiaoya. Xiaoya seems to be quite reluctant, "(Yishao and Qionghua are) predestined to be a good couple, who love me as soon as they meet me for no reason" (天生一对好夫妻，无端一见将人爱).[332] However, she still agrees to pledge sisterhood with Qionghua because of the Goddess's prophet, which, as I argue in Chapter 3, is merely an excuse to fulfill her romantic love.

Worth noting are the terms that the narrator uses to describe the relationship between Qionghua and Xiaoya. As shown above, Xiaoya considers the feelings of both Yishao and Qionghua for her as "*ai*." So does her maid, Hanmei, who comments

[332] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1404.

on their relationship being one of "*xiang'ai*," or mutual love,[333] the same term used to describe the relationship between Feixiang and Zhu. By using the same terms, the narrator is possibly implying that there is no difference in the nature of the love between Yishao and Qionghua or between Feixiang/Zhu and Qionghua/Xiaoya. While Yishao's love for Xiaoya is definitely normative heterosexual romantic love, as I argue, the love between Feixiang and Zhu goes beyond regular same-sex friendship, as does Qionghua's love for Xiaoya.

Again, as it does to the ambiguous relationships between Feixiang and Zhu, the narrative also legitimizes the relationships between Qionghua and Xiaoya in terms of *qing* aesthetics, by not only using the word *ai*, but also *qing*. Although Qionghua initiates their intimate relationship, Xiaoya finally participates in it willingly. After Qionghua and Xiaoya have gained mutual trust by revealing Yishao's love and flirtation with Xiaoya, Xiaoya begins to admire Qionghua's *zhencheng* 真诚, or sincerity and authenticity:

> Even though Miss Zhen thought highly of herself, she couldn't help being convinced by (Qionghua's) sincerity (*zhencheng*). She acknowledged (Qionghua) again at that time, "My elder sister, your deep love for me (*shenqing*) is truly extraordinary. I was too stupid to understand and took myself as a guest. Now that I believe you, there is an ancient idiom, 'One can die without regret if he gains a person who knows him (*zhiji*), ' how can I talk about things according to worldly customs. Today it is decided that I will live with you until my hair turns white, and I will never dare to break my promise in life or death." Lady Mu overjoyed, "Since you have faith in me, I can be at ease in carrying out my plan (*xingshi*)."
> [任是心高真小姐，不由心服意欣然。当时启口重称谢："姊姊深情自不凡。小妹痴愚犹未解，故而犹当客边看。此时既已心相信，[古人有云'天下得

[333] Ibid.

一知己，死无可憾'，]岂可还从俗例谈。白首同居今日定，死生不敢背盟言。"[夫人大喜道："贤妹既然相信，愚姊就好放心行使了。"]][334]

Xiaoya's response to Qionghua's authentic love is exactly the same as that of the lovers in male-authored cult of *qing* fiction. When one shows authentic love for another person and the other person also has authentic passions, regardless of their gender, both will repay the authentic love and consider each other as *zhiji*, such as Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu in *Honglou meng* and Mei Ziyu and Du Qinyan in *Pinhua baojian*. This is exactly what happens to Xiaoya, who refers to Qionghua as her *zhiji*. Therefore, Xiaoya can transcend worldly concerns about her status as a concubine or that the two women have unusual feelings for each other.

Their *qing* seems to be the crucial motivating factor for these two women to obtain and expand their agency. Qionghua, as the first wife, of course has the authority to carry out her plan (*xingshi*) to take a concubine for her husband. She executes her agency within the allowed region in a patrilineal family to fulfill her own wish, which is to stay together with a beautiful woman she sincerely loves. On the other hand, she respects Xiaoya's decision on her own marriage although her adopted parents should have full power over it. In this sense, the cult of *qing* only empowers Qionghua to make the effort to convince Xiaoya's parents to agree to this ignoble marriage, but also, more importantly, empowers Xiaoya to take control over her own marriage and therefore to gain agency over her own life.

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[334] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1405.

Conclusion

This chapter displays the pure *yin* world in the fictional world of *Feng shuangfei*. From a female perspective, instead of being dangerous or disastrous, female homosociality is completely acceptable and desirable. The long-neglected female same-sex desire is portrayed in the notion of authentic *qing*, a celebrated value among literati in late imperial China. It poses no threat to the orthodox Confucian values because it ambiguously erases the physical intimacy, but instead emphasizes a spiritual bonding between women. Moreover, as the female author perceives it, this spiritual bonding between women enhances their desire to pursue their autonomy in the late imperial patriarchal China. Therefore, this *yin* world in the fictional *Feng shuangfei* is depicted as positive to both mainstream patriarchal order and marginalized female subjectivity.

The female author can be considered manipulative since she chose female same-sex desires as the venue to implant the idea of female subjectivity. On the one hand, since it is common in *xiaoshuo* fiction that male writers imagine a harmonious polygamous family, it is easy for the male audience to overlook a subtle change of emphasis on the values promoted by the female author. Therefore, the *tanci* can still pass as an orthodox and entertaining text in order to get published. On the other hand, a female homosocial community is also a common fantasized theme in female-authored *tanci*. For the female audience, it may not be so hard to realize the subtle change from friendship to ambiguous same-sex desires. Therefore, the desire

for staying together forever, which was never achievable or realistic between female friends in late imperial China, makes more sense and calls for women readers' awareness of their subjectivity and agency.

In this chapter, we have made the fascinating discovery that marriages are no longer something to restrain women, but something that women can make use of for their own sake. Unlike women in Chapter 2 who try all means to pursue happiness through subtly making decisions on their own marriages, the women noted in this chapter use marriages as a device to pursue their happiness. In some sense, the women discussed in this chapter reach a higher level of autonomy because they realize that a traditional heterosexual marriage cannot necessarily determine their happiness. In terms of self-conciousness, they obviously are clearer about what they really want and what happiness is for them. This is especially true for the two first wives, Feixiang and Qionghuá, who could not make decisions on their own marriages.

These revelations lead directly to my next chapter on these two ideal primary wives. Although they cannot demonstrate their autonomy in making decisions concerning their own marriage, they do have more power in their households as first wives. After discussing how they successfully obtain happiness as subjects, I will look at how the narrative from the female author's perspective celebrates their powers and autonomy and considers them as ideals.

CHAPTER VI

VIRTUOUS WIFE AND SHREWS:

RE-ESTABLISHING A NORMATIVE ORDER

This chapter will discuss how the author portrays the two extreme types of women, virtuous wives and shrews, common images in male writers' works. The female writer, Cheng Huiying, creates a series of lovely women, Mu Qionghua, Murong Zhu, and Zhang Feixiang, to subvert the negative stereotype of shrews and the rigid stereotype of virtuous women. As the author indicates, both the shrews, Qionghua and Zhu, and the virtuous woman, Feixiang, end up being desirable for the men and their families. These different perspectives from the female writer suggest her tacit subversion of patriarchal literary and social norms and stereotypes of women. While both shrews and virtuous wives are desirable in a different way in this *tanci* than those in male-authored fiction, the author is celebrating and appreciating women's agency and individuality by reinterpreting these lovable women.

The Desirable Shrews

Shrews are always the center of criticism in male writers' works. As Keith McMahon argues, firstly, shrews are known as *pofu* (泼妇, scattering women), literally translated as "scattering women." They spill their temper uncontrollably so that men lose face or are even frightened. These fierce women are also called *hanfu*

(悍妇, fierce women). Secondly, shrews are known as *yinfu* (淫妇, lascivious women), in which *yin* (淫, lust) has symbolic meanings of flooding and polluting *po*. Both types are opposites of the idea of "nourishing life."[335] The spectrum of shrews includes jealous women, *dufu* (妒妇). Jealous wives are usually both irritable and lascivious. They always compete with other women for men's sexual attention and favors.[336]

There are plenty of shrew images in male-authored fiction and jealous wives are also one of the most popular images of women, who can fully display the destructive power of women and the failure of men's self-cultivation. Pan Jinlian 潘金莲 in *Jin Ping Mei* is a typical shrew, who exemplifies all the terms used to describe shrews, *pofu*, *hanfu*, *yinfu*, and *dufu*. She is so jealous that she is bad-tempered and never fails to scold and curse her peers, Ximen Qing's 西门庆 other wives and sexual partners; at the same time, she is the lewdest woman in the novel and is sexually insatiable and plays every trick to enjoy sex. Xue Sujie 薛素姐 in *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* (醒世姻缘传, Marriage Bonds to Awaken the World) is also another example of an uncontrollable shrew with destructive energy, in terms of neo-Confucian values.[337] The famous shrew with whom most female writers and readers are most familiar is probably Wang Xifeng 王熙凤 in *Honglou meng*. Capable

[335] See McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists*, 55-57.

[336] Ibid, 58-65. Also see Epstein, *Competing Discourses*, 120-149.

[337] See Epstein, *Competing Discourses*, 125-26.

as Xifeng is, she is still depicted as jealous, ill-tempered, and manipulative, becoming one of the major destructive forces to the Jia family.

There are two broad types of solutions for the shrew problem in male-authored fiction. The first one is containment of the woman through harsh punishment, infertility or death. Pan Jinlian is infertile in every relationship and ends up being killed by the hero, Wu Song 武松. Xue Sujie never gives birth to a son and dies from sickness. Although we are unclear about the author's real plan for Wang Xifeng's ending, it is clear that the poem and the song about her in Chapter 5 suggests her miserable fate and death and she actually does die from sickness in the popular 120-chapter version. Through the desolate deaths of these powerful women, we can see the fear of the male authors and their narrative of reconstruction of an orthodox social order.

The second type of solution to the problem of shrewishness is male triumph over the threat of a powerful woman. In this type, Keith McMahon concludes, these male-authored fictions end with three general solutions: the man realizes the predestined fate between himself and his wife, accepts his fate and tries to cultivate himself to avoid the same fate in his future lives, such as in *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*; the man cures the jealousy of his wife by legendary medicine or food, such as in *Liaodu geng* (疗妒羹, The Jealousy-curing Soup); the man transcends the mundane

desire for sex, such as in *Papo jing* (怕婆经, Sutra of Wife-fearing) appended at the end of *Cu hulu* (醋葫芦, Gourd of Vinegar).[338]

However, from the stories of the shrews in *Feng shuangfei*, we see a different standard and value accorded these women. There are two representative shrews, Mu Qionghua and Murong Zhu in this *tanci*. Although the personal traits of their husbands are totally different, *fengliu* (风流, dissolute) and orthodox, the two wives share some identical characteristics of shrews. Since usually there are no *yinfu* as important characters in *tanci*, *du* (jealousy) and *han* (fierceness) are the major qualities to identify the shrews in this *tanci*.[339] By establishing these shrewish images as positive figures, the author celebrates women's powers in their domestic lives and appreciates them as individuals, instead of criticizing them through stereotypes.

The first shrew is Qionghua, Zhang Yishao's first wife. She is known for jealousy and Yishao is known to fear his wife, although this reputation is intentionally spread by Yishao.[340] Everyone in the fictional world of *Feng shuangfei* knows that Qionghua is a jealous wife. Yishao tells Qionghua, "People outside say that you are jealous and I am afraid of my wife" (外边人说你妒忌，说我怕妻). Lingyun, the model of the orthodox male, also considers her "fierce and jealous" (凶妒). Mu Mengxiong 沐梦熊, Qionghua's elder brother, comments that she is "arrogant and

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[338] See McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists*, 59-60.

[339] Sometimes there are some very minor female characters that can fit into the type of *yinfu*, for example, Wo Lianggui 沃良规 in *Bi sheng hua* 笔生花. However, it seems they are portrayed as a negative stereotype character in the work, and they never occupy a considerable position in *tanci*. On this point, it seems female writers and male writers agree that lewdness is the ultimate negative characteristic in which women should never indulge.

[340] Yishao spreads this reputation so that he can use his "jealous" wife as an excuse, for example, the first time he rejects Bao Xiang'er's request to elope.

jealous" (骄妒).[341] Yishao's mother also agrees that Qionghua is a "jealous wife" (妒妻).[342] Mu Lei, Qionghua's father, also calls her "jealous" (妒忌) when talking to his wife about their daughter.[343]

As a first wife, she is considered jealous from three perspectives. First, she is very sensitive to her husband's interest in other women. Right after their marriage, Qionghua reads a poem by Yishao and realizes that Yishao has two lovers outside, "I sympathize with the people in the jade towers at two places; they are lovesick, and I do not know how many tears they have shed" (只怜两处玉楼人，相思泪落知多少).[344] People in jade towers usually refer to women, while the word "jade tower" is often related to desire.[345] The details of being "lovesick" and "shedding tears" are obviously both related to love affairs. Recognizing from the poem that her husband may have some illegitimate liaisons with other women, Qionghua questions her husband intensely. Her exclusion of other women from her relationship with her husband demonstrates her jealous attempts to control his sexuality.

Moreover, Qionghua is very aware of the threat from the maids. As the mistress of the household, Qionghua has the power to restrain her beautiful maids, so that Yishao cannot flirt with them or sneak into their bedrooms. Because sexual

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[341] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1480.

[342] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2384.

[343] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2438.

[344] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1352.

[345] Wang Guowei once pointed out that in *Honglou meng*, the "jade" in Baoyu's name can be read as a pun on desire. Maram Epstein, in her book *Competing Discourses*, developed his view and interpreted *nuanyu lou* (暖玉楼, warm jade tower) in *Yesou Puyan* (野叟曝言) as a warm tower of desire.

interest in women is one of Yishao's personal traits, he enjoys the fun of flirting with the maids even though he does not really want to have sex with them. When Qionghua is adamantly against his flirting with them, he makes fun of her when fighting with his wife:

> Although Yishao loved his wife to the utmost, he also blamed her for being jealous. Without any reason, he insisted on playing tricks on her. Coincidently it happened that there were four maids in the room... When the lady looked somewhere else now and then, he would pretend to be lustful. He either held the maids' necks, or stepped on their bound feet. His eyes stared at their breasts, and his fingers stroked their faces... It made the lady have no idea of what to do. She had to watch him all the time, so that her eyes burned. At night, she was so afraid that he would go out secretly that she dismissed the maids to their own rooms and then bolted their doors. She would also then go lock their rooms from the outside by herself, and only then could she allow herself to sleep peacefully.
> [逸少爱妻虽备至，又怪他不该如此妒心坚。弄空偏要将他耍。凑巧房中有四鬟.....夫人偶尔观他处，便弄风情假做馋。不是东边勾粉颈，定从西首踏金莲。眼光时向胸前射，手指还将颊上弹.....弄得夫人无计较，时时照察眼睛酸。夜来又恐他私出，遣婢归房门紧闩。外面亲身还上锁，方才放胆自安眠。][346]

This is the typical portrayal of the relationship between Yishao and Qionghua as husband and wife. It is impossible to say whether Qionghua's jealousy is the reason for Yishao's tricks or vice versa. Yishao has plenty of physical contact with the maids and it exacerbates Qionghua's jealousy. For her part, she is like any other shrew who commonly appears in male writers' works, watching her husband all the time and not allowing him to flirt with other women. Qionghua wisely uses her power to limit the maids, instead of her husband, in order to restrain him.

[346] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1361.

Lastly, when Qionghua learns that her husband has already had sexual relationships with other women, it is difficult to pacify her. Yishao has to get Qionghua's permission, as the first wife,to take concubines, so she uncompromisingly rejects Bao Xiang'er to enter their household. When she knows that Yishao has married Xiang'er secretly and that they even have a son, she is so angry that no one, even her parents-in-law, can persuade her to take them into the household until her father, General Mu, vents her anger for her by scolding and punishing Yishao. Moreover, when Qionghua and Xiang'er are both pregnant, Yishao has sex with Ruancui 软翠 and Jiaohong 娇红, the two maids whom Qionghua had given to Xiaoya, and later he initiates a secret relationship with Ruoyan 弱燕, one of Qionghua's maids. However, Qionghua only allows Yishao to take Jiaoying 娇莺, Qionghua's senior maid, as his official concubine, "Taking Jiaoying as a concubine was reported to the parents, and Mrs. Zhang and Lady Zhen both gave Jiaoying a lot of marriage gifts. Taking Ruoyan as a concubine wasn't told to everyone. This is called pronouncing praise and blame through not speaking" (娇莺收纳，特向堂上禀明，太太与真夫人各有许多赏赐。弱燕之纳，并不曾告诉别人，这便是意在不言的褒贬。).[347] Ruancui and Jiaohong's status in the family is exactly the same as Ruoyan's. In response to both cases of taking a woman from outside or taking maids from inside the household as concubines, Qionghua shows her strong will against her husband's dissolution and only yields to the most minimal degree. She is never

[347] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2476.

generous nor virtuous enough to allow him to take any woman he likes as his concubine without her resistance.

Not only is she jealous, she is also a fierce shrew. Although we seldom see her fierceness depicted in this *tanci*, we cannot overlook Lingyun's comment that she is "fierce and jealous." As the embodiment of orthodoxy, Lingyun can be looked upon as providing a final moral judgment in the *tanci*. When Qionghua knows that her maids have a secret sexual relationship with Yishao, she not only scolds her maids, but also beats them. He Danyan 何淡烟, Yishao's adopted sister, narrates the whole event to Lingyun:

> [Qionghua] scolded and beat the maids… Ruancui and Qionghong kneeled down and cried with their hands covering their faces and their hair in a mess. Qionghua still carried a whip to beat them, and her eyebrows raised like the Star of Killing.
> [喝骂丫鬟还乱打……软翠、轻红都跪倒，悲啼掩面乱鸟云。琼花兀自提鞭打，倒竖双眉像杀星。][348]

Qionghua cannot be considered a shrew if she does no more than beat the maids, because as a mistress she has every right to punish the maids if they commit adultery. However, more importantly, she fights with her social superiors when they are wrong. Towards the end of the work, when Yishao's secret marriage with Bao Xiang'er is revealed, her fury reaches a climax. Before meeting Yishao, she first scolds his teacher, He Shiwei 何世威, who had helped him hide Xiang'er, "Such a great teacher! … His fame has already become infamy" (如此名公好教师……佳名

[348] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2195.

已变臭名遗).[349] Then she learns immediately that it is her brother who had provided the garden for Yishao to hide Xiang'er, so she berates her elder brother, "You are an official and read books, but you don't know ritual and reputation at all... I won't let you off tomorrow, or even the day after tomorrow" (亏你为官也读书。礼义声名全不晓……莫说吵到明朝，后日也不放你。).[350] As a shrew, she does not leave any space for her social superiors to save face when they have done the wrong things, but instead denounces them directly in front of their families until they cannot argue.

As a typical shrew, Qionghua does not even listen to her parents-in-law when she is furious. Lack of filial piety is always one of the harshest charges against shrews, as in the case of Xue Sujie in *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*. Although Qionghua does not go as far as Sujie, who abuses her parents-in-law, her disobedience can also be considered unfilial. Due to Yishao's misdeeds, Qionghua goes back to her natal family and does not want to go back to the Zhang household. Yishao's parents send a servant to take her back, but she tells the servant: "The old master and mistress are kind people. They must be cheated by his clever words... but I won't be taken in" (老爷、太太都是慈善之人，必定被他一番巧话，骗得没了主意……我倒不去上他们的圈套).[351] Thinking of their words as traps, Qionghua definitely shows little respect to her parents-in-law. Furthermore, she has the servant repeat to her parents-in-law that she will not go back home unless Yishao and Xiang'er explain the whole story and

[349] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2378.

[350] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2380-2381.

[351] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2398.

apologize. A filial daughter-in-law will never ignore her parents-in-law's wishes or leave them home alone, staying at her natal family instead, even though it is her husband who has done wrong, because she knows that serving the in-laws is part of her essential role. In response to her strong attitude, her father-in-law can do nothing but comment on her as a "valiant and masculine woman" (骁雄妇) and being "brutal and unreasonable" (强横).[352]

Qionghua fits the image of a shrew in every way. However, she is not a negative character in the *Feng shuangfei*, but instead is a positive exemplar of a woman who is able to discipline her husband. First of all, unlike the universal criticism of shrews in male writers' works, the narrator defends and explains Qionghua's shrewishness, especially her jealousy, from the perspective of her husband's father, the dissolute Zhang Jing 张景:

> It doesn't matter. There is no girl in the world who is jealous if she and her husband are not close. The jealousy only comes from their lingering love. [张公又道"无妨碍，大抵裙钗在世间，夫妇悄疏原不妒，妒心只为爱缠绵。][353]

In this way, jealousy is positively rooted in *qing*. Since the narrator treats the values of *qing* between men and women in a positive light as I discussed in Chapter 3, jealousy is understandable and forgivable in the cases involving *qing*.

Moreover, the narrative indicates that what causes jealousy is not women's lack of generosity or virtue, but men's lack of virtue and the ability to cultivate themselves (*xiushen* 修身) and regulate their family (*qijia* 齐家). When Yishao's

[352] Ibid.

[353] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2416.

mother, Lady Qian 钱夫人, learns of his illicit relationship with Bao Xiang'er and of Qionghua's anger towards it, she, as another shrewish woman, criticizes her son for creating problems in the family:[354]

> Now you have a beautiful wife and a pretty concubine, enjoying a golden youth. Why are you so greedy, loving another girl out of the household? Now your secret relationship is revealed, and it becomes a widespread joke. You cannot hold up your principles as a husband. No wonder you have a jealous wife in the bedroom.
> [现有妻娇并妾美，风光不负少年时。为何贪欲犹无厌？路柳墙花恋别枝。以至于今私事破，一场笑柄遍传遗。自家不把夫纲振，难怪闺房有妒妻。][355]

This logic fits perfectly into the requirement of men in orthodox Confucian values suggested by *Daxue* (Great Learning 大学) that they rectify their mind in order to cultivate themselves and then to regulate their families.[356] It is a very common theme in Chinese fiction that if a man cannot keep his house in order, it indicates "a corresponding disequilibrium (*luan* 乱) at each other level of the system."[357] Interestingly, it is now a woman using this logic to legitimate another woman's shrewishness. Therefore, the narrator turns the common criticism on shrewish women in male-authored fiction into a criticism on dissolute men in the *tanci.*

In this sense, Qionghua's jealousy appears to have a certain power to regulate the family. She never rejects the reputation of a "jealous wife," and even seemingly accepts it as a way to keep the family in order. She does not allow Yishao to marry

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[354] She scolds Zhang Jing for having sex with the beautiful boy, Bai Wushuang, when Jing goes back home in Chapter 21 (Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 964), and Jing does not even fight back.

[355] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2384.

[356] In *Daxue*, it reads "once one's mind has been rectified, one's self can be cultivated; once one's self has been cultivated, one's family can be ordered" (心正而后身修，身修而后家齐，家齐而后国治). See Zhu Xi, *Sishu jizhu*, 2. The translation is from Plaks, *Four Masterworks of Ming Novel*, 158.

[357] Plaks, *Four Masterworks of Ming Novel*, 158. See pages 156-80 for a lengthy analysis on how Ximen Qing's family is *luan* on the very level of the above saying in the *Daxue*.

Xiang'er, but not merely because she is jealous. When she persuades Yishao to give up Xiang'er, her every word conforms to ritual, "The physiognomy of this person is low… Her stepfather is a eunuch. Her upbringing cannot be as strict and orthodox as that of one from a grand family" (此人骨相本低微……太监做干爷，终不比大家体统多严正。).[358] In truth, Xiang'er is the stepdaughter of Liu Jin, an evil eunuch and Yishao's political enemy, so it will cause trouble for Yishao to ask for her in marriage.[359] What is more important is that Xiang'er never appears to be a chaste and virtuous woman according to Confucian values. She frequently goes to Yishao's place with the excuse of staying with her cousin and Lingyun's concubine, Zhang Liyu, but actually in order to meet with Yishao alone and even request marriage or elopement.[360] Qionghua recognizes Xiang'er's personal traits after meeting and talking with her, so she rejects Yishao's demand to take Xiang'er into the household to keep the family in order. Yishao has to admit that Qionghua is reasonable and right, "After thinking carefully, he recognized that although his wife was jealous, she couldn't be considered unreasonable" (细思妻子虽是妒心，然而却也未尝无理).[361]

To regulate a family, the duties of a mistress are not only to control the quality of concubines, but also to train the maids. When she becomes aware of her husband's flirtation with her maids, Qionghua usually makes sure that her husband has little

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[358] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1451.

[359] This actually is the case when Yishao tries to ask for Xiang'er as a concubine. Liu Jin demands that Yishao abandon Lingyun in exchange for Xiang'er, but Yishao is unwilling to betray his sworn brother.

[360] See Chapter III for more details. Although these behaviors do not conform to Confucian values, I read them as Xiang'er's subjectivity and agency.

[361] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1452.

chance to approach the maids. When she stays at home, she locks the maids out at night; when she returns to her natal family, she brings her maids with her, taking them away from Yishao. In the relationships between Yishao and the maids, she is more concerned with the chastity of her maids than with Yishao's loyalty:

> Although I have a reputation for jealousy, I ask my own conscience and half of the jealousy is in order to keep you complete. Your social status is low, but you will get married in the end. Is it worth hurting yourself before your marriage? It is for this reason that I am not afraid of people's sneers and am alert day and night as if I were watching you in prison.
> [我虽妒忌有名传，然而自把良心问，一半因将尔等全，虽落低微终要嫁，此身何苦预伤残。故而不怕人讥笑，提防日夜像收监。][362]

Qionghua makes the above speech after the maids Ruancui and Qinghong tell her that they have already had sex with Yishao. Half of the reasons that she dares to be looked upon as jealous is to protect the maids, although we can assume that the other half is that she is actually jealous. While it can be considered disorder that Ximen Qing and the servants' wives have sex in *Jin Ping Mei*, a similar ideology works in this *tanci* too given that both are set against the background of Confucian society. Although the maids are not married women so Yishao can in no way be thought of as notorious as Ximen Qing, their relationships were still considered illegitimate if the mistress did not officially recognize the maids' status as concubines. Therefore, Qionghua's jealousy also serves to protect the reputation of Yishao and the Zhang family, as well as that of the maids.

Fierceness, another aspect of Qionghua's shrewishness, also helps Qionghua to keep the family in order. The elders all agree that a strict and fierce wife is good for

[362] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2412.

Yishao so that there will be someone who can discipline him. He Shiwei, Yishao's master of martial arts, is happy when he learns about Qionghua's personal traits. He says:

> This fellow is not afraid of heaven or earth, nor is he afraid of neither the emperor nor his father. Before he was afraid of only the Prince Guo; later Prince Guo left the capital, and he now has no scruples. He is exactly in need of a strict wife to restrain him, so that I, his master, don't need to worry about him.
> [这人上不怕天，下不怕地，在外不怕皇帝，在家不怕父亲。当初只怕个郭殿下，其后郭殿下出了京，真个肆无忌惮，正该要个严厉妻子管束管束，也省得我这师傅替他费心。][363]

Shiwei is one of the people closest to Yishao and also probably the one who understands him the best. He used to be a villain who did not care much about virtue, especially sexual propriety, so he can, to some extent, sympathize with Yishao's dissoluteness. He will never be as orthodox or strict as Lingyun, so he helps Yishao take Xiang'er as a concubine in secret. But at the same time, he is always able to see right from wrong, as well as good from evil, because he himself has experienced both. Even such a person agrees that a wife as strict as Qionghua is perfect for Yishao. Acquainted with Yishao's fearlessness, Shiwei believes that Qionghua's ferocity is a good match for Yishao's sense of invincibility because it brings order and balance to the family.

Parallel to Qionghua, Murong Zhu is another excellent example of a shrew as concubine. Being a concubine, she does not have much power to control the family and the behavior of the husband. Usually in male writers' works, a concubine shrew in

[363] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1361.

a wastrel's family, such as Pan Jinlian, will compete with her rivals in terms of appearance and sex; if she is in an orthodox man's family, she will be disciplined. However, neither of these two situations arises. Since Lingyun is the ultimate embodiment of ritual and always shows equality and propriety to all wives, his other three wives are all virtuous and generous. Murong Zhu is the only shrew in his household.

Murong Zhu's jealousy is only towards Zhen Daya, because Feixiang, the first wife, is her beloved sworn sister, and Zhang Liyu, the second wife, is so untalented and common that she cannot in any means be compared to Feixiang. Therefore, Daya is her only rival. When she discovers that Lingyun keeps a painting of Daya, she takes it away as evidence of their secret relationship.[364] When Lingyun hears it, he thinks, "[Her] jealousy must be growing wild" (必然妒意又横生).[365] As Lingyun expects, Zhu queries him angrily about the painting, and he ponders, "It is troubling that the woman's jealousy is so deep" (可怪裙钗妒意深).[366] This happens when Zhu lives in the Guo household but before she agrees to marry Lingyun. Getting along with Lingyun and living under the same roof with him, Zhu has already fallen in love with him, so she shows her feeling of insecurity and anger when she is cognizant of the existence of a potential rival. She herself is also very aware of her jealousy, but she

[364] Lingyun painted Daya's likeness himself. Daya does not know about it and it can, therefore, in no way be taken as evidence of their relationship.

[365] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2090.

[366] Ibid.

also wants to keep her pride. Therefore, she rejects Feixiang's suggestion of marrying Lingyun:

> I lack generosity and can't pretend to be mute or deaf, so I will feel resentment and enmity and the inner chambers will be perturbed. Rather than being laughed at by others with a notorious reputation from being jealous and competitive, I will break off with him now, so that I can still keep my original authentic nature.
> [我身既少宽宏量，作哑装聋总不能。势必与他成怨隙，闺房又起浪千层。与其日后遭人笑，妒宠争怜出丑名，莫若如今先断绝，犹然剩我本来真。][367]

She claims that she is never generous and always resentful, so there is no way for her to tolerate another woman as talented or beautiful as she sharing her husband. Although Feixiang finally persuades her to marry Lingyun, the major reason is the women's shared love and friendship, not Zhu's feelings for Lingyun.

Because of her jealousy, she never easily yields (*rang* 让) to others. Yielding is one of the virtues that a virtuous man or woman should model.[368] However, yielding is exactly what Zhu lacks. She does not want to marry Lingyun first because Zhang Liyu, who seems very incapable to her, will rank higher than she in the Guo family, and she cannot yield such a position to this kind of woman. Her feelings of competition with Daya are similar. She cannot yield her husband to another talented woman, nor is she willing to yield the status of the third wife in the Guo household to another woman until the Empress takes control of everything and makes the final decision that Daya ranks higher than Zhu when they both marry Lingyun on the same day.

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[367] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2189-90.

[368] In *Rulin waishi*, the ritual at the climax of the novel is that of the *rangwang*, the yielding king.

In contrast to Qionghua, Zhu's shrewishness focuses more on fierceness than jealousy. Right after she marries, others widely recognize Qionghua as a jealous wife, while Zhu is already recognized by people as a *pofu* before her marriage.[369] Her identity is a barbarian princess, (*man gongzhu* 蛮公主): *man* can mean "barbarian;" in this sense it reinforces the fact that she does not know much or care about the rituals in the Middle Kingdom; *man* also carries the correlate meaning of "brutal," which echoes her fierceness.

First, her personal traits are described as arrogant and irritable. The narrator never grudges using strong words to portray Zhu's peevish responses, such as *qi* (气, angry), *nao* (恼, angry), *he* (喝, to shout loudly), *ma* (骂, to scold) and *cui* (啐, to spit).[370] One of the best examples showing her peevishness is her sickness when she hears of Lingyun's decision to marry her to Yishao. She, at that time, has already fallen in love with Lingyun, but does not want to marry him because Lingyun had defeated her in war and Zhang Liyu would be above her in status. She has so much self-esteem and arrogance that she does not show any love for Lingyun and is angry that Lingyun, the person she loves, wants to marry her to Yishao. Worried and indignant, Zhu falls sick and is unable to eat or drink anything and even vomits food, water and blood.[371] No one can pacify her except for Lingyun. She gets well and

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[369] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1761.

[370] In Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, see examples of *qi*, 1548, 1652, 1712, 1728, 1777, 1784, 2195 etc.; *nao*, 1548, 1652, etc.; *he* , pp. 1758, 1772, 2043, 2250, etc.; *ma*, 1757, 1784, etc.; and *cui* , 1548, 1588, 1713, 1759, 2042, etc.

[371] This reminds the readers of Lin Daiyu's sickness when she is mad at Baoyu in *Honglou meng*. As with Daiyu's sickness, Zhu's sickness also indicates that she is deeply indulged in *qing*.

starts eating as soon as Lingyun apologizes to her, "The discussion about marriage the day before was my fault" (前日议婚之事，竟算是我不该), and admits his true feelings towards her, "How can my heart be like wood and stone? From now on I will cherish [you] twice as much" (我岂真同木石心。自此相看须倍惜).[372] Her arrogance and fury goes to such as extreme that she cannot be placated without others' concessions.

Moreover, she is one of the two best female warriors in the novel. She and Danyan together are entitled "*guanjun*" (冠军, champions) due to their exceptional martial arts. Although being a female warrior itself does not necessarily make a woman fierce, it helps establish Zhu's reputation in this case. Throughout the whole *tanci*, she is never reluctant to fight with men, nor is she afraid. When Xianyu Meng 鲜于猛 sends his troops to ask for Zhu in marriage, she personally kills the soldiers with her sword.[373] When Liu Xiangui 刘仙桂, Liu Jin's adopted son, flirts with her and tries to marry her by force even when he sees that she dresses as a married woman, Zhu chases him down and kills him with her two swords.[374] After the eunuchs kill her father, Zhu leads her own army to avenge her father and she, as the leader of her army, always fights against the male generals of the Middle Kingdom, including General Mu and Lingyun.[375]

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[372] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 846-47.

[373] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 846-47.

[374] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1558-1560.

[375] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1572-1799.

Capable in martial arts, she is cruel to her enemies and her inferiors. When fighting with Liu Xiangui and his servants, "the Princess killed insanely" (公主杀出了性) and "crazily" (杀昏了).[376] It indicates that Zhu sometimes cannot even control her own ferocious nature when she is involved in fighting. When Lingyun sends Ruyu to seduce her, she would have killed him if it had not been for Feixiang's interference; and when she learns that Ruyu is trying to get close to her through a sexual relationship with her maid, Wuhe 舞鹤, she immediately kills Wuhe.[377] When she suspects that her maid, Wan Caifang 万采芳, is having an affair with Yishao, she interrogates and scolds her right away; and when Caifang pulls out a sword to protest for her innocence, Zhu is so angry that she whips Caifang and throws her onto the ground.[378] Although maids are usually socially inferior to their mistresses, it is very common to see close relationships between them in both male-authored fiction and female-authored *tanci*.[379] But in Zhu's case, as fierce as she is, she shows no mercy or bonds to her maids, who, as we can assume, continually serve her.

Zhu's lack of compassion is not limited to her enemies and inferiors, but, as a barbarian princess without the restraint of Confucian values, it incorporates anyone, even ritual superiors, who have done wrong. When chatting about Qionghua's beating of her maids due to their flirtation with Yishao, Zhu comments to Feixiang and Danyan:

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[376] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1560.

[377] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1743-1760.

[378] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2337-2337.

[379] For example, Cui Yingying and Hongniang in *Xixiang ji* and Meng Lijun and Su Yingxue in *Zaisheng yuan*.

> "…This kind of person (the maid) should not only be scolded, but also be beaten. Xiaoya is too gentle, and Lady Mu only beats the maids when angry. It suggests that she is not very capable."
> Danyan said, "True! If it were you, a fierce goddess, you would catch your husband and punish him by having him kneel on the ground and beat him until his tendons broke."
> The Princess replied, "Exactly! Otherwise, what is the point of showing your temper?"
> ["……这等人非惟该骂，而且该打]小雅温柔无足道，还加这位沐夫人，气来只把丫鬟打，可见原非太有能。"淡烟姑娘称"是也！若然像你这凶神，必须揪住亲夫主，罚跪尘埃打断筋。"公主回言"须如此！不然何用气空争。"][380]

Assuming her husband is like Yishao, Zhu insists that the wife should punish the husband instead of the maids for his extramarital relationships. She takes it for granted that a wife is entitled to be mad at her husband's disloyalty and firmly claims a wife's right to punish a dissolute husband. As a barbarian princess, Zhu ignores the rules that a virtuous wife should be demure and always listen to her husband and encourage him to take concubines. What is more, her claim of the right to punish her husband seems unthinkable even to the Chinese He Danyan, another of the two best female warriors, although they alone share the qualities of bravery and cruelty and willingness to kill people.

Interestingly, the orthodox husband, Lingyun, does not discipline or cure his shrewish wife, but to some extent indulges her shrewishness. Zhu does not bring chaos (*luan* 乱) to the household as might be expected from the norms of male-authored fiction, such as Pan Jinlian in *Jin Ping Mei*, but brings piquancy to everyone's domestic life. For example, when Zhu shows anger or jealousy towards

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[380] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2195.

Bai Ruyu, Lingyun not only does not argue against her misunderstanding of their relationship but enjoys her show of jealousy. The omniscient narrator reads into Lingyun's mind:

> Because my wife (Feixiang) and my concubine (Liyu) are both virtuous, our household lacks the smell of vinegar among the seven domestic supplies. It is for the best that she adds this flavor to keep the romantic nature of the bedroom.
> [正因大妻小妾多贤淑，七件关门少醋香，最好由他添一味，维持风月称闺房。][381]

Although he is an orthodox Confucian, Lingyun seems not to be completely satisfied with his marital relations. His wife and concubine obey the Confucian teachings for virtuous women and behave generously without jealousy. This should be an ideal family for any man, but Lingyun appears to feel that exemplary virtue can be monotonous. Zhu's jealousy fulfills his desire for domestic passions. Although Zhu causes a lot of trouble in his domestic situation, Lingyun delights in her jealousy, need and love for him, just as Danyan comments, "If [his wife and concubines] often fight… [he] will voluntarily take the consequences for his dissolute behavior" (若然果尔常厮闹……风流罪业愿承当).[382] By associating this shrewish subplot with the orthodox Lingyun, the author is probably insinuating the ironically hypocritical nature of men, who demand generous wives and an orderly family on the one hand and romantic excitement from unconventional women on the other hand.

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[381] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2076.

Lingyun at this time has not married Daya and Zhu. He just consummated his marriages with Feixiang and Liyu.

"The seven things" is from a Chinese idiom since the Song Dynasty, "There are seven things when you open a door: firewood, rice, oil, salt, soy sauce, vinegar, and tea" (开门七件事，柴米油盐酱醋茶。). "Open a door" here means to keep a household running.

[382] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2259.

Lovely Virtuous Women

Virtuous women are another classic type of women in fiction. A virtuous woman is one who is in accord with orthodox neo-Confucian values, including loyalty, chastity, filial piety, and generosity. She is usually loyal to the country, loyal to her husband and his family, able to manage the household, and never jealous of his concubines. She devotes her life to chastity, but at the same time encourages her husband to take more concubines to continue the family line. To be a virtuous woman, she is not only a good wife, but also a good mother, who teaches all the orthodox Confucian values to her sons and daughters. In Ming-Qing fiction, these virtuous women are always highly praised and rewarded with a good ending, namely longevity, fertility, and the prosperity of the family.

Virtuous women are everywhere in Ming-Qing fiction. The best example among all is Lady Shui 水夫人, the protagonist Wen Suchen's 文素臣 mother, in *Yesou puyan* (野叟曝言, A Country Codger's Words of Exposure). She is a "Confucian matriarch" (圣母) "as the symbolic center of the novel's Confucian world" who always nurtures the "Confucian superman" Suchen with orthodox Confucian guidance.[383] The most well-known example from fiction for women during the late Qing is probably the talented and virtuous Xue Baochai 薛宝钗 in *Honglou meng* who has a good son to reinvigorate the Jia family. Another good

[383] Maram Epstein discusses Lady Shui as a "Confucian matriarch" in her *Competing Discourses*, 237, 236. Keith McMahon defines Wen Suchen as a "Confucian superman" in his *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists*, 150.

example, as Keith McMahon suggests, is the "overly virtuous wife" Yan Mengqing 燕梦卿 in *Lin Lan Xiang* 林兰香 (The Six Wives of the Wastrel Geng).[384] Only she among the six wives has a son to continue the Geng family line although she dies at an early age. From a male author's perspective, virtuous women deserve a good ending like these female characters.[385]

Zhang Feixiang obviously fits in this general category of virtuous women. Married to the ultimate orthodox man, she is supposed to be considered the ultimate virtuous wife in the *tanci*. She turns out to deserve the title because she successfully manages the Guo household, shows no jealousy towards Guo's concubines, and gives birth to a son to continue the Guo family line. However, Feixiang is constructed as an ideal wife not merely because she fits into the category of virtuous women, but, more importantly, because Feixiang is different from the stereotypes of virtuous women in male-authored fiction. While assuming the role of a virtuous wife, Feixiang is also literarily talented and a follower of *qing*. She also conforms to an androgynous ideal in public and domestic lives, displaying no apology for doing things with a certain degree of masculinity. Establishing such an ideal wife indicates the author's perspectives on, and celebration of, the agency and powers of virtuous wives.

First of all, unlike most virtuous women in male-authored fiction, Feixiang is never a morally strict virtuous woman. Instead, she bears some characteristics of a

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[384] McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists*, 205-206.

[385] Although Baochai's marriage is unhappy, she has a healthy and successful son in the popular 120-chapter edition, which can be considered the best reward for a virtuous woman.

beautiful talented woman in a companionate marriage, including *qing* and *chi* (obsession) and literary talent. Although companionship between men and women in marriage was nothing new in late nineteenth-century fiction, there is still a subtle difference in Feixiang's case in this *tanci* authored by a woman.[386] Companionate marriage in male-authored fiction usually follows one of three possible patterns: first, the wife is a perfect companion in terms of both *qing* and literary talent, but she fails to follow *li* and be a virtuous wife and daughter-in-law because of her obsession with *qing*, as in the case of Yun in *Fusheng liuji* 浮生六记 (Six Records of a Floating Life); or second, she is merely a concubine who does not need to care about the management of the household and therefore has plenty of time and freedom to devote to intellectual activities and she shares some aspects of her husband's interests, as in the case of Wen Suchen's concubines in *Yesou puyan*; the third pattern is that she is a talented and emotional companion before marriage, but after marriage her romantic traits fade and she becomes one of the standard virtuous wives mentioned above, such as in *Mudan ting* (牡丹亭, Peony Pavilion) and most scholar-beauty novels.

Feixiang can in no way fit into any of these patterns. First, Feixiang is always an adherent of *qing*, but her relationship with her husband is not based on *qing*, but on *li*. Feixiang's feelings for Murong Zhu are consistently described in terms of *qing* and *chi*, not only by the narrator, but also by all the speaking subjects around her.[387]

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[386] Keith McMahon also mentions this in his book, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists*, when talking about *Yesou puyan* and *Lin Lan Xiang*.

[387] For details, see Chapter V of my dissertation.

For examples of Feixiang's *qing*, see Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1543, 1547, 1782, 2034, 2233, etc.; for examples of

However, as a typical virtuous wife, her relationships with Lingyun can only be described in terms of *li*, propriety. Before her marriage, unlike a girl longing for a romantic heterosexual relationship, of whom the most extreme and popular example is Du Liniang, Feixiang, adapting herself to the Confucian ideal, has already seen through the nature of polygamy and fully understands her proper position in a polygamous family. When Danyan talks about the fake marriage between Feixiang and Murong Zhu, Danyan believes that the marriage only benefits Lingyun, bringing him a beautiful concubine. Feixiang responds,

> When one gets rich and noble, it is very common to have several concubines. Even if there weren't such a person [Murong Zhu], I can't guarantee that he [Lingyun] wouldn't take concubines in his life time…I am confident that I am not stingy and will definitely not be jealous and fight in the inner chambers. [凡人得了富贵，三妻四妾总是常情；我就没有这人，也难保他终身不取姬妾……自信居心非量窄，决不到争怜妒宠闹闺房。][388]

Obviously, Feixiang is very clear about what awaits her in her marriage. What is clearer for her is how to be a good first wife by being generous. Because of her awareness of marriage as part of proper Confucian rites, she does not shy away from talking about it. While she is with Murong Zhu on the Three Immortal Island, she is missing home and eager to go back to China. Zhu thinks that Feixiang wants to return because she desires to marry a man, and Feixiang replies with womanly virtue, "My man is arranged by my parents" (我的男子是父母婚配的).[389] Influenced by

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people commenting on Feixiang's *chi*, see comments by He Danyan and Lingyun in Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1774, comments by Murong Zhu in Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1990, and comments by Yishao in Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2033.

[388] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 834.

[389] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 849.

Confucian ideology, Feixiang considers it appropriate to talk about her marriage because it is an expression of ritual. And expectedly, after marriage she behaves as Confucian teachings for women require, "Between the couple, they treat each other as guest and friend" (夫妇之间，如宾如友).[390] We see none of the same passionate *qing* between Feixiang and Lingyun that she shared with Zhu.

As a first wife, not a concubine, Feixiang is extraordinary in terms of excelling in both dealing with her household duties and keeping up her literary talents. Whenever there is anything that happens in the inner chambers of the Guo family, people go to Feixiang to seek a final decision and she usually solves the problem perfectly and fairly. However, daily chores do not exhaust her literary merits. Lingyun appreciates her literary talent and values it as the highest among all his wives. When comparing her literary talent with that of Daya, who is the most famous talented female scholar in the *tanci*, Lingyun says, "To talk about your true nature, your poetry is astute and your style is romantic. Your calligraphy is elegant and naturally beautiful, and is better than hers" (若论夫人真本色，诗词警敏调风流。笔锋秀丽天然俊，尚比他身胜一筹。).[391] This comment follows right after the narrator's comment that "they treat each other as guest and friend" and the description of the couple chatting on literary arts, including poetry, painting, and calligraphy, within the bedroom. Apparently, Lingyun treats Feixiang as a friend and an intellectual equal when discussing the arts. He is especially grateful that Feixiang has such refined taste.

[390] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1999.

[391] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1999.

When Feixiang is able to recognize his painting of Daya based on his brush style, Lingyun praises her as able to "understand others (知人)" and "have great discernment (巨识)."[392] This understanding and recognition is not one-sided, but mutual. After Lingyun composes poems to complement the paintings of his four wives, only Feixiang comments on them as "more delicate and adroit than others" (工敏胜于人).[393]

Last but not least, Feixiang and Lingyun appreciate each other's literary talents and share interests in intellectual activities only after marriage. Because of the closeness of their families, they probably knew of each other's literary talents before marriage, because Lingyun was known as a capable prince and official and even the emperor had heard of Feixiang's talent.[394] But they, as exemplars of Confucian virtues, had never exchanged any literary works before their marriage as is typical of couples in scholar-beauty romances, although Lingyun had had a chance to read Feixiang's poems to Murong Zhu. Their mutual appreciation and understanding of each other's literary talents and intellectual communications all occurs after their official marriage and carries no hint of romantic attachment.

However, it seems that from the author's perspective, being an intellectual equal and companion is not enough to distinguish Feixiang from the virtuous women in male-authored fiction. She is unusual in the way that she is portrayed as an

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[392] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2193.

[393] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2473.

[394] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 759.

androgynous and unconventional wife, who carries all the positive qualities of a male scholar. By androgynous, I mean a single person who embodies both masculine and feminine character traits. Feixiang is not only androgynous in terms of her appearance, but also in terms of her personal traits. Dorothy Ko talks about historical examples of androgynous women who occupied an ambivalent gender space, but in the examples she lists these women were courtesans who were culturally considered outside of the Confucian system and the end result of playing an ambivalent gender role was to entertain men by becoming their ideal literate companion.[395] Portraying a virtuous first wife with these characteristics, Cheng Huiying, the female writer, may be accepting the courtesan model and rewriting it as a new model of the perfect primary wife.

Feixiang is able to pass perfectly in both male and female clothing. Since clothing marked gender in late imperial China, her mobility in both types of clothing indicates her gender fluidity. When Zhang Cai saw her when she was twelve or thirteen, he used the phrase, "appearance like flower and moon" (花容月貌), to describe her feminine beauty.[396] However, when she first dresses as a man, in her uncle's eyes, Feixiang has "eradicated the gentle and charming appearance of a woman, and has the stern air of a scholar" (绝少闺人容婉媚，俨然文士态清扬).[397]

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[395] Dorothy Ko, "The Written Word and the Bound Foot: A History of the Courtesan's Aura," in *Writing Women in Imperial China*, ed. Ellen Widmer, Kang-I Sun Chang (Stanford: Stanford University, 1997), 74-100.

[396] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 763.

[397] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 809.

In either type of clothing, Feixiang's appearance seems to embody the ideals of an elite gender role, for a cultured man or woman.

More interestingly, Feixiang always eliminates the potential negative qualities of the assumed gender while maintaining some positive qualities of the opposite gender. When Danyan and Feixiang are planning to dress as men, Feixiang's uncle is against it because he worries that Feixiang may be too feminine even though she cross-dresses. However, Danyan comments on the nature of Feixiang's appearance, "Although my elder sister is born with delicate beauty, she is not all that lithe and meek, and her personality is not pliable. Even if she is dressed as a scholar, it is still appropriate to be handsome and elegant" (姊姊虽生秀美姿，并不是一味轻盈柔媚态，性情又不软皮皮。只消扮作文人样，俊雅清疏也合宜).[398] Even though Feixiang is still in women's dress, Danyan is able to picture her as a scholar in men's clothes.

In the opposite way, when she is dressed in men's clothes, the language used to describe her good looks is also ambiguous in terms of gender. When Murong Zhu, a barbarian princess, sees Feixiang dressed as a scholar, she describes Feixiang in the following terms:

> His spirit is like autumn water, his bones are like ice and jade, his scent is like that of irises and orchids, and his skin is like snow and frost. His appearance is radiantly beautiful like a pretty woman, and his spirit is pure and integral like immortals... Only he can be considered a beautiful and elegant Chinese man. [秋水精神冰玉骨，芝兰气味雪霜肤。貌如好女浮光绝，韵比神仙藻节无……才算个中华男子美尔都。][399]

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[398] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 807.

[399] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 823.

The descriptors used to portray his/her spirit, bones, scent and skin can be applied to both men and women. While in this case Zhu is using this language to describe Feixiang as a handsome man, Lingyun uses the same wording when describing his bride Feixiang at their wedding, "Her beauty is so extraordinary that it can be taken as food. Her skin is like ice, her bones are like jade and her spirit is like water" (秀色可餐真绝世，冰肌玉骨水为神).[400] It seems that one becomes a beauty if he/she bears these qualities, and the beauty transcends the limitations of embodied gender norms. Zhu further compares the cross-dressed Feixiang to a beautiful woman and believes that only a man like this can be considered a handsome man. When talking about Feixiang's beauty, the narrative blurs the boundary between genders and identifies her with a transcendent androgynous beauty.

Feixiang's dramatic cross-dressing from man to woman suggests that her androgynous beauty stems from her personal traits. Witnessed by the women in the Zhang household, Feixiang's cross-dressing evokes people's praise for and wonder about her gender plasticity:

> She is truly a goddess descending to the capital! She was as dashing as Song Yu before, and now she is as gorgeous as Wang Qiang. She doesn't show any fragility or tenderness as a man, nor does she display any stupidity or vulgarity as a woman. She behaves as she wishes with no pretense, so she is naturally suitable as either a man or a woman.
> [真是神仙降帝乡！昔也风流如宋玉，而今艳丽比王嫱。为男不见娇柔态，为女仍无蠢俗腔。任意行为无假借，自然的为男为女总相当。][401]

[400] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1995.

[401] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1966.

In this passage describing people's appreciation of her, Feixiang's beauty fits within both male and female standards. They compare her to Song Yu and Wang Qiang, two of the leading examples of male and female beauty in Chinese culture. In either role, she displays no possible negative qualities of either gender. The narrator concludes that the reason Feixiang has this gender fluidity is her authenticity, *ziran* (自然, natural). In the literature of the Ming and Qing, authenticity (真), contrary to falseness (*jia* 假, *jiajie* 假借 in the quote above), was considered an ideal quality, that was usually concentrated in women, "in contrast to the decadence of the official center."[402] Being authentic as the reason for the gender mobility of Feixiang's appearance indicates that Feixiang carries the personal traits of conventionally gendered men and women.

Authenticity is merely one aspect of Feixiang's character. For the most part, Feixiang identifies herself as a scholar, a male social identity. She has all the intellectual talents of a scholar. Although intellectual talents are not necessarily masculine identified because of the presence of talented girls during the Ming and Qing, they help to blur the boundaries of the genders and later build the image of Feixiang as an unconventional scholar, which is usually a male role. Feixiang is good at painting. The emperor, the highest authority, believes that she inherits her father's talent and bestows honor on her painting, "Excellent! The refined talents really come

[402] Epstein, *Competing Discourse*, 90. Epstein examinesauthenticity and *qing*, and authenticity and women in different texts.

from Qiantang" (好！果然秀气出钱塘).[403] She is also good at calligraphy. Even Liu Jin, the evil eunuch who is out of the literary circle, thinks that her calligraphy "soars like dragons and snakes" (龙蛇飞舞).[404] Lingyun too comments that her "calligraphy is elegant and naturally beautiful" (笔锋秀丽天然俊).[405] Above all, she is of course good at composing poetry. Feixiang "wrote three seven-syllable quatrains within the time it takes to drink a cup of tea" (不上一盏茶时间，早写了三首七言绝句) on her own painting for the emperor.[406] The quickness indicates her talent composing poetry. She also writes four poems in the form of *ji tangju* 集唐句, collected verses from Tang poetry, to express how she misses Zhu when they are separated by war.[407] Her abilities in writing poems in this special form display her knowledge and wide readings in the poetic realm and her talent in poetry composition. As expected, she is not only good at composing regulated verses, but also lyrics—when she is on the Three Immortal Island, she writes one for Zhu.[408]

Although talented women during the Ming and Qing—Daya can be viewed as the perfect example in *Feng shuangfei*—may have all these intellectual skills, Feixiang differentiates herself from them by assuming a masculine *wen* stereotype.[409] In her relationship with Zhu, Feixiang clearly identifies herself as a male scholar.

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[403] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 759.

[404] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 760, 761.

[405] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1999.

[406] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 760.

[407] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1774.

[408] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 849, quoted in Chapter V.

[409] Kam Louie divides premodern Chinese masculinity into two large categories: *wen* (literary) and *wu* (martial or military) in his book *Theorizing Chinese Masculinity*.

Fitting herself into the scholar-beauty romance, she more than once considers her marriage with Zhu as a match between talent and beauty, "we are worthy of being called the match between talent and appearance" (才貌相当原不愧) and "(we are) perfect in talent and appearance" (才貌两兼全).[410] As mentioned above, Feixiang composes poetry for Zhu, a cliché of the scholar-beauty romance genre. Furthermore, the scholar role that Feixiang is playing in her marriage to Murong Zhu is not only romantic and talented, but also inherits "the [unconventional] demeanors of the Jin" (晋人风致).[411] When she recalls her life as a man, she concludes, "I am pretty sure that I have been as unconventional as I wished over the past five years" (我自信这五年以来任情放荡).[412] All the characteristics, with which Feixiang identifies herself when she cross-dresses as a man, typically belong to the stereotypical *caizi* (才子, talented scholar).

Moreover, assuming the role of a masculine scholar, Feixiang is good at governing a country. Acting as the son-in-law of the King of the Three Immortal Island, Feixiang assumes the ruler's responsibility of being in charge of the island kingdom, so that Murong Tao, the king, can enjoy retirement:

> [Enjoying the peace, the fake Prince promulgates many ritual and legal policies. In three years, she has transformed the cultures and conventions of the Three Immortal Island to be exactly the same as those in China. (People) not only obey the law, but also are able to open the door at night. Even China

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[410] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 840.

Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 843.

[411] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1999. The intellectuals during the Jin are famous for their wild and unrestrained behaviors as well as their extraordinary literary talents. See my discussion of the Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove and *linxia zhifeng* in Chapter II.

[412] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1966.

> cannot achieve this.] When she has leisure time from other books, she scrutinizes the military strategies in *Sunzi* and *Wuzi*. She is so smart that she can naturally understand these books, so she has mastered tactics and battle strategies. Her time on the island has benefited the soldiers and the myriad common people. There is no war, the crops ripen every year, and the good fortune is immense.
> [[假驸马坐享平安，就定出许多礼乐刑政。三年以来，竟把一座三仙岛上的风俗变做中华一样，非但奉公守法，兼可夜不闭门，这又是中国所不能及了。]闲时没有他书看，韬略孙、吴细细查。惊敏自然能会意，也知兵法阵图排。只因仙子居蓬岛，惠及军民数万家。烽火无惊年岁熟，三生有幸福无涯。][413]

On the island kingdom, Feixiang assumes the role of an ideal Confucian official who governs his prefecture or a sage king who rules his country. According to the Confucian ideal, she first cultivates the people through rituals (礼乐, literally rites and music), and then regulates them by laws. Her efforts bring about considerable achievements that surpass China—people do not need to close their door at night when they are sleeping—the ideal society as depicted in *The Book of Rites*.[414] Being cultivated is not enough for a country since they of course need to defend themselves. Therefore, Feixiang studies the works of famous military strategists, Sun Wu 孙武 and Wu Qi 吴起, and trains the kingdom's army. Feixiang's success as ruler is shown through the prosperity of the island, a state marked by the abundant food and peace from wars. Following Confucian teachings, Feixiang accomplishes a male scholar's goal, the canonical injunction laid out in the "Great Learning" to "cultivate one's self,

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[413] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1543.

[414] James Legge trans., *Li Chi Book of Rites: An Encyclopedia of Ancient Ceremonial Usages, Religious Creeds, and Social Institutions* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1967), 365-66. "In this way (selfish) scheming were repressed and found no development. Robbers, filchers, and rebellious traitors did not show themselves, and hence the outer doors remain open, and were not shut. This was (the period of) what we call the Great Union" (谋闭而不兴，盗窃乱贼而不作，故外户而不闭，是谓大同。).

order one's family, rule the state, and harmonize the country" (修身，齐家，治国，平天下).[415]

Due to her self-identification as a scholar, even though Feixiang later changes her clothes back to those of a woman, she still enjoys the characteristics of a *caizi*, of being unrestrained by rigid conventions and other people's opinions, although she can at the same time be completely feminine, behaving as a virtuous wife, as discussed above. As Carolyn Heilbrun remarks, "Androgyny seeks to liberate the individual from the confines of the appropriate."[416] In this sense, Feixiang continues to be androgynous even after she enters into an orthodox marriage. The adjectives which the narrative renders to describe Feixiang's characteristics after marriage are the ones that are usually used to describe an unconventional *caizi* scholar, including talented in letters and unconventional in life style (风流), literarily excellent (风骚), elegant and refined (风雅), bold and unconstrained (跌宕), open and upright (磊落), free and easy (脱洒).[417]

One of the most remarkable characteristics of *caizi* scholars, with whom Feixiang identifies, is that they do not care about rigid conventions or others' opinions derived from them. Still maintaining an authentic spirit after marriage, Feixiang often

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[415] This goal is articulated in the *Great Teachings* 大学. For translations of this whole passage, see Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel*, 158; Epstein, *Competing Discourse*, 27-28; Wing-tsit Chan, "The Great Learning," in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), 84-94; James Legge, *The Four Books: Confucian Analects, the Great Learning, the Doctrine of the Mean, and the Works of Mencius* (New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp., 1966), 317-46; E. R. Hughes, *The Great Learning and the Mean in Action* (New York: AMS Press, 1979), 145-66.

[416] Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), x.

[417] Cheng, *Fengshuangfei. Fengliu*, see 834, 1965, 2005, 2006, 2018, 2178, 2262, etc.; *fengsao*, see 845, etc.; *fengya*, see 2232, etc.; *diedang*, see 2473, etc.; *leiluo*, see 2018, 2262, etc.; *tuosa*, see 2262, etc.

follows her heart, and she does not pretend to be virtuous or generous. Lingyun's marriages with Daya and Zhu take place on the same day, so the issue of whom Lingyun sleeps with becomes a problem of protocol. Zhu, who always takes Daya as a rival, attempts to persuade Lingyun, who has already stayed in her bedroom, to stay in Daya's room in order to display her generosity and detachment from her husband. Daya, as the icon of a talented and virtuous woman awarded by the emperor, tries to show her modesty as well, of course, by not allowing Lingyun to enter her bedroom. The delicate issue between the two wives naturally becomes Feixiang's decision, since she is the head of the inner chambers. Feixiang harshly criticizes both women's hypocrisy and stubbornness. While Zhu has nothing to say in response to Feixiang, Daya challenges Feixiang by asking her what she would do if Lingyun were to sleep in her bedroom. Unexpected to both Daya and Zhu, Feixiang immediately responds with laughter, "What is the difficulty in this? If Lingyun does not come to me, there is nothing I can do; if he does come, you keep an eye on me, I absolutely won't push him away" (这有何难？凌云不到此间便罢，若到这里，看我决不推他。).[418] To Feixiang, there is no need to pretend to be virtuous or generous, because she believes that women in a polygamous household can only be considered virtuous and generous when they actually do not care about with whom the husband sleeps. Her authentic nature one more time distinguishes her from other women.

[418] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2261.

Compared to Zhu's peevish temperament and Daya's rigidness, Lingyun's comment best illustrates Feixiang's androgyny in terms of her flexibility, "(She is) open, unconventional and poised, unconstrained by trivial matters but clear about great morality. She is really a dignified *man* among women" (磊落风流更大方。小节无拘明大义，女中男子正堂堂。).[419] It is interesting that Lingyun comments on Feixiang as a "dignified *man*" because she does not shy away from sex or talking about sex. As we can see in late-imperial fiction, including male-authored novels and female-authored *tanci*, no virtuous woman ever talks about anything related to sex. When women talk about it, it indicates their interest in sex and therefore they are considered lascivious. It seems that sex, for virtuous women, is only a tool to continue the family line and a taboo in daily conversation. In this sense, the moral standards in this *tanci* are very different. Since sex is part of domestic life, avoiding talking about it is only hypocritical; instead, honestly talking about sex solves problems and therefore is considered "dignified." Hence, Feixiang's attitudes are not only looked upon as masculine, but also honorable.

Her androgynous subjectivity is more prominent when Murong Zhu is involved. As discussed in Chapter 5, Zhu follows Feixiang into the Guo household, but does not want to marry Lingyun. Feixiang, after her marriage to Lingyun, actually does not give up her idea of bringing Zhu into the household, so she creates chances for Zhu and Lingyun to be together and "abandons all the standards in women's

[419] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2262. My italics.

chambers, learns to be a go-between" (脱尽闺房套，学做牵头撮合仙).[420] A *Qiantou* (牵头 go-between) is usually considered a negative figure who connects men and women in illicit relationships, but Feixiang totally disregards the common contempt toward *sangu liupo* (三姑六婆, women holding nine professions), who are heavily condemned in *Jin Ping Mei* and other late-imperial literature, and willingly plays the role of one of them.[421] This break from propriety is unthinkable to other gentry women, such as Daya, but Feixiang does not feel embarrassment for the sake of her beloved Zhu. When her plan seems to fail due to the misunderstandings between Zhu and Lingyun, Lingyun suggests to Yishao that he marry Zhu. Feixiang argues with him, "If you don't have malevolent intentions, then you don't need to have any contact with her from now on. Let her follow me for her whole life just as we swore to live together on the island" (君若自无留恶意，从今不必再相关。任他一世相随我，誓若同居在海山。).[422] Concerning the relationship between herself and Zhu, Feixiang does dwell on the ultimate propriety of Zhu as a woman getting married. She, taking a man's part, still consciously considers Zhu as her wife although Feixiang herself has already become Lingyun's wife. When Lingyun insists on his suggestion based on rituals that Zhu should get married, Feixiang reluctantly tells Zhu about it.

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[420] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2005.

[421] The word *qiantou* is used on Hongniang who helps Cui Yingying and Mr. Zhang in *Xixiang ji*, Dame Wang who connects Ximen Qing and Pan Jinlian in *Shuihu zhuan*, etc.

Sangu liupo usually has a negative connotation, referring to women whose professions are either illegitimate or disreputable. *Sangu* refers to Buddhist nuns 尼姑, Daoist nuns 道姑, female fortune-tellers through *gua* 卦姑; *Liupo* refers to women trading girls as slaves, concubines, etc.牙婆, matchmakers 媒婆, witches 师婆、bawds 虔婆, female healers 药婆, and midwives 稳婆.

[422] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2035.

Interestingly, the reason Lingyun asks Feixiang to talk to Zhu is that "she is your wife" (她是你的令正).[423] From this detail, we can see that Lingyun also detects and agrees to Feixiang's masculine role in her relationship to Zhu.

Even though Feixiang does not have special feelings for other women, when it is related to their actual benefit, Feixiang's androgynous iconoclasm even gives Lingyun, the ultimate orthodox man, a lesson. Guo Lingyun takes Zhang Liyu as his concubine, but does not consummate their marriage in order to wait for his formal marriage with the first wife. Three days after their marriage, Feixiang suggests that Lingyun should sleep with Liyu and consummate their marriage, but Lingyun is still hesitant. They have a debate :

> The virtuous Prince, Lingyun, cannot help laughing, "You are generous for sure. However, I am afraid it is unreasonable since our marriage has only been three days. It is better to hide it from the people. Please let me follow your order after a full month. This girl is sedate and not evil. Moreover, she gets along with you. I expect that she will not complain or sigh." The Lady responded with a severe countenance, "Since she is sedate and without complaints, you shouldn't let her down more. How can you tolerate it that she spends her best days in solitude? Who can intervene in the affairs in our bedroom, and why should you keep in mind the customary taboos?!"
> [哑然一笑贤王子："海量宽宏信不差。但恐怕才过三朝无此理，还宜略把世人遮。且容月满方从命。此女端庄性不邪。况与夫人多契合，料无怨恨与嗟呀。"夫人正色回言道："彼既端庄不怨嗟，君更不宜相负彼，忍叫寂寞度年华？闺房之事谁来管，俗忌何须挂齿牙！"] [424]

This conversation takes place on the fourth day after Lingyun and Feixiang's wedding. In late imperial China, weddings consisted of three days of celebration, so this could be considered the first day after the wedding. Moreover, the groom and bride were

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[423] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2035.

[424] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1998.

still considered newlyweds within the first month. Because of this, when talking about taking a concubine during his "honeymoon," Lingyun is worried about his and Liyu's reputations because people may look upon them as lascivious. However, Feixiang points out Lingyun's hypocrisy. She tells Lingyun that the real benefit to Liyu is much more important than other people's views of them based on customs. Her opinion on this problem indicates not only her generosity as a virtuous wife, but also her real and practical concerns about other women's lives and happiness.

Conclusion

Examining and reconstructing the shrews and virtuous wives in her *tanci*, the author tries to subvert the stereotypes in male-authored fiction and suggests that every woman is an individual who can be appreciated. Cheng Huiying rewrites the jealous wives as a positive other and humanizes the often unidimensional characterization of the ideal virtuous wife. Each female character that seemingly falls into a stereotype is lovable and desirable for different reasons, in such a way that strongly opposes the stereotyped labeling of women in male-authored fiction. Moreover, these women are lovable and desirable because readers can see and identify with their subjectivity and agency as individuals, instead of viewing them as objects from a man's perspective. Meanwhile, the author also empowers their agency in public and domestic lives, suggesting women's powers and contribution in both spheres.

While reevaluating stereotypes of women, the author also reveals the hypocrisy of male authors and readers. By deconstructing the stereotype of shrews and virtuous women, the author points out the double standard imposed on women by men: while they want women to be "virtuous" and generous in the family, men still pursue domestic romances; while they require women to follow strict rules and blame women for any problems at home, they cannot follow Confucian rituals themselves and refuse to admit that they are the root of most domestic problems. To reiterate men's hypocrisy, Lingyun and Feixiang's conversation about his relationship with Zhu best illustrates the picture:

> [Lingyun:] "Why does the happiness between men and women have to take place in the bedroom? Drinking and chatting like this gives us the pleasure of keeping a certain distance…" When Lingyun finished, Feixiang laughed, thinking that this man's expressions were so odd. His opinions and plans are mostly different, like a civet cat which makes no noise but steals chicken. What he wants is not a fair and frank marriage, but secret meetings in front of flowers under the moon.
> [凌云：]"从来男女行乐，何必定在衽席之间？只像这般饮酒闲谈，便有种不即不离之趣……"重瞳说罢飞香笑，暗想斯人说话奇。主意安排多别调，竟像那狸猫不叫会偷鸡。光明嫁娶非其欲，倒想花前月下会佳期。[425]

Feixiang's analysis uncovers the unorthodox behaviors of the "orthodox" Lingyun. The metaphor of a civet cat she uses is especially cynical because Lingyun does not talk much, behaving like a true Confucian orthodox man. By projecting these motivations on the ultimate orthodox man in the *tanci*, the author seems to suggest that all men are hypocritical no matter how orthodox they seem to act. Compared to

[425] Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2009.

the desirable women who are lovely because they behave authentically, male hypocrisy is shown to be even worse and appalling.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Eight years after *Feng shuangfei* was published, the first female Chinese feminist writer, Qiu Jin 秋瑾(1875-1907), wrote a *tanci* called *Jingwei shi* (精卫石, Stones of the Jingwei Bird), which is one of the last *tanci* works authored by a woman.[426] Although this *tanci* was never completed due to Qiu's execution in 1907, Qiu Jin had already finished the first five chapters and sketched out the rest of the plot for an intended length of twenty chapters. Based on the extant five and half chapters and the remaining chapter titles, *Jingwei shi* tells a story of female protagonists, lead by Huang Jurui 黄鞠瑞, escaping from their traditional families and arranged marriages and travelling to Japan to study, joining a revolutionary faction as female soldiers, opening factories for women to gain jobs and economic self-support, and finally expelling the foreign invaders and establishing a republican Chinese state. In its exploration of new ideas, especially equality between men and women, *Jingwei shi* takes a more aggressive and progressive attitude. However, since it makes use of the traditional generic features of *tanci*, *Jingwei shi* makes a perfect bridge between

[426] Qiu Jin and her radical behavior and famous execution were probably related to her thoughts on nationalism and feminism. See Guo Yanli 郭延礼, *Qiu Jin wenxue lungaon* 秋瑾文学论稿 (Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1987), Mary Backus Rankin, "The Emergency of Women at the End of the Ch'ing: The Case of Ch'iu Chin," in *Women in Chinese Society*, ed. Margery Wolfand Roxane Witke (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), Amy D. Dooling and Kristina M Torgeson ed., *Writing Women in Modern China: An Anthology of Women's Literature From the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), etc.

traditional *tanci* works, such as *Feng shuangfei*, and novels authored by women during and after the May Fourth Movement.

As a fictional work of *tanci*, *Jingwei shi*, like *Feng shuangfei*, is a women's fantasy. While Cheng Huiying idealizes her audience as her *zhiyin* (知音), people who understand her and appreciate her talent, Qiu Jin assumes a wide audience of women. Because *tanci* was so popular among women, literate or illiterate, Qiu Jin uses *tanci* to educate women to struggle for individuality and equality:

> So I compose a *tanci* in order to let everybody understand, entering civilization from the dark. Elaborating gradually, I will write about the evil convention and women's sufferings and humiliation in the society completely in order to startle the readers. When [readers] suddenly feel lost, they will rise up in a rage, so that our women society will be entirely bright.
> [故余也谱以弹词，欲使人人能解，由黑暗而登文明；逐层演出，并尽写女子社会之恶习及痛苦耻辱，欲使读者触目惊心，爽然自失，奋然自振，以为我女界之普放光明也。][427]

Apparently, didactic values are the original intention of Qiu Jin. Although the preface also emphasizes the moral and didactic values of *Feng shuangfei*, these values, following the didactic tradition of novels, are more implicit and interpreted by commentators while the author never claims these functions.[428] In this sense, we can also see that Qiu Jin, ten to twenty years later than Cheng, was taking a more aggressive approach than Cheng to talk about women's problems, although Cheng has already subtly talked about the inequality that women were experiencing. While

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[427] Qiu Jin 秋瑾, preface to *Jingwei shi*, in *Qiu Jin quanji* 秋瑾全集 (Changchun: Jinlin wenshi chubanshe, 2003), 457-58.

[428] The 1898 prefacer of the *Feng shuangfei* says, "Although it is interwoven into fiction, [the author], having opinions on events, speaks for a purpose, which is to make people understand that one's loyalty will be revealed over time and one's evilness and lewdness will also destruct over time". (虽托于小说唱本，而感事发言，有为而言，使人知忠贞之心迹久则自明，奸淫之身家久则必败。).

Cheng idealizes the audience to be able to understand and interpret the implicit meanings in her text, Qiu expects her readers to learn from her work and follow her ideas.

Moreover, as fantasy, not only is the audience idealized in both *tanci*, but also the fictional worlds. In both works, political turmoil is finally pacified, order is finally restored, and the protagonists live happily ever after. As is mentioned in Chapter 1, in *Feng shuangfei*, under the historical background of the late Qing, this restoration of order can be interpreted as a wish to eliminate all the disorders in Cheng's contemporary society, presumably including foreign invasion, the Taiping (太平天国) and the Boxer (义和团) rebellions, and the economic and social changes that were changing the traditional society. However, the *tanci* itself is written in a very traditional way, setting its background in the Ming, and the social and political problems seem to be different from the ones in the late Qing. In contrast, Qiu Jin's setting of her *tanci* directly refers to her contemporary social and political background, with only the names changed. Her ideal solutions to the social problems are also indicated in her version of the ending of the story, which includes the final victories of women, including their achieving knowledge and independence, their free will to study, join the revolution and army, and their success in establishing a Chinese republic.

As most female writers focus on gender problems and sexual politics, we also see a development of their perspectives on these issues in the late Qing. From earlier

major *tanci* works, just as the influential "three major *tanci* works," authored by women, we can already see some debates on these issues. One of the central gender problems directed in these works is women's independence from men. In *Tian yu hua*, although the female protagonist, Zuo Yizhen, never has an official position, she is the hero who kills the evil usurper. More importantly, her marital life is centered on her, instead of her husband: her husband has to have an uxorilocal marriage with her, and her opinions in the household are more important than her husband's. *Zaisheng yuan* develops the theme of cross-dressing and gives the female protagonist, Meng Lijun, an official position, although she dresses as a man. It seems that the author cannot reconcile the problem between Lijun's will to continue the job and the wish of other related people to reveal her identity. As a result, the original author, Chen Duansheng, did not finish the *tanci*, and her successor, Liang Desheng, had to conclude with a happy ending, taking Lijun back to the inner chambers. Hou Zhi's *Jingui jie* and Qiu Xinru's *Bi sheng hua* are both rewritings of the *Zaisheng yuan* story. Although both authors take a more conservative perspective on the theme of women's cross-dressing and holding an official job in men's disguise, they still value women's talents and abilities as much as, or even better than, those of men. In chronological order, these works display a stronger and stronger desire of these female writers for subjectivity and agency in terms of their success in men's public sphere and indicate that women can be physically and psychologically independent from men, given a real job.

Living in a later age, Cheng Huiying goes much further than her predecessors on these women's issues. Probably under the influence of new incoming Western thoughts during the late-nineteenth century (although we cannot see any direct reference to Western thought or objects in *Feng shuangfei*), we can also read *Feng shuangfei* as Cheng's reevaluation of Chinese gender and sexual values from a woman's perspective. While women in earlier works can only earn money disguised as a man, Zhen Daya sets an example of a woman who can financially support herself and her family. When women have to yield to arranged marriage in earlier *tanci*, girls, despite the fact that they are concubines, are allowed plenty of space to pursue their own marriages and future happiness. When earlier *tanci* accept gender and sexual norms as a given, Cheng Huiying is bold and sophisticated enough to evaluate all kinds of sexuality, including heterosexual relationships, male same-sex practices and female same-sex desires, in order to validate women's desires and agency. Last but not least, *Feng shuangfei* also inherits the convention of examining women's roles and powers in domestic life from earlier female-authored *tanci*. Instead of creating a perfect female protagonist who overpowers her husband as in earlier works, Cheng Huiying's female characters, who have flaws, find their subjectivity and gain their powers and autonomy by subtle or explicit struggles and fights with men and social norms, taking a more realistic approach.

In this sense, Cheng Huiying's *Feng shuangfei* anticipates Qiu Jin's *Jingwei shi*, a *tanci* that targets a female audience and promotes radical gender reforms. From

the extant five and half chapters, we can tell that the central issues about women that Qiu Jin is concerned about and intends to teach her female readers are freedom of marriage, elimination of foot binding, and the equal rights of women to study, earn a living and engage in politics. Because of the ideology that Qiu Jin promotes in this *tanci*, *Jingwei shi* should be periodized as modern or contemporary although the *tanci* genre more properly belongs to traditional literature. In the *tanci*, Qiu Jin scrutinizes and criticizes all the biased traditional values and conventions on women, such as the saying that "women without talents are virtuous" (女子无才便是德), "women should be chaste, following only one man, while it does not matter for a man to have many wives" (女子守节须从一，男子无妨置众妻), "bound feet are extraordinarily beautiful" (束足美非凡) and "parents all rely on matchmakers' words and decide on [their daughters'] marriages hastily" (父母全凭媒妁言，婚姻草草便相联). One by one, the extant text points out that these are unfair traditions that men created to "restrain and fool women"束缚女子，愚弄女子.[429] As a result, Qiu Jin suggests that women have been so brainwashed that they cannot see that men have been objectifying them, "considering you the same as toys, flowers or birds" (将你作玩具、花鸟般看待), and they believe that they must depend on men, having no autonomy (*zizhu* 自主) or independence (*zili* 自立).[430] Compared to *Feng shuangfei*, which advocates the same ideas, women's autonomy and independence, *Jingwei shi* goes

[429] Qiu, *Jingwei shi*, in *Qiujin quanji*, 466, 470.

[430] Qiu, *Jingwei shi*, 468-69.

much further in itemizing women's sufferings and theorizing the causes of the sufferings so that the ideas seem more urgent and convincing.

According to *Jingwei shi,* the ultimate goal for women is to gain real "equality of rights between men and women" (*nannü pingquan* 男女平权).[431] While we are unclear whether Cheng Huiying had been influenced by Western reformist values, Qiu Jin was directly exposed to radical Western ideology. Qiu moved to Beijing in 1903 shortly after her marriage and started reading radical periodicals and meeting progressive intellectuals. In 1904, Qiu abandoned her marital family and left China to go to Japan to study in a women's school. These experiences of her female protagonists in *Jingwei shi* are fairly transparent fictional renderings of her own experiences. From these resources, Qiu Jin learns Western ideas:

> Recently I've had the chance to read many books from Europe and America that discuss the right to liberty, and how women and men are created equal. Heaven was impartial in endowing us with rights and privileges...And since women are capable of being independent, everyone is promoting women's rights.
> [近日得观欧美国，许多书说自由权，并言男女皆平等，天赋无偏利与权.....女子并且能自立，人人盛唱女之权。][432]

Interwoven with Qiu Jin's experiences, Huang Jurui, one of the female protagonists in *Jingwei shi*, claims that all these ideas are from Europe and America and believes that Chinese women and people should learn from them. These ideas are apparently much stonger, clearer and more specific than those in *Feng shuangfei.*

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[431] Qiu, *Jingwei shi*, 471-472.

[432] Qiu, *Jingwei shi*, 508. English translation from Amy D Dooling and Kristina M. Torgeson ed., *Writing Women in Modern China: An Anthology of Women's Literature from the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 71.

Qiu Jin not only promotes the ideas in her *tanci*, but also provides practical solutions to the contemporary problems she points out. As she argues, in order to be independent, women first need to have the right to education and then the right to work. As Qiu Jin visions the reform of women's status, she encourages all women to devote themselves to the social change: on the one hand, women, Huang Jurui and her friends as examples, need to have the courage to break off from their traditional families and conventions like foot binding; on the other hand, she appeals to people with wealth and power to support the feminist movement,

> If [this *tanci*] can make you fortunate and wealthy ladies be charitable, support with your money or powers, opening crafts factories or schools for women so that women can learn knowledge and skills by themselves and will be able to support themselves with a job.
> [若能够使诸位有福的、有钱的太太奶奶们发个慈善心，或助钱财，或助势力，开女工艺厂也好，开女学堂也好，使女子皆能自己学习学问手艺，有了生业，就可养活自己。][433]

Instead of fantasizing a woman who plays the role of an official as does *Feng shuangfei*, this *tanci* concerns readers' practical actions and efforts to solve women's real problems. In this sense, *Jingwei shi* transcends the nature of *tanci* as a genre of fantasy, modeling itself as a women's practical handbook.

A final but noteworthy feature of *Jingwei shi* is that women's problems are closely associated with the nation's problems. The time period Qiu Jin lived in was a difficult time for the Han Chinese, because not only were they under Manchu rule, but China had also been invaded by Japanese and Western powers. In the introductory poem, Qiu Jin, a very conscious and passionate nationalist, writes, "The great rivers

[433] Qiu, *Jingwei shi*, 469.

and mountains are swallowed by foreigners… It is pitiful that there is no light in women's world. They can only spiritlessly wait for death" (大好江山，忍归异族鲸吞！……可怜女界无光彩，只恹恹待毙。).[434] These two lines appear in the first and second half of the introductory *ci* poem, indicating that the two topics are internally related. Qiu Jin believes that saving the country has to start with saving the women because "Empowering the nation and the race both depends on women, and educations at home are all from mothers" (强国强种全靠女，家庭教育尽娘传。).[435] From Qiu Jin's perspective and logic, the weakness of the nation and the Chinese people is all due to the suppression of women's potential over the centuries. Therefore, solving women's problems is a priority and is the first step to saving China. It is worth noting that the connection between the nation and women never appeared in earlier *tanci*, including *Feng shuangfei*, but is very common in later literature during and after the May Fourth Movement.

From Qiu Jin's perspective, saving the nation is not only the job of men, but also of women. In fact, Qiu Jin believes that women have the ability and responsibility to participate in saving the nation:

> Every day I burn incense, praying that women will emancipate themselves from their slavish confines and arise as heroines and female gallants on the stage of liberty, following in the footsteps of Madame Roland, Anita, Sophia Perofskaya, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Joan of Arc. With all my heart, I beseech and beg my twenty million female compatriots to assume their responsibilities as citizens. Arise! Arise! Chinese women, arise!

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[434] Qiu, *Jingwei shi*, 458.

[435] Qiu, *Jingwei shi*, 508.

> [余日顶香拜祝女子，脱离奴隶范围，作自由舞台之女英雄，女豪杰，继罗兰，马尼他，苏菲亚，批茶，如安而兴起焉。余愿呕心滴血以拜求之，祈余二万万女同胞，无负此国民责任也。速振！速振！女界其速振！][436]

As Qiu Jin points out, setting themselves free and saving the nation as heroes are women's responsibilities as citizens. She gives examples of female heroes from the West to indicate that women can be heroes, *yingxiong* and *haojie*. She also lists famous heroines from Chinese history, such as Hongyu 红玉, Mulan 木兰 etc., to suggest that women are superior to men in terms of patriotism, "The ones who have surrendered and turned over their territories have always been men… Women ought to occupy the superior position" (投降献地都是男儿做……女子应居优等位).[437] According to Qiu Jin, in terms of their ability to serve in the army and save the country, women not only are as good as men, but are in some senses better. Although Qiu Jin may go too far in listing women's superior capabilities and potentials, she grasps the essentials of feminism and "equal rights issues," which promotes equal rights and duties for both men and women.

From this lineage of women's perspectives in their *tanci* works, we are able to see the rapid change of ideology among women at the turn of the century. In terms of requesting and fighting for women's subjectivity, individuality and autonomy, these female *tanci* writings developed from mild fantasy to practical didactics. *Feng shuangfei*, in this sense, becomes a perfect link between the late imperial and the

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[436] Qiu, preface to *Jingwei shi*, 460. English translation from Dooling and Torgeson ed., *Writing Women in Modern China*, 44.

[437] Qiu, *Jingwei shi*, 486. English translation from Dooling and Torgeson ed., *Writing Women in Modern China*, 55. We have to say that Qiu Jin here puts an unfair charge against men, considering that women did not have the opportunity to do these things in premodern China.

modern, heralded by Qiu Jin's *Jingwei shi*. As we can see, the pressing issues of concern to female writers during and after the May Fourth Movement on the subject of women and gender had already taken shape in late-imperial literary works by female authors. In this way, we can consider modern literature by women as not only a product of learning from the West, but also a continuation of traditional concerns.

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