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TALES OF SELF EMPOWERMENT: RECONNOITERING WOMEN'S *TANCI* IN LATE IMPERIAL AND EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY CHINA

by

Li Guo

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Doctor of
Philosophy degree in Comparative Literature
in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

December 2010

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Maureen Robertson

ABSTRACT

This dissertation has examined the narrative genre of *tanci* in late imperial China while keeping a close eye on the theme of women's self-empowerment. I have analyzed three voluminous *tanci* works, *Destiny of Rebirth*; *Dream, Image, Destiny*; and *A Histoire of Heroic Women and Men*, respectively published in the 18th, 19th and early 20th century. I have proposed that these *tanci* works, by depicting women's crossdressing, self-portraits, and homoerotic sensitivities, presented a transgressive potential to disrupt dominant social and cultural discourses of womanhood in late imperial China. Particularly, *tanci* works present women who leave their cloistered lives and travel while crossdressed as men. These women are the very opposite of the Confucian feminine ideal (the filial, chaste, and obedient woman who follows the prescribed codes required of a daughter, wife, and widow). Writing such challenging stories was itself a transgressive act for late imperial women authors, whose literary practices were under strict social regulation in the patriarchal society. For women readers of the time and for those of the contemporary period, reading these stories was and is an empowering experience. By identifying with the heroic protagonists, historical and contemporary readers alike may be inspired to envision a life of autonomy and freedom outside the domestic space. *Tanci* works, I propose, validate women in their immediate historical and cultural landscapes and project rich possibilities for women to reform social reality. The historical task of contemporary readers of *tanci* is therefore three-fold: to retrieve the voices of earlier authors from obscurity, to empower themselves with the help of these voices, and to integrate the predecessors' insights into a vision of new possibilities of social change.

Abstract Approved: ________________________________

Thesis Supervisor

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Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Maureen Robertson

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PH.D. THESIS

This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

Li Guo

has been approved by the Examining Committee
for the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy
degree in Comparative Literature at the December 2010 graduation.

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Steven Ungar

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David Wittenberg

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Linda Bolton

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Barbara Eckstein

To my parents

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INTRODUCTION

Tanci and its Cultural Reclamation Values

In the southern city of Suzhou (蘇州), China, there has been a traditional genre of oral storytelling *tanci* (彈詞) since the sixteenth and seventeenth century. In public teahouses and for private celebrations, professional singers, men and women, performed these stories—long, prose narratives written in rhyming lines—accompanied by traditional Chinese instrumental music. In the seventeenth century, educated women of the upper class took up this popular form of storytelling and transformed it into long written narratives similar to novelistic fiction. Telling stories of crossdressing, military heroism, subversive portraits and women's homoerotic tension, these texts are marked by their power to inspire the aspirations of readers and to nurture their collective creativity.

This dissertation conducts a critical reading of the feminist potential in these late imperial and early modern *tanci* texts and is based on a theoretical position derived from a contextualized understanding of their works. My premise is that scholarship in women's *tanci* cultivates new perspectives in feminist studies of subjectivity, gender representation, and self-empowerment. I am intrigued by the ways in which readings of *tanci* extend and challenge the theoretical assumptions of feminist studies in both China and the West. I take into consideration studies of *tanci* by scholars in Taiwan, mainland China, and English-speaking countries. This research unites my experiences as a native Chinese reader, a translator of *tanci*, and a literary scholar writing in English. My encountering of *tanci* in multiple cultural spaces and my reading of the texts with an understanding of permutable contexts enabled this project to come into being. I focus my

interpretative activity on the emancipatory potentials of these tales written by late imperial Chinese women authors, with the aim of showing how these texts celebrate feminist initiatives in a historical period that is currently underrepresented in feminist studies.

The Chinese term for "feminism" is a translated term which is correlated with an assortment of theoretical discourses imported from Western feminism. Contemporary scholars have traced the oral and textual histories of women during China's modernization period to the early twentieth century. In particular, the historical period following the May Fourth movement of 1919 has been held by critics at home and abroad as a milestone in China's progress toward modernity. In the 1980s, a large number of Western literary and cultural theories were brought to mainland China. Women from both Chinese academia and an official organization called Women's Federation (*fulian* 婦聯) advocated a reevaluation of Western feminism, which indicates Chinese women's growing interest in feminist discourse. Contemporary Chinese feminist scholars Li Xiaojiang (李小江), Dai Jinhua (戴錦華), and Li Yinhe (李銀河) approached feminism from literary, cultural, and sociological perspectives, and were engaged in vigorous theoretical debates with Western feminist critics. However, many scholars who claim to have established a Chinese feminist discourse have not sufficiently assessed late imperial women's texts, although the feminist potentials of these texts have continuously prepared for the reform and transformation of Chinese women in the twentieth century. This dissertation on *tanci* by women is an effort to fill this gap in contemporary scholarship by introducing the proto-feminist values contained in texts that speak of women of the preceding generations.

My goal is to help readers in and outside of China to understand the value of these texts in relation to the readers' immediate cultures. I hope to engage communities of readers in the recognition of *tanci* as a cultural heritage that demands further acknowledgement and understanding. A chronological reading of *tanci* texts from the eighteenth century to the early twentieth century generates a replenished historical view of the "question of women" in China.[1] These stories of women military leaders, artists, and crossdressers depict women of various social classes with a vivid realism. Late imperial women inherited tales from the preceding dynasties and made them their own, by circulating, chanting, and rewriting these stories. Women wrote sequels to existing stories in the form of *tanci,* to continue the narratives that had been learnt by heart by women in every household. These texts are precious resources for research on women's literary life in the late imperial period. Although several major Ming and Qing *tanci* texts[2] were edited and published in mainland China and Taiwan in the early 1980s, most texts published before the twentieth century were inaccessible to the general reader. A feminist study of these texts contributes to the cultural preservation of a narrative tradition that reflects themes of women's survival and self-empowerment.

In addition to the paucity of biographical information for women authors of *tanci*, their texts were often left unfinished, due to either the difficulty of resolving the plot or the lack of time and energy for writing, as women writers were inevitably burdened with

---

[1] The following scholars have offered assessment of this topic in various historical and cultural contexts: Susan Mann. *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century*. 1997. Wendy Larson. *Women and Writing in Modern China*. 1998. Tani E. Barlow. *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*. 2004.

[2] This refers to the texts which were written and published from the seventeenth century to the early twentieth century.

domestic duties. From the limited information about them offered by authors' prefaces to their works, by autobiographical confessions embedded in their *tanci*, and by references from the authors' friends in the inner quarters, the readers may discern that women authors of *tanci* overcame great difficulties in putting together these remarkably lengthy, precisely structured, and gracefully rhymed works. In Chapter 1 of this paper, I will study Chen Duansheng (陳端生), the author of *Destiny of Rebirth* (再生緣 1782), who was born to an upper-class family and married to a low-ranked official. Her husband was unfortunately involved in a scandal related to the Civil Service Examination and was exiled to a frontier region several years after their marriage. Chen spent the rest of her life waiting for her husband's return while taking care of two children and her parents-in-law. Her husband's court case did such damage to the reputation of Chen and her family that she lost her connections with fellow women literary scholars and even was forced to reduce her connection with her own parents and sister. Chen died of illness shortly before her husband was released from his exile. Chapter 2 studies Zheng Danruo (鄭澹若 nineteenth century), who lived and wrote during a period of great social and cultural turmoil. When the Taiping rebel armies broke into Hangzhou City in 1860, Zheng committed suicide by drinking a poisonous wine.[3] Her *tanci Dream, Image, Destiny* (夢影緣) was preserved in a few libraries in mainland China and Taiwan. Ordinary readers of *tanci* in Chinese-speaking communities do not currently have easy access to this text.

[3] The *Taiping Rebellion* by the "Kingdom of Heavenly Peace" (太平天國 1850-1871), was a civil war between the Qing Dynasty government and Chinese "Christian" rebels, led by Hong Xiuquan (洪秀全) who claimed he was the younger brother of Jesus Christ, chosen by God to establish a heavenly kingdom upon earth and replace the corrupt Manchu Qing dynasty. The conflict took place mostly in south China. It was the largest rebellion in the Qing and came close to toppling the Dynasty.

Chapter 3 studies *a tanci* work *A Histoire of Heroic Women and Men* (俠女群英史 1905). Its authors, who are three sisters, used pen names Yong Lan (詠蘭), Shu Zhu (書竹), and You Mei (詠梅). Their biographical information is only available in the two prefaces to the work, respectively by their brother Mengjü (夢菊) and by Yong Lan's husband Xin'An (心庵). Since these writers have also used pseudonyms, the authorship of the work cannot be verified in historical records or local chronicles. No research has been conducted on this *tanci* in China or abroad.[4] My experience of collecting these rare and fragmented texts convinces me of the urgency of reviving the voices of these texts through translation and research, and of the necessity to let these texts speak to contemporary audiences. In the following sections, I will review the historical context of Chinese women's writing, beginning with a discussion of the Confucian ideological social system which conditioned late imperial women's historical and cultural presences. Then I will review the tradition of women's writing in the domestic sphere, or the inner chambers. After a historical sketch of *tanci* and its development, I elaborate on the progressive initiatives in works written by late imperial women. Following this introduction to the genre, I shall describe the chapters in this dissertation.

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[4] For this study, I have used the text preserved in the Fudan University Library rare books collection, Shanghai.

Review of Historical Contexts

The Confucian Ideological System and Women's Social Status

The Confucian ethical and philosophical system, which has had tremendous influence on the culture and society of China, can be traced throughout many ancient and imperial literary and historical texts. Among these texts, the earliest is *The Analects* (論語), a compilation of statements attributed to Confucius by his students. During the Western Han Dynasty (206 BCE to 220 CE), the transformation of the Confucian philosophical system into state ideology took place. Modern critics have shown interest in how Confucian philosophy offered techniques for remaking and reproducing state and society using the model of a Confucian golden age. (Elman 5) In the current discussion, however, I will focus on the influence of the Confucian social system on the gendering of women's roles, giving special attention to the principle of "Three Submissions and Four Virtues" (四德). The "Three Submissions" (三從) defines women's subordinate relationship with their male family members. According to *The Book of Rites* (禮記 first century), "In her youth, a maiden follows her father and elder brother; when married, she follows her husband; when her husband is dead, she follows her eldest son."[5] The "Four

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5 未嫁從父，既嫁從夫，夫死從子. The saying of "*sancong*" originally refers to women's funeral clothing (喪服) in ceremonies. Because the women do not hold official positions, they are dressed in accordance with the rank of their fathers before they are married, and in accordance with the rank of the husbands after their marriage. If their

Virtues" (四德) refer to womanly moral behavior (婦德), womanly speech (婦言), womanly bearing (婦容), and womanly work (婦功). Found in nearly all conduct books for Chinese women, these principles emphasized a woman's innate inferiority to a man, and her domestic duties to serve her husband, his siblings, and his parents.

The famous conduct book *Admonitions for Women* (女誡, first century CE) by Ban Zhao (班昭 45-116 CE),[6] opens with a chapter titled "Being Lowly and Weak" (卑弱) which stresses women's submission to men. The primary womanly qualification is "virtue," which, according to Ban Zhao, means to "guard carefully her chastity; to control circumspectly her behavior; in every motion to exhibit modesty; and to model each act on the best usage; this is womanly virtue."[7] Women's speech means to "choose her words with care; to avoid vulgar language; to speak at appropriate times; and nor to weary others with much conversation. These qualities may be called the characteristics of womanly speech."[8] These moral parameters constituted the ritual education of all women before marriage.

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husbands decease before them, they shall dress in accordance with the rank of their sons. (Ruan Yuan Volume 30, 359)

Born into a family of scholars (her father and brother both celebrated historians), Ban Zhao received extensive education in literary and historical classics, and was herself one of China's earliest historians. She assisted her father Ban Biao and brother Ban Gu in collecting historical data and played a crucial role in the completion of the great history work *History of the Han Dynasty* (漢書, first century CE).

7 幽閑貞靜，守節整齊，行以有恥，動靜有法，是為婦德。(Tetsuzō , 671) Translated in Wang Robin, 53.

8 擇辭而說，不道惡語，時然後言，不厭於人，是謂婦言。(Tetsuzō , 671) Translated in Wang Robin, 53.

The Chinese word for women, 婦 (*fu*), is composed of two parts, 女 (*nü* female) and 帚 (*zhou* broom). The word suggests an image of a woman sweeping the ground with a broom, suggesting women's foremost obligation to keep the household clean. With heavy duties to run the household and serve the husband's family and raising children, a woman was given little space and time for social activities. In general, literary and artistic creativity was not included as part of women's everyday life. Women's daily lives were strictly constrained in the domestic sphere, separated from men's world outside the family compounds.[9]

Such restriction of women's activities to the domestic sphere was reiterated in classical texts and didactic books. *The Book of Odes* (詩經) says: "Women do not engage in public affairs, (for if they did) they would stop their weaving."[10] The exclusion of women from public affairs is a key principle which maintained the distinction between men and women in Confucian society. Lisa Raphals, who specializes in East-West comparative history, reflects on the exclusion of women from political matters, citing from the ancient philosopher *Guanzi* (管子), "If women have a voice in people's affairs, rewards and punishment will not be reliable. If there is no distinction between men and women, the people will have neither integrity nor shame."[11] In the early ritual texts

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[9] A famous saying goes as follows: "The men should not speak of what belongs to the inside (of the house), nor the women of what belongs to the outside. …Things spoken inside should not go out; words spoken outside should not come in." (男不言內，女不言外…內言不出，外言不入。) See *Regulations for the Family* (*Neize* 內則), Section I. Number 12. (Tetsuzō, 679) Translated in Wang Robin, 56.

[10]婦無公事,休其蠶織. (Deng Xiang, 62)

[11] 婦言人事，則賞罰不信；男女無別，則民無廉恥。*Guanzi* (管子 475 BCE – 220 CE), 3:10a, translation in Raphals, 209.

plentiful evidence demonstrates women's subordination to men in domestic, social, and political life. In the following section, I will discuss one of the most prominent feminine virtues--women's chastity--to review the social and cultural restrictions on women in imperial China.

Women's Chastity

Since the ancient periods, didactic texts have identified chastity as the most important principle for women to uphold. In the Han didactic text *Biographies of Exemplary Women* (列女傳 by Liu Xiang, 16 BCE), there are seven scrolls (卷) of women's biographies, including two chapters on chastity (貞節), respectively entitled, "Biographies of the Chaste and Obedient" (貞順傳) and "Biographies of the Chaste and Righteous" (節義傳). These chapters include biographies of chaste women of various social classes, such as wives and royal concubines, wives of high officials, widows of lower-class families, housemaids, and nurses.[12]

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[12] Two of the stories of chaste women in this book present female chastity using examples of women from, respectively, the upper and lower social classes. The first story in the "Biographies of the Chaste and Obedient" is about the widowed wife of the Prince of Wei (召南申女). She observes three years of mourning after her husband's death and turns down the marriage proposal of the younger brother of the former Prince. To demonstrate her chastity, she writes a poem decrying the opposite deportment, and remains faithful to her deceased lord. The narrator applauds the widow's rejection of a prosperous marriage. The woman's literary talent contributes to the narrator's idealization of chaste widowhood. Another story in the collection is about a "chaste and righteous" maid of the Chu family(周主忠妾). The protagonist is the handmaid of the wife of a Minister of Zhou. The Minister's wife is unfaithful to the Minister and secretly poisons her husband's wine. She then orders the maid to present the wine to him. To avoid being disloyal to her mistress, the maid pretends to fall and drops the wine. When the Minister hears the truth, he kills his wife, and proposes to marry the maid, in order to reward her loyalty. The maid turns down the proposal, saying that she cannot be

In feudal China, literature about exemplary women was edited and rewritten by both women and men, to instill doctrines of feminine virtue and chastity in young girls and cultivate them as ideal wives, mothers, and daughters-in-law. In the seventeenth century, fiction writer Feng Menglong (馮夢龍 1574-1646) composed *Tales of Exemplary Women in Ancient and Present Times* (古今列女傳演義), which rewrote Liu Xiang's text as a vernacular work of fiction, so that girls and less educated women could understand the text and learn from the worthy ladies of history. Historian Susan Mann, citing the modern critic Liu Jihua, notes that in the eleventh century, the cult of chastity for widows became almost a religion. In the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties (tenth century to the early twentieth century),

> …judicial and social sanctions discouraging widow remarriage and rewarding so-called chaste widows became a hallmark of the moral education programs sponsored by the throne. Under Ming rule for the first time, the court published detailed and explicit regulations for awarding imperial testimonials of merit (*jingbiao*) to chaste widows, who---together with obedient grandsons, righteous men, and filial sons---were singled out for special honor along with women who died resisting rape. In addition, under Ming law families headed by chaste widows were exempted from the corvée labor tax. (Mann 1987, 37-38)

These governmental policies encouraging widow chastity partially contributed to the cult of marital fidelity in the Ming dynasty. These chaste widows, as Tian Rukang suggests, can be divided into three categories: "the virtuous ones who observed lifelong widowhood, [those who] committed suicide for the sake of marital fidelity at the death of a spouse or fiancé, [and those who] committed suicide preserving their chastity in refusing to submit to rebels" (Tian 61). Joan Judge, further probing the social, historical, and religious factors that contributed to the cult of women's chastity, suggests,

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unfaithful to her deceased mistress. Although the narrator approves of the maid's loyalty, the story itself carries a progressive initiative, presenting the maid's capability to rationalize her refusal of her master's proposal in the name of chastity.

> Faithful wives marked the fundamental distinction between mankind and beasts, keeping patriarchal bloodlines clear and maintaining domestic order. They were honored as exemplars of the righteousness and of Ming-Qing values by elaborate systems of government rewards that attempted to co-opt and control their dramatic acts of self-denial. (Judge 34)

Judge notes that the importance attached to chaste women's private practice of self-mutilation, mourning, and suicide implies that "at the opposite pole of the regime of feminine virtue were women who provoked debate, not because of their private devotion to the principles of women's virtue, but because of their alleged public flaunting of those very principles" (Judge 2008, 59). Such acts of suicide and self-mutilation inspire social debates about the Confucian regulation of feminine virtue. A related example can be found in *Biography of a Chaste Woman of the Kang Family* (*Kang lienü zhuan* 康列女傳), by the Qing scholar Fang Bao (方苞 1668–1749). (Fang 377)[13] The story, based on a real incident, is about a merchant's daughter who was betrothed to a scholar, Zhang Jing, from a lower-middle-class family. Zhang passes away from illness before their marriage. To prove her chaste loyalty to Zhang, the merchant's daughter commits suicide. Her death instantly brings fame to the Zhangs and promotes their declining family clan to a higher social rank in the capital city. The engaged girl's suicide secures and preserves the economic and social interests of her fiancé's family, thus resonating with Joan Judge's discussion of chastity as "the singular source of female social capital" in imperial China (Judge 59).

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[13] For a discussion of female chastity in the Ming and Qing dynasties, also see Guo Qitao. *Ritual Opera and Mercantile Lineage: the Confucian Transformation of Popular Culture in Late Imperial Huizhou*. 2005.

The Paradox of Talent and Virtue

Women's chastity, in dynastic China, constitutes the broader topic of feminine virtue. A major subject of debate was the relationship between women's talent and their virtue. Confucian ideology and didactic texts on women's virtue generated extensive discussion of the seemingly paradoxical relationship between women's virtue (德) and their talent (才). A common phrase, "for women lack of literary talent is a virtue" (女人無才便是德), implied that in Confucian society, women were more likely to become notable for their virtue, whereas men were more likely to be acclaimed for their literary talent.[14]

The Confucian cult of women's virtue conceives a wife's relationship to her husband and his family as analogous to a man's loyalty to the emperor. Women's subordination to men reflects one of the Five Constant Relationships (五常) that served as moral principles for the regulation of relationships in society. These five cardinal relationships refer to those between a father and son, an emperor and his subordinates, a husband and wife, older and younger siblings, and to that between friends. Except for the relationship between friends, these relationships are definitively hierarchical and reflect the power relationship between men and women.

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[14] Debates about women's virtue and talent can be also found in the *Four Books for Women*, which comprise four major educational texts for women written by women authors over the course of a thousand years, from ancient times to the seventeenth century. These four texts are the *Admonitions for Women* (女誡) by Ban Zhao (班昭 45 CE-117 CE), the *Women's Analects* (女論語 785 CE-805 CE) by Song Ruosheng (宋若莘) and Song Ruozhao (宋若昭), the *Domestic Lessons* (內訓 fourteenth century) by Empress Xu, and the *Sketch of a Model for Women* (女範捷錄) by the chaste widow Lady Wang, the mother of the sixteenth century scholar Wang Xiang (王相).

Under the impact of these ideological concepts, literary, historical, and philosophical texts of later generations offered differing definitions of women's virtue. Chastity, humility, modesty and reserve in speech, and devotion to housework constitute the main characteristics of women's virtue in pre-twentieth century China. *Women's Analects* (女論語, eighth century CE) notes that "the foremost duty of women is to establish themselves to fulfill their proper roles. To establish themselves, they shall make themselves pure and chaste."[15] The book contains nine chapters on women's domestic duties,[16] with not a single chapter describing women's intellectual life. Likewise, in the Ming text *Domestic Lessons* (內訓, early fifteenth century), the author Empress Renxiao (仁孝) offers twenty chapters of moral lessons for women. The first and most important chapter is on women's virtue, which she defines as "chaste and quiet, proper and constant."[17] After the seventeenth century, as more women engaged in literary composition and pursued "talent," debates about the propriety of such activities surfaced. A crucial example is the didactic text *Sketch of a Model for Women* (女範捷錄 1624), written by a woman who repudiated the popular saying, "A woman without talent is virtuous." [18] She suggests,

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[15] 凡為女子，必學立身。立身之法，唯務清貞。(Tetsuzō, 679) Unless otherwise indicated, all translations in this dissertation are mine.

[16] These descriptions of women's domestic duties include "rising early in the morning," "serving the parents," "serving the husband's siblings," "serving the husband," "teaching children," "running the household," "welcoming the guests," "being peaceful and gentle," and "adhering to chastity."

[17] 貞靜幽閑，端莊誠一。(Tetsuzō, 769)

[18] The author, a woman of a Liu family, was the widowed mother of the above mentioned scholar Wang Xiang. Wang Xiang also compiled and edited many educational

> It is reasonable to say that a virtuous man is talented. To say that a woman without talent is virtuous is, however, far from the truth.… Virtuous women certainly do not have to be talented. Yet those talented women must have been (considered) worthy because of their virtue. Virtue is the root, talent the branches. This is indeed their original relation. If a person's deed is not well-meant, his talent should not carry the blame. Hence a talent that yields practical benefits, even if they are the words of a woman, they could be put to use. A skill used with a vicious purpose, even if it is practiced by men, is not appropriate…. With regard to the royal wives, humble concubines, and wives of common people in ancient times, none of them were unfamiliar with the *Book of Odes*. Does this imply that they were not virtuous?... Judging from this, women should pursue knowledge in words and literature, and learn well the classics and histories, so that their fame will spread wide in their lifetime and so that their exceptional talent can be applauded by later generations. This is certainly the way it should be![19]

Although this book was considered a collection of conventional dictates about women's obedience and filial piety, this chapter advocates the need for women's literacy, suggesting that ancient empresses and talented women were precedents for the compatibility of talent and virtue.[20] Another famous essay written on women's literacy is "Women's learning" (婦學), by the Qing scholar Zhang Xuecheng. Zhang composed this essay to criticize his contemporary, Yuan Mei (袁枚 eighteenth century), a poet who accepted women pupils and supported the publication of their poems. Zhang denounced Yuan for corrupting women's learning with entertainment and triviality instead of

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texts such as the Confucian classics for children, *Three Character Classic* (三字經), and the literary anthology *A Thousand Masters' Poems* (千家詩).

[19]男子有德便是才，斯言尤可。女子無才便是德，此語殊非。----女子之有德者,固不必有才.而有才者,必貴乎有德.德本而才末,固理之亦然.若夫為不善,非才之罪也.故經濟之才,婦言猶可用,而邪僻之藝,男子亦非宜……古者後妃夫人,以逮庶妾匹婦,莫不知詩,豈無德者歟? …. 由是觀之, 則女子之知書識字, 達理通經, 名譽著乎當時, 才美揚乎後世, 亶其然哉. (Tetsuzō, 769)

[20] Critic Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee, in a philosophical study of Confucianism and women, note that the *Sketch of a Model for Women* is "not only a resource for reinforcing the realm of *nei*, …but also a source of empowerment where women through the power of literacy become self-affirmative in their historical consciousness" (Rosenlee 8).

guiding them with the principles embedded in the ancient rites. He noted that in women's learning, "one must begin by learning ritual and then move to comprehending poetry.… Women's learning of tradition always begins with rites and poetry. The women's learning of today is the reverse; it uses poetry to destroy the rites."[21] Yuan Mei responded to Zhang, saying that women had been authors since the ancient times, and that many famous song lyrics in the *Book of Songs* had been composed by women. (Yuan 1982, 590)[22] This debate laid bare the important question of whether or not women's speech should be considered a category of gender propriety as strictly defined by the Confucian cult of feminine virtue in the specific social context of the late Ming and early Qing. In the following section, I will address this question by reviewing the tradition of women's writing in the late imperial period, and assess this tradition in view of its specific social and historical circumstances.

Women's Writing in the Late Imperial Period

Why Was It Difficult for Women to Write?

The constraint Confucian society placed on women's speech was a dominant ideological principle that regulated women's literary activities. Women were cautioned to

[21] 古之婦學，必由禮以通詩；今之婦學，轉因詩而敗禮. (Zhang Xuecheng Volume 1, 128)

[22] Aside from Yuan Mei, other famous literati also had women disciples. These scholars include Li Zhi (李贄 1527-1602), Chen Wenshu (陳文述 1771-1843) and Yu Yue (俞樾 1821-1907).

guard their talents of speaking and writing, and not to compete against others.[23] The socio-ideological constraint on women's literary talent had been constant since ancient times, despite the fact that there had been several socially-acknowledged women writers in individual historical periods. In the Tang dynasty (eighth century), courtesan poets such as Yu Xuanji (魚玄機), Li Ye (李冶), and Xue Tao (薛濤) actively participated in literary exchanges with male poets. The achievements of these courtesan poets were such that even the aforementioned Zhang Xuecheng praised them, saying that their poems were "elegant and sensibly constrained, sincere and uncontaminated. (These poems) were transmitted continuously for hundreds of generations. Their achievements could not be dismissed because of personal deficiencies."[24] In a male-dominated literary tradition, these courtesan poets asserted their voices and visibility. Nevertheless, their marginal social status as authors made them vulnerable to criticism and even attacks by conservative male scholars. The Song dynasty scholar Chen Zhensun (陳振孫 around 1183-1162), for instance, commented that the courtesan poet Yu Xuanji was a most notorious woman who "disrupted the rites and corrupted social customs."[25]

The contradiction between women's newly vigorous writing activities and the Confucian indoctrination of feminine virtues became all the more prominent in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties (seventeenth century). Supporters of women's literary

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[23] As Ban Zhao notes, "Now what is called womanly virtue need not be outstanding in their literary talent or reputation. Womanly speech need be neither good in argument nor sharp in conversation." (夫云婦德，不必才名絕異也。婦言不必辨口利辭也。Tetsuzō, 455)

[24] 雅而有則, 真而不穢, 流傳千載, 得耀簡編, 不能以人廢也。(Zhang Xuecheng, 126)

[25] 亂禮法，敗風俗之尤者. (Chen Zhensun Volume 19, 29)

endeavors, such as Ming scholar Ye Shaoyuan (葉紹袁 1589-1648), asserted women's right to express their literary talents. Shaoyuan proposed the talent-virtue-beauty ideal for womanhood, which held that talent, together with virtue and beauty, are desirable components of women's achievements.[26] Parallel to this advocacy of women's talent were opposing voices from scholars who adhered to Confucian teachings for women. For instance, the late Ming scholar Lü Kun (呂坤 1536-1618) suggested that proper education in the inner quarters should focus on classical texts, and that women should not compete against each other in poetic talent, or take up singing or any other performing that could reduce their position to that of the lower-class entertainers.[27]

These examples illustrate the universal belief at the time that women should have family education in order to prepare for their domestic duties after marriage. Even if they were literate, running their households occupied most women's daily lives, leaving them little time to write. *Tanci* author Qiu Xinru (邱心如) once remarked that in her daily life she had a "mind burdened with worries, hands busy with housework; [was] devoted to womanly duties, [and] everyday suffered fear and anxiety. With no thought left to take up writing, interest in poetry was reduced by necessities such as oil, salt, sauce and vinegar."[28] Likewise eighteenth century writer Wu Wenyuan (吳文媛), in a preface to *Compositions at Remnant Time after Women's Work* (女紅餘誌) by Long Fu (龍輔

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[26] Ye Shaoyuan. Preface to *Collections of the Midday Dream Hall* (午夢堂集序). 1935.

[27] Lü Kun, Preface to *Women Exemplars* (閨範 1600). The classical texts that he recommended for women's education include *Biographies of Exemplary Women*, *Classics of Filiality*, as well as *Admonitions for Women.* (Lü Kun 479-480)

[28] 心計慮，手匆忙，婦職兢兢日恐慌。那有余情拈筆墨，只落得，油鹽醬醋雜詩腸。(Qiu Xinru Chapter 8, 289)

fourteenth century), notes that women's writing usually "depends on the time left from embroidery work, and the meager savings made from tailoring." [29] "Womanly" work (女紅), including such manual labor as silk reeling and weaving, was a major constituent of womanly qualifications.[30]

Susan Mann notes that in the eighteenth century, "both gentry women and commoner women were held to the same moral standard." (Mann 1996, 166) While the daughters of poor families depended on women's work for survival, upper-class women were also expected to perform these duties: "the same attributes were essential to the proper discipline and management of domestic help---the mistress sets the standards for her servants' work by her own example." (Mann 1996, 166) Childbearing and pregnancy also limited women's freedom to pursue their literary and artistic interests. Late imperial writings by women include many personal laments about heavy domestic labor and the scarcity of opportunities for literary endeavors. Such obstacles to women's writing demonstrate both the suppression of women's writing by the patriarchal culture and the fact that women's self-expression in writing was a largely marginalized social practice in dynastic China.

The Inner Chambers: A Site of Self-Inscription

Women's writing had long existed in China's literary history and had confronted many impediments. Among the many women writers in ancient and medieval periods, a

[29] 乞刺繡之余暇，假制衣之分貲・Wu Wenyuan, author's preface to *Compositions Written in the Time Left After Women's Work* 女紅餘誌自序。(Hu Wenkai, 77)

[30] Also see Fong 2004, 1-58.

handful were well-known, such as the Han poet Cai Wenji (蔡文姬 second century CE), the Tang courtesan poet Xue Tao (薛濤 eighth century CE), and the Song poet Li Qingzhao (李清照 1084-1155). The late Ming and early Qing period (seventeenth century) witnessed the expansion of women's education and the increasing visibility of active woman writers. The development of women's literary activity was especially marked in the Jiangnan regions, which encompasses several provinces around the lower reaches of the Yangzi River. In the seventeenth century, the textile industry heavily contributed to the economic development of the area. Cities such as Yangzhou, Hangzhou, and Suzhou were marked by concentrations of rich merchants who boosted the local economy as well as expanded the need for entertainment. The social circumstances of these cities were characterized by their "nonconformity," "refinement of taste," and high levels of culture (Johnson 86). Literary activities such as poetry readings and literary gatherings of scholars became an indispensable part of social life. It was under such circumstances that society began to admire talented women.

These women authors were labeled *Guixiu* writers, or talented women of the inner chambers. The so-called "gui" (閨) refers to the inner quarters where women resided in the domestic compound. Many variations on the term "gui" appear in women's writings, such as *guiwei* (閨闱), or "inner room," and *guikun* (閨阃), or "women's bedroom." The word *gui* reflects the Confucian ideological division between masculine and feminine, interior and exterior. It also demonstrates the patriarchal regulation of women's speech,

which was not to be heard outside the inner quarters.[31] In the late imperial period, educated gentry women transformed the inner chamber into a unique space that valorized women's voices. In this space, the dominant male literary discourse did not have absolute control. In the context of women's flourishing literary activities, the acutely interior quarters harbor the multiple possibilities of new feminine existence.

This division between the inner chambers and the exterior social sphere was destabilized in the late sixteenth century. Some women challenged the Confucian restrictions on women's speech and engaged in literary exchanges with other writers. Two prominent seventeenth century examples were poets Wang Duanshu (王端淑 1621-1706) and Huang Yuanjie (黃媛介 seventeenth century). Wang was born into a high official family, and was well-known for her expertise in poetry and calligraphy. Her poetry contains abundant evidence of her poetic exchanges with other women and scholars, showing her active participation in the literary scene of her time. Also known as a teacher in the inner chambers" (閨塾師), Wang became a professional itinerant teacher who provided literary instruction to women in the inner quarters. Another poet, Huang Yuanjie, travelled extensively, working as a teacher of women, and had opportunities to make the acquaintance of famous literati poets, who dedicated poems to her.[32] Another important aspect of the *guixiu* culture was the development of women's literary groups, such as the seventeenth-century Banana Garden Poetry Club (蕉園詩社), the eighteenth-

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[31] A popular sub-genre in traditional Chinese literati-verse is the "lament poetry" of the inner chambers (閨怨詩), which comprise expressions of distress by neglected, offended, or simply unhappy women (Kang-I Sun Chang 1999, 14).

[32] These male poets included elite intellectuals such as Qian Qianyi (錢謙益 1582-1664), Xiong Wenju (熊文舉 1595-1668) and Mao Qiling (毛奇齡 1623-1716).

century women pupils of the Suiyuan Garden (隨園女弟子), and the Ten Women Poets of Wu (吳中十子).

In contrast to previous dynasties in which women's literary works had not been properly preserved, the late Ming dynasty (seventeenth century) witnessed the recovery and publication of works by talented women.[33] The surging development of print culture and the publishing industry in the Jiangnan region contributed much to the growth of women authors' readership.[34] Women's energetic participation in literary activities during this period indicates that some women authors had gained access to the world of the male literati writers and exerted considerable influence on mainstream literary culture. This, in turn, suggests that the inner chambers were not completely isolated from the social sphere and were open to the external world. Dorothy Ko suggests that the inner/outer dichotomy is "a relational category that describes a series of nested hierarchies whose boundary changes with context" (Ko 273). The literary lives of late imperial women demonstrate a degree of social mobility of women across established gender boundaries. For some women, this mobility relatively transformed the inner chambers into a space of gradual self-empowerment to which men did not have full

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[33] In her essay "Ming and Qing Anthologies of Women's Poetry and Their Strategies," Kang-I Sun Chang discusses the sudden proliferation of women's anthologies and collections during the Ming and Qing eras, and offers a list of anthologies of women's writings. (In Widmer and Chang 147-221) Besides this, many important works on talented women appeared in historical writings and vernacular fiction by both men and women authors during the Ming and Qing, such as the *Book of Talented Women Scholars* (女才子書 1658) by seventeenth century writer Xu Zhen (徐震), and a popularized history titled *A History of Women of Past and Present* (古今女史), compiled by Liang Xiaoyu (梁小玉). (Hu Wenkai 127)

[34] For a detailed introduction to the printing culture, see Brokaw and Chow, *Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China*. 2005.

access. It was under this progressive social condition that Ming and Qing women *tanci* authors depicted imaginary characters, especially crossdressed women, who freed themselves from the family compound and entered the social and political realms that had formerly been men's privileged spaces.

The History of *Tanci* in Late Imperial China and the Early Twentieth Century

What is *tanci*?

Tanci is a Chinese narrative form that includes scenarios from ancient oral traditions, classical poetry, and traditional novels. The genre has its origins in the oral performance tradition, and its name—*tanci*, or "plucking rhymes"---refers to a form of singing accompanied by instrumental music. The tradition of *tanci* performances can be traced to medieval China, where it manifested itself in various forms of storytelling. In the seventeenth century, there emerged a group of women writers in Southern China who wrote voluminous *tanci* fiction works. These *tanci* works by gentry women writers distinguished themselves from performance-related *tanci* scripts by their literary quality, and were composed mostly for the entertainment of literate, governing-class women in the inner chambers. The following section discusses the two distinct kinds of *tanci*: *tanci* as a form of professional storytelling performance, and written *tanci* from the seventeenth century onwards, one of the important legacies of late imperial women writers.

Tanci as storytelling performance

Even though scholars in China and abroad have not reached agreement about the historical origin of *tanci*, there is evidence in China's history of long oral tradition of professional *tanci* performance. One of the theories considers the origin of *tanci* as predominantly a phenomenon of women's storytelling performance. (Bender, 153) Historical records from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries document professional *tanci* performances conducted by blind women singers who performed this kind of storytelling as a vocation in public teahouses, professional studios, and "book residences" (書寓). Early *tanci* performance was also called "blind women's *tanci*" (盲女彈詞). Although both men and women performed *tanci* in public, women *tanci* performers suffered severe criticism for defying the Confucian restrictions on women in public activities. In 1860, male *tanci* performer Ma Rufei (馬如飛 1851-1908) denounced women's *tanci* performance as "amoral and appalling" (Zhou Liang 75), comparing male mentors of women performers to the aforementioned Ming scholar Yuan Mei, who was accused of corrupting the morals of women in the inner chambers by teaching them to write lyric poetry. Despite controversies of this kind, professional women's *tanci* performances continued to develop in southern cities.

Another hypothesis holds that the origin of *tanci* can be traced back to the medieval chantefables (唱本), which evolved into *tanci* during the Yuan and Ming periods (Tan, 35). This theory is supported by contemporary scholar Chen Wulou (陳午樓), who has studied the origin of *tanci* in Yangzhou storytelling, focusing on the

"narrative communicatory situation" in the oral tradition.[35] In the current study, I consider readership, a common focus in these theories, as a criterion that distinguishes performed *tanci* from written *tanci*. Unlike written *tanci* works, performed *tanci* must be more explicit and immediately understandable for the audience. Modern *tanci* writer Lu Dan'an (陸澹安 1894-1980) notes,

> The scripts for *tanci* performers are entirely different from the *tanci* fiction works from professional book publishers. For the latter, the parts for singing might apply elegant diction. The scripts for *tanci* performers, however, must first be simple, so that when the texts are performed, they can be understood immediately. If the diction is too embellished, both the performer and the audiences will be baffled. The appeal of the text will be greatly reduced.[36]

Professional *tanci* performances remain popular in modern South China. Today, at the Suzhou Pingtan School of Performance, special trainings are offered to cultivate the skills of professional *tanci* singers. In the southern cities of Shanghai, Suzhou, Yangzhou, and Hangzhou, *tanci* performances are regularly staged at tea houses and theatres. Men and women *tanci* singers' performances are also recorded, radio-broadcast, and staged in TV series. With the development of the media industries, the popularity of *tanci* as part of China's cultural heritage has expanded among ordinary audiences.

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35 Mark Bender likewise offers an analysis of the complex dialectics between narrative and dramatic registers. Bender stresses the "here-and-now" effect of the grammatical tense of verbs in *tanci* narratives, suggesting that the narrative passages and the dialogue are in a continuing "present" or neutral time.(In Børdahl, 181-197)

36 唱書先生的腳本，與書坊裏所印的彈詞小說完全不同。書坊裏印行的彈詞小說，其中唱篇，不妨文藻典雅一點。但是唱書先生的腳本，卻第一要通俗，唱出來教人家完全聽的懂。倘然作的太典雅了，唱的人和聽的人，大家都莫名其妙，書中的趣味便要減去不少。Lu Dan'an, *River Washed in Red* (滿江紅 1935). A copy is held in Fudan University Rare Books Collection.

<u>*Tanci* fiction by women</u>

Written *tanci* fiction (彈詞小說) constitutes an important but infrequently studied literary innovation of late imperial women writers. These written *tanci* appeared as voluminous books written mostly by upper-class women authors from the seventeenth century to the early twentieth century. They were written in a language very close to the traditional vernacular novel, or "fiction in chapters" (*zhanghui xiaoshuo* 章回小說). The structure of these works consists of volumes (*zhang* 章) or scrolls (*juan* 卷), and their subordinate chapters (*hui* 回). The title of each chapter is a rhymed poetic couplet that summarizes the chapter's plot or events. The published versions of these texts also include extensive prefaces by the author or the author's friends, and, at times, poems dedicated to the author or to the fictional characters in the work. The texts were largely composed in rhymed, seven-character lines. This poetic structure, however, is recurrently interspersed with dramatic dialogue, passages of straight narration, poems, and even verse riddles. Illustrated editions of *tanci* works in the first half of the nineteenth century include woodblock illustrations representing the characters and scenes in the works. [37] Shorter *tanci* stories appeared in the early twentieth century in newspaper columns as serials or in journals. However, in the twentieth century only a few of the longer *tanci*

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[37] The first half of the nineteenth century includes the Jiaqing (嘉慶) and Daoguang (道光) reign periods of the Qing dynasty. Sheng Zhimei suggests that due to the steady economic development and common people's increasing interest in reading fiction and drama works, there was a rising demand for *tanci* works in the book market of the time. The audience for *tanci* at this time, however, were mostly ordinary people rather than intellectuals. (Sheng, 74)

works by pre-twentieth century women have been re-edited and printed by publishers in mainland China and Taiwan.[38]

The content of *tanci* portrays women's fantasies of dressing up in male disguise and enacting a "masculine" identity on the battlefield, in the examination halls, or at court. For the most part, the authors of *tanci* were upper-class women who were heirs to an extensive family education in poetry, history, and classic literature, and had a targeted group of women readers in the inner chambers, where *tanci* narratives were composed, read, and circulated. As Chen Duansheng, the author of *Destiny of Rebirth* notes, "Reluctant to give my writings to the uncultured to read, I just offer this preserved work as a gift for my friends in the inner chambers." [39] She noted that her work had been circulated in the Southern province of Zhejiang Province and was "frequently appreciated by readers in the boudoir."[40] Some *tanci* authors expressed a wish to expand their readership to lower-class women. The rhythmic nature of these texts made them fine candidates for performance with instrumental accompaniment, which allowed them to be appreciated by less-educated women. The linguistically accessible and mobile nature of the genre made *tanci* an ideal choice for women writers, in comparison with other relatively male-dominated genres, such as poetry, drama, and fiction. The comparison of

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[38] For instance, *Dream, Image, Destiny* was published by Wenhai chubanshe in Taiwan, in 1971. In the 1980s, Heilongjiang chubenshe in mainland China published several major *tanci* works including *Destiny of Rebirth* (再生緣 1782), *Heavenly Rain of Flowers* (天雨花 1651), and *Pomegranate Dreams* (榴花夢 1841).

[39] 不願付刊經俗眼，惟將存稿見閨儀. Chen Duansheng 3: 9, 250.

[40] 閨閣知音頻賞玩 17: 65, 1085.

the literary status of *tanci* with canonic literary genres is reflected in many writers' authorial statements. For instance, Tao Zhenhuai (陶貞懷 seventeenth century) notes,

> And why did I develop my story using the plucking rhymes? Because I wanted to incite people to moral effort. Now, those who cannot be regulated by means of the rites, may yet be moved by music; for those who cannot be moved by music, one writes plays; and those who may not even be reached by plays, may yet be awakened by plucking rhymes.[41]

Despite the vigorous depictions of feminine desire in these texts, a large number of the authors claimed that they wrote *tanci* to entertain women friends and family members, or to promote the moral integrity of their readers. At the same time, many writers emphasized their aptitude in womanly duties over their literary competence. Even the adventurous eighteenth century *tanci* writer Chen Duansheng stated in *Destiny of Rebirth* that her book was about loyalty and filial relations. The disjunction between the moralistic tone of such authorial statements and the liberating and progressive potential of the texts reveals women authors' anxiety about censorship in publication, as well as their prudence in defining their literary competence as within the social regulations of women's literary activity.

Contemporary scholar Ellen Widmer has conducted a comparative analysis of *tanci* and vernacular fiction.[42] Widmer suggests, quoting from Nancy Armstrong, that *tanci* displays a kind of "feminine authority," for *tanci* "arises in the wake of conduct books for women, addresses readers from a feminine point of view and grapples with

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41 蓋禮之不足防而感以樂，樂之不足感而演爲院本，廣遠本所不及而彈詞興。夫獨弦之歌，易于八音；客座之聽，易于廣筵；亭榭之流 連，不如閨闱之勸谕. (Tao, 1) Translated in Idema 2004, 724.

42 *Xiaoshuo* (小說): In the Chinese literary context, *xiaoshuo* functioned as the "other" of official historical narrative, and was treated as part of the oral popular culture until the Ming Dynasty.

questions of how women should behave" (Widmer 1997, 286). Locating the study of *tanci* in the cultural context of late imperial women's writing, Widmer invites an assessment of women's authorship and the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion of their writings. *Tanci* works contain copious laments by narrators on the plight of talented women, speaking on behalf of the writers.[43] This textual feature invites questions about how *tanci* texts reproduce, resist, or remodel representations of gender in prevailing intellectual, political, and cultural discourses of the time.[44]

In contrast with Widmer's study of *tanci* as fiction narratives, Hu Siao-chen considers *tanci* as a "feminine" form of poetic expression (Hu Siao-chen 1994, 2). Hu claims that literary *tanci* should be viewed in light of *écriture féminine*, a form of resistance to patriarchal values. A doctoral dissertation by Toyoko Yoshida Chen in 2004 examines the theme of self and morality in women's *tanci*. Chen suggests that although these authors challenge the Confucian orthodox ideal of womanhood, they could not fully expose the inherent contradictions of the dominant social moral system due to their socialization in the prescribed gender roles.

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43 Widmer's understanding of *tanci* as part of the vernacular fiction tradition resonates with the criticisms of *Destiny of Rebirth* by Chen Yinke (陳寅恪 1890-1969). Chen suggests that since *Destiny of Rebirth*, composed mainly of verse interspersed with prose passages, was meant to be read as a literary work, it should be viewed not as poetry or a performed script but as a novel with a sophisticated and systematic structure (Chen Yinke, 78)

44 The theme of women writers' self-definition within the male-dominated literary tradition is also discussed in *A Study of Women Authors'* Tanci *Fiction in Qing Dynasty* (清代女作家彈詞小說論稿 2002), by mainland Chinese critic Bao Zhenpei. Bao's work offers a contextualized reading of women's *tanci* works in the Qing dynasty, assessing *tanci* authors' literary achievement in relation to the rise of the "talented women" culture in the Ming and Qing period (fourteenth to nineteenth century; Bao 73).

These critical studies trace the development of women's consciousness in those *tanci* texts by prominent women writers of the late imperial period. My dissertation shall focus primarily on the liberating and progressive potential in *tanci* and examine how writing and reading *tanci* could have been an empowering experience for women. The following section addresses several key themes, including a.) crossdressing as transgressive performance; b.) *tanci* writing as transgressive practice; c.) readerly reception of *tanci*; d.) subversive gazes and the portrait motif in *tanci*; and e.) protofeminist *tanci* works at the turn of the twentieth century. In my discussion of these topics, I demonstrate the disruptive tensions in these narratives and examine their heroic characters as empowered and empowering figures.

What Characteristics of *Tanci* are Empowering?

Crossdressing as Transgressive Performance

Cross-dressing is one of the most important traits of many *tanci* works, as it displays gender role reversals and subversions of the Confucian gender power regime. Many *tanci* texts depict heroines dressed in masculine attire in order to renounce marriage and explore a newly acquired social identity outside domestic walls. Many works of late imperial fiction, such as Qing short story collection *The Unofficial History of the Scholars* (儒林外史) by Wu Jingzi (吳敬梓 1701-1754), depict a male protagonist embarking on a journey towards happiness and fulfillment. *Tanci* works, however, present women characters who leave their cloistered lives and travel while crossdressed

as men.[45] These women are the very opposite of the Confucian feminine ideal (the filial, chaste, and obedient woman who follows the prescribed codes required of a daughter, wife, and widow). Women's crossdressing is a remarkably progressive practice and undermines the ideal of women's submissiveness as described in classics and ritual texts, and Confucian social philosophy of stable gender roles and relationships producing social harmony.

In many *tanci* works, young women flee home to escape imposed marriages, and may refuse to revert to their feminine identity. Some, using men's names, attend the Civil Service Examination and are recognized and honored for their intellectual accomplishments. Sometimes, crossdressers enter an arranged marriage with a loyal and thoughtful woman partner who is willing to keep her secret while the two pretend to be a "real" heterosexual couple. Some *tanci* also challenge and ridicule the Confucian cult of chastity by presenting examples of faithful "male widows," who are awaiting the return of their fiancés for marriage, even after the crossdressed women have refused to admit their real identities. In such cases, the texts reverse the principles of women's three-fold obedience to their fathers, husbands, and sons, making the men follow the decisions of women.

In the Song dynasty poetry collection *Anthology of "Music Bureau" Poetry* (樂府詩集), the well-known *Ballad of Mulan* (木蘭辭) tells of a young woman who disguises

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[45] Some late imperial fiction, however, depicts central women characters who are resourceful and outwit men. Two examples are the collection of short stories *Silent Opera* (無聲戲) and *The Carnal Prayer Mat* (肉蒲團) by Li Yü (李漁 1611-1680). Both novels have been translated into English by Patrick Hanan. Many short stories in Ming and Qing periods likewise also have extensive description of women characters. However, it should be noted that a lot of these works were written for a male audience and were influenced by authorial choices.

herself as a man to stand in for her father on the battlefield, and who later becomes a national hero. (Guo Maoqian edited, 373-375) The emphasis of the original story is not placed on Mulan's intelligence or military skill, but on her filial piety to her father, her loyalty to the country, and her preservation of her chastity among the crude soldiers. When she returns from the battlefield, Mulan declines the Khan's reward of an official position and returns to her hometown. In her chamber, she takes off her armor and puts on an old dress, indicating a wish to live the life of a common woman. The legend of Mulan demonstrates a certain social mobility for women crossdressers. A woman who crossdresses and lives the life of a man does not necessarily lose her virtue and chastity, so long as she fulfills the obligations of a filial daughter and a chaste woman, and ultimately reverts to her feminine identity.

Another example of crossdressing is in the Tang *chuanqi* story Xie Xiao'e (謝小娥).[46] When the protagonist Xiao'e was traveling with her family after she was married, her husband and father were murdered by bandits. To avenge her husband and father, she crossdresses as a man, searches for the traces of the bandits and finally kills the bandits. The crossdresser is represented as an ideal of intelligence and chastity, for by crossdressing as a man, she is able to march into the midst of the outlaws, and to live with the servants and workers, who do not notice that she is a woman at all. The crossdresser remains loyal to her husband by protecting her chastity, and accomplishes the filial act of avenging her parent.

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46 "Story of Xie Xiao'e" by Li Gongzuo (李公佐 770CE- 848CE). (Ouyang and Song, 36)

In these stories, women's crossdressing is a means of accomplishing heroic deeds without violating the Confucian regulations on chastity and virtue. In *tanci*, women crossdress to flee from marriage and explore the world by performing a "masculine" role. Marriage is endowed with great significance in the development of the plot, for as soon as the crossdresser's secret is revealed, she is given the choice of either marrying her betrothed fiancé or another man in an arranged marriage. To renounce marriage, some crossdressed characters refuse to reveal their true sexuality. Authors also strategically delay the marriage event by arranging "mock marriages" between the women crossdressers and their sympathetic "sisters." In both *Destiny of Rebirth* and *A Histoire of Heroic Women and Men*, the mock marriages are so successful that even the crossdressers' parents-in-law and handmaids are not aware of the true situations.

The act of crossdressing carries disruptive initiatives by reversing gendered codes for men and women. A historical example of a woman crossdressing is Huang Zongjia (黃崇嘏), who crossdressed from childhood and impressed the Minister with her talent in writing poetry. When the Minister proposed to marry Huang with his own daughter, Huang wrote a poem to decline the marriage and confessed her true sex, "If my lord wishes to have me as a son-in-law, I wish heaven could change me into a man instantly."[47] An example of women's crossdressing is the story *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai*, or *Butterfly Lovers*. The heroine Zhu crossdresses as a man to travel outside the inner quarters, and studies with Liang at school. Liang and Zhu fall in love with each

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[47]幕府若容為坦腹，願天速變作男兒. *Declining the Proposal of the Minister of the Shu Kingdom that I Marry His Daughter* (辭蜀相妻女詩). (Peng Volume 799, 8995) Huang's life story has been adapted into an opera *The Female Top Candidate* by Xu Wei, during the Ming Dynasty.

other. However, familial oppositions forced them to separate from each other. Later, when Liang died from an illness, Zhu commits suicide in front of Liang's tomb. Their spirits transform into a pair of butterflies and are never separated. The tragic myth has been passed down through generations via literary texts and traditional opera performances. The opera performances of this story, often conducted by all-women troupes in the southern areas of China, usually cast a woman crossdresser as the male protagonist Liang Shanbo. Underlying the theme of "true love," the textual and theatrical performances of the legend invite innovative readings of gender and sexuality on more than one level of representation.

For crossdressed women, marriage, whether in real life or in a fictional world, challenges them to resume their socially prescribed gender roles as chaste wives, filial daughters, and ultimately as caring mothers. In the *tanci* work *Affinity of the Golden Fish* (金魚緣 1865) by Sun Deying (孫德英), the heroine Qian Shurong (錢淑榮) confesses to her parents her unwillingness to live the life of a woman.

> In this world, no one suffers so much as a woman. She is not allowed to make her own choices, and has to follow others in every matter…. Having understood my affinity with the ethereal life, I have not a shred of sentiment lingering in my heart. Unable to achieve fame in this world, I shall hide my tracks and conceal my path, and withdraw from mundane life.[48]

Likewise, in *Destiny of Rebirth*, the crossdressed Lijun when recognized by her parents, rationalizes her unwillingness to go back to a woman's life. She defends her

[48]世間最苦無如女，諸事依人難自專。……悟徹塵緣皆若此，兒因此，了無情愛系心牽。不能夠，揚名顯性於天下，到只願，匿跡潛蹤避世間. (Sheng, 227-228) Original text *Affinity of the Golden Fish: A Full Text with Illustrations* (繪圖金魚緣全傳) was published in 1902 by Shanghai shujü. According to Sheng Zhimei, copies are held in Shanghai Municipal Library, Tianjin Municipal Library, and Zhengzhou University Library.

choice in the name of filial piety, attempting to persuade her parents into keeping her sexual identity a secret.

> Even though you would like me to return to your side, I could only end up marrying into another household and serve the parents-in-law. What is the benefit of this for my own parents? Why don't you just let me go on and live the life of a man?...Even though I was born a woman, now I enter the royal palace and serve the emperor. ….What is the need for me to be married? Even the place of the Empress herself could not fit into my expectations![49]

These defiant statements in *Destiny of Rebirth* invited criticism from *tanci* authors of the time and in ensuing generations.[50] Perhaps because she was incapable of balancing the character's personal aspirations with the readers' desire to see Lijun's reunion with her fiancé, Chen Duansheng left the work unfinished; it ends after Lijun's sexual identity is accidentally disclosed. A later *tanci* writer Liang Desheng added three volumes to the work. In the added ending, Lijun returns to the life of a wife in a polygamous family. As in the earlier *tanci Jade Bracelets* (玉釧緣) by an anonymous author, the crossdresser marries her betrothed fiancé, together with a sworn sister who had been her "wife" in the mock marriage. Modern adaptations of *Destiny of Rebirth* in local operas and film and television dramas have presented multiple interpretations of

[49]就使要兒歸膝下，也無非，嫁得出去孝公姑。論來沒益雙親處，倒不如，且令孩兒做丈夫。……麗君雖則是裙釵，現在而今立赤階。……何須必要歸夫婿，就是這，正室王妃豈我懷? 11:44, 780.

[50] Hou Zhi criticized Lijun for her political ambition and rebellious deed of refusing to recognize her parents in public. Hu Siao-chen offers a reading of Hou Zhi's *Remaking Heaven* (再造天), which rewrote *Destiny of Rebirth* and portrayed Lijun as a converted filial daughter and wife. (Hu Siao-chen 2008, 29)

Lijun's fate.[51] The interpretation and reception of women's crossdressing have been conditioned by discursive practices in various historical and cultural contexts.

Hong Kong critic Siu Leung Li suggests in *Crossdressing in Chinese Opera*, suggests that in today's revival of traditional plays about woman warriors, "the representation of the woman shows several tension points where a complex negotiation between the empowered and empowering woman and an oppressive but posed-and-masked-as-natural masculine narrative is subtly played out" (Sui Leung Li, 87). In the universe of male writing, he suggests, the crossdresser's "subversiveness is continuously suppressed and rendered as a stereotype" (Sui Leung Li, 87). Li's criticism reveals the paramount relation between the emancipating potential of crossdressing and the representation of it in a particular discursive practice. In the male writing tradition, Mulan is not so much a woman as a substitute for a man, a filial son and loyal servant of the Emperor. In *Destiny of Rebirth*, however, Lijun crossdresses to flee from a marriage imposed by her family and thus denies her obligations to her family and fiancé. It is for her own sake that Lijun changes her dress and travels the world as a man. The text is principally a woman-oriented story, driven by the crossdresser's desire to pursue a life in which she is equal to a man by "becoming" a man socially. *Tanci*, by establishing a tradition of women's writing outside the world of male writers, allowed the vital manifestation of a transformative and progressive potentiality in women's crossdressing.

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51 *Destiny of Rebirth* has been adapted into various regional operas. An early film adaptation of this work was released in 1949, entitled, *The Ancient Beauty, Meng Lijun*, directed by Hong Kong film director Chen Pi (陳皮). A recent television soap opera series, *Meng Lijun*, was released in mainland China in 2007.

Crossdressing in *tanci* also opens up progressive readings of women's same-sex desire, an infrequently considered topic in pre-twentieth century literature. In two of the texts in this dissertation, *Destiny of Rebirth* and *A Histoire of Heroic Women and Men*, there are numerous scenes in which exchanges of homoerotic gazes between women and the crossdressers occur. Literary representation of women's homoeroticism in late imperial literature has attracted critics' attentions since the 1990s. In comparison with male homoeroticism, women's homoeroticism is a topic seldom explored, although there were some male authors who represented women's homoerotic tensions.[52] In women's *tanci* fiction, representations of women's same sex desire either celebrates a spiritual harmony among the crossdressed heroines and the feminine members in the mock-marriages (some crossdressers married more than once), or creates a melodramatic irony by showing unsuspecting women's infatuation with the beautifully disguised crossdressers. The progressive nature of these narratives resonates with the works by the self-avowedly modern Chinese homosexual writers Hong Ling (洪淩 1971--) and Chen Xue (陳雪 1970--). When homoerotic affinities between women were filtered through the convention of crossdressing in *tanci*, the texts bring forth an imaginary realm, in which the diverse representations of womanhood are presented with various degrees of comical intensity. Women's homoeroticism, poignant or comical, constantly distorts gender boundaries and reveals crossdressers who are empowering characters counteracting with patriarchal conceptions of sexuality.

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[52] Some examples of the male-authored fictional portrayals of women's same-sex-love could be found in the famous Ming novel *The Golden Lotus* (金瓶梅 16th century), authored by Lanling Xiaoxiaosheng (蘭陵笑笑生), and the play *Cherishing the Fragrant Companion* (憐香伴) by Li Yü (李漁 1611-1679). Also see Wu Cuncun. *Homoerotic Sensibilities in Late Imperial China*. 2004.

Writing *Tanci*: A Transgressive Act

In the late imperial period, *tanci* authors wielded their brushes to enact new forms of identities by positioning the personal within the diegesis and reconfiguring moral commitments and desire through memorable storylines. The author becomes a speaking subject and conceptualizes a self by exploring multiple possibilities of subjectivity through tales of the others. By fashioning a "feminine" representation of subjectivity, *tanci* writers found a habitable space of self-expression in the male-dominated literary tradition. In their prefaces and authorial insertions, *tanci* authors embedded copious personal references. These passages demonstrate the authors' subjective decision to alter or even challenge social conventions through writing. Cheng Huiying (程惠英), author of *Flying Phoenix* (鳳雙飛 nineteenth century), remarked,

> To whom can I tell my heart's secrets of half a life?
> Let me use this frosty brush to reveal them to you.
> There is no need for tears and laughter to always fit the beat,
> Dare but speak your wrath and curses and you will have a text!
> Deeds that will frighten even Heaven---dreams of autumn months,
> Sadness and joy that move the Earth---it's only clouds.
> I want this book to be opened only by a true friend,
> I would rather it be unknown by the common crowd.[53]

Chen's desire to make her words heard and her grievance over the difficulty in doing this can be understood from a contextualized perspective. *Tanci*, because of its origin in oral traditions, especially professional storytelling, was usually held as "a low class popular amusement." (Idema 1974, 69) The genre of *tanci* was regarded as

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53 半生心跡向誰論？願借霜毫說與君。未必笑啼皆中節，敢言怒罵亦成文。
驚天事業三秋夢，動地悲歡一片雲。開卷但供知己玩，任教俗輩耳無聞。
--- Cheng Huiying, "Self Inscription on the Back of *Phoenixes Flying Together*, Dedicated to Yang Xiangwan" (自題鳳雙飛後寄楊香畹, Xu Ke Volume 70, 160.)

belonging to the general category of fictional narratives, such as the vernacular story (話本) and the novel (長篇小說) in pre-twentieth century dynastic literature. In contrast with the official histories and elite poetic works, *tanci* has been categorized as "unofficial histories" (野史), "insignificant words" (微詞), or "minor art" (小道). These texts were excluded from orthodox educational materials, and were considered inappropriate for women to read and write. Because of its disruptive exploration of women's desire, *tanci* was criticized as immoral writing which could corrupt custom in the inner chambers.[54] In 1868, the local government of Jiangsu province launched two consecutive prohibitions against licentious song-lyrics and novels (淫詞小說). Nearly 200 *tanci* were destroyed; even book printing blocks at the publishing houses for these works were confiscated by the government. (Sheng 99) *Tanci* authors were persistently confronted with censorship and moral accusations, in addition to male editors' manipulation of their work. For women, writing in this textual form is an impertinent and audacious choice, showing their desire to represent a space in which traditional definitions of women's sexuality could be displaced and a popular awareness of unconventional sexual identities of women could be imaged.

Readerly receptions of *tanci*

Although little historical evidence of women's readerly reception of *tanci* is available today, contemporary readers and scholars can still find proof of the popularity

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[54] According to Hu Siao-chen, Hou Zhi criticized Lijun for her deeds which "completely obliterated the fundamental human relationships" (滅盡倫常). See Hou Zhi's criticism of *Destiny of Rebirth* in the preface to *Heroines of the Golden Chamber* (金閨傑). (Hu Siao-chen 2008, 121)

of *tanci* in the prefaces to published *tanci* works. A poem dedicated to the *tanci* work *A Tale of Illusions* (子虛記 1883) described the circulation of this work in women's quarters: "In the inner chambers, women vie with each other in passing on these beautiful lines; sadness or joy, departure or reunion, these are all because of sincere feelings. Even aged women can understand these words. This is even better than reading poems by the famous ancient poet Bai Juyi." [55] Wilt Idema also suggests that women in the inner chambers have always been enthusiastic audiences of *tanci* narratives, whether performed by blind performers who knew their texts by heart or read aloud from printed texts by a literate member of the household. (Idema 1974, 77) *Tanci* writer Qiu Xinru noted, "When the newly edited version of *Destiny of Rebirth* was published, its devoted readers vied with each other in passing it around."[56] Some women even circulated *tanci* by transcribing these lengthy works by hand. Li Guiyu (李桂玉) made three handcopies of her *tanci Pomegranate Flower Dreams* (榴花夢 1841) as wedding gifts for three women students of hers.

Women's *tanci* fiction reached its apex in development in the first half of the 19th century. With the flourishing of the book printing industry, many *tanci* texts were extensively edited and reprinted, generating a wide impact on their audience.[57] It was also during this time that Hou Zhi, the famous writer and editor, completed her editing of

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55閨閣爭傳絕妙辭，悲歡離合總情癡。間他老嫗都能解，勝讀當年白傳詩. Hu Oushang (胡藕裳). *Zixu ji* (子虛記 1883). A copy of this work is held in the Fusinian Library, Academia Sinica, Taipei.

56 新刻再生緣一部，當時好者競爭傳. Qiu Xinru (邱心如) preface to *Blossoms from the Brush* (筆生花 1857).

57 According to Sheng Zhimei, the famous *tanci Jade Bracelets* had as many as eight reprints in the market in 1842, its first year of publication. (Sheng Zhimei 74)

major *tanci* works such as *Jade Bracelets* (玉釧緣), *Brocade Flowers* (錦上花), and *Heroines in the Golden Chambers* (金閨傑). These printed *tanci* texts have undeniably expanded their popularity among women readers. A scholar of the time recounted an anecdote about women's infatuation with idealized characters in *tanci*,

> Once, a man was selected as the Top Candidate in the Civil Service Examination. He was more than forty years old, with a pockmarked face and a waist of ten armfuls in width. He planned to buy a concubine in the capital city. A young girl from a humble household had just taken to the reading of *tanci* fiction, and thought the Top Candidates were all beautiful young men as in these works. She happily agreed to marry the Scholar. On the wedding night, she saw his real age and looks, and was extremely disappointed. The Scholar was addicted to drinking and was persuaded by his friends to drink on the wedding. When he was intoxicated, he vomited excessively and made the pillows and the quilts filthy. The bride, in despair, hanged herself that very night. Someone wrote a satirical poem, "A great irony that a pillar of the country is not a good husband; the Top Candidate is not a good fit for her." (Zhou Liang, 243) Translation mine.

The narrator's ironic comment, explicitly, shows disapproval for the corrupting influence of *tanci* in the inner chambers. However, the story reveals that the extensive readership of *tanci* had included women of middle and lower social classes. Besides, the readership of *tanci* is correlated with the broad audience of public *tanci* performances. Chanted *tanci* texts, in comparison with written *tanci* fiction by women, were simpler in style and more explicit in language, with an aim to entertain the audience and to make the story understandable for people of less education and lower social class. In the early twentieth century, professional teahouses for *tanci* performances were prevalent in the southern cities of Shanghai, Suzhou, Yangzhou and Hangzhou. (Zhou Liang 232) Thanks to the opener social customs of the time, women had more freedom to attend public activities than previous centuries. Going to the teahouses for *tanci* performances became one of women's favorite entertainments. A scholar noted,

> In today's society, regardless of people's backgrounds, they are all fascinated with *tanci* fiction. For *tanci* performance houses, there are as many as several hundred in Shanghai. *Tanci* is mostly favored by women. They often sit in clusters, laughing and chatting, their feet rest side by side. When a singer at the corner of the room begins to sing the opening sessions, they all listen solemnly, with no one making noise. When the performance ends, they chatter and make gestures with hands, take pleasure in discussing the stories, and even dream of the tales at night. The power of *tanci* is thrilling to such an extent.[58]

When the performance-related *tanci* introductory songs (開篇) were adapted for radio broadcasting programs in the 1920s, the readership/audience of *tanci* was once again reconfigured. With the rise of China's radio broadcasting industry, numerous radio stations emerged in the southern cities of Shanghai, Hangzhou and Suzhou. Some of these stations were exclusively women's *tanci* radio stations. From the 1920s to the1930s, broadcasted *tanci* constituted an indispensable part of radio programming.[59] At the crux of the question of readership/audience is how the process of reading *tanci* may empower women's presences in the social and cultural landscapes of their times. As *tanci* transforms through new media and sends out new messages, these narratives perhaps could commence an enabling process for women to embrace innovative social subjectivities.

Subversive Visuality: Portraits in *Tanci*.

In addition to depictions of crossdressed heroines, late imperial *tanci* works contain ample depictions of portraits and self-portraits, which show the characters

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[58]方今社會，無論何等人，均竟尚彈詞小說，以滬上論，不下數百處，而彈詞尤為婦女所信用。往往履舄交錯，笑語相聞，而隅坐者唱開場，則肅然無一嘩者。即畢，口講指劃，津津樂道之，甚或形諸夢寐。其感人之深如此. (In A Ying 1960, 173)

[59] The history of the radio broadcasting industry has been recorded in detail in the local chronicle of Shanghai city. URL:< http://www.shtong.gov.cn>, viewed on June 17, 2010.

making, observing and interacting with the portraits. These texts assimilate stories of portraitures that had appeared in other literary genres and endow them with innovative meanings. The portrait provides a narrative pretext: stories come into being when the woman interacts with her painted image and describes what she sees. The text transforms the readers into both spectators and interpreters of cultural images or scenarios which are endowed with specific contextual meanings. In late imperial *tanci*, one can also identify the challenges to and reversals of the conventional scenarios of paintings, which in Chinese are called "inscribing the real" (寫真).[60] In *Destiny of Rebirth*, Lijun leaves her parents her self-portrait as a surrogate for her person and flees home; disguised as a man, she explores new possibilities of life. In another related *tanci* work *Dream, Image, Destiny*, the author depicts a woman who searches to fulfill her own desire, by making portraits of others and rejecting imposed social and cultural representations of women in traditional beauty paintings.

The theme of visuality in *tanci* invites study of the illustrations in published *tanci* works, and the popular print culture which flourished since the seventeenth century. Classic *tanci* works such as *Destiny of Rebirth*, *Dream, Image, Destiny*, *Blossoms Under the Brush* were all published with woodblock illustrations depicting important scenes from the texts. These illustrations at the beginning of each chapter provided evidence for the interconnectedness of *tanci* narratives and the Ming-Qing publishing enterprise and the complex mechanism of readerly reception, as affected by the correlations between

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[60] The term "inscribing the real" refers to traditional portraiture in Chinese painting. Many pre-twentieth century literary texts portray the characters making, observing and appreciating the portraits. The portraits in literary works invite discussions of the interplay between textuality and visuality. In this dissertation I will address the motif of the portraits in *Destiny of Rebirth* and *Dream, Image, Destiny*.

literary texts, art, and print culture.[61] A critical reading of illustrated *tanci* works provokes consideration of women's relationship with book illustrations in the late imperial period, and raises the question of how such relationships might have affected and transformed the interpretations of published *tanci* works.

Protofeminist *tanci* in the early twentieth century

At the turn of the century, the popularity of *tanci* among women readers provoked some writers to reform traditional *tanci* for women's enlightenment and education. A critic noted, "To compile an adapted *tanci* work is no less than editing a textbook for the promotion of women's studies." [62] A pivotal work is *Twentieth Century* Tanci*: Light of Civilization in the Women's World* (二十世紀女界文明燈彈詞 1911) by Zhong Xinqing (鐘心青). The book contains a series of short stories about Chinese women's awakening in the modern period. The first chapter depicts a reincarnated Goddess, Ms. Picha (批茶) from the United States, who had dedicated her life previously to the liberation of black slaves in the Civil War. She now descends to the other side of the globe to free Chinese women from oppression and slavery. The author's imagination of a universal ideal of womanhood is also echoed in another work, *Tale of a French Woman Hero* (法國女英雄

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[61] Robert Hegel notes that as part of a trend toward general standardization of book appearance by late in the sixteenth century, bindings, page formats, and the illustrations in published books displayed much similarity, by adopting recurring motifs, patterns and standardized elements. Hegel's discussion of the homogeneous visual motifs draw attention to the status of the illustrations as paratexts, which were dependent upon the publishers' choice of the book format and constitute an important part of the materialization of *tanci* texts for public use. (Hegel 6)

[62]改良彈詞，不啻編一女學教科書. (A Ying 1960, 173)

彈詞 1904), which applauds the French revolutionary Marie-Jeanne Roland de la Platiere as an exemplary model for Chinese women. [63]

The development of *tanci* has an intimate relation with women's press in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Many of the aforementioned progressive *tanci* works were first published in newspapers and journals. [64] A prominent example is *Heartlocked Cape Jasmine* (同心栀 1919) by Cheng Zhanlu (程瞻廬), which contains a collection of *tanci* tales excerpted from the progressive journal *Women's Magazine* (婦女雜誌 1915). [65] The author brought together six stories about heroic women in China and the West, and entitled the book *Heartlocked Cape Jasmine*, suggesting a unified conceptualization of women's identity across geographical, historical and cultural boundaries. The text shows how early twentieth century *tanci* works have imagined a collective identity of women by intertwining stories of women from other cultural contexts into their own tales.

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[63] Authored by Chen Wanlan 陳挽瀾 (1887-1917). Originally published in *Forest of Fiction* (小說林), a popular literary journal in the1920s. A detailed discussion of this *tanci* work is available in Hu Ying, 2000, 153-196. Chen Wanlan claimed that her purpose in utilizing the popular form of *tanci* was to advocate for the political and cultural movements of women at the time. Such activist inclination is also evident in *Rouge Blood* (胭脂血彈詞 1908) by Qi Hong (泣紅). (A Ying 1960, 223-252)

[64] Famous journals of the time include *Forests of Fiction* (小說林), *Fiction Monthly* (小說月報), *National Soul Collection* (國魂叢編). (A Ying 1960, 156-164)

[65] The *tanci* is about a Qing widowed female poet Wu Jiangxue (吴绛雪) who committed suicide when held at hostage by a rebelling army. The opening sessions of the six chapters were adapted from the published stories in the individual columns of the journal. Images of women invoked in the introductions of the chapters are real historical figures in China and the West. A copy of Cheng Zhanlu's work is held at the Shanghai Municipal Library.

One of the most manifestly feminist *tanci* works is *Pebbles of the Jingwei Bird* (1905), an unfinished work by feminist writer Qiu Jin (秋瑾 1875-1907), who, when beheaded for attempted insurrection against the Qing government, became a revolutionary martyr. The text depicts a group of young women who escaped from their domestic bonds and travelled abroad to Japan to study modern culture. These heroines, like the author herself, dedicated themselves to advancing the cause of women's liberation on a national scale. Qiu Jin claimed that she was not only addressing "women in scholarly circles," but women of disadvantaged socials status "who suffer from ignorance and limited experience."[66] In her real life, Qiu Jin also frequently crossdressed as a man and actively participated in social and political events. In 1907, when she became a teacher in the Datong Normal School in Hangzhou, she trained women students in military calisthenics, and was infamous as a woman who rode through the town dressed in men's clothing. Qiu Jin's personal undertaking, I propose, brought out the progressive initiatives of the Mulan legend with vigor. Such tales of crossdressing, legendary or historical, are important resources for disrupting established social gender roles and engendering women's social and political empowerment in their immediate living environments.

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[66] To startle readers by writing systematically about women's suffering, she applied a traditional symbol of feminine power the *Jingwei* bird in the title. The Jingwei is a daughter of the Heavenly Emperor in Chinese mythology. She is drowned accidentally in the East Ocean and endeavors to fill up the ocean with pebbles. Qiu Jin appropriates the image to suggest in a more positive sense that feminist enlightenment is a monumental yet achievable task.

Précis of Chapters

Focusing my analysis on the three selected texts, one each from the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, I have organized this dissertation into four chapters. Chapter 1 offers a close reading of the famous eighteenth century *tanci* work *Destiny of Rebirth*. My analysis focuses on two aspects. Firstly, I explore how *tanci* assimilates stories of portraitures that occur in other literary genres and endows these stories with innovative meanings. The portrait provides a narrative pretext: the woman interacts with her painted image and describes what she sees. Secondly, I analyze crossdressing as a form of gender mimicry, and assess *Destiny of Rebirth* in relation to late imperial narratives of women crossdressers. I argue that crossdressing is a form of gender mimicry by recalling the tradition of *ni'nan* (擬男, women imitating men) in China's late imperial drama, fiction and poetry. I propose that mimicry is a form of gender performance that foregrounds a subject-in-process that is continually supplementary. Further, Chen's inheritance and revision of extant scenarios of women's crossdressing is a case of the writer's own inner mimicry, her way of appropriating existing literary traditions and making them her own in *tanci*.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the theme of woman's authorship in *Dream, Image, Destiny* (夢影緣) by Zheng Danruo (1811-1860). I study Zheng Duanruo's case as reflective of authorship for *tanci* writers, and suggest that *tanci* foregrounds a powerful narrative voice of a woman, a speaking self which borders between the author, the narrator and the fictional character, searching for self-inscription by mediating amongst these subjective positions. Zheng Danruo adopts a panoramic view of her fictional world,

accessing the minds of the women characters from an external perspective. Yet her own immediate writing situation drives her to intervene in the story and assert a personalized narrative voice. The authorial narrator, in a nutshell, is an acculturated woman who presents grievances against accusations, asserts her selfhood and claims the right to her own "voice." The narrator does not simply play the role of the puppet master controlling the characters and development of plot, but is engaged in generating a self-narrative. At the same time she withholds some information from those imagined audience who ridicule and question the credibility of her story. The opening and ending sections in the narrative are composed strategically to elicit an interplay between authorial and readerly empathy.

Chapter 3 of the dissertation offers a study of the portrait motif in *Dream, Image, Destiny*. In this text, the author's rewriting of the "playing with the portrait" (玩真) scenario is emphatically shown in two examples, one concerns the male protagonist Zhuang Mengyu making a portrait of his predestined companion Xianyu. The other concerns Xianyu's painting of her would-be father-in-law Zhuang Yuan. The story represents Mengyu's watching of the portrait as a production, witnessing, and loss of self in spectacle. The process of viewing the portraits prompts the viewer's sympathy for the painted image, and in return modifies the viewer's self through sympathetic identification. The portrait is an ironic reference to male-oriented desire to frame and control the woman through a subordinating visual structure, which includes the male artist, the painted image of the woman, and the heroine who was summoned upon by the male artist's imagination. Reading the literary scenario of portrait in this text, in the context of late imperial Chinese literature, I explore how, in the textual depiction of the

woman's image, the relationship between truth and representations could become ironical and reversible.

Chapter 4 concerns a rare *tanci* text, *A Histoire of Heroic Women and Men* (俠女群英史, 1905), collaboratively written by three anonymous women. The text presents a group of young women who crossdressed to renounce marriage and pursue life as scholars, officials or military leaders. Intrigued by scenes of crossdressers exchanging gazes with unsuspecting women characters, I will discuss how the text constructs sympathetic, fetishistic and voyeuristic roles for the early modern audience. Through the analysis of subverted gender roles and women's fascination with the crossdressers, I study how women audiences deploy a gaze from the male viewpoint in the visual mode of homoeroticism. The text, furthermore, carries a disruptive potential that resists established modes of reading by opening to plural interpretations. In this collaborative text, narratives and memories are threaded together, leaving gaps and open points for the multiple authors, the readers, and the editors to continue the narrative. For women authors and their appreciative audience, the text meaningfully reveals that the text is "ourselves writing." Drawing from this example, I will suggest that the body of *tanci* writings can be read as a compendium of women's utopian desire for a communal identity; its revolutionary potential rests in this ongoing process of collaborative writing.

CHAPTER 1: MIRRORS, MIMICRY AND PORTRAIT NARRATIVES: VISUALIZING THE “TALENTED WOMAN” IN *DESTINY OF REBIRTH* (再生緣)

Introduction

The subject of this chapter, *Destiny of Rebirth* (1782) written by Chen Duansheng (陳端生 1751-1796), is one of the most distinguished *tanci* works of the late imperial period. This chapter will address *Destiny of Rebirth* in terms of self-portrait, women’s crossdressing, and the interpolation of the author’s voice into the narrative. Situating this discussion in the historical context of late imperial China, I study the crucial relation between this *tanci* work and the tradition of women’s writings. I am interested in exploring the author’s participation in and performance of the theme of gender mimicry, and will explore how the use of this theme in *tanci* interacts with and modifies contemporary critical accounts of gender and sexuality. I will discuss extensively how the heroine’s crossdressing performance appropriates the Confucian codes of chastity and filial piety, and undermines these ethical codes in practice. A woman author who not only depicts life-like characters, but also directly inserts a self-empowering voice into the narrative, endorses the crossdresser’s transgression of social norms.

Synopsis

A brief plot summary of the text goes as follows. The heroine Meng Lijun (孟麗君) is a daughter in a gentry class family in the southwestern province of Yun'nan (雲南)

in the early fourteenth century. To escape from a marriage imposed by the Emperor, and remain faithful to Huangfu Shaohua (皇甫少華), to whom she was originally engaged, she crossdresses as a man on the night before her wedding and flees her home, leaving a self-portrait as a keepsake for her parents. Later, in the Civil Service Examination (科舉), a system to select imperial officials, Lijun ranks first among all male candidates and is subsequently appointed Prime Minister by the Emperor. As a successful and handsome young "man," Lijun is favored by the Emperor, who arranges for Lijun to marry Liang Suhua (梁素華), the adopted daughter of an eminent official. It happens that Suhua is actually the daughter of Lijun's former wet nurse and has changed her name after being adopted by the Liang family. Since Suhua and Lijun have grown up together as bosom sisters, the mock-marriage between them, with Suhua's complicity, passes as a happy marriage.

Lijun's fiancé Huangfu Shaohua is also selected through the Civil Service Examination as an official. Ironically, his mentor is none other than his own betrothed, the crossdressed Lijun. Love-sick, Shaohua takes Lijun's self-portrait from her parents' place, without knowing Lijun's secret of crossdressing. Shocked by the likeness between the Prime Minister and the portrait, he confronts the Minister and questions "his" identity. When Lijun refuses to tell the truth, Shaohua reveals his suspicion to the Emperor. Lijun ultimately faces the choice of resuming her feminine role and marrying her fiancé, or continuing her crossdressed life as the Minister. At a palace banquet, the Empress Dowager gets the crossdressed Minister drunk and secretly has "his" boots taken off. When Lijun's bound feet are revealed, her secret crossdressing is exposed. She is then pressed by the Emperor to become his concubine and threatened with death by

execution if she rejects the proposal. The last scene in the text shows that Lijun, seriously ill and spitting blood. She would rather accept death than revert to her feminine identity.

Critical Approach

My analysis of *Destiny of Rebirth* approaches the work from two vantage points: that offered by the theme of the self-portrait, and that offered by the performance of crossdressing. First, I shall explore how *tanci* assimilates stories of portraitures that have occurred in other literary genres and endows them with innovative meanings. The self-portrait, as a form of self-representation, brings the woman painter into representation and asserts her right to her own image. The woman author's own status is deeply related to the public spectacle of a purportedly real *cainü* (a woman with literary talent, 才女) and her author's self-dramatizing text. I assess *Destiny of Rebirth* in relation to other extant narratives of women crossdressers in late imperial literature, and show how, in the perception of historical and contemporary readers, the image of Lijun could be conflated with an array of talented women who crossdress as men to leave the inner chambers and take excursions in the social terrain. I investigate crossdressing as a form of gender mimicry, while recalling the late imperial literary tradition of *ni'nan* (擬男), that is, women crossdressing as men. Moving between the domestic, "feminine" inner quarters and the open, "masculine" public realm, crossdressers act as transitive subjects at the margins of established norms for women's behavior. Women crossdressers supplement and subvert the idea of an idealized feminine identity as perceived by the patriarchal society.

On a related note, I shall suggest that in *Destiny of Rebirth* (significantly, just as in the *tanci* genre as a whole), writing becomes an experiment on the part of the author, who utilizes the text as a space for exploring the multiple manifestations of woman's subjectivity. Chen Duansheng's revision and development of the literary formula of women's crossdressing calls attention to the importance of women authors' self-inscription through writing, which entails the possibility of transforming social, cultural and historical structures of the time.

Destiny of Rebirth in the Historical Context

Chen Duansheng and the Culture of Talented Woman

Chen Duansheng, the author of *Destiny of Rebirth*, was a seventeenth century author in Hangzhou, a city of rich intellectual culture heritage. Located in the center of the urban Jiangnan region (Yangzi River and southward area), Hangzhou was home to many semi-cloistered women writers from the gentry class who left rich records of their literary accomplishments beginning in the sixteenth century. This women's literary culture of the time was manifested in literary voices generated through their works, and elite male authors' writings on and perceptions of these talented women. Born into an upper-class family, Chen Duansheng was the granddaughter of famous literary scholar Chen Jushan (陳兆崙 1701-1771). Chen's family was very encouraging toward women's literary education, contrary to the conventional belief that "a talented woman is not virtuous." In an essay "On Talented Women" (*Cainü lun* 才女說), Chen Jushan proposed that women's learning would contribute to their aptitude in assisting the husband and educating children, and that education in literary and philosophical classics

was conducive to the augmentation of women's virtue.(Chen Yinke, 15) Chen's family also had frequent contact with the literary scholars of the time. Her sister Chen Changsheng (陳長生) was a disciple of the renowned scholar Yuan Mei and published a collection of poetry *Collected Poems from the Huisheng Chamber* (*Huishengge ji* 繪聲閣集). Chen Duansheng herself published a poetry collection *Collected Poems from the Huiying Chamber* (*Huiyingge ji* 繪影閣集.)[67]

This family background, one may surmise, played a crucial supportive role in Chen Duansheng's literary activities before her marriage. At the age of seventeen, she finished the first seventeen volumes of her *tanci* work *Destiny of Rebirth*. (Bao 89) Her marriage to a lower-level official Fan Yan left an important impact on her literary pursuits. Several years after the marriage, Fan Yan was involved in a scandal related to the Civil Service Examination, and was banished to the frontier region of Xinjiang. Chen was left alone to support two children and her parents-in-law and had little time to continue writing. Her husband's political scandal also forced her to retreat from any literary exchanges with other women. Although Chen's life of solitude left her in obscurity after this family calamity, readers can still find traces of her life in the significant number of autobiographical statements embedded in *Destiny of Rebirth*. The text, consequently, juxtaposes a kind of imaginary autonomy represented by the transvestite heroine with an author's voice gauging a space for self-expression in resistance against forced silence.

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[67] The title *huiying* (繪影 depictions of images) suggests Duansheng's precise imitative strategies in characterization. Although the original text of this poetry collection is lost, critics suggest that some of the poems might have been embedded in the introductory poems to the chapters of *Destiny of Rebirth.* (Chen Yinke, 25)

Destiny of Rebirth and *Tanci* Narrative Traditions

Although *Destiny of Rebirth* was one of the most influential and extensively reprinted *tanci* works, several precursory *tanci* works prepared for the popularity of *tanci* among their readers before the circulation of Chen Duansheng's work.[68] A prominent one is *Jade Bracelets* (玉釧緣), which provided the original story from which *Destiny of Rebirth* developed its own plot as a sequel. The authorship of *Jade Bracelets* remains unknown. The introductory poems in the chapters and the epigraph of the book imply that the authors were a daughter and a mother, with the daughter as the main author. (Bao, 87) *Jade Bracelets* recounts a tale of a young man Xie Yuhui (謝玉輝) and his sister Xie Yujuan (謝玉娟), who exchanged identities with each other. The brother crossdresses as his sister Yujuan, in order to rescue his fiancée, who is selected as a royal attendant by the Emperor. Alternatively, the sister Yujuan disguises herself as her brother to attend the Civil Service Examination, is selected as a Top Candidate and becomes an imperial official.

Destiny of Rebirth takes on this narrative frame, and develops a tale of the crossdressed heroine Meng Lijun, who is the reincarnation of Zheng Ruzhao (鄭如昭), a minor character who was Yujuan's sworn sister in *Jade Bracelet*. The male protagonist Xie Yuhui is reborn as Lijun's fiancé Huangfu Shaohua (皇甫少華). The title "rebirth" (

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[68] Aside from *Jade Bracelets*, which is discussed in this section, another major *tanci* work precursory to *Destiny of Rebirth* is the seventeenth century work *A Rain of Heavenly Flowers* (天雨花). The work depicts the story of the Wei family, and consists of many domestic scenes in which a well-bred and talented wife challenges her husband's domination in the household. Some of these scenes are intensely dramatic. In comparison with *Destiny of Rebirth*, this previous *tanci* work focuses on women's everyday life in the domestic sphere after marriage.

再生) implies this intertextual bond between the two *tanci* and suggests that the characters are reincarnated to fulfill their destiny in the continued work. The two works, though, have fundamental differences. *Jade Bracelets* develops around the male protagonist Xie Yuhui, who disguises himself as his sister to save his fiancée from the Inner Palace. The work ends with a polygamous marriage of Yuhui with his fiancée and seven other women characters. *Destiny of Rebirth* restructures the story around the crossdressed heroine Meng Lijun, who repeatedly denies her feminine identity to postpone the marriage event. Lijun's fiancé Shaohua plays the role of a constant "spouse," reversing the Confucian code of women's chastity with a representation of male "widowhood."

Stylistically, the intertextuality in *tanci* creates a symbiotic relationship between stories of the past and present. The alignment of the text with its prior text also reflects the oral traditions in which *tanci* originates, for every story follows a previous story and anticipates its continuation in a subsequent narration. It is in this process that *tanci* develops its own durability as a narrative tradition. Structurally, *Destiny of Rebirth* preserves the oral storyteller's characteristics of opening and closing poems. The first chapter of each volume begins with an introductory poem (開卷詩), which is followed by the main story written mostly in seven-character rhymed lines, with intermittent vernacular prose passages. In these introductory poems, *she* recurrently alludes to her writing brush as the "brush of vivid colors," a reference to literary and artistic talent.

> In tranquility I sit by the studio window, contemplating the past,
> At times I collect scattered thoughts to compose new lines.
> Brush of vivid colors, makes thick ink strokes,
> Enlivening delicate insights, eliciting astute ideas.
> The subject of the book is filial devotion and loyalty,
> My humble self composed the comments in the opening poems.

Since my devoted audience hopes to hear more after reading the previous work,
I shall write this work as a sequel and enjoy it with them. [69]

In an opening paragraph of another chapter she says,

Without reserve I devote my spirit to the brush,
and infuse my passion and thoughts entirely into the book. …
This three-inch pointed brush in my hand
will bring countless events into being in *Destiny of Rebirth*.[70]

Since the allusion to the "brush of vivid colors" is frequently evoked by male poets to imply their literary talent,[71] Chen Duansheng's use of the image asserts that she is an author endowed with a literary talent equal to that of male poets. The brush of vivid colors also suggests the visual quality of Chen's writing: the brush is used for painting and writing both. How then, do we position the author's self-image? How do *tanci* facilitate, in this context, a specific form of imagination and desire: for the author, the characters, and the women readers? How do we understand late imperial women's self-imaging through the narrative lens of *tanci*? In the following session, I address these questions through an analysis of the portrait motif in the text. I review the scene of Lijun making a self-portrait, and discuss how this scene evokes similar scenarios of woman

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69靜坐蕓窗憶舊時，每尋閑緒寫新詞。縱橫彩筆揮濃墨，點綴幽情出巧思。 論事可關忠孝事，評詩原是拙愚詩。知音未盡觀書興，再續前文共玩之。 *Destiny of Rebirth*. 1:1,139.

70 盡放精神來筆上，全收意興到書中。……仗我尖尖三寸管，做成了，再生緣內事無窮。14:53, 889.

71 The "brush of vivid colors" alludes to Jiang Yan (江淹), a male poet of late fourth and early fifth century (南朝 450 CE -589 CE). In his youth Jiang dreamed that he was given a magic five-colored brush and acquired great poetic talent. In his later years, however, he suffered loss of talent and could not write beautiful lines anymore. Legend has it that Jiang dreamed of an earlier literary scholar and Daoist Guo Pu (郭璞 276–324 CE) who claimed to be the owner of his brush and took it away. When Jiang woke up he could no longer compose good poems. Li Yanshou (李延壽 seventh century) *The History of the Southern Dynasties* (南史). (Li Yanshou Volume 1. 209)

making and viewing portraits in late imperial China. From this point, I reflect on the relation between portraits of women and their gendered spectatorship, and the ironical relationship between the woman and her painted image.

Self-portrait in *Tanci*

The Scene of Lijun Making Her Self-Portrait

Let us begin by focusing on a scene in *Destiny of Rebirth* in which the heroine paints a self-portrait (3:10, 280). The trope of women painting a self-portrait is a recurrent one in many theatrical and novelistic narratives in the late imperial period, and is particularly associated with the theme of women's artistic agency. My interest lies with how the self-portrait situates women's spectatorship within a complex web of agencies among the artist/character, the *tanci* author, and the women readers/viewers. I suggest that Lijun's self-portrait is a public spectacle of woman's sexual/ artistic agency. Lijun makes a self-portrait before she flees home to escape an imposed marriage, which threatens to break her already arranged engagement to Huangfu Shaohua. The protagonist, disheartened upon leaving home, decides to leave her parents a portrait by copying an image of herself as seen in her mirror.

Figure 1 Huang Mingqi, “Painting the Self-Portrait.” Woodblock illustration, a scene from *The Peony Pavilion* (1607)

Lijun stands up, facing the mirror,
and rearranges her make-up and embroidered dress.
Gazing at the mirror, she lets out a sigh at times,
Thinking to herself that she has to change her girl’s appearance soon.
No longer will she sit by this window and put flower pins in her hair,
beneath the tree, on a spring morning.
No longer will she sit near this warm stove,
and put on the sweetly perfumed clothes.
From now on, she will travel in wind and rain and stop at roadside inns.
From now on, she will be a lonesome one riding across mountainous regions.
“I am a fledgling swallow that loses its nest and is chased by arrows.
I am a damaged flower petal fallen from the tree and drifting in the wilderness.
Once I change my appearance and leave home,
When will come the day of my return?”
This refined girl looks into the mirror, with sorrows surging in her heart;
She strives to bestir herself, though her sleeves are wet with tears.[72]

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[72]麗君小姐抽身起，臨鏡梳妝整繡衣。面對菱花常嘆氣，暗思量，儀容不久要更衣。再不得，綠窗春曉花簪鬢。再不得，紅獸香濃麝染衣。從今後，苦雨淒風投客旅。從今後，弧身匹馬走崎嶇。奴好比，失巢乳燕遭弓箭。奴好比，辭樹殘花在野飛。這一改妝逃出外，茫茫何日是歸期。玉人對鏡增悲感，強掠輕雲淚染衣。……烏雲寶髻一層盤，金鳳斜挑翠鬢邊。面映芙蓉含玉露，眉分柳葉帶春煙。梅妝粉額添姣艷，櫻顆朱唇未語言。鳳眼微凝秋水動，雪腮輕抹嫩紅鮮。水紅裙子淩波步，皂色

….

(*Lijun looks into the mirror and compares her reflection with the portrait*.)

Cloud-like hair rolled up in a fine coil,
A golden hairpin parting the hair at one side of her forehead.
Face fresh as a lotus flower bathed in jade-like dew droplets,
Eyebrows two willow leaves carrying spring mist.
Adorned with plum flower petals, her brow is all the more lovely.
Rarely do words depart from her cherry-like mouth.
Almond-shaped eyes, gazing attentively, reflect the limpid light of autumn waters.
Snowy complexion is nicely set off with crimson blushes.
Bright pink skirts hide her gentle footsteps;
A dark cape hugs her pale blue shirt.
Dark sleeves softly conceal her fair wrists;
The skirt sways slightly to reveal a lotus foot.[73]
Her elegant manner outshines many,
Truly incomparable among those of her generation.
Lijun examines the portrait,
And cannot but sigh for her misfortune.
"Many times I have seen beautiful women.
None of them can rival this painted image.
Can it be that my appearance is not as stunning as the painting?
Is it much lovelier than my real person?
If the image truly resembles myself,
I shall take the lead among women and rise to the top of the world."
Turning to her maid Ronglan, she asks if the image resembles her,
Or is the image even more attractive?
The maid leaps in joy
And says, "This painting is a triumph,
For the eyes, the eyebrows and even the attitude are all identical,
Not to mention the stature, as slender as my mistress's.
If you really want to compare the image and the person,
My mistress is certainly more spirited.
The talented girl, upon these words, is finally convinced,

雲肩月白衫。翠袖輕垂籠玉筍，湘裙半舞見金蓮。飄然出世神仙態，絕代無雙獨占先。小姐看完圖上女，自相悲嘆自相憐。想奴家，曾觀多少紅顏女，要比那，紙上真容萬萬難。莫不是，奴貌未能如此美，圖中畫得太鮮妍。若然果得豐姿像，奴竟可，獨占花魁在大元。回問榮蘭相像否，莫非紙上更妍然。侍兒踴躍通稱好，此幅方能算十全。眉目風流無不像，身材窈窕總其然。若然紙上同相比，自然是，小姐精神更在先。才女聞言心始信，取圖鋪案細重觀。3:10, 280.

[73] The lotus feet here refer to women's bound feet, which was fetishized as an erotic object the late imperial period.

And then spreads out the painting on the desk to ponder it again.

At this moment, the portrait functions as an extended screen through which the woman interacts with her projected image, as well as the very surface that activates and meets the gaze of the viewer/reader. Lijun's gaze at the mirror is a secondary process of identification, a process through which the subject is anxiously in search of a self-image. This search is not gratified, for the image mirrors the subject's very discordance with reality. The portrait is modeled on her feminine appearance, which is about to be changed. The poised woman's body is inadvertently caught in a moment of anticipation and indeterminacy. Rearranging her make-up and embroidered dress, Lijun is hesitant to accept the drastic change into men's clothing, comparing herself to "a fledgling swallow that loses its nest," "a damaged flower petal…drifting in wilderness." Her gaze into the mirror brings sorrow and, moreover, a fear of loss.

Accompanying the woman's gaze at her own image in the mirror is a reflection of the subject's split sense of self. Her tears reflect her anxiety and fear at the threshold of the unbearable real world. The scene offers a striking illustration of the subject's identity formation process in the Lacanian mirror stage, the outcome of which remains unfathomable. Lacan says, "It suffices to understand the mirror stage … as an identification, … namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image---an image that is seemingly predestined to have an effect at this phase, as witnessed by the use in analytic theory of antiquity's term, 'imago'" (Lacan 1977: 4). In this scene, the woman's gaze into the mirror corresponds to a transitional moment between the imaginary and symbolic registers of her subjectivity. She is both the active agent looking at herself, and the elusive image which is being looked at. In this

narcissistic moment, the subject is entranced with the captivating image of the self. Lijun is caught up in the discrepancy between her own internal desire or longing to stay in the "perfumed chambers," and the necessity to confront a world of vicissitudes and danger on her own.

Making a self-portrait is a process of fixing one's image in a certain symmetry while bridging the difference between the body felt from within and the image perceived in the painting. Lijun's moment of self-recognition takes place when the maid assures Lijun about the resemblance between herself and the painting. Lijun's girl's hairdo and dress in the portrait betray her resistance against the parents' arrangements for her marriage, even though the painting was made to demonstrate her filial devotion to her parents. The protagonist exploits the irony implicit in her self-exhibition: she is at once the artist and the object of the artist's gaze. Employing the mirror as a tool of a reversed gaze, Lijun shifts her "gaze" from the "window" to the "flower pins in her hair," from the "warm stove" to her "sweetly perfumed clothes." This reversed look sets the visual structure in motion, by now positioning Lijun with the readers, allowing both parties a refracted look at the inner chamber. The text thus invites the readers to become active participants by "seeing" Lijun through reading.

On top of all this, and markedly in control of what the readers see, Lijun demonstrates her artistic intelligence not only by painting her self-image, but also by composing a poem on the portrait itself. The poem goes as follows:

> What's the use of sighing in regret, when a grave calamity befalls a person?
> How can I allow my purity to be eroded, like a flawed jade?
> No longer will I cling to my parents for shelter from upheaval,
> To preserve my chastity I shall exile myself to terrains remote.
> A paper kite with a broken string, I will float away with no destination.
> With a handbag of gold jewelry, I can travel to places distant.

> Today I leave this painted image of myself, hanging it up on the wall,
> For I would change this feminine coif into an official's *wusha* hat.[74]

The poem, and the painting of which it is a part, travel through the story. First, Lijun flees from home, leaving her self-portrait and the poem for her parents. Then Lijun's fiancé Huangfu Shaohua, who thinks Lijun has already passed away, asks for the portrait from Lijun's parents and discovers Lijun's secret of crossdressing by reading the poem. At a crucial moment, the painting draws attention to her status as a talented woman with artistic and literary accomplishment.

Lijun's poem on the portrait is an exemplar of a mirror-text, foreshadowing the progression of the plot, adding discontinuity and tension in the narrative process. She appears and acts at once. Again, in Lacan's words: "The privilege of the subject seems to be established here from that bipolar reflexive relation by which, as soon as I perceive, my representations belong to me" (Lacan 81). Facing the mirror, Lijun performs her own objectification and simultaneously, seeks self-empowerment through spectating and speculating. The image of the protagonist is remarkably dramatized in the visual narrative underlying the text. She is an active agent of looking, whereas the authorial position is that of a detached and disincarnated eye with the vantage necessary to see the subject as she is. Conversely, there is a degree of mirroring going on between the aesthetic portrait of woman, the author Chen Duansheng, and the group of talented women that Chen envisages as her *zhiyin* (知音), her appreciative readers who can truly understand the tune of her song.

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74 風波一旦復何嗟，品節寧堪玉染瑕。避世不能依膝下，全身聊作寄天涯。紙鳶線斷飄無際，金飾盈囊去有家。今日壁間留片影，願教螺髻換烏紗。3:10, 281. *Wusha* (烏紗), hat worn by Chinese officials before the seventeenth century.

Other Portraits in Late Imperial Literature: Feng Xiaoqing

and Du Liniang

In these portraits, the woman's body becomes marked, valued, and preserved in the form of brush strokes. Judith Zeitlin notes that the so-called "beautiful woman portrait" (美人圖) in the late Ming drama of the sixteenth century is affiliated with the body, in that it is not simply an image but also a material object, a hanging scroll. (Zeitlin 1993, 138) *Destiny of Rebirth* invites an investigation of the theme of "portrait narratives," foregrounding the visual trope of Lijun's self-portraiture as a lens for considering issues of identity and subject formation. The heroine's speculating gaze at her self-portrait reveals the gulf between visual mimicry and the character's subjectivity. Despite her expectation of making an image that truly resembles her person, Lijun is frustrated in her first attempt to paint the self-portrait:

> Her heart full of pain,
> Lijun wonders how to depict her *genuine image*.
> If the painting does not resemble the person,
> I should not bother to take up the brush.
>
> Ah, Lijun,
> you are so beautiful,
> Why do you suffer so much misfortune!
>
> If the painting cannot be made satisfactorily,
> Doesn't this predict an ominous future for my trip?
> If the trip cannot realize my wishes,
> I would rather hang myself on the day of the wedding![75]

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[75]芳心不覺如刀絞，欲寫真容怎樣描。如若畫來都不像，這番紙筆枉徒勞。咳，孟麗君呀孟麗君！我看如此容貌，何故這般薄命！何事真容描不就，莫非此去有災殃？倘如不遂平生願，奴竟在，花轎之中自縊亡。3:10, 278. Italics mine.

The "genuine image" (literal translation of *zhenrong* 真容) is used in late imperial literatures to refer to a portrait of a person. Interestingly, the term carries much irony itself, for the assertion of women is always in the *absence* of real women. Compelled to achieve a likeness between the image and the person, Lijun relies on the portrait to mimetically represent herself with accuracy. Yet for the woman artist, the mirror/portrait trope here is not a symbol of desired objectivity, but a medium for self-representation and endorsement. For the gentry women authors, the self-portrait reveals their desire to acquire an extended life after death: the painted image is complementary to these women's written words, for their disadvantaged literary status would not allow them the possibility of being remembered by their writings.

A distinctive example of the portrait scenario in late imperial literary tradition is associated with the famous and possibly fictitious courtesan poet Feng Xiaoqing (馮小青 1595-1612), who insisted on having a "genuine image" of herself painted before she died from tuberculosis at the age of seventeen. (Xu Zhen Volume 1, 1-36) In her spare time, Xiaoqing enjoyed gazing at her reflection in the lake, often engrossed in an imaginary dialogue with herself. A well-known poem of hers entitled *Regret* (怨) goes as follows.

> With fresh make-up I rival the beauties in the portraits,
> Knowing not how I would rank among them.
> By the autumn lake I gaze at the reflection of my emaciated body,
> You shall take pity on me as I on you take pity.[76]

Reminiscent of Lijun's narcissistic gaze in *Destiny of Rebirth*, the poem stages an intriguing conversation between Xiaoqing and her own reflection, to which she appeals for pity and understanding. The woman's self-reflexive gaze reveals her subjectivity as

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[76] 新妝竟與畫圖爭，知是昭陽第幾名？瘦影自憐秋水照，卿須憐我我憐卿。(Xu Zhen Volume 1, 23)

constructed through a series of images, which are transmitted back and forth between the portraits and the audience. Simultaneously, the last line of Xiaoqing's poem expands the visual structure by establishing an emotive bond between the text and the author's envisaged audience, from whom she invites compassionate responses: "You shall take pity in me as I in you take pity" (卿須憐我我憐卿).[77] This textual moment recalls what Jonathan Culler named the "mimetic contract," which works to generate intelligibility and recognition by building up "descriptive residue…gesturing towards a world in which he [the reader] can identify" (Culler 225). The so-called "Xiaoqing lore"[78] strongly demonstrates the problem of the literate woman whose visibility crucially entails her empathetic communication with her targeted readers, a subject that is equally quintessential for the author of *Destiny of Rebirth*.

The fascinating scene of Lijun painting the self-portrait also recalls a similar scenario in the popular Ming dynasty drama *The Peony Pavilion* (牡丹亭 1598), which serves as an important subtext for *Destiny of Rebirth*. The protagonist Du Liniang (杜麗娘), the daughter of a high official, takes a walk in a spring garden. She falls asleep, and

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[77] At the same time, this line also presents Xiaoqing speaking to her own image in the water, as the address *qing* (卿) is another way of saying "I" in Chinese literature.

[78] The term "Xiaoqing lore" is from Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 93. Notably, Xiaoqing's image has been extensively recycled by literary scholars, as representative of pathetic women. In her essay "Xiaoqing's Literary Legacy," Ellen Widmer suggests that Xiaoqing's story has been understood as "real." Accordingly, "her life may be said to be a life waiting for legend to discover, or else the representation of a life that legend provided for people who needed to believe in her." (Widmer 1992, 113) Xiaoqing's plight in this sense is not so much a real historical reference to premodern women writers, but an illuminating example of the "talented woman" image as being infiltrated through and assimilated by the connoisseurship of Chinese male literati. On the other side, reading the "Xiaoqing" plight as a subtext in *tanci* is meaningful for women to critically reflect, and to explore new possibilities for female literary fame.

in a dream she encounters a young scholar named Liu Mengmei (柳夢梅). Afterward she dies of love-sickness, leaving a self-portrait in the garden where they first "met." Later Mengmei finds Liniang's portrait in the garden. Liniang's ghost visits Mengmei and comes back to life three years later (with Mengmei's assistance), and marries him. This play had continued to enjoy enormous popularity among both male and women readers into the Qing dynasty: the aforementioned courtesan poet Xiaoqing, for instance, was an alleged reader of the play. In a poem "On Reading *The Peony Pavilion*" (讀牡丹亭絕句), she laments the fate of the protagonist, "Some in the world are even more intoxicated by love; Xiaoqing is not the only brokenhearted one."[79]

Likewise, Chen Duansheng was a devoted reader of the play. In *The Peony Pavilion*, when the love-sick Liniang finds the splendor of her looks fading due to illness, she hastens to make a self-portrait to preserve on paper her beauty at its prime time. Scrutinizing her own reflection in the mirror, she replicates that image in her self-portrait and urges her maid to compare her with it. This well-known episode in the play is seamlessly adapted into the scene of Lijun's making of her self-portrait in *Destiny of Rebirth*. The theme of death and resurrection in *The Peony Pavilion* is also built into *Destiny of Rebirth*, explicitly resonating with the title for instance (which is translated by Ellen Widmer as *Karmic Bonds of Reincarnation*).[80] Judith Zeitlin suggests that in the

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[79] 人間亦有癡於我，豈獨傷心是小青！(Wang Duanshu, 10:18b)

[80] Similar motifs of karmic death and incarnation can also be found the seventeenth century play *Dream of the Mandarin Ducks* (鴛鴦夢), by the woman playwright Ye Xiaowan (葉小紈 1613-1657). The play takes the form of a northern-style drama (雜劇) and was written by a woman during the Ming period. Ye Xiaowan is the daughter of Ye Shaoyuan (葉紹袁), who edited and published *Works from the Hall of Meridian Dreams* (午夢堂集), a collection of family women's poems and essays, containing writings by

literature of the late imperial period, a young woman commissioning a portrait of herself, or painting a self-portrait, is a fatal act. Traditional belief has it that by having one's portrait painted, one loses his or her spirit and withers. Such a painting is destined from the start to be a deathbed portrait meant for posthumous viewing (Zeitlin 1993, 138). Lijun's pathos at the sight of her portrait thus also reflects the woman's encounter with a life-death situation: her old home lost, her future abode undetermined. The rebirth or resurrection of Lijun's self, as a man, is inexorably connected to the viewing and transmission of her self-portrait, a surrogate for her person.

To return to an exegesis of *Destiny of Rebirth*, I will discuss the crucial role of the portrait in the development of the plot. After Lijun's flight from home on the wedding night, her parents, her fiancé Huangfu Shaohua, and even the Emperor himself search for her. The lovesick Shaohua takes the portrait from Lijun's parents' place and hangs it in his bedroom, lamenting the loss of his fiancée day and night, and composing poems about the painted image. Attracted by the power and wealth of Shaohua's family, many women from all over the country claim to be Meng Lijun. To find the real Lijun, the Emperor has to perform multiple tests on the candidates to assess their physical beauty and talent. These tests reflect the standards for the ideal woman who is endowed with the qualities of beauty, talent and virtue. Meanwhile Lijun herself, disguised as a man, explores the possibilities of a newly acquired life under the pseudonym Li Mingtang (酈明堂). Lijun's portrait, or the so-called "genuine image" (真容), becomes a portable image reflecting a

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Ye's wife and daughters, as well as stories by gentry women authors who were related to the Ye family. See Li Xuyu. *Works from the Hall of Meridian Dreams: A Study of Women's Writings*. 1999.

constantly substituted and reconstructed feminine subjectivity, its true origin paradoxically displaced and irretrievable.

Perhaps this ironic split between Lijun's self-portrait and her crossdressed body is also associated with the coalescence and conflict of the two texts (*The Peony Pavilion* and *Destiny of Rebirth*) on the narrative level. *The Peony Pavilion* is a vintage "woman-oriented" tale, with its narrative focus on the protagonist's discovery of love in a dream and her extraordinary experience crossing the boundary of life and death in search of love. *Destiny of Rebirth* also sets the locus of the narrative on the protagonist's desire, while at the same time exposing a deviation, a kind of non-closure, toward the end of the story. Unlike the resurrected Liniang who is happily reunited with Mengmei, the crossdressed Lijun does not desire a consummated marriage, nor can she relinquish her prosperous official position for the role of a devoted wife and daughter possessed of filial piety. This disparity between the two texts reflects Chen's symptomatic anxiety concerning a woman's proper place in family and society. Averse to the theme of a woman in a painting coming to life in response to male desire, the author renders the crossdresser Lijun an equivalent of a ghost, who leaves her body and freely pursues its private, illicit desires.[81]

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[81] For the image of the female ghost see Judith Zeitlin's *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Classical Chinese Tale* (Stanford 1993). It is also of note that the classic episode of Liniang dreaming of her lover Mengmei in *The Peony Pavilion* was adopted in the depiction of a minor character Liang Suhua (梁素華), who, originally named Su Yingxue (蘇映雪), was Lijun's bosom sister and later becomes her "wife" in a mock marriage. At the beginning, Lijun's parents hold a martial art contest for the many young men who hope to marry her. Huangfu Shaohua (皇甫少华) ranks the first among all the candidates. Su Yingxue, who was then a maid at Lijun's house, manages to get a glimpse of Shaohua by peeping through the curtains. That night Xingxue dreams of a romantic rendezvous with Shaohua. (1:3, 164) In her dream, Yingxue and Shaohua make a private marriage arrangement. The author draws a comparison between Yingxue and Liniang,

Portrait and Gender Mimicry

The painted image in the portrait prompts questions concerning the boundaries between staged truth and the text's quasi-theatrical representation. The readers, like those women who attempt to substitute for Lijun, are deeply invested in gleaning the true character of Lijun from the portrait, which in itself might have been based squarely on illusion. While the male protagonist Shaohua observes Lijun's image with a fetishistic gaze, the other women characters view the portrait from a different perspective. In certain cases women viewers of the painting exploit the dramatic tension between truth and fabrication by mimicking the painted image. An interesting example in the text is a scene featuring a "false Lijun," Xiang Nanjin (項南金), an educated girl from an affluent family inspecting herself in the mirror before claiming to be the authentic Lijun during the Emperor's search. Nanjin gazes at her image in the mirror, and is amazed by her own likeness to the portrait, which a house servant has described for Nanjin in detail.

> Gazing again into a decorative mirror,
> Nanjin is startled by her own image.

"Apparently today's Su Yingxue bears a resemblance to the legendary Du Liniang" (分明今昔蘇家女，宛若當年杜麗娘 1:3, 164). This particular reference to *The Peony Pavilion* as a subtext seems to foreshadow the possibility of Xingxue and Lijun both marrying Shaohua. However, Chen Duansheng departs from this arrangement in plot at the end. The development of the female characters Lijun and Xingxue requires an ending more satisfactory than becoming wives of Shaohua in a polygamous marriage. When Lijun decides to cross-dress and flee home, she decides to ask Yingxue to substitute for her, to marry the designated husband and fulfill her duties as a daughter for her parents. Interestingly, the author's strategic adaptation of the plot of *The Peony Pavilion* in the case of the minor character Yingxue reveals the impact of the dramatic intertext, as well as Chen Duansheng's dissatisfaction with its plot arrangement. Du Liniang's story is not completely transplanted in *Destiny of Rebirth*, but is disseminated in the depiction of several female characters; the closure of a happy marriage in *The Peony Pavilion* is also only projected as one of the future possibilities for the protagonist, without being realized.

> Ah, so curious! Why do I look more and more *like* the legendary Miss Meng?
> Can it be that her *genuine image* is just ordinary?
> If so, she is less fortunate than I am.[82]

Although Nanjin has never met Lijun nor has she seen the portrait with her own eyes, her performance in front of the mirror transforms her into the image of the talented and beautiful protagonist. The text, with a subtle shift from the third-person to the first person narrative voice, enables a fusion of the viewing positions of Nanjin, the narrator, and the readers/textual audience. Interestingly, the "likeness" between Nanjin and Lijun's image reveals a code of verisimilitude at the heart of *tanci* narratives. In theatrical performance, "Verisimilitude should not be equated with reality; it refers, rather, to a particular culture's coded expectations about the artistic representation of reality" (Pearson 28).

In *Destiny of Rebirth*, I propose, the "real" Lijun is called into being in the text through the function of the late imperial culture's coded expectations of the talented woman and the function of *tanci* as narrative portraitures of women. The identification of the textual audience with Lijun is channeled and mediated through a verisimilar performance enabled by the genre of *tanci.* The presence of Lijun invites spectators to gauge an aesthetic image of the talented woman from the portrait, and simultaneously unveils the dubious and constructed nature of the portrait itself, the "genuine visage."

Chen Duansheng seeks to replicate the representational power of an actual painting and theatrical performance to complement her narrative. Ironically, the text presents the subverted identities of Lijun and Nanjin. As the chapter titles imply, "The

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[82]一邊重照菱花鏡，看了芳容也自奇。
咳！真正怪事，奴怎麼*像*起孟小姐來？
難道真容竟一般, 她可無福我多緣。12: 45, 769.

fake one says every word in a truthful tone", while "the real Lijun pretends to be a fake one now and again."[83] In the scene in which she is tested, Xiang Nanjin enters the Palace and is tested by the Emperor in person. Based on her pure instinct, she recognizes Lijun's father and brother among the many officials at the court and tells a story of herself as "Lijun" with convincing emotions. She confesses, "What a pity because of the forced marriage, I could not stay; with no other recourse to keep my chastity, but to take a distant path."[84] She weeps and pleads guilty to unfilial acts to her parents, while secretly anticipating a marriage to the handsome and gifted Shaohua. The real Lijun, now the Minister, takes pleasure in observing Nanjin's performance at the court, satisfied with the idea of having an ideal substitute to fulfill her own womanly duties. Both Nanjin and Lijun would have succeeded in their schemes, were it not for Lijun's mother, who discloses Nanjin's falsehood by suggesting that she looked too well-fed for a long-time traveler. Nanjin's melodramatic imitation of Lijun, juxtaposed with Lijun's crossdressing performance, shows an additional kind of gender mimicry. Both cases obviously undermine traditional representations of woman's identity in the late imperial context.

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[83] The original titles of Chapter 54 and Chapter 55 in Volume 14 are as follows, "Every word by lady under false pretensions seems true" (假小娘句句如真), "The real girl frequently acts falsely." (真女兒時時裝假)

[84]可憐逼嫁不能留，無奈全貞作遠遊. 14:54, 898.

Crossdressing and Mimicked Subjectivity

Crossdressing As Gender Mimicry

To continue the discussion of gender mimicry, I will now move to an analysis of crossdressing in *Destiny of Rebirth* by conducting an intertextual analysis of narratives of women crossdressers in late imperial literature. I propose that crossdressing is a form of gender mimicry, in that the subject actively takes part in constructing his/her own image by drawing on seemingly incongruent gender roles. In a Lacanian psychoanalysis, mimicry accounts for ways in which the body can actively adapt its posture and movements to match an image of "itself" from a point of view outside itself. Mimicry is a means of assuming an image through a process of bodily matching. Kaja Silverman elucidates this Lacanian concept by describing how human subjects do not always wait passively for the gaze to "photograph" them in the shape of a pre-existing image. On the contrary, they may give themselves to be apprehended by the gaze in a certain way, by assuming the shape of either a desired representation or one that has come through less happy circumstances to mark the physical body. (Silverman 201) Through a close analysis of the woman crossdresser in *Destiny of Rebirth*, will interrogate these critical discussions of mimicry and reflect on their viability in the present context. I propose that gender mimicry in crossdressing performance is represented by a transitive subjective position. The crossdresser challenges and transforms seemingly opposite gender positions, in search of a gendered subjectivity which eludes any positivist understanding.

In late imperial China, women's crossdressing can be found in many literary depictions of the idealized androgynous woman. Wai-Yee Li, in a study of sixteenth to

seventeenth century courtesans, explains that an androgynous ideal is often fashioned around the figure of a beautiful woman endowed with supposedly male talents and virtues, who dresses as a man and assumes male roles (Li 1997, 42). A pivotal example is the heroine in *Maid Mulan* (雌木蘭), a short play by Xu Wei (徐渭 1521-1593). This play depicts Mulan, the heroine in the Six Dynasties ballad (220-589), who crossdresses as a man and takes her father's place in military service. The legendary Mulan has become a prototype of heroic women characterized by a deviation from sexual norms. The imagery of Mulan may be considered a case of gender reversal, which challenges orthodox gender representations and is often adapted into literary depictions of women warriors triumphant over their male contenders on the battlefield or women scholars who excel over male contestants in the examination halls (Zhou Zuyan 13).[85]

The following discussion analyzes crossdressing by reviewing several scenes in which Lijun changes into men's clothing and performs a new masculine identity. I will read this incidence of crossdressing in the context of late imperial literature, and examine the correlations between Lijun and the other women crossdressers in Chinese history and literature. Building on this contextualized reading, I will investigate how Lijun's acts of crossdressing subvert the Confucian ideological prescription of women's identity. By appropriating the concepts of filial piety and chastity, Lijun rationalizes her

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[85] The legendary image of the Mulan has undergone much transformation and assimilation in Confucian society. In *tanci*, allusion to Mulan serves quite another purpose; it reflects the authors' self-strategizing, not assimilation. *Tanci* authors attempt to rewrite the image of Mulan by inserting the story into their contemporary literary output and endowing this allusion with new visions of female agency. Mulan's filial devotion is thus appropriated as a "cover" that that serves to legitimatize women's writing. Accordingly, the use of the Mulan legend in *tanci* writings is often rendered with a doublevoice.

unconventional acts, displaying her active efforts to pursue autonomy in a patriarchal culture.

The Scene of Lijun Changing Clothing

In *Destiny of Rebirth*, Lijun's decision to crossdress is made under the influence of two legendary crossdressers, Liu Qingyun (柳卿雲) and Xie Xiang'e (謝湘娥), who impersonate men to escape from family crises and attain grand fortune and long-lasting fame.[86] Lijun ponders the possibilities of following these precursors,

> If I crossdress and flee home,
> I may follow the examples of Xie Xiang'e and Liu Qingyun.
> If I become the top graduate in the Exam and meet the Emperor,
> It will indeed display the outstanding talent of women in the inner chambers….
> If I don't commit myself to this goal and become a heroic woman,
> What's the use of having all these talents? [87]

After Lijun changes into the attire of a male scholar, she examines her new look in the mirror. This intriguing scene shows Lijun's self-reflective gaze directed to an image of herself disguised as a man, a visual act almost antithetical to the previous gaze she deployed toward her girl's appearance in making the portrait. The text stages an

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[86] Liu Qingyun (柳卿雲) and Xie Xiang'e (謝湘娥) were both legendary women who crossdressed and earned eminence after becoming top graduates in the Civil Service Exam. Liu was initially married to a man named Wang Jingxing (王景星). Later Liu was forced to leave her husband and exile outside. She gained much success and was married. When she reunited with her husband Wang, she arranged for her "wife" to marry Wang, so that they still belonged to one family. Xie Xiang'e was a legendary woman in the thirteenth century, who disguised herself as her brother and went to the capital city of Beijing to seek adventure. She later married Wang Shuzhen (王淑珍), a daughter of a prime minister. Upon her final reunion with her family, Xie arranged for Wang Shuzhen to marry her brother.

[87]奴若改妝逃出去，學一個，謝湘娥與柳卿雲。那其間，蟾宮折桂朝天子；方顯得，繡戶香閨出俊英… 奴若不，轟轟烈烈為奇女, 要此才華待怎生? 3:10, 274.

intense visual drama in which the woman's disguised body becomes emblematic of a gender trans/formation process which entails a "dress-tease" rather than a "strip tease" (Garber 149). Lijun's performance reflects the "deconstructive nature of the transvestite performance," which is "always undoing itself as part of its process of self-enactment" (Garber 149) In this self-confessing scene, the text displays a transition from a third person narrator to a distinctive first person voice, with the character Lijun first calling herself *nu* (奴), a way for a woman to address herself. Lijun's feminine voice, interestingly, dissolves in the following lines when she finishes her "transformation" and begins to imitate man's manners. The feminine first person pronoun *nu* (奴) is no longer used. The text deftly returns to a third person narrative voice, depicting the crossdressed Lijun by listing the details of "his" appearance, with minimum use of gendered pronouns.

> Afraid to be seen by someone else,
> Lijun lets down the curtain and sits by the back window.
> In the candlelight she hastens to open the mirror,
> And gently combs the hair into a man's coiffure.
> Then she removes the red candle and opens the golden trunk,
> Takes out a bundle of clothes and puts them on the bed.
> She ties on the headscarf and the sash,
> Binds her feet with thin white silk satin, and puts on boots.
> Fully dressed in an instant,
> She holds the mirror in hand to examine herself closely.
> Where are the cloud-like chignon and the beautiful feminine face?
> There is now only an admirably handsome young man.
> A hat embellished with jade and decked with soft wings, and a scholar's scarf;
> A white gauze robe and a small bag to hold poetry drafts.
> A pair of white ribbons set off refined looks;
> In those bachelor's boots, imitating the gait of a man.
> Complexion like a peach blossom, fair and rosy;
> Eyebrows shapely as willow leaves, long and dark.
> A straight sculptured nose and cherry-like mouth;
> Blush on the cheeks like rosy clouds, diffusing fragrance.
> Demeanor outstanding and absolutely unrivaled;
> A handsome appearance truly extraordinary.
> A gentle and graceful young lad,
> A man with porcelain skin and poetic sensibility.

Such looks may overwhelm beautiful maidens,
And break the hearts of goddesses.
Lijun, after seeing this male look,
Cannot help but admire the image.[88]

Lijun's scrutinizing gaze of herself as a "man" in the mirror reveals the active and creative involvement of the body in how the readers see what they see. Centered in the visual paradigm, she is both the body that is seeing, and the one that is seen as a spectacle under public and private scrutiny. Her gaze into the mirror is meaningfully associated with gender mimicry, as effectively demonstrated in the scene of crossdressing before she flees home. Her crossdressing passes as convincing, for her handsome appearance is completed with an "unrivalled manners" and "poetic sensibility." By putting on the "scholarly scarf and the elegant robe," Lijun transforms herself into a "man" of refined manners. Gazing at her male look in the mirror, Lijun compares herself to other distinguished women crossdressers. In the Lacanian mirror stage, what is seen is crucially constitutive of the subject's self-identification. Through the mirror stage, the body and the self are intertwined; the body seen and the body seeing are integrated (Lacan 1). The crossdresser is not merely a spectator or a static participant, but displays a bodily responsiveness accompanying a womanly gaze into the mirror. Mimicking the walk and demeanor of a man, Lijun demonstrates an uncertain sexual identity which, in Jacqueline Rose's words, "muddies the plane of the image so that the spectator does not know where

[88]麗君恐有人偷看，帳幔相垂對後窗。燈下慌忙開寶鏡，輕輕攏發改男妝。移絳燭，啟金箱，取出衣包放在床。戴上巾來懸了帶，白綾繞足把靴裝。霎時打扮多完畢，手執菱花細端詳。全不知，雲環玉貌何方去；但見那，一位風流俊俏郎。軟翅唐巾銜美玉，素羅袍服佩詩囊。雙垂玉帶儀容麗，並踏宮靴步履裝。面似桃花紅又白，眉分柳葉翠還長。鼻懸玉柱櫻桃口，腮泛紅霞脂粉香。氣宇不凡真絕世，豐姿出眾貌非常。翩翩儒雅青春客，冉冉風流白面郎。堪使佳人動魂魄，可憐神女痛心腸。麗君看罷男裝貌，自己芳心亦贊揚。3: 10, 287.

she or he stands" in relationship to the protagonist. The crossdressed heroine evokes confusion at the level of sexuality and "brings disturbance into the visual field" (Rose 226). Tactfully acting out against the audience's gaze, Lijun transforms her ambivalent self into a token of artifactuality and a source of anxiety for men and women audiences alike. Even Lijun herself is surprised by her flawless "male scholar" look.

> Ah, how curious!
> How is it that as soon as I changed into the male outfit, I look completely
> different from my usual self.
>
> With this scholarly scarf and elegant robe I look even more genteel.
> Who upon seeing me could doubt that I resemble an immortal?
> Even the legendary crossdressing ladies Liu Qingyun and Xie Xiang'e
> Might not have been as handsome as I.
> They were truly exceptional women;
> Both became immortals and lived in paradise.
> Liu Qingyun married a Miss Xiao, west of the Yangzi River,
> and had a happy family.
> She became a top graduate in the Imperial Exam
> and earned eminence in her career;
> A marriage with several wives seemed only a game for her.
> Liu Qingyun and her "wives" are all remarried
> with Liu's husband Wang Jingxing.
> Liu's remarkable adventure was told from generation to generation.
> Another lady, Xie Xiang'e, disguised as her own brother,
> became a top graduate in the Exam
> And married a prime minister's daughter, Wang Shuxian.
> Since they were both women, in their marriage,
> They had true respect and sympathy for each other.
> When the truth was revealed, Wang Shuxian was
> remarried to Xiang'e's own brother.
> Xie and Liu were truly exceptional among all women.
> I myself am endowed with talent.
> If I am successful in future,
> I should follow the example of these ancient precursors.
> If I am married to a woman,
> I certainly have the most skill in drawing eyebrows for my wife.[89]

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[89] According to the *Biography of Zhang Chang* in *History of the Han Dynasty* (*Hanshu* 漢書•張敞傳), during the reign of Emperor Han Xuandi (漢宣帝 91- 49BC), an official Zhang Chang loved his wife very much and did eyebrow make-up for her every morning before leaving home for work. Day after day he became very skillful in this matter. The

Ah, my dear Huangfu!
If I follow the example of Liu Qingyun,
Could you be Liu's husband Wang Jingxing?
Maid Ronglan is busy herself;
She puts on socks and boots, instead of skirts.
A tilted melon-shaped hat is put on her head, and lowered to her eyebrows;
Her whole body is covered in a drape.
A long cloth belt is wrapped and tied around her waist.
What a neat and tidy young household servant!
Lijun looks and looks, her sorrows replaced by joy.
With such disguises, who will suspect that these two are women?[90]

Facing the mirror, Lijun orchestrates her own objectification and simultaneously, seeks self-empowerment in spectating and speculating. The image of the protagonist is dramatized in the visual narrative underlying the text. The moment witnesses a fusion of viewing positions for Lijun, the narrator, and the targeted textual audience. Lijun's reflexive gaze demonstrates a disparity between the mimicked "male" look, and a woman who persistently seeks to surpass corporeal boundaries. Embarking on an adventurous journey, Lijun is elated in spirit. "Letting out a breath and raising her chin, she takes on manly manners. / Her behavior is no longer feminine at all" (3:10, 289). Following her precursors, Lijun engenders a subjectivity that lies at the borders of life and legend, truth and fabrication.

Emperor heard of this anecdote and praised them as a couple who really loved each other. (Ban Gu Volume 76, 86)

[90]啊唷奇了：怎麼一換男裝，全不是日常的模樣了。儒巾雅服倍翩翩，誰道相逢不是仙。當日卿雲和謝女，可能如此美容顏。想她們，身為女子多瀟灑；一個個，跨鳳登仙入洞天。柳卿雲，江右成家偕配偶，蕭姬高結好良緣。狀元及第身榮貴，聘妾迎妻只當玩。到後來，婚嫁同房王氏府，風流佳話至今傳。再兼謝氏湘娥女，相府招親娶淑仙，一樣紅顏成配偶，倒覺得，相敬如賓兩意憐。到後成為兄長婦, 謝與柳，風流獨占眾嬋娟。想奴家，豐標既美堪同化，到他年，得意何妨效古賢。娶了夫人成了配，畫眉手段定稱先。咳， 皇甫郎君呀！奴家既效柳卿雲，君可能如王景星。侍女榮蘭忙打點，雙登鞋襪不穿裙。齊眉斜扣瓜楞帽，罩體翩披布直身。長帶一條腰內束，好一個，清清白白小家丁。麗君看看悲還喜，似此誰疑是女人。3:10, 287.

Intertextual Readings: Huang Zongjia, Xie Xucai and Wu Zao

Lijun's crossdressing performance could further be understood with intertextual readings of historical and literary examples of crossdressed women in the late imperial period. These women crossdressers, by taking on a masculine identity, consciously resisted the normalized understanding of gender and sexuality in the patriarchal society. I will discuss three prominent examples of women's crossdressing, literary characters Huang Zongjia (黃崇嘏), and Xie Xucai (謝絮才) and playwright Wu Zao (吳藻). After Lijun is appointed Prime Minister, local officials from a southern county send a women's opera troupe called "Hundred-flower Troupe" (百花班) consisting of all women performers, hoping to please the Minister with the beautiful opera singers. Lijun chooses a play staging the story of a woman who crossdresses as a man and becomes the Top Graduate in the Civil Service Examination. The play mentioned here alludes to a sixteenth century popular play "The Female Top Graduate" (女狀元), in which the crossdressed character Huang Zongjia (黃崇嘏) claims, "Who is responsible for good deeds in this world? It's not men; it's the women!"[91] The allusion to this play in *Destiny of Rebirth* contributes to an intense scene in which Lijun watches the crossdressed performer on stage. Lijun, together with the fictional audience, are all involved in the same sympathetic mood: "The scene pleases the viewers' minds with its subtlety; its implications are naturally and spontaneously accessible."[92] David Marshall argues that

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[91] 世間好事屬何人，不在男兒在女子. Xu, Volume 1766, 239.

[92] 情景巧妙娛心境，意想天然出世標. 10: 43, 688.

sympathy, defined as the imagined reproduction of another's feeling within an observer's mind, is inherently bound up with representation and theatricality (Marshall 21). Here this "play within a play" demonstrates a sympathetic moment when Lijun and the woman performer face each other as actor and spectator. But it ironically complicates Lijun's role as the spectator and subverted actor off the stage, revealing an engaged dialectic relation between life and theatre, fact and representation, and the unstable, ever-changing space between these assumed polar opposites.

The above scene together with the many other instances of theatrical performance in *Destiny of Rebirth* suggests the influence of a dramatic tradition which dates to the Song (宋 960-1279) and Yuan (元 1279-1368) dynasties. Compared to poetry, drama was a relatively accessible genre for a general audience in the late imperial period. In this sense, the intertextual references between *tanci* and theatrical works about women crossdressers would condition both the production and the reception of the text among the author's envisaged audience. While the late imperial dramatic tradition of *ni'nan* (imitating men) reflected resistance to differentiated sexual roles in the patriarchal society, these crossdressers' self-positioning necessarily remained indeterminate, conditioned by their unviable socio-cultural status in the context of patriarchy.

Lijun's story of crossdressing recalls a play *Silhouette in Disguise* (喬影), by the woman poet and playwright Wu Zao (吳藻 1799-1862). The play consists of a set of song suites in which the protagonist Xie Xucai (謝絮才) crossdresses and paints a miniature of herself in official's robes. Describing herself as a latter-day Qu Yuan (屈原),[93] Xie

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[93] Qu Yuan (fourth to third century BCE), a loyal minister in the state of Chu, who, slandered, rejected and exiled, wrote allegorical poems expressing his grievances.

expresses her frustration that the disjunction between herself and her times prevents her from fully employing her talents.[94] "Alas! Fettered by my physical form, I can only sigh all alone over my sadness. If one considers the matter carefully though, while miraculous transformations depend on Heaven, the initiative rests with oneself. That is why a few days ago I painted a small portrait of myself dressed in male attire."[95] The protagonist's self-portrait, rather than being conceptualized as a likeness or an aesthetic representation, is figured to be a shadow, a "silhouette" lacking substance, as the title of the play illustrates. The play emphatically displays the complexity of transvestite identity, which appears multiplied and even fraudulent in crossdressing performance.

Subverting the Confucian Cult of Filial Piety and Chastity

In the context of Confucian patriarchal society, the crossdressed protagonist possesses an emancipatory potential by subverting women's subordinate relation to the father, the husband and the son. Lijun's denial of her feminine identity and her refusal to recognize her parents in public position her at the very opposite of the Confucian ideal of feminine virtue. The text's presentation of the crossdressed heroine, however, shows the

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[94] Wai-Yee Li suggests that the author's purpose for writing *Silhouette in Disguise* is "explained by her frustrations with the limitations imposed by her gender role and her wish to transcend them" (Wai-Yee Li, 49). This sense of frustration is also articulated in the play *Dream of the Pear Flower* (梨花夢 1840) by He Peizhu (何佩珠). The heroine Du Lanxian (杜蘭仙) made a self-portrait of her female image before cross-dressing as a man. Taiwanese scholar Wang Lijian (王力堅) suggests that in both plays, the self-portrait reflects women's sexual displacement and self-estrangement in Confucian society (Wang Lijian, 35).

[95] 咳！這也是束縛形骸，只索自悲自嘆罷了・但是，仔細想來：幻化由天，主持在我！因此日前描成小影一幅，改作男兒衣履・(Wu Volume 1768, 132)

crossdresser's strategic justification for her decisions, by using the Confucian ethical codes for women's chaste and virtuous conduct. As modern critic Guo Moruo comments,

> (Lijun) uses feudalist ethics to deny feudal order, fame and position to oppose women's subordination to men. She refuses to recognize her parents and exploits the emperor's power; she relies on the doctrine of master and denies her obligations to the husband. And in the name of implementing filial piety, she challenges the imperial court, causing chaos and upheaval.[96]

Guo Moruo suggests that Lijun's acts are given justification by her apparent advocacy of filial piety and chastity, in order to protect her work from censorship and moralistic criticism from mainstream society. Despite this apparent authorial precaution, the progressive initiative in *Destiny of Rebirth* suffered disparagement from critics, with comments such as "demolishing the cardinal human relationships" (滅絕倫常), "rebelling against the primary principles" (大逆不道). (Chen Duansheng 889) Lijun, as a "man," challenges to the Confucian ethical principles in her relationship with the "ruler, father and husband" (君父夫三綱), leads to the author's dilemma in closing the story. When Lijun's real identity is revealed, the Emperor presses her to revert to her feminine appearance and to become his concubine. Lijun claims that she "would rather take the punishment of death than follow this order."[97] Chen's work breaks off, showing Lijun, who has come down with a sudden illness after her identity is revealed, vomiting blood in front of the Emperor. The text seems to imply that death would be a better choice for the crossdressed Lijun than reversion to a woman.

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[96] 挾爵祿名位以反男尊女卑，挾君威而不認父母，挾師道而不認丈夫，挾貞操節烈而違抗朝廷，挾孝悌力行而犯上作亂。(Chen Duansheng, 889)

[97] 願甘死罪斷難從。17:68, 1178.

Lijun's unconventional actions are first demonstrated in her relationship with her fiancé Huangfu Shaohua. The author replaces the relationship between the couple with a hierarchical relation between teacher and student, making Lijun Shaohua's mentor in his career. The cross dressed Lijun perplexes Shaohua, who recognized her features from the portrait but does not dare to ask if the Prime Minister, his own teacher, is the woman Lijun masquerading in an official's robe. This uncertainty is highlighted in an introductory poem to a chapter,

> With outstanding talent she rises from the inner chamber,
> Taking off her make-up, she passes as a fine scholar.
> A top candidate in the Imperial Exam,
> A dutiful and loyal Prime Minister in the palace.
> Fame and majesty widely admired by the world,
> Wisdom and ingenuity unrivalled among many.
> A beautiful countenance bewilders disciples like Shaohua,
> Who is uncertain whether the Minister is a woman or a man.[98]

The first two lines draw attention to the interchangeability of gender roles in the late imperial period. Like crossdressing, applying and taking off make-up is already a gendered performance. Interestingly, before she transforms her appearance into that of a man, the protagonist plays up her identity as a woman by the very act of applying make-up. Taking off the make-up is an ironic process of "revealing" the feminine body beneath, which may appear indistinguishable from that of a refined young man.[99] Beneath the

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[98]奇才迥出綺羅鄉，卸得閨妝便是郎。榜上三元名姓重，朝中一品股肱良。15:57, 952. 雷霆威望時同仰，冰雪聰明智獨長。卻使門墻桃李課，幾回疑鳳復疑凰。13: 49, 831.

[99] The interchangeability of gender roles is widely demonstrated in traditional Chinese paintings and literatures. Men and women are often painted as very similar figures, distinguished mostly by clothing. Additionally, the model of the scholar is often very lean and even effeminate in appearance. Readers of cross-dressing stories are able to see the practicability of changing gender roles through the changing of clothes. In the famous eighteenth century novel *Flowers in the Mirror* (鏡花緣 1832), for instance, there is a

robe, the crossdresser's body presents in its androgyny the very uncertainty underlying the binary of masculine and feminine gender identities. Lijun's crossdressed body is in this way a dynamic text, captivating yet indecipherable to Shaohua, who darts interrogative glances at the Minister but cannot resolutely recognize "him" as his lost fiancé. Thus I contend that this opening poem reflects the author's vigorous struggle with socially prescribed gender categories and her efforts to innovate, to create new positions for women of the time. Interestingly, this process of creating new forms of gender roles for women begins with what Judith Butler calls the "undoing" of gender: the removal of the make-up (卸妝), the undoing of notions of dominated femininity.[100]

Lijun's crossgender performance is particularly well dramatized when her male appearance stuns and even intimidates others. In the text, when Shaohua suspects the Minister to be the real Lijun, he raises the issue with the Emperor. When the Emperor interrogates Lijun as to her true identity, Lijun pretends to be greatly offended by Shaohua and angrily denies it. Later, Shaohua sends his newly wedded wife Liu Yanyu to pay the Minister a visit, privately hoping that his wife might act as a go-between and help Lijun reconcile with him. But when she enters the Minister's presence, the refined lady Yanyu is awed by the regal appearance of the crossdressed Lijun.

> Striding in steady steps, his comportment stands out among others,
> A fresh countenance and a refined stature, not to mention the exceptional
> manners.

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comic chapter in which the male protagonist was forced to change his male attire into female dress when he travels to a *Country of Women* (女兒國). The author's depiction of women, who are the incarnated flower spirts, involves a critique of social and cultural constraints in women's gender roles in the late imperial period.

[100] In her book *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler suggests that to "do" one's gender in certain ways sometimes implies "undoing" dominant notions of personhood. (Butler 2004, 15-16)

Face fair as porcelain,
Lips red as fresh rouge.
He lets out a cough and marches into the palace,
His face dignified and solemn.
At the sight of the Minister, the gentle Duchess
Is rather intimidated by the eminent official.
"The Minister looks so spirited in the golden belt and the purple robe with dragon patterns.
Such an appearance certainly can be called outstanding!
Even though his features are similar to Lijun's features in the painting,
How could one with such a majestic air be a woman?[101]

Not only does Lijun put on a regal appearance, she also gives the bashful Yanyu a lecture in a didactic tone, asking her to warn Shaohua that he should always respect the Minister as his teacher and should never "defraud the emperor and manipulate his own teacher" (侮聖戲師).[102] Seeing this intensely dramatic and comic scene, Lijun's "wife" Suhua covers her mouth with a sleeve to conceal her smiles. Whereas Yanyu plays the role of an obedient wife delivering an apology for her husband, Lijun mimics the manner and tone of a male official and teacher, denouncing Shaohua for his audacious inquiries about her gender. The contrast between Yanyu and Lijun demonstrates again the author's mockery of and resistance to the gender roles prescribed for women.

Lijun's unconventional notion of subjectivity gives explanation to her rejection of marriage with Huafu Shaohua. The opening poem of Volume 15 serves as another moment that foreshadows Lijun's ultimate unwillingness to revert to the role of the good wife.

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[101]步穩行端威出眾，神清骨秀品非凡。面如傅粉溶溶白，唇若塗朱艷艷鮮。咳嗽一聲朝內走，看他那，巍然顏色十分嚴。多嬌郡主觀瞧罷，倒不覺，暗懼當朝極品官。金貂紫蟒好精神，容貌堪稱第一名。雖與圖中生得像，那有個，這般威武是釵裙。13: 50, 857.

[102] Lijun openly denounces Shaohua's suspicions about her real identity and refuses to recognize her own parents in front of the Emperor. 13: 49, 838.

> Heaven has it that a person with unique talent will come from the inner chambers,
> Young and genteel as she is, she is appointed the Prime Minister of the country.
> Without the least intention to be locked with her fiancé in marriage,
> She crossdresses to express a desire to achieve, in whatever small way.
> She would never sacrifice her chastity to acquire fortune,
> Relying on her wisdom she stays away from common people's suspicions.
> When her true identity is revealed in the future,
> The phoenix will ascend, hearing the melody of the *xiao*[103].

The poem starts as a biography of the protagonist, who is destined to rise from the inner chambers and become the country's Prime Minister. Line 3 and 4 indicate that the protagonist's personal aspiration for achievement (誌) surpasses a common woman's wish for a consummated marriage, leaving open the possibility that the story will divert from the expected closure. Line 5 and 6 suggest that by crossdressing Lijun escapes the arranged marriage and preserves her own chastity, since with her ingenious reaction to every sort of situation, she could continue to pass as a man.

The author's claim of Lijun's chastity, as the beginning of this section suggests, reflects the authorial concern for legitimizing her writing in the dominant patriarchal culture and may serve as a "cover" for the potentially subversive content in the text.[104] Chastity is strategically evoked and stressed to justify Lijun's cross-gender performances. This resonates with the ending lines of the poem, which allude to the legend of "playing

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[103]天教繡閣出奇才, 年少風流拜相臺。琴瑟無心攜伉儷，衣冠有誌抱涓埃。豈因富貴傾貞節，卻仗聰明避俗猜。他日復還真面相，蕭聲吹引鳳凰來。 15: 57, 952. The last line might suggest Lijun's reconciliation with Shaohua, and that both might become immortals in the end.

[104] A famous example is *The Carnal Prayer Mat* (肉蒲團), an erotic novel of the late Qing period written by Li Yü (李漁 1610-1680). Although the sexual descriptions in the novel are extremely graphic, in the preface the author adopts a didactic tone and claims that his purpose is to warn his readers the danger of sexual pleasure by exposing the harmful outcome of the protagonist's deviant sexual behaviors.

the instrument *xiao* to draw the phoenix" (吹簫引鳳), suggesting the possibility of Lijun marrying Shaohua when she reveals her true self.

This expression regarding Lijun's possible reunion with Shaohua and her persistent rejection of the marriage develops to a moment when Lijun's identity is officially exposed on the account of her bound feet. Patricia Sieber suggests *Destiny of Rebirth* "adumbrates the lure of modern forms of female self-determination—unfettered mobility, sexual choice, and professional power. Yet what this story also shows is that the girl had to renounce her female community once she began to pass for a man." (Sieber 147) What is also exposed at the revelation of Lijun's bound feet is the fact that the physical and social cultivation of the woman has been internalized and unconsciously implemented by women in their daily life. Even in the mock marriage, Lijun binds her feet everyday and then hides them in men's boots. Lijun's "wife" even makes embroidered inner shoes for her. In the imperial period, Sieber suggests, women's "subjection to these somatic regimens was neither voluntary nor optional." (Sieber 147) The everyday lives of most women did not offer opportunities for them to conceive of resistance. Lijun's story not only depicts an imaginary space of women's autonomy, but also represents the difficulty for women of doing away with imposed cultural prescriptions.

Women's Homoeroticism: the Scene In Which Lijun's Identity Was Revealed

When Lijun's bound feet are dramatically revealed, the multivalent and volatile identity of the crossdresser causes a homoerotic tension between the crossdresser and the

unsuspicious women characters who mistake Lijun for a man. When the Emperor suspects that Lijun (with the pseudonym of Li Mingtang) is actually a crossdresser, he schemes with the Emperor Dowager to invite Li/Lijun to the palace and get him drunk. Then the Emperor Dowager orders two palace maids to take off Li/Lijun's shoes to see if "he" is a woman. The text stages an intriguing scene in which the two maids are overawed by the sleeping Minister's ravishing beauty while they muse on his/her sexual identity. The revelation of the bound feet is endlessly delayed. After the boots are taken off, the maids find both feet wrapped in satin socks. Driven by curiosity, they remove the socks and are surprised to see layer after layer of clothes binding the feet.

> Giggling in hushed tones,
> They take pleasure in looking, while pulling off the wrapping cloth.
> They see that the cloth on his feet seems endlessly long,
> Almost a *zhang* of white satin is scattered on the couch[105].
> After six or seven rounds, the shape of her refined shoes appears,
> pleasing as the newly sprung bamboo roots.
> Yet another layer removed, a pair of scarlet shoes is seen,
> red as dewy lotus flowers.
> After all the white satin is taken off,
> The two maidens are thrilled by the sight.
> When the satin foot binding cloth runs to the end,
> The scarlet embroidered shoes are revealed.
> The upper is sewn with interlocked golden threads and pale blue trimmings.
> The toes of the shoes are adorned with clusters of pearls secured with minute stitches.
> Free of stains and dust,
> These shoes are barely three inches long;[106]
> The feet must be even smaller, because of the two shoes.
> The maids, upon seeing this,

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105 *Zhang* (丈): a traditional Chinese unit for the linear measurement. One *zhang* roughly equals 3.33 meters.

106 *Inch*: Here the original Chinese is *cun* (寸), a traditional unit for measurement of length. One *cun* roughly equals 3.333 centimeters. In the cult of bound feet, the smallest ones are the more admirable.

Cannot help beaming with joy.[107]

Curiously, Li's feet are not fully revealed yet. "Since Lijun has to go to the Royal Palace many times, she easily wears out the shoes, for she has to carefully imitate a man's walk and hide her feminine manners."[108] The maids, surprised at the small size of Lijun's feet, remove the red shoes, and find another pair of sleeping shoes inside. The narrator's jovial description of the scene stages the pleasure of the women spectators both in and out of the text. At the end, Lijun's feet are still wrapped in a pair of embroidered shoes, hidden from the sight of the audience. Possibly Chen makes such an arrangement so that Lijun would not lose face by having her body revealed in public.[109] Under the readers' fetishizing eye, the moment of revelation is infinitely deferred. The text resists the exposure of its heroine's body, offering instead an opacity that blocks the gaze of both the reader and the palace maids. Judith Zeitlin observed in a study of *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* (聊齋誌異 1766) that, "bound feet, those man-made fetishes that had become the locus of the erotic imagination in late Imperial China, are transformed into a natural and immutable proof of true femininity." (Zeitlin 1993, 116) The "absence" of Lijun's feet figuratively suggests that there are no authentic original identities in trans-gender performances. The narrative creates a "scenographic space" of women's same-sex

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[107]言悄悄，笑融融，扯一重時看一重。只見那，裹腳重重扯不完，白綾盈丈散床前。六七轉，已觀嫩玉初生筍；去一層，漸看嬌紅帶露蓮。抽到後來綾盡了，喜歡煞，藍巾彩袖兩嬋娟。但見那，白綾裹腳一抽開，竟露出，兩只猩紅小繡鞋。口上是，月白鎖邊金線壓，尖上是，明珠攢住細針排。無染垢，不沾埃，三寸還差兩只鞋。宮女一觀如此狀, 只喜得，朱唇難合口張開。16: 64, 1082.

[108] 只因他，赴闕赴朝行得費。只因他，裝男掩女走來嚴。16: 64, 1082.

[109] Although the bound feet are representative of traditional feminine beauty, they are always covered with embroidered shoes. The feet, deformed and mutilated, are considered unsightly and never revealed in public.

desire. Miaake Bleeker suggests that the "scenographic space" refers to a theatrical space in which all that is seen is in a sense staged for a viewer. (Bleeker 2008, 98) The quasi-theatrical episode of taking off Lijun's boots offers a provocative case of feminine desire, with the women readers invited to share with the royal maids the pleasure of looking at Lijun's concealed feet. This visual structure transforms the Freudian heterosexual model of fetishism, and submits the crossdressed protagonist to an ambivalent homoerotic gaze from the audience.

Chen Duansheng's text exemplifies the liberating potential of cross-gender mimicry, a topic that many feminist scholars have theorized and explored. Interestingly, the author Chen Duansheng did not continue the narrative beyond the point at which Lijun is confronted with the Emperor's proposal of marriage, after her "true" identity is revealed. Chen thus leaves the text and the protagonist Lijun in a tale of deferral, indicating the very impossibility of relegating the crossdresser to an embodied and distinctively feminine subjectivity.

Authorial Interpolations and Self-Empowerment

In the last section of this chapter, I will return to the authorial interpolation in the narrative, with the purpose of drawing a comparison between the depiction of the woman crossdresser, and the author's self-representation. I will study two passages of Chen Duansheng's autobiographical description in *tanci*, at the beginning and ending of *Destiny of Rebirth*. I will first examine how Chen's adoption of the "scholar and beauty" narrative tradition creates the readerly anticipation of a conventional ending, and why this anticipated ending could not be worked through. Secondly, I will examine the authorial

voice as in a dialectical relationship with the readers, and assess the authorial interpolation into the narrative as a form of self-empowerment. My discussion will consider the authorial position in *Destiny of Rebirth* both in the tradition of late imperial fiction narratives, as well as in the context of contemporary novel criticism. My primary focus is on how the author's autobiographical insertions reflect the themes of women's authorship and gender representation in the late imperial context.

The title of the work, "Destiny of Rebirth," implies the author and the readers' desire for a fulfilled love relation. The narrator seeks to "continue the story" of the precedent *tanci* work *Jade Bracelets*. The author invites the readers to foreground the tale as an embedded one, demanding that the audience make connections between the characters and worlds of different narrative frames. In Chapter 1, the narrator takes an extradiegetic position, looking through the lens of the marriage imperative.

> As an ancient saying goes, marriage is predestined five hundred years before the fact.
> I believe that success and failure in love are both fated.
> Often a handsome horse is ridden by an uncouth villager;
> A clever wife commonly rests at the side of an imprudent husband.
> One should believe that such incidents are the doing of
> The karma of predestination,[110] and are by no means accidental.[111]

The text displays a dialectic between a desiring drive toward the closure (a happy marriage), and the delaying of that closure in the narrative (the frustrated love relations in characters' past lives). The subsequent lines, though, demonstrates a proleptic shift from

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[110] In the work there are repeated references to Buddhist beliefs concerning reincarnation and predestination. The title *Destiny of Rebirth* is such an example. The protagonist Meng Lijun and her fiancé Huangfu Shaohua were both incarnations of stars in heaven and were predestined to have a relationship.

[111] 自古雲，婚姻五百年前定。我觀來，成敗之由總在天。駿馬常馱村漢走，巧妻每伴拙夫眠。這些多是循環理，須信其間非偶然。1:1, 1.

the ancient stories of marriage to a flashforward to events that *will* take place chronologically in the characters' present lives.

> If a scholar marries a beautiful lady,
> It is mostly because of their destined bond in their last lives.
> If a couple has no luck to achieve a desired relationship in their latest lives,
> They are connected through karmic bonds in this life.
> If they are not particular about their partners' looks,
> They will be able to resume their love bond with each other.
> …
> Why do I bring up the issue of predestination here?
> Because it is a vital matter in this story.
> Here I will tell an unusual tale of grief and joy,
> Of separation and reunion.
> Entitled *Destiny of Rebirth*, it is a quite unconventional story.[112]

The theme of predestination, which Chen brings up in her authorial assertions, is a narrative convention in the "scholar and beauty" (才子佳人) fiction, which became popular in the southern regions since the late imperial Ming and early Qing period (seventeenth century). This kind of fiction, which focuses on themes of marriage and love, also depicts women characters who are not only beautiful but who also are endowed with exceptional talents and independence. Chen Duansheng's tale, likewise, starts with an anticipation of the consummation of Lijun and Shaohua's love. This foreshadowing, nevertheless, did not lead to a corresponding closure in the work, when the author gradually came to realize the discrepancy between Lijun's character and her predestined marriage. Her destiny departs the precursory tale of love and reunion. By disguising herself as a man, Lijun already eludes the feminine body and resumes a new life-form after the crossdressing. The title word "rebirth" does not refer to the reincarnation of a

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112有一等，才子佳人成伉儷，多應前世有盟緣。或為參差難遂願，故而今世又牽連。若非兩意 相關切，便是同心契愛全……因甚書中談及此？這情由，卻同此集事相關。說一番，悲歡離合新奇語。再生緣，三字為名不等閑。1:1, 1.

previous woman into another body, but implies the crossdresser's acquisition of a new life beyond gender boundaries or karmic circumstances.[113]

The text also presents an evolving aesthetic relationship between author and reader. This relationship recalls Paola Zamperini's discussion of the traditional trope of *zhiyin* or appreciative audience (literally, those who understand the tune) in Chinese literature. Zamperini suggests that late imperial literature presented "elective affinities" between authors and readers, who were literary soul mates. Zamperini suggests the authorial voice, which announces itself by periodic interventions, is a clear vehicle of self-empowerment for the writer and the reader. (Zamperini 67)[114]

The authorial statements in the text represent an empowering voice of the woman author, and elicit the author's sympathetic readers in return. These insertions reveal the author's conflicts, dilemmas and anxiety about writing, and recall similar concerns about authorship in late imperial male literati writers' works. A famous fiction writer Li Yü (李渔 1611-79) holds that the greatest value for an author in writing plays or any fictional narratives lay in the opportunities for relieving anxiety and in the fulfillment of fantasy (Huang 25) . Similarly, in the nineteenth century "scholars and beauties" novel *The Flat Mountain and the Cold Swallow*, the author emphasized that authorship is underwritten by the impulse for wish fulfillment, "Frustrated in trying to find a use for one's talent in

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[113] The concept "Karma" in this context refers to the fact that star-dwelling immortals, for a reason, must live out a human life on earth.

[114] See Zamperini's review of the nineteenth century novel *A Dream of Green Bowers* (青樓夢) by Yu Da (俞達) (Zamperini 62-91). Zamperini also referred to Li Yü's works, such as *The Carnal Prayer*, where the author's self-promotion, clearly aimed at higher sales, is disguised under the robe of the ethical and pedagogical functions played by his fiction.

the public service, but not willing to be content to be a failure, one cannot but resort to fabricating a fictional character in order to envision a grand fulfillment of a thwarted ambition” (Huang 25).

Destiny of Rebirth echoes these sayings, by presenting a woman author’s voice that grieves over family misfortunes and the difficulty of taking up the writing brush. This voice is reminiscent of the authorial interventions in novels by Jane Austen, whose works came out only several decades after Chen Duansheng’s *Destiny of Rebirth*. Both authors, one may say, presented penetrating portraitures of characters and proved their abilities in doing so as a form of power. In Chen Duansheng’s case, though, her authorial voice comes through in an intensely personal, and sometimes dramatized tone. The authorial impulse for self-empowerment becomes most prominent at the beginning of the last volume, where Chen contemplates the correlation between her life as a writer and possible endings for the story. After her family calamity, Chen lamented on the vicissitudes of life and recalls the old days before marriage:

> I scratch my head and call out to Heaven, wishing to ask,
> “Can the Way of Heaven can be turned around?”
> Having tasted to the full all the bitter sufferings of the world,
> I recall the days of my earliest youth in the inner chambers:
> We sisters shared a couch as we listened to the night rain,
> And our parents assigned us rhymes and taught us poetry…
> In my ignorance I dared steal a glance at the affairs of the past.
> With brush in hand, I wrote *Destiny of Rebirth*.[115]

The first line alludes to the poem *Questions to Heaven* (天問) in *Songs of Chu* (楚辭), a monumental work representing the beginning of an ornate literary tradition in

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115搔首呼天欲問天，問天天道可能還？盡嘗世上酸辛味，追憶閨中幼稚年。姊妹聯床聽夜雨，椿萱分韻課詩篇。管隙敢窺千古事，毫端戲寫再生緣。 17: 65, 1084. Idema translated the title of the book as *Karmic Bonds of Reincarnation.* (Idema 2004, 750-752)

China.[116] Qu Yuan (屈原 340 BC - 278 BC) of *Songs of Chu* was a loyal minister, to whom are attributed core texts of this anthology. In his life time, he was banished and persecuted, and consequently committed suicide by drowning. Chen Duansheng's strategic identification with the male poet enables her to articulate her own predicament in an affirmative and self-empowering voice. In the fictional space, she is the reincarnated Qu Yuan in both her talent and banishment. The following lines recount the happiness of her marriage, which ended abruptly when her husband was involved in a scandal of examination corruption and banished to a frontier province as a common soldier. Chen mourns over her separation from her husband:

> Then he was caught in the fetters of profit, the snares of fame.
> Once a string on a zither has snapped, it is broken forever;
> The half of a broken mirror can never be made round again:
> …Could it possibly have been an omen of our fate today,
> That long ago I called this work *Destiny of Rebirth*?
> During the day, my face in the mirror always provides the proof,
> "An orphaned star following daybreak" truly does apply to me.[117]

Displaying the clear link between the circumstances of her life and the contents of her work, Chen evokes the image of the "mirror" to reflect on the transience of existence and the anticipatory nature of her writing, which inadvertently had become prophetic of her own destiny. Like Lijun pondering her reflection in the mirror, Chen Duansheng casts

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[116] The "Heavenly Questions" is an interrogation that begins with questions about the heavens but soon progresses to questions about earthly matters and the affairs of men. Some of the questions address political issues of the time. Chen Duansheng's allusion to "Heavenly Questions" reflects a woman author's determination to break out of the snare of silence and to use the same format as a tool through which women can speak. For an English translation of "Heavenly Questions" in *The Songs of the South*, see Hawks 122-152.

[117]利鎖名韁卻掛牽。一曲驚弦弦頓絕，半輪破鏡鏡難圓。豈是早為今日讖，因而題作再生緣。日中鏡影都成驗，曙後星孤信果然。17: 65, 1085.

a retrospective view on the text in search of her own face and own voice, suggesting that her audience engage in a double reading of her personal life and Lijun's story. In both cases the readers are engaged in a dialectic of rupture and return: just like the author who waits for the return of her banished husband, the readers are held in suspense awaiting the fictional reunion of the crossdressed Lijun and her fiancé Shaohua. Yet, as the symbol of the "broken mirror" implies, writing only brings up irrevocable fissures between desire and destiny, between prescient visions and nostalgic longings. In addition to the image of "broken mirror," the "broken string on a zither" is an additional sign that this book, for all its plucking of rhymes, will be left without an ending. Chen speaks of the readers' prospect for closure:

> As it happens, my book has enjoyed a reputation for a time,
> And has found its way throughout the province of Zhejiang.
> My friends in the inner chambers have often voiced their admiration. …
> My elders in their screened halls have all let themselves be amused.
> They've buzzed about my ears, urging me to complete the book,
>   as they all longed to see
> The star-crossed lovers, that perfect couple, brought together at last.
> "Huangfu Shaohua must be matched with his beautiful bride,
> Minister Li must finally consummate her marriage!
> As you have played the role of match maker on their behalf,
> You should not play the Son of Heaven and keep them apart!"
> The Creator should not blame me for this state of affairs,
> I am only, a woman with a broken heart grieving over her lonely life…
> All the endless affairs of the last twelve years,
> Have passed in a tipsy dream of Li Mingtang![118]

This textual moment demonstrates a notable embeddedness of the protagonist, the author, and her envisaged readers in the inner chambers: that is, all three are at a vantage

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[118]惟是此書知者久，浙江一省遍相傳。閨閣知音頻賞玩，庭幃尊長盡開顏。諄諄更囑全終始，必欲使，鳳友鸞交續舊弦。皇甫少華偕伉儷，明堂酈相畢姻緣。為他既作氤氳使，莫學天子故作難。造物不須相忌我，我正是，斷腸人恨不團圓。悠悠十二年來事，盡在明堂一醉間. 17: 65, 1085.

point to anticipate and recollect, becoming both the objects and the subjects of the narrative. Presenting a replica of the text within the text itself, Chen Duansheng concludes *Destiny of Rebirth* in a reflection of the past and the present, revealing the author's own unviable position as a textual subject and a woman author in real life. Simultaneously, Chen's twelve years of writing is internally replicated in Lijun's dream, revealing a self-producing desire in the text which circulates between the author, the text, and her projected audience.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have studied the progressive potentials in *Destiny of Rebirth* from the aspects of self-portrait, women's crossdressing and an author's interpolation in the narrative. The protagonist's self-portrait reveals the ironic fissure between representation of the woman and her transient subjectivity. Crossdressing, on the other hand, brings out the heroine's power to resist Confucian ethical codes, which prescribe women's subordinate relationship in the inner quarters and within the public sphere. The author's maneuver of these textual scenarios reveals a strategic negotiation between the social and cultural discourses on feminine chastity and filial piety, and women's private desire to pursue autonomy and freedom against these regulations. The text of *Destiny of Rebirth* brings to surface a feminine consciousness which challenges the dominant prescriptions of women's gender roles, and reveals the author's emancipatory vision and its unresolved problems. Simultaneously, the text represents the author's conflicts and dilemmas about writing which were shared by other women authors in the Chinese patriarchal context. These author's conflicts and dilemmas are centrally reflected in the

crossdressed Lijun, who commits the crime of disloyalty to the Emperor and impiety to her parents by denying her real identity, but is who depicted as "the most loyal minister in defending the country and running state affairs, and a most human character in caring for Shaohua, her sworn sister Suhua, and her own mother." (Wu Qingyun 74) This apparent self-contradiction in the author's presentation of Lijun, Wu suggests, reveals the ironic and irreconcilable relation between a utopian vision of women's identity, and the "stern reality" which constrains women's daily lives in patriarchal society. (Wu, 80)[119] The author's predicament in her real life echoes the heroine's implied death in the end, as the ailing Lijun spits blood when pressed by the Emperor's proposal, knowing that she would surely be executed if she rejected the Emperor. The open-endedness of the book suggests that Chen Duansheng's progressive vision, resembling Lijun's pursuit of freedom, could only await its fulfillment in the next life.

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[119] Perhaps the most compelling textual detail that reveals this irony is the sight of Lijun's bound feet, which both proves her social identity as a woman, and her internalization of such social prescriptions of her gendered identity. It proves her early subjection to the foot-binding practice and the difficulty of undoing it physically as well.

CHAPTER 2: FEELING ALONG WITH THE AUTHORIAL NARRATOR: AUTHORIAL VOICE AND NARRATIVE EMPATHY IN *DREAM, IMAGE, DESTINY* (夢影緣 1843)

> My pen is accustomed to express anger against injustice,
> The heart of the *Jingwei* bird is most steadfast.
> I would express regret for my precursors,
> And eliminate vice and malevolence throughout the world. [120]

This chapter investigates the theme of woman's authorship in the *tanci* work *Dream, Image, Destiny* (夢影緣 1843) by Zheng Danruo (1811-1860). I propose the central concept of narrative empathy as central to the work and examine how the authorial narrator mirrors what the characters might feel, articulating that feeling through an authorial voice. I explore the text and its social and political interventions in the predominant discourse of the time. As part of this proposal, I discuss how *Dream, Image, Destiny* foreshadows later proto-feminist works in China by representing the multivalent nature of the feminine voice and its soliciting of sympathetic reader responses. Zheng foregrounds writing as a predestined task; the act of writing constitutes the author's attempt at self-redemption and recreation. While Zheng vividly describes twelve unusual women characters, her writing philosophy helps tie together the disparate characters into a unity. Authorial statements in *Dream* demonstrate her deep anxiety about the social and cultural turmoil of the late Qing dynasty, and also reflect the persistent struggle of women authors to create a space for self-expression. The author marshals a powerful narrative voice to elicit the sympathy of her readers, and establishes a "speaking self" that

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[120] 管城慣做不平鳴，癡絕冤禽填海心。聊為古人抒憤恨，鋤奸誅惡廣施刑。Zheng Danruo 2: 20, 104.

gives equal weight to the author, the narrator, and the fictional character. Zheng's epic undertaking in *tanci* calls attention to the importance of women's self-inscription through writing, an act crucial to the very possibility of social, cultural and historical-structural transformation during that time.

Zheng Danruo and the Cult of Chastity

Like the *tanci* author Chen Duansheng, Zheng was a member of the gentry and a woman author. She was born in a county of Zhejiang province in the early nineteenth century. In her earlier years of life, she established her fame as a poet under the name of Zheng Zhenhua (鄭貞華), and completed a poetry collection, *Green Water Pavilion* (綠飲樓集), which was published around 1833. (Hu Wenkai 194) Later, she did become known as a master of *tanci*. A literary critic of Zheng Danruo's time commented on her *tanci* and the development of women's writing: "Zheng Danruo wrote the renowned *Dream, Image, Destiny*, which stood out with its erudition, splendid style, and refined diction, and consequently brought about a transformation of the genre of *tanci*."[121]

Current scholarship on Zheng Danruo shows that she frequently exchanged poems with other women poets of the time, and these poems provide some of the little biographical information that remains about her.[122] Some of the poems dedicated to her

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121 昔鄭淡若夫人撰夢影緣，華縟相尚，造語獨工，彈詞之體，為之一變。周穎芳，精忠传弹词序。(Bao 269)

122 A female poet Wang Yaofen (王瑤芬), who was Zheng Danruo's close friend, had several poems referring to Zheng in a poetry collection entitled *Poetry Collections of the Rhyme Composition Pavilion* (寫韻樓詩抄). According to Bao, Wang Yaofen was a family relative of Zheng Danruo. Zheng's daughter Zhou Yingfang (周穎芳) married Wang Yaofen's son. (Bao 269)

by her women friends also shed some light on her literary reputation and style of writing. In a poem composed for the celebration of Zheng's birthday, a poet Yan Yonghua (嚴永華), who was a close friend of Zheng's, comments that she had long known that Zheng's "magic brush was born with an immortal spirit."[123] Yan honored Zheng as the "woman master" in poetry (女宗師), and in comparison calls herself a "poetry disciple" (詩弟子). These references attest to the author's poetic talent, which is consequently displayed in the large amount of poetry and verse games in *Dream*. Zheng's poetry collection *Green Water Pavilion,* however, apparently was lost relatively soon after her death. A poem dedicated to Zheng from a later woman poet notes, "Her chaste spirit, together with the *Green Water Pavilion*, left no traces."[124] The poem, punning on Zheng's formal name "Zhenhua" (chaste flower), suggests that the poet had not left many poems after her tragic suicide in 1860.

This suicide, which is probably the most important piece of extant biographical information, can be contextualized with the mass-suicide of women that occurred during the Taiping Rebellion. As I mentioned earlier, the Taiping Rebellion was a social upheaval which nearly overthrew the late Qing government.[125] When the rebels

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[123]久知妙筆存仙骨. Yan Yonghua.(嚴永華). "For the Celebration of Lady Zheng Danruo's Birthday" (寄祝鄭澹若夫人生日). (Yan 1.10a.)

[124]貞魂綠飲無消息。Chen Yun (陳蕓), "On Zheng Danruo's Poems" (論鄭淡若詩). (Chen Yun 23b.)

[125] The cult of female chastity in the late imperial period has caught the attention of many critics. Wenjing Lu offers valuable research on the cult of widow chastity in Ming and Qing China. Her scholarship focuses on the cult of the faithful maidens, those betrothed women whose fiancés died before marriage, but who nevertheless maintained lifelong chastity or committed suicide to join their "husbands" in death. Lu proposes that these faithful maidens were not passive victims of the Confucian social oppression, but

occupied the southern cities, local residents were forced to leave their families and live in separate camps for men and women. As their domestic lives were shattered, many women of the gentry class committed suicide to protect their chastity. Zheng's husband was the head official of Hangzhou when the rebels broke into the city in 1860. Probably to preserve her chastity, Zheng committed suicide by taking poison. Janet Theiss notes that for late imperial women, "once the boundaries of the chaste body, the virtuous reputation, the proper interaction or the inner quarters had been violated, only a publicly known and violent vindication of the chastity that was destroyed could restore the moral integrity that was integral to so many women's sense of self." (Theiss 134) Zheng's death, in this light, might be understood as an attempt to express her selfhood in a shattered society by the spectacle of suicide.

Corresponding with the author's personal demonstration of moral integrity, *Dream, Image, Destiny* manifests the widespread moral concern with chastity and filial piety, which formed the basis of feminine heroism. In *Dream,* the themes of women's chastity and filial piety are evoked and reinforced by the authorial insertions and authorial comments on the characters. Zheng Danruo's women characters manifest acts of chastity as a form of resistance. While faithful unmarried maidens who commit suicide in the name of reuniting with their deceased fiancés, Zheng's characters also reject marriage in the name of maintaining their filially pious service to their own parents. When they are forced to marry under the pressure of their natal families, they commit suicide to preserve their sexual and moral purity. In the following summary of the plot, I will attempt to illustrate how the heroines in Zheng's *tanci* assert their own moral value

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were active agents who used the Confucian ethical codes to assert their sense of identity. (Lu 247) Also see Susan Mann 1987, 37-56.

by actively appropriating the Confucian cult of chastity, and explore the social, cultural, and psychological meaning of women's suicide in this era.

Synopsis and Major Themes

Dream begins with a predestined relationship between two heavenly spirits, Premium Flower Goddess (魁芳仙子) and Dream-Concealed Deity (夢隱真人). The two heavenly spirits are summoned by the Heavenly Emperor to descend to earth, to lead the scholar Zhuang of the Song Dynasty (960-1279) to ascend to the immortal world. The Emperor demands that Dream-Concealed Deity enter the world and be reincarnated as Mengyu (夢玉), the son of the Zhuang family. When Mengyu grows up, he will take the place of his father and serve the country and the emperor. Together with twelve flower goddesses, High Flower Goddess and the Dream-Concealed Deity descend to "demonstrate their [outstanding deeds] in person" (現身說法), in order to educate people in the world. (1:1, 3)

The main plot line then follows the family of the reincarnated immortal Zhuang Yuan (莊淵), who descends to the world during the Song dynasty. After serving the Emperor with dedication for many years, Zhuang resigns from his position, to avoid conflict with a treacherous high official. He retreats to his home in the countryside with his wife, Mrs. Zhuang, a highly talented woman who also happens to be the reincarnated Premium Flower Goddess. She is the leader of the twelve flower goddesses in the story. Zhuang's son Mengyu, who is the reincarnated Dream-Concealed Deity, descends to the world to redress social customs. The Plum Goddess, who shares a predestined bond with Mengyu, is born into Lin's family, carrying the name of Lin Xianyu. When Xianyu's

father General Lin Wu meets Zhuang Yuan and becomes his friend, he arranges a union of the two reincarnated deities. The tales of the other flower goddesses overlap with Lin and Zhuang's romance. Each of these goddesses possesses a distinctive talent or has an outstanding virtue. The major plotline develops around Zhuang Mengyu, and two other flower goddesses, Lin Xianyu and Song Renfang, both of whom married Mengyu to fulfill a preordained relationship.

The text threads together the individual stories of the goddesses through intricate plot manipulation. Instead of rendering these characters as flat or minor characters, each character is depicted with remarkable psychological depth and complexity. The author stresses four basic virtues for human beings, including filial devotion (孝), loyalty (忠), chastity (節), and uncorrupted purity (烈). These virtues are presented through the unusual deeds of the twelve reincarnated goddesses. Almost all the women characters resist marriage, and express their wish to stay unmarried to accomplish filial duties to their own parents. Unlike in the cult of widow suicide or faithful maiden suicide, many reincarnated women characters pass away in illness or regret before they are arranged to be married by force. This kind of death *before* marriage or even engagement reveals the author's modification of the notion of chastity in the Confucian moral system. In the text, women's moral integrity is presented as a spiritual agency which is of higher importance than her obligation to her parents, her husband, and her in-laws.

The Authorial Narrator: Basic Features

The Use of First Person Narration in Chinese Fiction

In *Dream*, the narrative voice shifts between the first-person narrative voice and the third-person narrative voice. As a result, the distance between the narrator and the story world becomes dynamic and changeable. By calling into question the "authorial narrator," I will analyze the relation between the authorial narrator and the fictional world. In *Dream*, the authorial narrator asserts a voice of "I," at the beginning and ending of each chapter, and dexterously mediates in between the multiple embedded narratives. The positions of the authorial narrator in the multifarious narrative lead the readers to question the shifting boundaries between the authorial narrator, the fictional character, and the actual author.

The first person authorial insertions demonstrate the relation between *tanci* works and some subgenres in China's vernacular fiction. Current scholarship has offered extensive discussion of the narrative points of view in late imperial fiction.[126] My

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[126] In late imperial fiction works, narrative points of view could be understood in several ways. Liang Xiaoping points out three major narrative perspectives in the Ming and Qing domestic fiction. One kind of narrative perspective is the "omniscient hetero-diegetic narrative perspective." Liang suggests that most domestic fiction in the Ming and Qing periods belong to this category. The second kind is "limited narrative perspective, which is when the narrative perspective is attached to a fictional character whose knowledge and feelings will affect the representation of events in the story" (Liang Xiaoping 170). A third kind is the "pure objective narrative perspective," which refers to "an objective representation of the character, action, event and situation, without any expression of the characters' subjective feelings, and is also called theatrical narrative perspective." (Liang Xiaoping, 170). Specific literary works, however, often reveal a combination of two or more narrative points of view. Liang uses an example from the famous novel *A Dream in*

discussion will consider this first person voice in two respects. Firstly, the first person voice reveals the connection between *tanci* and vernacular storyteller fiction in which the authorial voice appears in the prologue, opening and ending sessions, with criticism and direct address to the readers. David Rolston suggests, “As also happened in drama, it became standard for longer works of vernacular fiction in the literati mode to contain opening and closing sections in which the author (or implied author) spoke more directly to the reader than in the bulk of the text. Under the influence of *Honglou meng*, the prologue sections of many nineteenth century and late Qing novels are written in the first person.” (Rolston 1993, 123)[127] The use of the first person narrator in the opening and closing session can be traced back to many texts produced during the Ming and Qing periods.[128] This narrative structure is borrowed by many *tanci*, in which authors insert direct comments in the beginning and end of each chapter.

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the Red Chamber, which frequently embeds the character’s perspective in an overall omniscient hetero-diegetic narrative perspective. Liang suggests that when the heroine, Lin Daiyun, first enters the Grand View Garden of the eminent Jia family, the narrative develops from Lin’s point of view, presenting the luxurious appearance of the Jia family and the family members. This use of perspective, according to Liang, emphasizes Lin’s awareness of her own appearance and manners, since she came from a declining family and rejoins her deceased mother’s relative at the eminent Jia family (Liang Xiaoping, 170).

[127] Rolston’s note might resonate with Li Yü’s short story collection *Silent Opera* in late Ming, in which the author speaks explicitly and directly to the readers in the opening and closing sessions of the chapters. Besides, although in *Dream* there is no direct reference to the famous novel *Dream in the Red Chamber*, which precedes Zheng Danruo’s text by half a century, the two texts bear many similarities in characterization, style, and the manifestations of Buddhist philosophical thought.

[128] A relevant example is *The Carnal Prayer Mat* (肉蒲團), written by the well-known Li Yü. The authorial insertions robed his vivid descriptions about sexuality with didactic moralization, claiming in the prologue that his purpose in writing a book about the protagonist’s sexual adventures is to intrigue the readers first with outrageous incidents and then when the readers are enchanted by the story, insert moralistic criticism to startle them.

In addition, Zheng Danruo's work might have been influenced by Ming and Qing memoir, in which the narrator is often a main character or the witness of the event.[129] This personal narrative point of view in autobiographical fiction is present in most *tanci* works, especially when the author describes her life in the inner chambers, and comments on characters and events. Zheng's authorial narrator reflects these two kinds of first-person narrative voice in Chinese vernacular fiction. The narrator's voice is personal and sometimes dramatized, as in memoir. Simultaneously, the authorial narrator is situated outside the plot of the story, and recounts the development of the plot from a distance.

Patrick Hanan argues that the use of the first person participator pronoun in Wu Jianren's *Strange Things Observed Over the Past Twenty Years* (二十年目睹之怪現狀 1905) is the most striking technical innovation in modern Chinese fiction, and that readers accustomed to traditional novels felt a certain amount of shock when reading the narrator's "I" scattered throughout its pages.(Hanan 165) Hanan notes that the earliest use of the first person pronoun was in *A Treatise on Repentance* (悔罪之大略 1839), a tract by the missionary Karl Gützlaff that takes the form of a Chinese novel told by an "I" narrator. However, *Dream* actually precedes *A Treatise on Repentance* by over half a century, and used a first-person narrative frame. The intervention of this narrating-I at the beginning and closing lines of each chapter poses a challenge to current studies of narrative voice in fiction, since *tanci* borders between fiction and oral narrative.

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[129] Famous examples, according to Liang Xiaoping, include the mid Ming novel *Tale of an Infatuated Woman* (癡婆子傳) by Furong Zhuren (芙蓉主人), the Qing novel *Memoir of the Shadow Plum Pavilion* (影梅庵憶語) by Mao Pijiang (冒辟疆 1611-1693), and *Six Records of a Floating Life* (浮生六記 1809) by Shen Fu (沈復 1763-1825), which is a blend of autobiography and love story and social document (Liang Xiaoping 170).

To sum up this section, a close reading of *Dream* shows that *Dream* challenges the novel by reclaiming "the situation of live communication between the storyteller and the audience," and thereby creating spaces of sharing and exchange characteristic of live communication (Brooks, 99). This simulation of orality in writing offers a unique case for the study of narrative enunciation, when the author self-consciously plays with narrative tactics. Zheng Danruo's text is confronted with the slippage between "woman" as a signifier defined by male discourses in history and "women" as individual subjects devoted to the transformation of social and historical discourses through writing and reading. I contend that *Dream* resonates with later protofeminist writings in the early twentieth century China, by locating at its center a woman's authorial voice, which is characterized by its dialogic connections with readers.

Telling Stories of Chastity and Filial Piety

One of the most important features of the authorial narrator is her concern about chastity. The author claims in the beginning of a chapter, "My sole concern is to eliminate the abominable parts in people's hearts, and clear a copious space of pure sentiment in their minds. Filial piety, justice, loyalty, and chastity are all most honest qualities; even sentimental writings should appeal to pure feelings."[130] These moral qualities resonate with the exceptional deeds of the characters in the text. Filial devotion is reflected in the male characters Zhuang Yuan and his son, Zhuang Mengyu, both of whom aspire to flee to the heavenly realm to enjoy reunion with their immortal ancestors.

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130 惟有掃除天下人心穢，洗出情場異樣寬。孝義忠貞皆至性，風花雪域亦清權。1:1, 1.

The quality of loyalty is reflected in the male protagonists' faithful service to the Emperor, and in the servants' loyal caring of the Zhuang family.

An example of filial piety occurs when the reincarnated immortal Zhuang Mengyu, in order to cure his ailing father, uses magical powers to transfer his father's illness to himself. In her comments on Mengyu's filial act, the author evokes the concern with *qing* (emotions, or sentiments 情) in vernacular fiction, but offers an innovative interpretation of *qing* in light of loyalty and filial piety. She comments on Mengyu's sacrificial action to save his father: "The most profound human emotions are loyalty and filialty. Only in being filial children and faithful officials can human beings have these feelings. Who then is the leading figure in the field of sentiments? The most devoted one is a person of filialty and faithfulness." [131] In contrast to the sensualized interpretation of *qing* as romantic love or even sexual passion in some Ming and Qing popular novels, the author holds that only those who can implement filial and loyal actions have the purest *qing* (至情). The author's reinterpretation of *qing* with an emphasis on filialty and loyalty shows her appropriation of the notion of *qing* as expressed in vernacular fiction to assert the author's moral integrity and self-cultivation.[132] At the beginning of a chapter, the narrator offers an innovative interpretation of *qing* from a conservative point of view.

> The song of "The Calling Ospreys" initiates the rituals and customs [in the matter of marriage], only chaste emotions can be expressed through words. A beautiful lady should marry a gentleman, even though he is sleepless because of longing for

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[131] 人生忠孝至情深，孝子忠臣始有情。誰可情場為領袖，讓他忠孝至情人。1:7, 95.

[132] On a related note, Richard Davis suggests the appropriation of *qing* by disenfranchised male intellectuals might be a means to assert their status as "scholars" (士). (Davis 206) This is subtly an indication of the interest in *qing* in literati culture of late Ming and early Qing, even 100 years before *Dream* was written.

> her; it is understandable. [In some cases,] one may have a friend with the same heart, and should not carelessly search for another lover.[133]

Qing or emotions is here explicitly interpreted as an emotive bond between the companions, based on sincerity and chaste feelings for each other. Chastity, rather than desire, is emphasized as a determining component of *qing*. The narrator's moralistic concerns are presented in examples of virtuous women in the text. For instance, when the reincarnated goddess Lin Xianyu sees that her mother-in-law, Mrs. Zhuang, loses her youthful beauty because of aging, Xianyu prays in private that she could compromise her own beauty and life-span to redeem Mrs. Zhuang's beauty.[134] The narrator, in her comments on Xianyu's filial act, evokes the popular pedagogical text *A Song for Filial Piety*[135]: "The most moving text is *A Song for Filial Piety*; how on earth could people understand the meaning of it? When the wife is in her prime beauty, the mother's beauty has declined. Who could have taken up this filial intention again?" [136] Only the most thoughtful children could sympathize with the parents. In describing Xianyu, the narrator

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133 關雎風化最為先，情到無邪始可言。淑女應成君子偶，求之寤寐亦何嫌。偏則是意中尚有同心友，輕易難開射雀弦。1: 11, 157. The *guanju* (關雎) or "The Calling Ospreys" alludes to a song of the same name which is placed first in the *Book of Odes* (詩經 1046BCE-771 BCE), because of its influence to transform and normalize human relations and feelings in the institution and rituals of marriage. (Deng Xiang, Volume 1, 1) Contemporary scholar Ming Dong Gu offers a reading of the "open textuality" of the poem in a study of Chinese hermeneutics and poetics. (Gu, 158-168)

134 This concern with beauty, first spurred by men and therefore by women, is similar to the case with Lijun's bound feet in *Destiny of Rebirth*.

135 The full name of this text is *A Song to Persuade People to Be Filial* (勸孝歌), which was a pedagogical text for children in rural areas of Weixin (威信) county in Yun'nan province. It was composed by a Qing scholar, Xu Xin (徐熙), in the mid 19th century. (Xu Xin, 12)

136 最可傷心勸孝歌，世人究竟意如何。母顏如土妻如玉，誰把初心再揣摩？4:43,125.

notes that using her magical power to decrease her own beauty and to redeem Mrs. Zhuang's looks, is "originally an imaginary and exceptional incident; I would allow the others to laugh at my speculative description." [137] Zheng Danruo's depiction of the filial protagonist could be understood in comparison with the depictions of chaste women in Chinese history and literary writings. These writings, Susan Man suggests, belong to "an elite discourse on chastity" and are male presentations of idealized women. (Mann 1987, 40) Regarding the tradition of writing the "notable women," modern scholar Richard Davis suggests that these chaste and filial women are often "stripped of their personal traits," and that their lives were obviously reduced to simplistic moral categories of good or evil in ways that were almost ahistorical. (Davis 206) In comparison with the dispassionate, and almost "stoically virtuous" women in some didactic texts (Davis 206), Zheng's depiction of Xianyu suggests her personal affections, and may elicit an emotional response from the readers.

In *Dream*, claims of filial piety have also been made by some women to justify their persistence with virginity and renunciation of marriage, because not marrying allows daughters to stay home and serve parents. Virginity has been evoked in the text as an exceptional case of women's virtue, and surpasses chastity by its complete rejection of sexual desire. In her author's preface, Zheng criticizes the writings of her time which lose their uniqueness by pursuing popular themes of love and romance, and fame and fortune. The author reiterates that her purpose is to counterbalance some morally corrupting "scholar and beauty" romances with tales of women who preserve their virginity and moral virtue. She notes, "[in my work] the unrivalled scholar with poetic sensibilities,

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[137] 本是 天开异想稀奇事，一任他人笑我讹。4:43,125.

will follow the example of the unaffected Liu Xiahui (who avoids sexual craving). A couple who hold true understanding of each other, they would still emulate the virtuous Liu Xiahui who guards his valuable wills against sexual temptations, and maintain their virginity as the Children of the North Palace." [138] The author alludes to the "Children of the North Palace" (北宮嬰), which refers to women who take vows of lifelong virginity.[139] Most of the women in *Dream* have never entered into marriage. These characters express their wish to live a consecrated life, in the name of serving their natal parents. When they are forced to marry, some women will protest by voluntary suicide or illness. As Zheng's text goes, "all the chaste wives and filial daughters have sacrificed their lives to preserving their integrity; such a family custom of loyalty and filial piety could hardly find a match in any household."[140] Although the main couple, Mengyu and Xianyu, ties the marriage knot in the end, the wife, Xianyu, has been solemnly dedicated to lifetime virginity, and avoids sexual intimacy with the husband. Returning to the author's endorsement of virginity in her preface, I propose that Zheng Danruo's insistence on women's virginity is potentially transformative and emancipatory. The

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138 以風流絕代之才人，反效坐懷柳下惠。以燕婉同心之艷偶，仍為守誌北宮嬰. (*Dream*, author's preface) The first line alludes to Liu Xiahui (柳下惠 720BCE-621BCE), who is considered as a model of moral integrity. It is said that Liu Xiahui once was travelling in a remote area, and met a woman who asked to stay at his place on a cold day. Liu, concerned that the woman might not be able to resist the cold weather, held the woman in his arms and covered her body with his clothes. Throughout the night he did not make any offensive move toward the woman. (Hu Bingwen, 190)

139 *Beigong* (北宮) refers to the queen's palace. In late imperial China, *beigong* usually means parents. *Beigong ying* or "Children of the North Palace" refers to filial daughters, alluding to a story about *Ying'er zi* (Infant Girl 嬰兒子), a filial daughter in the State of Qi (齊 1046 BCE-221 BCE), who did not marry all her life in order to serve her parents. (Liu Xiang, Volume 11, 6-8.)

140 貞妻孝女皆從殉，忠孝門風世少同. 4:46, 197.

Confucian notion of women's chastity emphasizes the married widows' abstinence from sexual desire. However, women's vows of lifetime virginity openly renounce marriage, which normally defines women's social identity and enmeshes them in the family system, placing upon them a filial obligation to produce the next generation of their husbands' lineage

Ethical Concerns About Authorship

The author's preface to the work also addresses ethical problems inherent to authorship. She laments, "Allowing bad writing to circulate is as harmful as to commit a murder without leaving a trace." She stresses a writer's responsibility to articulate truth and improve society, "I put all my heart into composing [this] work. Those unusually perceptive will see the purpose of my writing."[141] The author's assertion claims her right to a cultural voice, yet she remains uncertain of the influence of her work when transmitted, edited and circulated through the publication business.[142] This ethical concern is reflected in the author's awareness of her moral responsibility to awaken and inspire her targeted readers. Zheng notes in the preface, "I wish to strike the morning bell and the night drum, and with every beat stir lost souls; in the bright and aromatic hues [of language)], every word must be filled with bitter tears."[143] This passionate self-expression is in tune with the authorial comment in the opening of the novel, *Dream in the Red Chamber*, by Cao Xueqin: "Pages full of idle words, penned with hot and bitter

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141 姑盡我心，翻出言情之作。誰開別眼，識其主意之由。*Dream*, author's preface.

142 已將文字流殃，即咎殺人無跡. *Dream*, author's preface.

143 即欲以晨鐘暮鼓，一聲聲敲醒迷魂，定須於艷碧香紅，一字字包藏痛淚。*Dream*, author's preface.

tears. All men call the author fool. None his secret message hears."[144] Pervaded by irony, the authorial lament in Cao's text shows the incommensurable distance between the author and his imagined readers. Zheng's self-preface, in comparison, presents similar emotional expressions of the authorial narrator. However, Zheng's narrative voice carries a distinctive ethical appeal, establishing the credibility of the author and calling on the readers' moral judgment.

Dorothy Ko notes,

> [Late imperial women authors were] extremely creative in crafting a space from within the prevailing gender system that gave them meaning, solace and dignity. Their impressive array of tactics ranges from reinterpreting the dicta through writing, revamping the meaning of such dicta in practice, to boring the cracks between the morally laudable and the permissible both in writing and in practice. (Ko 9)

This authorial tactic in creating a space for self-expression is resonated in Zheng Danruo's explicit claim of rewriting history through her personal literary practice. In the text, the amplified opening and closing passages show the reinforced narrative voice of a feminine subject whose voice effectively brings together the voices of talented women. The term "those wearing hair ornaments" (巾幗人) is a reference to women in general. The author notes,

> As a woman I am filled with anger against injustice; my heart does not take change over time. While writing history I reflect three times and would not carelessly write false facts. Don't say that wine can wash away this regret in heart. To dissolve the sorrows one has to put them into words. I will avenge for the upright and the honest in ancient times, retrace their cases and eliminate the evil ones. How amusing that such a task cannot be accomplished by a substitute,

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144 滿紙荒唐言, 一把心酸淚, 都云作者癡, 誰解其中味。(Cao 3).

> only those involved in such situations have the power to exercise transformation. 145

The text brings forth an explicitly woman narrator who tells the audience that justice awaits the villains. In the above passage, the technique of the narrator proclaiming history to the audience reflects the anxiety of women authors' writing positions in the literary tradition created by men. The author stresses the moral responsibility of each individual, or "those who are involved" (個中人) for achieving these demanding tasks. In the following example, the narrator's voice goes further into a kind of emotional self-dramatization. "If people in the world scold me for ridiculous sayings, why should I argue and explain my true purpose? Everyone has his own mindset, it is difficult to reach common understanding with others. I can only turn toward myself for reassurance."[146] In this example, the narrating self of the first-person narrator is filled with anxiety, frustration and anguish. The recurrent use of the first person "I" (我) mirrors the focus of the author's consciousness, offering an illuminating portrayal of the author's struggle against social constrains on her speech, and her hardship in finding sympathetic readers.

The author's ethical concerns are associated with her intellect, energy, and her sense of frustration in the quest for self-articulation. Her lament brings forth a feminine voice which beseeches freedom from socially prescribed gender roles. She aspires to leave the secular world and search for a space of freedom and agency:

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[145]巾幗人偏懷義憤，花開花謝總無幹。一編青史三回復，有英何嘗肯妄彈。漫道酒能澆塊壘，遣愁還賴管城夫。替往古忠良盡把冤仇報，公案重翻再戮奸。一笑此功難頂替，原仗個中人有力回天。3:30, 49.

[146]只求向天心最初念，無奇極是坦平懷。世人若謂余言謬，余亦何需辯此原。人各有心難會意，只堪我與我周旋。4: 45, 160.

> I have also contemplated leaving behind worldly concerns, and escaping into the secluded mountains, concealing my name and hiding my tracks. Only that I was shackled by my life as a woman; despite my ideals, I could not take this journey, and can only sigh in regret. Even though I am aware of my situation, I cannot escape fate; never can I flee the material limits. The chains of karmic bonds cannot be easily shaken off. Even though my mind and heart are as pure as ice and snow, I cannot but pity myself.[147]

The author's lament over her shackled life as a woman is reminiscent of many late-imperial women's grieving over their feminine identity. The passage demonstrates an impulse to retreat from worldly affairs, reminiscent of late imperial women authors' aspiration for Buddhist beliefs in spiritual transcendence. In a study of Qing women's *ci* (詞) poetry, Wang Lijian suggests that many talented women authors attributed their miserable lives to the karmic fate of predestination. Wang cites from the poets Wu Zao (吳藻) and Jiang Zhu (江珠), who both displayed their regret for their lives in a patriarchal society and turned to Buddhism to strengthen purity through meditation. Wang quotes from the woman poet Jiang Jixiu (蔣機秀): "If women take to religious meditation and admire Daoist thoughts, they are most likely caught in a desperate situation, and do so because of external pressure." [148] Sometimes, women's despair was caused by failure in marriage. In many cases, however, women authors expressed discontent with the society and their desire for a life of reclusion. Zheng Danruo's authorial narration demonstrates the author's dilemma between entering and renouncing the world. The text displays the ironic contrast between the author's performative efficacy in the narrative, and her unviable existence in real life.

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147 我亦久思遺世事，隱名匿跡入深山。偏教身困於巾幗，義在難行只嘆嗟。看得破來逃不過，總難脫此一重圈。層層魔障消難淨，冰雪為懷只自憐。1:1, 1.

148 红粉参禅，翠环慕道，大半水穷山尽，有迫使然. (Wang Lijian, 35)

The possible influence of religious beliefs in predestination and reincarnation on the women's authorial statements can be understood in the historical and social context of the late imperial period. In a study of women in the eighteenth century China, Susan Mann suggests, "Buddhism and Daoism…repositioned Confucian family values for women, enriching the spiritual and emotional existence of motherhood, widowhood, old age and even creating a tiny space where filially pious daughters could refuse marriage entirely." (Mann 1997, 200) Mann's comment sheds light on Zheng Danruo's filially pious and chaste heroines, who protect their virginity by becoming devotees of established poems of spiritual self-cultivation. On the other hand, the authorial narrator frequently evokes a religious philosophy of redemption. She laments human mortality as well as the difficulty of completing her ambitious task. She asks, "Where is the path for regeneration, once my bones disintegrate into powdery dust? Therefore, I shall make use of this body while it still bears breath, and seek to redeem my mistakes."[149] One can perceive that in the preface the author has made a moral choice by expressing herself in the present moment and searching for spiritual freedom through writing.

The author's deep concern for moral propriety might be related to women audience of the time. In a study of nineteenth century female public readership, Ellen Widmer suggests that literary works of the time "allow scholars to posit a group of women readers that included but was larger than the elite literary circles of the Jiangnan regions" (Widmer 2003, 300). This "implicit community of readers" might have affected the shape of literary work with protofeminist potentials, such as *Flower in the Mirror* (鏡花緣 1828) by Li Ruzhen and *Remaking Heaven* (再造天 1826) by Hou Zhi. *Dream* was

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149乃一朝骨化輕 塵，豈有再新之路，趁此日屍居余氣，須尋補過之方。1:1, 1.

published in the year 1843, shortly after the two texts mentioned above. It is possible that Zheng Danruo's moral concerns reflect a tactful authorial choice in meeting the need of the women readers of the time. This concern with the historical readership of her work might explain some apparent incongruities in the authorial voice in *Dream*. In the authorial insertions, the narrator's expressions of personal ambitions and literary aspirations are often robed in modest and self-effacing statements. The author's personal ambition seems to be cautiously reconciled with moral instructions concerning virtue and filial devotion. She says that "virtuous deeds are foremost in importance, literary talent secondary."[150] And that "one should by no means boast of unusual literary talent, but should rely on his filial deeds to move heaven."[151] These examples show reconciliation with, if not a submission to, the prevailing norms of the society, with a possible purpose of meeting the demands of women readers. This authorial prudence is also reflected in her choice of narrative style. She notes,

> The matter at hand seems fantastic but not a fantasy. However, when did I ever imitate the well-known text of *Strange Tales of the Leisure Studio* [152] and tell eccentric stories? I talk leisurely about feelings which surface spontaneously in writing; subtly I imply an intention that comes across to my readers without misapprehension. Nonetheless, right and wrong might not have been properly distinguished in my writing; and I worry that I cannot completely remove ornamented expressions. Thus I claim that this is a tale about a filial child and

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[150]最先德行後文章 1:5,69.

[151]漫倚才華高八鬥，須憑孝行格穹蒼。1:5, 69.

[152] *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* (聊齋誌異) is a collection of nearly five hundred mostly supernatural tales about fox spirits and ghosts, written by Pu Songling (蒲松齡) in classical Chinese during the early eighteenth century.

> disciple, hoping to sweep away shallow and commonplace sentimental writings.[153]

Although the recounted tales of the characters are fantastic stories, the author insists that the basis of her work is filial piety and loyalty. The fantastic motif in the narrative, she suggests, is adopted to illustrate the moral rightness of the characters. Unlike the romance stories about fox spirits and ghosts in *Strange Tales of the Leisure Studio*, Zheng Danruo's text, as she claims, intends to present man's emotions with simplicity and propriety, without resorting to "ornamented language" (綺語). The "shallow and commonplace sentimental writing" (薄俗濫情言) here might refer to the popular fiction of love and romance in the early nineteenth century. Some of these writings were condemned as licentious fiction (狹邪小說) because of their direct depictions of sexuality and crude diction. Despite the government's open censorship, these writings enjoyed great popularity of less educated people and even influenced women and children. In this context, Zheng Danruo's moralizing tone in the narration shows her effort to establish moral and personal integrity through writing, and thereby instruct her selected readers.

Transforming the Extant *Tanci* Work

Having reviewed the author's ethical concerns about writing, I now move on to review Zheng Danruo's challenge to the narrative traditions of *tanci* works, and her breaking-away from the "scholar and beauty" convention in vernacular literature. Zheng

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[153] 事雖似幻還非幻， 又何嘗，蹈襲聊齋述異端。 淡淡言情情自至，微微寓意意無偏。但只是是非未必全無謬，又還愁，綺語仍難一例刪。故妄稱，敷演梓潼心孝語，只無非，掃除薄俗濫情言。1:1, 5.

Danruo states in her own preface that to restore moral integrity to people's minds, she will distinguish her writing from the conventions of romantic love in popular fiction and take an innovative approach in plot arrangement. Zheng first compares the genres of drama, fiction, and *tanci*, and concludes that *tanci* is a particularly accessible genre for her. This passage draws attention to the correlation between Zheng Danruo's choice of *tanci* and her literary aspirations, as well as to the mutual fitness of the two. Zheng holds a critical view of the genre of *tanci*. She bewails the deterioration of the readers who were under the influence of some *tanci* writings of the time.

> I am regretful that casual gift exchange between men and women has caused people's habits to degenerate; *tanci* have fallen into clichéd writing. How could these stories match the tales of those children who dress in colorful clothing, to dance and to entertain their parents? The true feelings of sons and daughters shall prove their filial piety. I regret that these degraded writings are circulated in the inner chambers, making it difficult to distinguish chastity from licentiousness. Hence I will do without the conventions of previous authors, and depict the genuine chastity and pure virtue of women. [154]

Filial piety and chastity are reiterated again as the fundamental standards for good *tanci* fiction, and distinguish Zheng's work from the other *tanci* writings on love and romance. Zheng articulates a determination to dispel morally degraded writing and instead to circulate morally instructive writing in the inner quarters. The effect of this statement is two-fold. It supports the image of a virtuous woman and asserts this author's distinctive literary voice. At the same time, the passage reveals women authors' ambivalent attitudes toward these fictional genres. Ellen Widmer notes that *tanci* had been considered acceptable to write, although unsuitable for women to publish, until the

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154 嘆贈芍采蘭風俗壞，彈詞小說襲陳言。又何如斑衣舞彩同為戲，兒女癡情秉孝懷。玩物出於堂上手，光明正大絕無嫌。麻姑王子非唐突，聊作登場傀儡看。恨只恨邪說流行閨閣內，貞淫二字辨來難。要期脫盡前人套，把正節清貞表一番。2: 15, 37.

nineteenth century (Widmer and Armstrong 408). In *Dream*, Zheng Danruo's moralizing tone possibly demonstrates her concern to speak in the right manner to her targeted audience. In the current study, I suggest that the author's explicit moral point of view justifies the validity of her writing in the social and historical context of her time. Filial piety and chastity might have been strategically used as sign-posts to Zheng's authorship. Probably in Zheng's view, it is only through telling the stories of filially pious and chaste characters that she could celebrate her identity as a woman writer.

To further pursue the question of feminine voice, I shall now move from the author's discussion about *tanci* to the relation between the speaking subject in *tanci* and its sympathetic readers. In the following section, I will study how the authorial laments evoke the reader's sympathetic identification with the fictional characters, and at times with the self-dramatizing narrator. I shall consider the theme of narrative sympathy by studying the topic of "putting oneself in another's case" (設身處地) in the context of late imperial fiction and drama.

Feeling Along with the Authorial Narrator

The narrative *tanci*, as I have suggested above, demonstrates the tension between the social discourse of gender roles and women's desire for a habitable social space. The author's refusal to resolve the tension between these poles produces a narrative intensified by the authorial narrator, whose voice brings forth an explicit appeal for the reader's emotive response. This narrative voice destabilizes the distance between the authorial narrator, the character, and the reader, and draws attention to the ironic aperture between these subjective positions. *Dream* foregrounds an explicit narrative voice of a

woman, a speaking self which borders on those of the author, the narrator and the fictional character, and searches for self-inscription by mediating between these apparently disparate subjective positions. In the text, the authorial narrator adopts a panoramic view of the fictional world, accessing the thoughts and minds of the talented women characters from an external and elevated perspective. Yet her own immediate writing situation drives her to intervene in the story and assert a recurring narrative voice in the text. In the following section, I will study the theme of sympathy in three aspects, namely (i) the emotive bonds between the readers and the characters; (ii) "imagining oneself in the other's case" (*She-shen chu-di*) in vernacular fiction, and authorial identification with the characters; and (iii) narrative empathy and the cult of *qing* (emotions) in late imperial China.

Sympathy and Authorial Laments

While the narrator and the readers are both story-sharing creatures, emotional contagion between these subjective positions becomes crucial in the transmission and development of the text. In this section of the chapter, I will study how narrative sympathy has operated between the authorial narrator, the fictional characters and the readers of the text. Sympathy, I propose, functions as an empowering experience for both the author and the readers. I will examine how the authorial laments about the difficulty of writing invites the readers' sympathetic understanding of the fictional characters, and establishes an emotional bond between the readers and the characters.

In the text, the author's lament and strong empathetic identification with the character is strengthened by the use of a distinctive first person narrative voice "I" (我)

and frequent references to strong emotional expressions such as “lament” (嘆), “desolate feelings” (傷逝感), “deserving pity” (堪憐), and “regret” (恨). This emotive expression is especially compelling in the following textual example. In *Dream*, one of the reincarnated flower goddesses Liu Lingjuan becomes a victim to her cousin’s scheme and is forced to marry him by her parents. Enraged by this injustice, she spits blood and dies instantly. Her death is proclaimed as that of a chaste woman by the narrator, who, seeing the character’s calamity, turns to comment on her personal misfortune.

> I sigh that in this life all people have suffered death and loss. Pitiable are those of great beauty who pass away at an early age. I regret there is no magic brush to capture their images, and that instead there are ten thousand thoughts and powerless desires. Like her I could not forget my own sisters, and suffered misfortunes, although our fates are different. I try to resolve the dilemma with this cup of wine, only to be filled with more regret. [155]

The dramatized lament on sadness of losing a companion is rendered with much ambiguity in the text, for the lack of a distinctive pronoun in these lines opens up the space for multiple interpretations. One may as well ask whose regret is presented here. In a comparative study of focalization in Western and Chinese narrative theories, Chinese narratologist Dan Shen argues that in certain cases, although a character’s perception in the narrative belongs to the level of the story, it might also be “adopted by the narrator at this moment as a means of transmitting the story” (Shen Dan, 232 my emphasis). Additionally, “in its role as temporary ‘angle of vision,’ it also takes on a discourse function. … When a character's ‘diegetic consciousness’ is adopted by the narrator in rendering the story, it will unavoidably take on a dual nature, constituting at once part of

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[155] 嘆人生誰無傷逝感，最堪憐雪膚花貌化青煙。恨描容又乏傳神手，枉有相思萬斛深。我亦如渠難忘妹，遭逢雖異亦傷情。借酒杯消此胸中塊，轉覺胸中更不平。3:36, 219.

what is narrated and a means of presentation." (Shen Dan, 232 my emphasis). In the above textual example, the root for this sentiment of regret is ambivalent, partially because there is not a distinctive pronoun in the opening lines. As the narrative lens gradually zooms in on the authorial narrator's interior world, the text brings out the resonance between the narrator's lament on the misfortunate woman character, and her personal lament on the loss of friends in the inner quarters. The text, in this example, suggests the multiple scales in which narrative sympathy takes place.

The author's frequent lament on separation and loss also reflects her split sense of self, which underlies her appeal for sympathetic readers in the inner chambers. The text demonstrates an intimate, personal connection between the authorial narrator and readers in the boudoir, who are repetitively invoked and deeply inscribed in the text. The function of the narratee is meaningful because it exists on the same diegetic level as the authorial narrator. This dialectical relationship between the authorial narrator and her targeted audience is presented in the following passage.

> Please do not complain about the many exclamations in the story; it is truly because of the difficulty to convert people's hearts. If I were to use my tongue carelessly, I will certainly suffer false accusations, for I am not good at words myself. Yet if there are some friends in the boudoir who will appreciate my story, they will confirm that my words are not far-fetched and imaginary. Since ancient times, the legend of Zhong Ziqi and Bo Ya's friendship has been widely applauded; to imitate them, I started composing this book. ……Exposing my amateurish writing to experts in literature, I might only make them have a good laugh. If writing is uninspired, how could it be passed down? I don't mind being considered as an unabashed imitator, for the word sincerity is not necessarily out-dated. [156]

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[156] 漫嫌一唱還三嘆，欲挽人心尚自難。饒舌定遭人誹謗，本來舌上又無蓮。但或有閨中慧眼能垂鑒，許我非同河漢言。從古聽琴佳話廣，效顰聊且作斯篇……班門弄斧徒貽笑，筆下無靈豈可傳。不辭人以東施視，總則是二字無邪未必慚。1:13, 204.

As the above passage shows, the authorial narrator addresses the reader/ narratee and pleads for sympathy. The narrator shows much concern over her right to write: talking to her readers, the intrafictional addressee of the narrator's discourse. The authorial narrator tells the story in a humbled, confessional tone, but also maintains that she is well educated and is a competent writer. She is actively engaged with the projected audience, her "friends in the boudoir"; their relationship is an intimate, personal one, and is frequently invoked to support the authorial narrator. The narrator says, "If my clumsy brush composes a witty work, it depends on the outstanding talents of my friends who themselves are experts in writing poetry. I will rely on you my readers to revise my rough lines into refined texts, so that they can be circulated widely in the inner chambers."[157] This group of friends in the inner chambers is equivalent to a fictional character who listens to the narrator's story, even though the narrator is not active on the plot level and exists only "offstage." The authorial insertions, in these situations, elicit ample interplay between the authorial and readerly sympathy.

While the narrator may start the tale by presenting a panoramic perspective of society and history, the narrative always comes to a point where the narrator is engaged in a sympathetic relation with the characters in the story. When the male protagonist Zhuang Yuan, a descendent of the immortals, decides to leave the world and return to the heavenly realm, Zhuang's close friend Lin Wu is overwhelmed with sorrow over his departure. In the closing lines of this chapter, the author is profoundly moved by the plot that she laments on her own separation from friends, "At this instant I could not continue

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[157] 但拙筆合能成妙作，杖諸君頌椒賦茗有高才。慨施點石成金術，閨閣方堪廣布傳。2: 16, 53.

writing, dismayed by the fact that the few friends I have are scattered to other parts of the world. Even though there are a few really intimate friends, we cannot see each other anymore because of death or distance."[158] From this lament on the loss of her friends in life, the author continues to invite an imaginary group of readers, who might be sympathetic to her personal experience.

> When emotions are harnessed, regret grows; one becomes impulsive, laughing, talking, singing or weeping. To over-praise a person is no less than to degrade him; shall I meet my female friends again, it is difficult to find appropriate words. With this cup of wine I hope to dispel my regrets, my untainted heart finds articulation at the tip of the writing brush. When my story is compiled by dear friends, it will have the luck to attract her perceptive eyes and make her understand my mind. [159]

In these lines, the correspondence between "my pure heart" (素心) and "perceptive eyes" (星眼) demonstrates the mutual dependence of the writer and the reader. The text presents a dialectic relationship between the author and audience; in the reader's reciprocation the text takes it fullest shape. This textual moment demonstrates an imaginary relationship between reader and writer when a reader interprets a text. In the cited passage, the narrator's lament on the loss of personal friends is gradually replaced with a longing for a sympathetic readership. By fostering an imagined community of sympathetic readers, the author empowers the articulation of her literary identity. It is probable that this sympathetic readership is evoked to overcome the author's sense of loss, and to address the women audience of the author's time.

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[158]書至於斯難下筆，亦自感零星閨友散天涯。雁行大有知心客，偏則是死別生離再聚難。2: 16, 53.

[159]最是無情偏有恨，笑談歌哭總無端。嘆譽人過實何如毀，女伴相逢莫可言。聊借酒盃澆塊壘，素心浪瀉管城尖。一編入我知音手，空博他星眼垂青鑒我懷。2: 16, 53.

"Imagining Oneself in the Other's Case" (*She-shen Chu-di*)

The theme of narrative sympathy, in traditional Chinese fiction and drama, is addressed as "imagining oneself in the other's case" (*She-shen chu-di* 設身處地). David Rolston notes that this practice of imaginary identification with characters (historically or not) different from oneself is a facility very important to creative work in fiction or drama (Rolston 25). "Imagining oneself in the other's case" produces an important situation of sympathy. Min Tian, in a study of traditional theatrical performances, notes that *She-shen chu-di* means for the performing artist "to forget that he is acting and merge himself into the part. Only then can you depict these feelings profoundly and meticulously" (Min Tian, 54). In *Dream*, "imagining oneself in the other's case" is presented as the identification of the authorial narrator with the characters at moments of pathetic or emotional appeals. For example, when the reincarnated immortal Zhuang Yuan retreats to the sacred mountains to search for his parents, his friend Lin Wu suffers from his absence. The author states, "Very often I allow the character to suffer emotional turmoil. As an author, one has to make adjustments as the story demands."[160] She then comments on her relation with the characters that "it is not easy to imagine myself in the character's case; such an endeavor does not just successfully happen overnight."[161] For the author, "imagining oneself in the other's case" implies sincere and heartfelt depiction of the characters' emotions. By imitating the characters' emotions in the narrative, perhaps the author at times forgets that such emotions are fictional.

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160 作書人合為周旋 4:40, 82.

161 但設身處地真難事，豈易成功一旦間。4:40, 82.

In imitating the characters' emotions, the authorial voice interpolates with the diegesis and speaks in the manner of the character. In the following passage which opens a chapter, the text presents an explicit case of narrative mimicry, in which the narrator takes on the perspective of the character Lin Wu and contemplates melancholy from his point of view.

> How does one cross a city of a thousand miles of sorrow? The most affectionate person is none other than he who, in melancholy, encounters another who is also burdened with grief, changing his mind to dissolve his feelings, only to find more burdens in his mind. Even a thousand words cannot comfort the heart of this traveler. Then he thought of asking advice from his wife.[162]

Here the omission of pronouns, which is characteristic of poetic narratives, allows the narrative voice a certain mobility to shift between the extradiegesis and the character's consciousness. The narrator relates what the male character thinks and sees from his perspective. By "imagining herself in the case" of the sentimental Lin Wu, the authorial narrator transcribes the character's thought. The lack of the identifiable pronouns, in addition, reduces the traces of the narrator's subjectivity. This example indicates that *She-shen chu-di* implies a fusion of subjective positions between the authorial narrator and the character, regardless of the differences between their genders and backgrounds. It is not within the scope of this article to examine whether sympathetic identification between the narrator and the character always implies a case of narrative mimicry. However, one may notice the irony in textual moments like this, when the characters' consciousness is filtered through the narrator's presentation, no matter how well the narrator's presence is concealed.

162怎破愁城一萬裏，癡情人本屬吳儂。愁中偏又逢愁客，轉為消愁費曲衷。萬語難寬遊子念，更思問計向閨中。3:28, 1.

The narrator's sympathetic identification with the fictional characters is also reflected in the following example. In telling exemplary stories of filial piety, the narrator comments on Han Ziying (韓紫瑛), daughter of a rich family, who was committed to changing her mother's lavish life style,

> She ventured to use her personal power to transform degraded social customs; I agonize for her that she could not carry this out in practice, even though she was ambitious. Before writing about her, I first let out a sigh, for this woman was very exceptional. Like a multihued phoenix perching in the thorny bushes, she must have found it hard to withhold sorrow when looking at her own forlorn shadow.[163]

The narrator's presence is explicitly asserted through the use of the first-person pronoun *wo* (我), which contrasts with the third-person pronoun *ta* (他). The narrator's compassionate lament or *tan* (嘆) is thus interwoven in the emotive commentary on the woman character. In this case, the word lament or *tan* is both an affirmation of the woman's usual achievements and a lament on the vicissitudes of her fate. The narrative lens shifts from the external narrator, to the psychological realm of the character, projected through the narrator's sympathetic identification with the woman. The last line, "she must have found it hard to withhold regret when looking at her own forlorn shadow" (教他顧影怎禁悲), suggests a readerly sympathy for the character's situation that simultaneously mirrors the fate of the authorial narrator herself. Accordingly, the last word, "sorrow" (悲), calls forth feelings generated by a fusion of the narrator and the character, the self and the other. The text thus demonstrates an involved author who dedicates herself to the task of transforming social customs through the personal practice

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[163] 妄想頹風一力挽，尚恐他雖然有誌力難為。我管城欲下先興嘆，先為佳人嘆數奇。彩鳳棲於枳棘裏，教他顧影怎禁悲。3: 34. 151.

of writing. Sorrow is seen as moral emotion by the narrator, who shows an awareness of herself as capable of inhabiting the feelings of others. The following example shows a similar situation which the authorial voice makes an explicit emotional appeal to the readers.

> Simple are my words, far-reaching their meaning. Three times I let out sighs; nine times affection and rage penetrate my body. My heart's devotion is that of the *Jingwei* bird; like the *Jingwei* who sought in vain to fill up the sea with small pebbles, I am mourn the frustration that comes in advancing. My simple life has been ridden with divine retribution. Who would trust that my words are true? I hope you do not disbelieve my words. Please meditate on this piece three times, and trust my good intention.[164]

The first person narrator here lays out a communicative frame from which the story continues. The authorial narrator interrupts and delays the storytelling process by inserting sighs and exclamations. The usage of the imperative "please meditate on this piece three times" further reveals the narrator's desire to engage the listener/reader in a dialogic situation. To create a narrative relay by affecting emotive interventions, the narrator takes deliberate pauses to achieve an aesthetic distance from the events being recounted, heightening the readers' awareness of the gripping story.

An example of this comes when the Princess falls in love with the male protagonist Zhuang Mengyu, who is already married to the protagonist, Lin Xianyu. The Emperor decides to disguise himself and exit the palace in order to look for help in persuading Mengyu to accept the marriage proposal. The narrator builds the suspense by commenting, "My readers, you should close the book and ponder the story; the writer

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164 語淺意長三致嘆，感深憤極九回腸。也同精衛癡心願，片石徒啣轉自傷。薄命已遭天譴重，更 何人信我語非誑。願諸公不因人以其言廢，請三復斯篇意或良。3: 33, 144.

shall steal a moment of leisure and recede."[165] These personal marks of the authorial narrator shift the readers' attention from the accounted events to the concrete communicative situation between the authorial narrator and the reader.

Qing, a Sympathetic Bond Between the Narrator and the Reader

To further examine the theme of sympathy in *Dream*, I now return to the topic of *qing* (emotion/affection), which is manifested in various ways in late imperial literature. In Section II, I discussed the author's evocation of *qing* with an emphasis on filial piety and chastity, and suggested that Zheng rewrites the cult of *qing* in vernacular fiction to assert the importance of moral integrity. In this section, I will investigate the relation of *qing* to narrative empathy. Through a study of the multifaceted meaning of the notion of *qing* in late imperial philosophy, culture, and literature, I will show how the notion of *qing* amplifies the concept of narrative sympathy in the Western context, and leads to an innovative understanding of the emotive connection between the authorial narrator in *tanci* and her targeted readers. My goal is to show how the notion of *qing*, as a modulating register, is recharged with different energy in Zheng's text. Zheng Danruo's appropriation of *qing* in *Dream* exemplifies a personal author-reader relationship that reinforces the sympathetic bond among women in the domestic compound. I suggest that Zheng Danruo's text resonates with texts by earlier Ming and Qing women writers, who reconceived *qing* as an overarching sentiment which presides over and facilitates human relationships.

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165 看官們 正宜掩卷姑猜擬，作書人卻欲偷閑暫住停。4: 42, 101.

The concept of *qing* was endowed with varying implications in late imperial Chinese literature and philosophy. Before the Ming dynasty, *qing* was used to refer to the individual's emotions and feelings; it has been traditionally considered an opposite to the Confucian concept of *zhi* (誌), which indicated universal ideas and aspirations, reflecting Confucian social and political philosophy. The expression of *qing*, or individual thoughts and feelings, were guided and regulated by *zhi*. However, beginning with the Wei and Jin dynasties (220 CE -589 CE), scholars gradually replenished the concept of *qing* and celebrated it as an important aesthetic value.[166] The Ming philosopher Wang Yangming (王陽明 1472-1528) furthered earlier scholars' theories and proposed that "the heart is the master of both *xing* [human nature] and *qing* [human emotion]. *Xing* [is one's] heart and body; *qing* [is the] execution of the heart."[167] Wang Yangming's aesthetic theory marks an important transitional period in late imperial philosophy, leaving an impact on the literary works of the time and later generations.

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166 Several important aesthetic and philosophical schools contributed to this transformation of thought, including "Theory on Child's Heart" (童心說) by philosopher Li Zhi (李贄 1527-1602), and "Theory on Genuine Emotions" (唯情說) by playwright Tang Xianzu (湯顯祖 1550-1616). Li Zhi holds that *tongxin* or "child's heart," is the pure "heart that generates man's thinking from the beginning" (最初一念之本心; Li Zhi 1974, 273). In Li's view, "child's heart" is the root of the natural desire of human beings, including both man and woman. Li Zhi also affirms the respectability of women's desire contributing to free choices in love and marriage. For Li Zhi's discussion of the talented woman poet Zhuo Wenjun (卓文君) of the West Han Dynasty (202 BCE-9BCE), see Li Zhi's essay "On Sima Xiangru" (司馬相如; Li Zhi, 1959, 624-626). Playwright Tang Xianzu, the author of *The Peony Pavilion*, holds that *qing* is a powerful sentiment that transcends the boundary between the physical and the spiritual, and can "take the life of the alive and resurrect the deceased" (生者可以死，死者可以生; Tang 1982, 1093). Contemporary scholar Liu Guo (劉果) holds that the interpretations of *qing* in both Li Zhi's and Tang Xianzu's theories challenged Confucian orthodox thinking, especially the so-called "Cheng Zhu Theories on the Learning of Principle" (程朱理學) represented by earlier Confucian scholars Cheng Hao (程顥 1032-1085), Cheng Yi (程頤 1033-1107), and Zhu Xi (朱熹 1130-1200). (Liu Guo, 17) For discussion of *qing* as human desire in late imperial literature, see Martin W. Hwang. *Sentiments of Desire: Thoughts on the Cult of Qing in Ming-Qing Literature*. 1998.

167 心統性情。性，心體也；情，心用也。(Wang Yangming, 88)

One prominent literary example that reflects the influence of the late Ming intellectuals' endorsement of *qing* is the fiction work *A History of Qing* (情史) by the late Ming author Feng Menglong. For Feng Menglong, *qing* regulates and moderates the Confucian concept of *li* (理 Principle).

> Since ancient times, one's actions concerning loyalty, filial devotion, chastity, and purity, when executed following *li*, inevitably look forced and unnatural. When these acts are implemented in the name of *qing*, however, they will be more real and sincere… The scholars in the world only know that *li* is the model for *qing*. Who could know that *qing* would be the [power of] preservation for *li*?[168]

Feng Menglong's theory reconciles the seemingly disparate notions of *qing* (human emotions) and *li* (Confucian principles), and reinvests the cultural register of *qing* with innovative meanings. The collected stories in Feng's *A History of Qing* reflect various implications for *qing*, ranging from a shared universal sentiment of human beings, heterosexual or same-sex love, desire, regret, or sorrow.

Feng's re-interpretation of *qing* recalls critic Anthony Yu's suggestion that *qing* implies a kind of universal disposition of human beings. He notes, "The pervasive… and universal characteristic of *qing* is precisely based on the perception of it as the essential endowment of the human that cuts across social and cultural stratifications; it unifies the noble and the humble, the foolish and the wise, the worthy and the unworthy" (Yu 60). This understanding of *qing* as a universal human disposition is also resonated in some late imperial women authors' writings and commentaries on literature. Dorothy Ko, regarding the work *Three Wives' Commentary* on *The Peony Pavilion* (吳吳山三婦合評牡丹亭還魂記 1694） suggested that the three women who commented on the play *The Peony Pavilion* consider *qing*, including romantic and sexual love, as "a noble sentiment that gives meaning to human life" (Ko 84).[169] Ko further notes that, "Similar to Feng

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168自古忠孝節烈之事，從道理上做者必勉強，從至情上出者必真切。……世儒但知理為情之範，孰知情為理之維乎？ (Feng 2003, 21)

169*Three Wives' Commentary on The Peony Pavilion* (吳吳山三婦合評牡丹亭還魂記) is a work of commentary on Tang Xianzu's play *The Peony Pavilion* by three female

Menglong's reduction of loyalty and filial piety to sincerity of heart, these women affirmed that *qing* is an overarching principle governing all human relationships. As such, *qing* is not the prerogative of either sex alone." (Ko 84) In particular, late imperial women critics consider *qing* a universal sentiment which strikes a sympathetic bond between the readers and the text. *The Three Wives' Commentary* itself shows the outcome of this emotive connection between the women readers and the text of *The Peony Pavilion*. A Qing critic notes that *The Peony Pavilion* had repeatedly found "discerning and sympathetic readers among the fair sex," and that women readers identified strongly with the protagonist Du Liniang. (Yang Fuji, 21a)

In Zheng Danruo's text, the sentiment of *qing* is rendered as an imaginative ability to identify with the other, to feel along with the passions of the other. *Qing* operates both in the relationship between the readers and the fictional characters with whom they identify, and in the relationship between the readers and the authorial narrator who, in her inserted episodes, explicitly appeals for the readers' emotional understanding. For example, the following passage from *Dream* strongly expresses the notion of *qing*. It takes place when the narrator grieves over two reincarnated flower goddesses, Tao Xianbi (陶纖碧) and Liu Lingjuan (劉令鵑), both of whom died in anguish when their families forced them to marry (4: 41, 83). In the narrator's voice, *qing* or emotion is depicted as a sympathetic bond between the deceased and the living, the fictional and the real.

> Life and death are always related to one's *qing*. When *qing* reaches those who understand with sincerity, these are real feelings. Even a thousand miles of distance could be reduced to inches; when the spirit is startled, she will return to the sacred island with chastity preserved. What a pity that those who treasure the

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critics: Qian Yi (錢宜), Chen Tong (陳同), and Tan Ze (談則). This work by received much critical attention among scholars of later generations because it offers a feminine perspective on the characters in Tang's well known work. Contemporary scholar Zhou Ruchang notes that *Three Wives' Commentary* might have been an important influence for the Qing novel *Dream of the Red Mansions* by Cao Xueqin (1717-1763) (Zhou Ruchang 187).

> spring hold their sentiments in vain; the blossom and the falling of flowers cannot not be predicted by human beings. Profound or simple, one's affinity with others is predestined. Long-lasting or brief in time, one's dream can always be traced to a previous cause. Only those who can distance themselves from the world may have good fortune in their turn. At this moment I myself cannot distinguish my *qing* of happiness from that of grief.[170]

In the above passage, Zheng Danruo appropriates the word *qing* to address the readers' sympathetic identification with the characters.[171] The story is no longer a unidirectional projection to the reader, but invites reciprocal productions by establishing a sympathetic connection between the narrator and the narratee. The narrator is not merely puncturing the illusion of reality. Instead, the text engages the readers in direct communication with the narrator, building up the mutual trust between the reader and narrator. The first two lines indicate that *qing* or emotions can only be testified to by a sympathetic understanding between two subjects. This emotional affiliation between the characters reduces the spatial distance between them. The fifth and sixth lines however address the changeable nature of human beings' lives, bringing up the Buddhist theme of predestination. At the end of the passage, the intrusion of the first person "I" reveals a moment of narrative irony, when the personalized narrator acknowledges the distance between herself and the characters in respect to knowledge.[172]

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[170]生生死死總關情，情到知音始是真。千裏迢遙如咫尺，驚心瑤島返貞魂。惜春空有留春意，花落花開不可憑。緣淺緣深皆定數，夢長夢短亦前因。但只是 早能出世翻為福，這其間 我也難猜喜戚情。4: 41, 83.

[171] Haiyan Lee points out that *qing* figured prominently in the late Qing novels of sentiment (寫情小說). (Lee 4)

[172] It is worth noting that in *Dream*, the author's use of the notion *qing* is of a great variety, and cannot be fully covered in the current discussion. In *Dream*, depending on the specific context, *qing* might imply sincerity, benevolence, compassion, filial piety, or propriety. For instance, the notion of *qing* includes filial devotion, which the author applauds as a most important trait of human nature. For Zheng Danruo, *qing* is not opposite to man's moral principle, but is an innate sentiment of human beings harbored in

I have now analyzed the relationship of the authorial voice to narrative sympathy in three respects. I have suggested first of all that the authorial narrator establishes a compassionate relation between the readers and the characters. At times, and secondly, the narrator interpolates herself into the consciousness of the fictional characters, by "imagining herself in the case of the other" and speaking in a mimicked voice. Finally, the authorial narrator also rewrites the cult of *qing*, by including sympathetic identification as a form of emotive affinity between the narrator and the narratee, the raconteur and the fictional character. These three aspects together suggest the dialectic relationship between the author, the readers, and the fictional characters. Accordingly the authorial narrator at once voices her "self" and gives voice to the others. One may, again, relate the multifarious nature of the authorial narrator to the oral tradition, the origin of *tanci*. The authorial narrator, like the storyteller, establishes the sympathetic connection between the audience and the characters as a certain mode of persuasion.

The following part of this essay will discuss authorial interpolations into the characters' consciousness. I will study the depiction of women characters in the text as miniatures of the author's self. In addition to exploring the author's self-reference in the characterization of women, I will study the text's reference to itself as a *tanci*, and discuss how this self-referentiality reflects the author's ambition to create a manner of speaking all her own.

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the "hearts of the sincere children" (赤子之心), a sentiment that incites and moderates man's moral actions. (Author's preface to *Dream*) Hu Siao-chen, in her study of *Dream*, offers a detailed discussion of *qing* as filial devotion, and explores the interconnection between Zheng's text and the possible influence of late Ming *qingjiao* (情教), or the "school of *qing*." (Hu Siao-chen 2008, 265-315)

<u>Authorial Voice and Self-References</u>

Women Characters As Authors

Mirroring the author's self-dramatization in her statements, many women characters have also addressed the issue of writing and authorship directly. These fictional characters' experience of writing parallels that of the authorial narrator. It is not that the narrator takes on a "double" in the text, but rather that the narrator finds partial identification with multiple heroines presented therein. In some parts of the text, the characters comment on choices of genres in writing and the lack of appreciative audiences, which indicates the involvement of the *tanci* author in the text. These textual moments are notable cases of self-reference, although the word *tanci* is not directly used, but only vaguely referred to as "half drama, and half novel," revealing the author's caution in utilizing this controversial narrative form. (4:35, 175)

An example of a character who is a woman author is Tao Xianbi, one of the twelve flower goddesses. Tao is reincarnated as a women's doctor, offering medical service for women in the inner chambers. At an early age, her parents pass away. She is then adopted by her aunt and uncle, and learns writing and medicine. In her spare time she composes prose in the hybrid genres of drama and fiction; however, she dares not risk having these private writings published in public under her name, deeply concerned that her writings might be distorted in the process of publication. She talks over this dilemma with another character, Xianyu, who is herself a poet:

> In the past I was adopted by my uncle, who constantly let me read popular plays. Then he asked me to sing those lines to him. In vain I tried to avoid such performances. Then he used to change my words carelessly when he would read

> the text out. I have thought of burning all my writing. Regretfully I don't have the power to do so, even should I try very hard. [173]

Tao Xianbi's concern over having her writings made public indicates women authors' dilemmas with publication and the printing business of the nineteenth century China. Talented women of the late imperial period were discouraged from publishing before their marriage, or refrained from doing so themselves because of social taboos. Some women authors, forced to conceal their literary activities, would burn most of their work and leave little trace of it for others. Writing by women was published posthumously, and although some women managed to publish their works, often with family assistance, these frequently suffered from extensive editing, abridgement, and even distortion. Because of these concerns, women authors relied on networking with other women writers and assistance from mentors to have their works published in a proper manner.[174] In contrast to Tao Xianbi, who grows up in a lower-class household and is forced to hide her writings, Lin Xianyu is an upper-class woman whose works are composed with a moralistic purpose, including stories of filially pious children and loyal officials. These women characters' anxiety about authorship and publication is revealed in the following conversation.

> [Xianbi asks Xianyu,] "How many pieces have you written today? You should have them published, so that your original purpose is accomplished." Xianyu replied, "I have only thirty pieces. Once I obtain approval from my parents, I will

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[173] 昔日依於舅氏門，每每使儂覺院本。又教說唱與他聽，妹兒欲避真無計。但信口雌黃改鄙文，常想妄為施一炬，恨無其力妄存心。4:35, 175.

[174] In the late imperial period, some women who have suffered the death of husbands or lost financial support became "teachers of the inner chambers," namely, private tutors of young *guixiu* (talented women). (Ko 118) In *Dream, Image, Destiny*, Mrs. Zhuang, the wife of Zhuang Yuan, is such an exemplar, advising the talented young women who are the reincarnated flower goddesses.

> submit them for publication. My writings are half drama and half fiction, retelling the deeds of loyal officials and filially pious sons and daughters. We should make known the outstanding deeds of women in the boudoir, and gradually gather their stories together as a collection. We shall conform people's mind to the ancient ways of thinking, bring about a swift cleansing of their heart, and enlighten them. Yet this is not an easy process, and we might very likely be frustrated, because some people of this time are blind, even if they have eyes, and cannot understand our intentions." Xianbi let out a sigh, "Even so, there might be someone who could immediately understand us by reading our writings." [175]

In this passage, Xianyu speaks of herself as a *tanci* author, indicating that her writing borders between the genres of drama and fiction. The character is endowed with the thoughts and concerns of the *tanci* author who interpolates her own voice into the fictional character's voice and addresses the issue of women's writing with noticeable self-referentiality.

The text also reflects the relation between women and commercial publishing in the late imperial period. Dorothy Ko suggests that the appearance of women as both author and audience was in itself one of the most remarkable elements of the urban culture taking shape in Jiangnan market towns from the mid-sixteenth century onward (Ko 30). The quickening pace of commercial publishing and circulation of books "created a fertile ground for cross-pollination between the ideas of men and women, local and cosmopolitan cultures, and written and oral traditions" (Ko 30). Meanwhile, the publication of women's writing in the late Ming and early Qing periods was largely paid for and hence controlled by their families.(Widmer and Chang, 147-170) In *Dream*, for example, Xianbi's writings are under the control of her crude uncle, who freely modifies

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[175] 你制作到今計有幾，早交梨棗始相應。素君答道方三十，待稟家君即梓行。半是傳奇半小說，把往古忠臣孝子敘來明。閨房奇行須傳盡，待陸續將來集腋成。總須當化轉人心歸古道，投明棄暗豁然清。但只是談何容易徒勞力，恐今人有目如盲豈會心。纖碧嘆雲雖如此，也未必觀書即晤竟無人。4:35, 175.

her writings for public singing performances, and forces her to perform these works for him. Later with the help of her mentor General Lin Wu, who is the father of another woman scholar, Tao Xianbi has her writings preserved properly during preparation for publication as a literary work.

In these ways, Xianbi and Xianyu's conversation offers a look into women's literary activities of the nineteenth century. The passage quoted above reflects women's anxiety about authorship at the time and their common effort to preserve and promote their own writings. The text also shows these women authors' creative approach to popularizing tales of exceptional women by appropriating dominant discourses of filial piety and chastity. This authorial stance shields women authors from censorship by male editors, and energizes women authors' voices in the public sphere.

Internal References to Women's Authorship and *Tanci*

In the above section I discussed the author's self-projection in depicting women characters who are talented authors themselves and are confronted with similar ethical concerns about authorship and writing. I now move on to discuss the text's internal references to *tanci*. As I have partly discussed in the previous sessions, *Dream* contains extensive discussions of the genre of tanci, criticizes the narrative conventions of romance and marriage, and emphasizes the author's educational and moralistic concerns. In this section, I will review some important examples of references to *tanci* internal to the text.

At the end of *Dream*, when the Zhuang family reunites with the twelve flower goddesses in the immortal world, Mrs. Zhuang proposes that a book should be written to

record the experiences of the deities who have descended to the earth to redeem people's innocence and virtue. The characters' conversation about the choice of genre resonates with the authorial narrator's comment on her preference of *tanci* in writing at the beginning of the work. Mrs. Zhuang suggests, "Our story should not be composed into lyrics, lest it be contaminated by common singing girls. It is better to let the *tanci* performers sing our tales, so that even the most uneducated people will be enlightened."[176] Zhuang Yuan replies, "Although *tanci* is a minor genre, its value depends on whether the author has set high goals or not. If the author has an unconventional mind, he or she would be able to adapt this genre to suit his or her purpose."[177] The characters' words draw attention to the authorial motive or purpose, which defines the literary positioning of a *tanci* work among diverse trends and genres. Remarkably, the fictional characters answer the question of how their own stories should be told, suggesting that this *tanci* is to be completed. The ending reflects a cyclical narrative structure that weaves back into the tale. At the end of the story, upon his parent's request, Zhuang Mengyu composes a melody to commemorate the family reunion in heaven, accompanied by the musical performance of the flower goddesses. The concluding song further contributes to the heightened form of narrative framing, reflexive of the tales already told and those yet to come. Zhuang Yuan's comment on the authorial purpose in *tanci* deserves a nuanced reading. The male character notes that an author's goals in writing will determine the value of the work, regardless of the narrative

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176 不應被之管弦，終為俗伶玷辱。反不若盲詞彈唱，堪以警化愚頑. 4:48, 241.

177世無優孟者流。傳奇竟可不作.至若彈詞雖小道，亦在乎作者誌向之低昂。若真有絕俗胸襟，正不妨以此寓意。4:48, 241.

form that one uses. This example shows that the fictional characters are not merely acting at the behest of the author. Instead, the characters reflect and affirm the author's choice, signaling an alignment between author and characters. This alignment is mutually empowering. The character is endowed by the author with a certain degree of autonomy in the narrative. The author opens herself to the character's critical scrutiny, and allows her characters celebrate use of *tanci* in narrating "their" story. Perhaps Zheng wishes to stress the validity of her choice of genre and uses this scene within the diegesis to support her own decision.

Authorial Self-Empowerment

The previous sections of this essay have discussed the basic features of the authorial voice in *Dream*, the correlation between the authorial voice and narrative sympathy, and examples of internal references to women's authorship and the genre of *tanci*. As I have suggested, the author establishes her moral voice by adapting discourses of filial piety and chastity to depict talented and virtuous women. I have also suggested that the authorial voice empowers the readers by inviting the readers' sympathetic identification with the idealized women characters. This notion of empowerment is demonstrated in the author's relation to the fictional characters. The author endows the characters with the autonomy to reflect and assess the narrative form of the work. The characters' affirmative comments on the value of *tanci* give support to the stylistic choice of the author, and affirm her presence in the literary text. In this last section of the chapter, I will discuss the relationship between self-empowerment and authorial identity.

In many passages, the text presents the authorial narrator as a cultured woman who presents her grievances with the hardships of life, and claims the right to her own "voice." This voice of the author finds its power from retelling moral stories from the past.

> Cleaning my ears, I will be as untainted as upright scholars; contemplating in my heart, I approve only the words of ancient people. Saddened by the fact that the field of emotions has been corrupted in the world, I shall recount the upright deeds of the worthy and refined in times gone by.[178]

In recounting tales of previous scholars of moral worth, the authorial voice finds its moral empowerment. The narrative is developed with an explicit focus on reinstating the moral order in society through the instruction of readers. This is possibly the reason why the author locates the story in the Song dynasty of the 10th century, and depicts the fictional characters as historical figures. On a related note, this authorial emphasis on moral obligation reflects a general view concerning the goal of women's writing in pre-twentieth century China. Whether Zheng Danruo intended to create the work as an imagined history of unusual women is probably not within the scope the current discussion to judge. It is clear, however, that the authorial narrator in *Dream* plays a role analogous to a historiographer or a chronicler. This narrator recounts the individual characters' stories as historical narratives that are relevant to human beings' lives in the present.

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[178] 洗耳自同高士潔，問心只許古人言。因悲今世情場壞，欲把前賢雅行談。1:1, 3.

The authorial narrator's acts of self-empowerment in the text are conducted through mimicking and rewriting the literary traditions of the time.[179] For instance, the narrator notes that her depiction of Zhuang Yuan and Lin Wu's friendship in the story is modeled on an ancient legend of friendship.

> Since ancient times, the legend of Zhong Ziqi and Bo Ya's friendship has been widely applauded;[180] to imitate them, I started composing this book. Exposing my amateurish writing to experts in literature, I might only make them have a good laugh. If my writing is without true feelings, it will not circulate. Alluding three times to the images of fragrant grass and the beautiful being in *Falling into Grief* (*Li Sao*, 離騷), I have pondered on the nuances of the poem. I do not mind being perceived as an unabashed imitator, for the word sincerity is not really out of date.

The passage above shows that the author frames her own story within extant narratives, and develops her fictional authority by so doing. The authorial narrator states that Zhuang Yuan and Lin Wu's friendship is a reincarnated tale of the vowed friendship of Bo Ya and Zhong Ziqi. Also, the evocation of the classical poem *Falling into Grief* written by Qu Yuan (340BCE-278 BCE) reflects a mimetic impulse at work in the narrative. Specifically, the images of the "fragrant grass" (香草) and the "beautiful being" (美人), in Qu Yuan's poem are allegoric references to the poet and the King.[181]

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179 從古聽琴佳話廣，效顰聊且作斯篇。班門弄斧徒貽笑，筆下無靈豈可傳。香草美人三致意，離騷微旨我曾探。不辭人以東施視，總則是二字無邪未必慚。1:13, 204.

180 The story of Bo Ya and Zhong Ziqi can be traced back to the Spring and Autumn period. When Bo Ya plays the music, suggesting the images of high mountains and flowing spring, Zhong Ziqi could detect his thoughts. When Zhong Ziqi passes away, Bo Ya destroys his instrument, cutting the strings, believing that no one else in the world could understand his music in the world. (Liu An, 1029).

181 The term *meiren* (美人) usually means a beautiful woman. In early Chinese literature, however, it can refer to a man, or a good person. See the annotated version of

In Zheng's text, the author might have evoked these images to reflect the male protagonist Zhuang Yuan's relationship with the Emperor. The loyal Qu Yuan is clearly the model for the character of Zhuang Yuan, who is depicted as a faithful but unrecognized official of the Emperor. By implying these intertextual connections between Qu Yuan's poem and her own work, the author asserts her status as a competent writer. She also draws an allusion to the banished poet, implying her own image as a writer in exile. These references, I suggest, indicate a case of narrative cross-dressing, in which the author takes on the position of an elite male literary writer and performs from this appropriated position, since the unrecognized Zhuang Yuan represents Zheng Danruo's similar condition as an author.

Conclusion

I have now reviewed examples of the authorial narrator's self-empowerment through claiming to offer a morally instructive historical narrative, and through explicitly mimicking extant narratives, whether from legend or the elite literary tradition. I have analyzed the authorial voice in *Dream* in its appropriation and its rendering of the moral themes of filial piety and chastity. The author presents these moral qualities as the most important human sentiments or *qing*, and replaces typical narratives of chaste widows with tales of young women who renounce marriage entirely in order to preserve their virginity during their lifetimes. Tactfully advocating moral integrity by rewriting the discourses of moral codes, the authorial narrator reveals her awareness of the ethical issues that a woman author is challenged with. I have suggested that the author's deep

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the poem in Wei Yuzhang 3. For translation of the original text, see David Hawkes. *The Songs of the South*. 1985.

concern with moral propriety might be attributed to her concern for the targeted community of women readers and her possible desire to appeal to these readers' interest and sympathy. The concern with filial piety and chastity distinguishes Zheng Danruo's *tanci* work from other popular *tanci* of love and romance while simultaneously lending credence to the author's right to articulate her concerns in her own voice.

Following this discussion of the authorial voice in *Dream*, I also analyzed the relation between the authorial voice and narrative sympathy. I reviewed the authorial rendering of narrative sympathy in three of its aspects: authorial laments and sympathy; "Imagining Oneself in the Other's Case" (*She-shen chu-di*); and sympathetic identification and the cult of *qing*. My argument is that the authorial narrator establishes an emotive affiliation between herself, the fictional characters, and an imagined community of sympathetic readers. A dialectic connection between these subjective positions empowers the author's literary presence in the text, and creates for the fictional characters and the readers a space for critical reflection. In the two sections that followed, I reviewed internal references to women's authorship and the narrative form of *tanci*. In certain instances of the characters' reflection on authorial choices, the fictional character is elevated to the status of critic, allowing the character much autonomy. In the last section of the article, I unified these themes with the notion of self-empowerment, and argued that *tanci* works were morally and aesthetically empowering narratives for women. Such empowerment is sometimes achieved through narrative mimicry and cross-dressing, as in those textual moments when the woman author exploits, imitates, and modifies the language of elite male authors.

In conclusion, I now return to the title of the work, *Dream, Image, Destiny*. The word "image" (影) is especially worthy of a detailed reading. David Rolston notes that a narrative strategy in late imperial Chinese fiction is "letting go of the outward body in favor of its images" (舍形取影). Rolston argues that this is the basic intention of the author, who, when depicting characters in the book, begins from their reflected "images" (影處) (Rolston 1990, 329). Significantly, Zheng Danruo notes in the preface that "the form is not much different from its image, sending out fragrance before my sense comes to it" (形何異影, 在我意之先芳), suggesting the authorial power over the fictional characters, who are rendered self-consciously as representations within the text. A close reading of *Dream* moves us deeper into the dialectical relationship between the authorial voice, the character's viewpoint, and the reader's engaged gaze that beholds the characters.

CHAPTER 3: GAZING FROM BEYOND THE INNER CHAMBER: RETHINKING LITERARY PORTRAITURES IN *DREAM, IMAGE, DESTINY*

Introduction

This chapter offers a study of *Dream, Image, Destiny* by focusing on the use of portraits which propose to offer verisimilitude to their viewer. Whereas literary texts fuse diverse spatio-temporal viewing positions, the imperative for the reader is to identify with certain fictional characters and find her place within the story's space. In this process, the reader's sympathetic identification with the characters takes place. The reader's sympathetic identification with the specific characters is activated by the author Zheng Danruo's use of the motif of literary portraitures. The portrait scenario as used in her work calls into question traditional gender constructions in the late imperial context. While the author recycles extant literary representations of the "painted beauty", she transforms these scenes by rewriting them. In Zheng's text, the painted image of the woman subverts the codes of verisimilitude, and dismantles the male-oriented visual structure by gazing out at the male voyeur/artist. Viewing an image is thus, in *Dream*, a process in which the author transforming the reader into a spectator of certain cultural images or scenarios that are themselves connected to the gendered codes of the late imperial period.

Meanwhile, the process of viewing the portraits invites the spectator's sympathy for the painted image, and modifies the viewer's sense of identity temporarily through

sympathetic identification. The text is composed of several important scenes of characters making, viewing, exchanging, and interacting with portraits of other characters. Portraits are narrative texts themselves, "stories" about women that reflect the ideological structures of the late imperial society.[182] Zheng Danruo's text modifies extant narratives associated with portraits of and by women, and shows the transformative potential of women's presence in portrait scenarios. The inner chambers, for the author, presents a space in which paintings of women or by women could be viewed and appreciated privately by their own eyes. By cultivating an imagined readership of women, Zheng Danruo's text projects the possibility for portraits to be considered from a doubly gendered point of view, inviting sympathetic gazes from both men and women readers/viewers within the diegesis and out of it.

Portraits of Women and by Women

In this section, I will discuss the representation of women's point of view through their making and viewing of portraits, and their writings concerning portrait scenarios in

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[182] The current study can be complemented with considerations of the broad context of visualization in its socio-historical development of the late imperial period, including processes of production, circulation, function, and reception. For instance, the significant development of the printing business since the mid Ming dynasty has enabled authors to insert figures, images and miniatures in their published writings to draw the attention of customers. Mao Wenfang points out that, despite the censorship of the "licentious popular novels" in the early Qing, many literary works retained large numbers of preserved images and drawings on the themes of love and romance. Distinguished literary works, such as *The Peony Pavilion* and *The West Chamber* (西廂記) by Wang Shifu (王實甫 1260-1336), were published with many editions that contained large numbers of drawings as complementary parts of the texts. In the tradition of *tanci*, published texts like *Destiny of Rebirth* (1782), *Heroes in the Golden Chambers* (金閨傑 1824), and *Dream, Image and Destiny* (1843) all contain large numbers of portraits and miniatures.

literature. Since a single chapter cannot accommodate a full review of this rich tradition, my analysis here will address the following two areas. On the one hand, late imperial male intellectuals approached portraits of women as voyeurs and connoisseurs of feminine beauty. On the other, women themselves had a tradition of making their own portraits, as well as making statements about their ideals through these painted images. Talented women, many of whom were skilled in painting, also composed poems for their friends' paintings. In the later sections of this chapter, I review examples of men's representations of women in portraits and women's self-representations of their gender. Particularly, I will show how portraits of women and by women reflect distinctive points of view in gender representation.

References to women making self-portraits can be found in many historical records since the ancient times. Some scholars hold that painting initially was an artistic practice of women. One of the earliest painters, according to the Han dynasty scholar Xu Shen(許慎 58-147 AD), was a woman. Xu notes, "The Painter Lei was a younger sister of the ancient Emperor Shun [23-22 century BCE]. Lei was the first one who took to painting, and hence was named the Painter Lei."[183] This observation was later amended by the Ming scholar Shen Hao (沈顥 sixteenth century), noting that Lei had the power of creating the world and deserved the name of the "Progenitor of Painting." [184] These earlier records of women's connections with painting found resonance in similar stories of women making portraits in later generations. In late Tang dynasty, a talented woman, Xue Yuan (薛媛 8th century), to call back her husband who was travelling afar, made a

183 畫嫘，舜妹。畫始於嫘，故曰畫嫘。(Liao, 31)

184 造化在手，堪作畫祖. (Mingmo Shilong, 147)

self-portrait, on which she composed a poem to show her longing for the husband. The poem was entitled, “A Self-Portrait for the Traveler.”

> Before making the first stroke with the painting brush,
> I took up the precious mirror and had a look at myself.
> Already shocked by my withered look,
> Now the hair around my temples is even thinner.
> Easy to sketch these eyes filled with tears,
> Difficult to compose lines that speak of my melancholy heart.
> [I] hope you my lord do not forget about me,
> And will open this scroll at times to have a look. [185]

As the title of the poem suggests, the portrait of the woman herself invites a compassionate gaze from the male viewer. The ending lines, in particular, suggest the wife’s subordinate relation to the husband. The portrait creates an image of a lonely woman, inviting the male viewer’s sympathetic gaze. Here the poem internalizes a male-oriented perspective, presenting the woman as a passive object under the masculine gaze. This dialectic relation between the painted woman and the projected male viewer suggests that women’s subjectivity has important associations with a gendered point of view. Later in this chapter I will probe into this question and examine how Zheng Danruo’s text, unlike Yuan’s poem, enables the reader to imagine a woman-oriented perspective that undermines and even reverses this male-oriented visual scenario so common in extant literary and historical narratives about painted women.

In the Ming and Qing period, literary and historical records showed that women played multifarious roles in the making and circulation of portraits. Some of these talented women’s activities were recorded by literati authors. Eighteenth-century poet Yuan Mei played an important role in supporting and promoting women’s literary and

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185 欲下丹青筆，先拈寶鏡端。已驚顏索莫，漸覺鬢雕殘。淚眼描將易，愁腸寫出難。 願君渾忘卻，時展圖畫看. (Ji, 1122)

artistic endeavors. In his work *Sui Garden Remarks on Poetry* (隨園詩話 1790), a record of anecdotes and stories about poets, some entries reflect women poets' relationships with paintings. He notes, "In ancient times there were no miniatures. [The tradition of portraiture] may be traced to the paintings of the ancient worthy and chaste women in the Wuliang Temple of the Han Dynasty."[186] Yuan's comment suggests that the ancient portraits of women might have been initially created to advocate women's chastity and filial devotion, topics presented in mainstream social discourses about women's virtue.

In Yuan Mei's story, *Portrait of the Added Fragrance of Scarlet Sleeves* (紅袖添香圖 eighteenth century), a scholar named Feng paints a portrait of an imaginary woman, having no particular person in mind. Later, Qiu, a friend of Feng's, sees the painting and is struck by the resemblance of the image to his own maid, Hua. Qiu then invites Feng to his house and gives the maid to Feng as his wife. In the story, the scholar's portrait of the imagined woman becomes a pledge for an unanticipated marriage with a maid the painter had never met (Yuan 1982, 206). Yuan Mei himself was once invited to compose a poem on a portrait of Zhang Yiniang (張憶娘), a famous courtesan from Suzhou City. Some years earlier, a scholar named Jiang had commissioned a famous artist to paint her

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186 古無小照，起於漢武梁祠畫古賢烈女之像. (Yuan 1982, 231)

The Wuliang Temple's (武梁祠) painting collection that Yuan Mei mentions here refers to the collection of ancient portraits dating from the Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE) engraved in stones discovered in Shandong province, East China, in the eighteenth century. These engravings reproduce the content of ancient literary and historical texts such as *Biographies of Exemplary Women* (列女傳 Western Han 206 BC - 9), *The Records of the Grand Historian* (史記 109 BC to 91 BC), and *Accounts of Filial Children* (孝子傳 first century BC). Pictures of these engravings and analysis of the related stories can be found in *Collections of Paintings in Wuliang Temple of the Han Dynasty* (漢武梁祠畫像錄) by Rong Geng. 1936.

portrait. It was then Jiang's grandson who later invited Yuan Mei to compose a poem on this portrait. When Yuan Mei opened the scroll on which the portrait had been painted, he saw that on the painting there were already several poems dedicated to the courtesan. These poems, composed by famous scholars during the reign of an earlier emperor of the Qing dynasty, suggested the companionship between these literati poets and the courtesan during her lifetime. Just as in the example of the imagined woman's portrait, this anecdote suggests that portraits of women, idealized or realistic, were important parts of the literati culture at the time. [187]

Many women in the late imperial period were themselves accomplished painters. In the late nineteenth century, a scholar Tang Suyu (湯漱玉) edited a collection entitled *A History of Paintings of the Jade Terrace* (玉臺畫史 1871), in which she listed four kinds of women painters, including palace maids, noted gentry women, women servants, and famous courtesans. Painting, like poetry, was one of the areas of artistry in which a talented woman might excel. For example, in the late eighteenth century, Sun Biwu (孫碧梧), a student of the aforementioned scholar Yuan Mei, once invited Yuan and thirteen talented women to a banquet in Hangzhou city. At the gathering, the women poets exchanged poems and paintings with each other as gifts (Yuan 1982, 553). One of the attending women scholars of Yuan's time, Xu Yuxin (徐裕馨) made a portrait of this

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[187] Perhaps a similar example in the pre-twentieth century English literary tradition is Robert Browning's well-known poem "My Last Duchess." In the poem, the Duke Ferra presents to his guests a portrait of his former wife, while negotiating a second marriage with a daughter from a rich family. While the poem carries signs that the Duke had murdered this former wife himself, the portrait of the woman survives and displaces the woman's actual presence. The poem presents the Duke's appreciation of art and his controlling and manipulative nature.

gathering, entitled "A Gathering of the *Suiyuan* Poets at Hulou" (隨園湖樓請業圖, Yuan 553). Some of the most well-known women poets and painters in the late imperial period were Liu Shi (柳是 1618—1664), [188] Li Yin (李因 1610—1685), Fang Wanyi (方婉儀 1732—1779), Yang Guxue (楊古雪 late eighteenth and early nineteenth century) and Liao Yunjing(廖雲錦 nineteenth century). Along with these were a few women who earned a living by selling their paintings: the early nineteenth century poet Shen Shanbao (沈善寶), who was born in a humble family and lost her father in childhood, sold her poetry and paintings to support her widowed mother. (Chen Yun 8b)

Some portraits depicted women as cross-dressers. A late eighteenth century woman poet named Shen Xiang (沈纕) described a portrait of the courtesan Liu Shi, in which Liu cross-dressed as a young scholar to pay a personal visit to a male scholar. In Shen Xiang's poem about this painting, she notes, "Who could tell the truth from the appearance of a person after all? Beauty or scholar, now both are seen as one." [189] This unique example shows Liu Shi's cross-dressed image, which recalls other similar examples of portraits of cross-dressed women. In Wu Zao's play *Drinking Wine and Reading* Lisao (飲酒讀騷 nineteenth century), similarly, the protagonist cross-dressed as a man and made a portrait of herself in a man's robe. She laments her fate of being born a woman under social constraints, mimicking the ancient poet Qu Yuan. Images of the cross-dressed woman such as these carry a disruptive power, suggesting alternative possibilities of gender representation.

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[188] Liu Shi published a collection of paintings called *A Small Scroll of the Moonlit Dam and Shadowy Willow* (月隄煙柳小卷).

[189]從來色相誰能辨，紅粉青衫一例看．(Shen Xiang 15a.)

Many women's paintings from the late imperial period are not traceable as such today. However, readers may find many poems composed about women's portraits or for inscriptions on the paintings in poetry collections. A particularly important genre of poetry is the set of poems dedicated to paintings (畫像題詠). Taiwanese scholar Mao Wenfang suggests that these poems composed on paintings reflect "a dialogic relation" between the painted image and the observer who composed the poem on the painting (Mao 2006, 56). While poems composed about or inscribed on paintings can be used by us to reconstruct some of the details of paintings that have been lost (Mao 2006, 56), originally these poems on the paintings were likely to have served to enrich the viewers' experience of interacting with the painted image. Mao's study focuses on the early nineteenth century poet Gu Taiqing (顧太清 1798-1877). Gu and her husband Yu Hui (奕繪) both had their portraits made, and then each composed poems on the other's portrait. According to Mao, Gu Taiqing also composed poems for the portraits of her friends in the inner quarters, including Li Renlan (李紉蘭), Xu Yunlin (許雲林) and Shen Xiangpei (沈湘佩). Gu Taiqing's portrait poems offer a glimpse of gentry women's literary and artistic activities during that period.[190] Poems by women about portraits of women show that the women depicted were not merely passive objects of male artistic connoisseurship. In women's own literary communities, portraits of and by women can be viewed from a more sympathetic perspective. In my discussion of *Dream*, I will return

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[190] The Qing dynasty poet Xi Peilan (席佩蘭 1760-1829) also commented on paintings by women authors, and had her own portraits commented upon by others. One of her poems is "On the Miniature of Female Scholar Xi Peilan Holding the Flower" (題席佩蘭女史撚花小照, 孫雲鳳.) (Yuan 1796, 1:213)

to this theme of sympathetic viewers and discuss how portraits in the text counteract the male-oriented voyeuristic visual structure, and foreground a woman's perspective.

A good example of the ironized relation between portraits and the painted woman is a poem by the Qing poet Xi Peilan, from her work "A Collection of Poems on Beautiful Women: Wang Qiang" (題美人冊子). (Xi 2.7b) The poem alludes to a historical woman named Wang Qiang (王嬙), more often called Wang Zhaojun, a woman in the harem of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty (漢武帝 156 BCE–87 BCE). The Emperor selected his concubines according to the women's painted appearances. To win an emperor's favor, many women bribed the painter in the palace into making beautiful portraits of them. Wang Zhaojun, an honest and beautiful maiden, refused to do the same and consequently failed to attract Emperor Hanwu's attention. In 33 B.C., the Huns, a nomadic people of the north, wanted to establish friendly relations with the Han through marriage with a Han princess. Unwilling to marry off his own daughter nor a real beauty to the Huns, the emperor ordered the plainest maid to be chosen as the candidate. Zhaojun, whose portrait was among the least attractive, was selected. As she was departing for the Huns, the emperor saw her in person and regretted his choice instantly but could not reverse his decision. Instead, he granted Zhaojun a generous dowry, and she travelled to the Huns, playing *pipa* on her solitary journey to the remote country. After she joined the Huns, Zhaojun devoted her life to the spreading of Han culture and civilization. Back at the palace, the emperor, greatly enraged by the portrait maker's deception, put him to death. Xi Peilan alludes to this incident in a poem on Zhaojun:

> Falling out of the regal favor due to a portrait, she fled to a foreign land.
> In the cold snow and frontier wind, the radiance of her looks declined.
> The melody of *pipa* beyond the frontier, the dances in the royal palace,

All the same, they took pains to offer the emperor pleasure.[191]

The poet's reference to the portrait in the first line presents the ironic situation of the portrait, a determinant of women's fate, failing to do its subject justice and making her a misfit. The last two lines deepen the irony, suggesting that both the favored women, as well as the one in exile, are no more than objects of pleasure for the male ruler. The poet's comments suggest the pathos in the women's situation, and the absence of a woman's perspective from these portraits. This chapter will discuss in detail how Zheng Danruo's text explores the possibility of disrupting this tradition of "beauty portraits" by presenting spaces of disruption, reversal, and transgression.

With the foregoing discussion of literary portraits in late imperial literature, I hope to provide a contextualized understanding of the portrait scenario in Chinese literature. Literary representations of women in works by male authors in many cases reflect the elite, male-dominated literary discourse about women's social roles. I shall study whether these texts represent the controlling of women's desire through narrative framing and examine how Zheng Danruo's text challenges these narratives through an innovative interpretation of the portrait scenario in *Dream*. Zheng Danruo notes at the beginning of the first chapter that she has borrowed from extant narrative conventions regarding the appearance of portraits in writing, with an eye to transforming these conventions and endowing them with new meanings. She notes in the first chapter, "Twice in this book I have rewritten the 'playing with the portrait' scenario, for one

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[191] 丹青失意竄殊鄉，朔雪邊風減玉光。塞外琵琶宮裏舞，一般辛苦為君王。(Xi Peilan, 2.7b)

should agree that a fledgling phoenix has a more refreshing voice than a mature one."[192] The literary allusion to *wanzhen* (玩真, appreciating the portrait of a person) can be traced to the Tang story "The Portrait Maker" (畫工) from Du Xunhe's (杜荀鶴 846–904) collection *Miscellaneous Writings by the Pine Window* (松窗雜記). (Cited in Zhang Jing'er 486) In the story, a painting of a beautiful woman comes alive when a male scholar calls the subject's name, Zhenzhen. The woman then steps down from the painting and marries the scholar. The name of the painted woman—Zhenzhen, literally meaning "real" or "genuine"— ironically shows the woman's imagined existence, for she only becomes real when her name is spoken by the man.

Portraits are profusely depicted in the Ming popular story, *Resurrection of the love-enchanted Du Liniang* (杜麗娘慕色還魂 seventeenth century), which includes episodes titled "Making the Self-Portrait" (寫真), "Picking up the Portrait" (拾畫), "Calling on the Portrait" (呼畫), "Transformation of the Portrait" (畫變), "Loss of the Portrait" (失畫), "Reappearance of the Portrait" (畫現), and "Proving the Portrait" (證畫).[193] In this story, the woman paints her own portrait and observes her own image as a viewer. This visual structure shows the woman at the axes of multiple subjective positions, as the painter, the painted image, and the observer.

A close reading of *Dream, Image, and Destiny* shows that the text contains an intertextual reference to the famous play *The Peony Pavilion*. In this play, Du Liniang's

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192 這書中玩真兩度翻新筆，須認取 雛鳳聲比老鳳清. 1: 11, 173.

193 In Feng Menglong edited. *A Journal of the Swallow House* (燕居筆記), Volume 98. 534-541.

ghost is startled in the underworld by Mengmei's call to her painted image and visits Liu Mengmei in order to fulfill their prior dream (*wanqi qianmeng*). Likewise, in *Dream*, the metaphysical dream trope is brought into a dialectical relation with the "image," for, as the title indicates, the destined affinity between the characters is produced through the interplay of "dream" and "image." The male protagonist's name, Mengyu (literally "dream stone"), is an intertextual reference to the preceding novel, *Dreams in the Red Mansions*, in which the male protagonist bears a similar name: Baoyu (寶玉 or "precious stone"). If the dream represents a fusion of past with present and presages the characters' reunion in marriage at the end, it is the painted "image" that recurrently reveals multi-layered possibilities of reading that complicate and potentially disrupt the development of the plot toward a consummate narrative closure.

In *Dream*, the author rewrites this "playing with the portrait" scenario (玩真) in two different episodes, one of which features Zhuang Mengyu's painting of Xianyu's portrait, and the other of which concerns Xianyu's painting of her would-be father-in-law, Zhuang Yuan. This latter episode represents the male protagonist's viewing of the portrait as a production, witnessing, and loss of self in spectacle. In each case, the act of viewing the portraits prompts the viewer's sympathy for the painted image, and in return modifies the viewer's self through sympathetic identification.[194] To observe an image in

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[194] An example of the male viewer's sympathy for the painted beauty can be found in Chapter 19 of the *Dream of the Red Mansions*, in which the sentimental male protagonist Baoyu skips an opera performance to view a portrait of a beautiful but lonely woman in his uncle's studio, with the hope of comforting her. Before he sees the portrait, Baoyu thinks, "There used to be a little studio here in which hung a beautiful portrait. I have heard that it was painted with great vividness. It is so festive here today; there must not be a soul in that room. The beautiful woman must feel lonely now. I shall pay her a visit to comfort her." (這裏素日有個小書房，內曾掛著一軸美人，極畫的得神・今日這般

this manner is a process in which the reader is transformed into a spectator of certain culture scenes, which are endowed with unique meanings in their specific contexts. Through analysis of these examples, I propose that *Dream* can be regarded as a self-consciously interrogative text, in that the story is about the heroines making discoveries themselves and coming face to face with their own "not-said" in the form of the ideologies into which they have been interpellated. Lynne Pearce and Sara Mills argue that, "it is the very dislocation between the women's ideological interpellation and her psychological subjectivity that enables her to challenge her imaginary relationship to her real conditions of existence" (Pearce & Mills 194). The woman's changing position vis-à-vis the symbolic order may be seen to culminate in a "revolution" through which she arrives at a "synthesis" of the different "stories" she has told from within the ideological structures. In the following sections of this chapter, I shall discuss women both as subversive images in the portrait, as well as strategic painters who employ portraits and self-portraits to assert moral agency.

The Painted Beauty Looking Back: Transgressive Image of the Woman

The following section explains how the image of the painted woman dismantles the male-oriented visual structure by returning a gaze at the male voyeur/artist. A powerful example of this is Mengyu's making and viewing of Xianyu's portrait. Xianyu's resistance against being captured in the painting reveals her wish to counteract

熱鬧，想那裏自然無人，那美人也自然是寂寞的，須得我去望慰他一回。) The expectation of seeing the image heightens the male spectator's desire--an expectation that resides in that liminal zone between reality and fantasy. (Cao, 644-645)

the male protagonist's subordination of her body, by calling and naming her painted body. In the text, the male protagonist, Zhuang Mengyu, has long had excellent painting skills and had been praised by his mother, Mrs. Zhuang, for having magic hands that could capture the spirit and fragrance of the image. When he reached the age of twelve, Mrs. Zhuang intended to marry him to Song Renfang, a daughter of Zhuang's friend. Because he has feelings for the High Flower Goddess (魁芳仙子), with whom he shares a predestined bond, Mengyu is unwilling to tie the marriage knot with another woman. However, as a filial son, he cannot reject the suggestion of his mother. In response to his mother's request, he paints an image of his ideal wife, based on his memory of the goddess.

> He took up the brush and opened out the paper, thinking about his beloved, taking the ink and making sketches of her. Mrs. Zhuang stood behind Mengyu and looked frequently at the painted image. She saw the facial features and felt very startled that the image looked so real. Then she saw him painting the refined shoulders, hands, and waist. …Upon her first full glance, Mrs. Hui smiled and said to Mengyu, "Indeed you have a pair of magic hands, and captured the image of the unrivalled Miss Song." Upon a second glance, she saw the painted image had particularly eloquent eyes and refined eyebrows; she looked like Miss Song but appeared to be a completely different person. Fully smiling, she seemed about to talk, her eloquent eyes seemed to be looking at the audience, enhancing her beauty all the more. Anguished with admiration in facing the image, the kind-hearted mother could not help feeling compassion and pity. After a long interval, she called upon Mengyu joyfully, "It is truly a different person! She and Miss Song both have endless grace; one could not tell which one is more beautiful. Yet Miss Song's body often bears so much fragrance, and no less than you who bear so much fragrance like the legendary Xun Ling, whose fragrance lingers in places where he has sat.[195] The painted image is indeed very beautiful, yet it is most difficult to pass through the fragrance of it. She is, after all, not comparable to Miss Song; even though she is predestined to marry you, she should let Miss Song

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195 The allusion to the scholar Xun Yu (荀彧 163-212) comes from "Chronicle of Xiangyang County" (襄陽記) in Li Fang 李昉 edited. *Imperial Overview of the Era Taiping*, *Great Peace"* (太平禦覽 976–983), Volume 703, 3113. Xun was known for the intense fragrance that he was born with. This allusion to Xun Yu's fragrance was later extended to refer to elegance of a literary scholar.

be the first one." Mengyu then said to his mother, smiling, "Please observe the painting carefully." Mrs. Zhuang then approaches to smell the image, which then exudes strands of subtle fragrance from the beautiful woman's sleeves.[196]

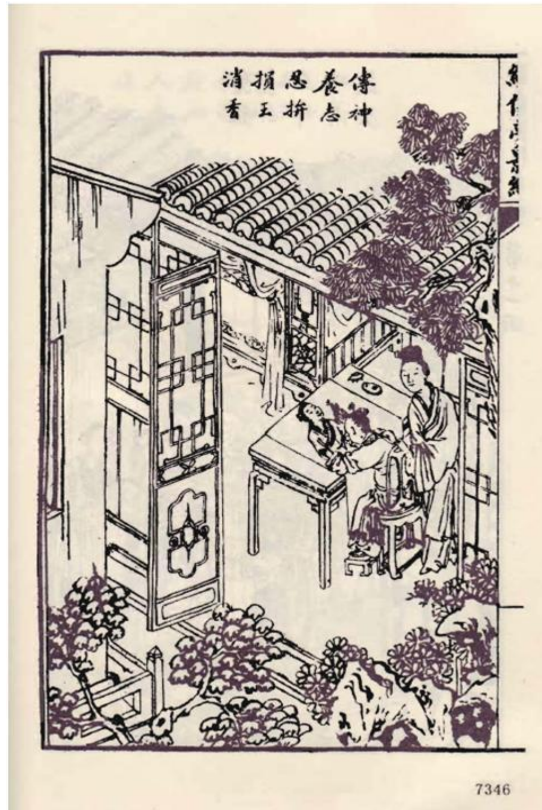

Figure 2 Zhuang Mengyu, by then age six, makes a portrait of his predestined companion, Lin Xianyu, for his mother, Mrs. Zhuang. Engagement at the time of childhood was common in the late imperial culture (Jing 7346).[197]

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196 夢玉揮毫展素箋, 凝想意中知己客，引香攝影寫嬋娟。夫人後立頻觀看，看他將眉目容顏已繪完。不覺驚奇真似活，再看繪香肩玉手柳腰間。……惠氏夫人先一觀，欣然笑對玉兒言，果然兒有傳神手，竟是無雙宋女顏。秀臉纖軀何等肖，不過他年華尚小未梳寰。蘭君笑請重凝視，惠氏夫人又細看。只覺得無限風流無限美，比宋媛另自有其妍。在觀她眼波眉黛非常秀，似又全然別一般。笑面盈盈如欲語，流波似盼益嫣然。銷魂相看真無奈，慈母癡情又起憐。良久含歡呼夢玉，果然另是一紅顏。傾城各具無窮艷，與宋女難分伯仲間。但是他體氣如蘭常馥郁，不讓你香如荀令座中延。圖中自是羞花貌，獨有芬芳氣不傳。畢竟還輸於宋女，大喬應讓小喬先。蘭君又笑呼慈母，請在留神細察來，惠氏夫人微作嗅，竟覺有暗香陣陣出衣間。1: 11, 163.

With Mrs. Zhuang's close inspection of the painted beauty, the text directs the reader to a close observation of the image and controls the reader's sensory experience. Through the eyes of Mrs. Zhuang, the reader is engaged in a process of looking, feeling, identifying, and empathizing with the painted image. The text incites the reader to enter into the viewing exchange with the painted image, teaching the reader to empathize with the woman. By doing so, the text situates the reader in a dynamic visual space in which he or she is constantly constructed as a sympathetic subject. The painted beauty is desirable, but inaccessible. Mengyu's hands, which "capture the fragrance and soul" of the image, inch by inch, inscribe the imagined desire of the male subject toward the woman. The visual structure represented in this moment highlights what Laura Mulvey calls the "to-be-looked-at-ness" of what is represented. However, the painted beauty transforms this desire by "looking back," subverting and manipulating the gaze of the male artist/viewer. In fact, her image is so breathtaking that it even "daunts" the viewer.[198] The reader, along with Mrs. Zhuang, is invited by the painter to look at the portrait repeatedly. Upon first glance, Mrs. Zhuang takes the painted image as her selected daughter-in-law Song Renfang. Gradually, the image gains life under the viewers' scrutiny, and even sends out a subtle fragrance to the viewers. The grace of the painted image is displayed through her bodily actions: with a smiling face, she looks at the viewer with eloquent eyes. The "gaze" from the painted beauty undermines the male-dominated visual structure and supplements the one-way viewing gaze into an associative

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[197] All the illustrations in the chapter *Dream, Image, Destiny* were selected from Jing Li's edition, 2006, from *The National Library Collections of Illustrations in Rare Texts, Drama and Folk Opera* (國家圖書館藏珍本雜劇傳奇地方戲曲藝插圖全集.)

[198] 畫中人竟咄咄逼人. 1: 11, 163.

one. “Anguished with admiration, exchanging gazes with the image, the kind-hearted mother Mrs. Zhuang could not help feeling compassion and pity.”[199] Instead of being a passive object under observation, the woman exchanges gazes with the viewer and prompts the viewer’s sympathetic identification. Simultaneously, this scene stages a shifted power relation between the mother Mrs. Zhuang and the male viewer Mengyu, who is still a child at the time. The male protagonist, a child of six, shows his autonomy in choosing his spouse by painting the woman that he wants to marry. This textual example illustrates two distinctive levels of meanings. One is that the power relation between the painted woman and the male painter is dynamic and potentially reversible. The painted woman’s reverted gaze may overpower the male viewer/artist, suggesting her ability to resist the male protagonist’s voyeuristic control. The other is that the male child’s filial devotion to his mother allows room for his autonomous choice. By painting the woman that he truly wants to marry, Mengyu pleases his mother with the beautiful painting and thereby expresses his own wish to have a choice of his own in marriage. Perhaps the textual scenario is not interpretable by any binary gender representations; however, the author’s interpretation of the power relations between the painted woman, the male viewer, and his mother shows an innovative understanding of the underlying familial relationship between these characters. Both Mrs. Zhuang’s son and her future daughter-in-law display the power of autonomy, in addition to their filial maternal devotion. Later in this paper, I will discuss further the author’s innovative interpretation of filial devotion, which allows room for the woman’s autonomous choice in marriage.

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199 銷魂相看真無奈，慈母癡情又起憐 1: 11, 172.

In the particular scene discussed above, the viewer's sympathetic response affirms the image's representational potential, its power to reverberate within the viewer's mind and body. The image responds to the viewer's desire, exuding a subtle fragrance from the sleeves, implying the imperceptible motion of the woman's hands. The textual scene exposes a narrative embedded in the identity of the painted woman, whose illusory presence supplements the male artist/viewer's own loss of self. The painted beauty is a consolation for Mengyu's loss of Xianyu, revealing the male subject's desire to restore his celestial self to his physical being in this life. Yet the text takes on another meaning near the end of the passage. Mrs. Zhuang claims, with perceptible irony, "Ah, Yu'er, even though this is the situation, the person that I chose for you is, after all, a person with a real physical body. She is unlike your painted lover, whose existence is imagined and not real."[200] The captivating image, despite all its liveliness, denies the viewers access to it because of its status as visual representation.

> Mrs. Zhuang turned back. She saw that the painted beauty, her jade ornaments stirred by her movements, and was about to approach them. Mrs. Zhuang smiled and called Mengyu to see the painting. "Your magic brush can truly capture the body and soul of the woman. If you can call the beauty to life, you might as well name her." Upon these words, Lanjun thought privately, "If I call upon her name, I am afraid that I will imprison her spirit. I am afraid that I would take the life away from her fragile body; even though she is skillful in maintaining her heavenly spirit, she is but a physical being.[201]

The scenario wherein a painted beauty comes to life when called upon by a male viewer, as I mentioned above, alludes to a legendary painted beauty who is revived from

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200 唉，玉兒，話雖如此，究竟我意中人有形跡可求，不似你畫中人虛妄無據阿。1: 11, 163.

201 惠氏夫人回首看，珊珊玉佩似降臨。展顏一笑呼兒視，你妙筆真能繪影神。倘或呼名應可活，我兒可試擬芳名。蘭君聞語心思忖，但一呼名可招魂。恐斷送玉人冰雪體，縱煉形有術究輸真。1:11, 171.

the paper and marries the male protagonist. The story, widely circulated, elicited the emulation of later writers. A similar example is in *The Peony Pavilion* when the love-enchanted Du Liniang takes up her painting brush and makes a self-portrait. She laments, "How futile is it to make this self-portrait? Who would weep over it? Were I the legendary painted beauty Zhenzhen, still no one would call my name."[202] In this scene, Du Liniang's melancholy is provoked by the absence of the male viewer Liu Mengmei, while she projects herself into the imaginary subjective position of the legendary Zhenzhen. The textual moment is an example of melodramatic pathos, wherein the subject's grief is caused by the deferral of narrative closure. Her imaginary lover Liu Mengmei did not discover Liniang's self-portrait until after her death. This pathetic scenario of Liniang's narcissistic gaze at her own portrait has been replicated extensively in later literary texts.

The above scene of Mengyu painting a portrait of his predestined companion possibly alludes to the seventeenth-century play *The Painted Beauty* (畫中人) by Ming playwright Wu Bing (吳炳 1595–1648). The play depicts a love story between the scholar Yu Qi (庾启) and the painted beauty Zheng Qiongzhi (郑琼枝), who is resurrected from the portrait scroll and marries Yu Qi. The plot of the play bears much similarity to that of the precursory play, *The Peony Pavilion*. The author closes *The Painted Beauty* with the comment, "What can be as effectual as [the power of] *qing*? It could even make the image in scattered painting powders come to life."[203] In Wu Bing's play, the portrait becomes a vehicle of desire (*qing* 情) and makes possible both the

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202 虛勞，寄春容教誰淚落，做真真無人喚叫。(Tang, 36)

203 世間何物似情靈，畫粉依稀也喚醒. (Wu Bing 5.)

resurrection of the deceased and the reunion of the separated.[204] To view the image is to pass from the terrestrial to the sacred, to cross the boundary between the two realms. The resurrection of the painted woman depends on the mechanism of human emotions, a topic which has been extensively discussed in the study of late imperial literature.[205] Wu Bing's play depicts a visual space that draws the readers' attention to a dialectic between the observed and the observer. In this visual space, the image of the woman is offered as an object of desire for the male viewer. In *Dream*, this dialectic between the fetishizing male spectator and the woman's image is amplified; she is not simply an object submitted for the male viewer's contemplation—she also carries a notable power to stimulate male desire. I will discuss this disrupting power on two levels. In paintings of women, the painted beauty reverses the male viewer's gaze and challenges the voyeuristic visual scenario. Women themselves, in *Dream*, also paint portraits of men. Their artistic practice breathes life into their painted images, and presents a gendered perspective on chastity and filial devotion.

In *Dream*, portraits of women and by women consistently stress chastity. The author compares her heroine Xianyu with the famous character Liniang:

> Liniang's much acclaimed story of a departed soul searching for love has been passed down for hundreds of years and won much praise. In comparison with Bihua Xianzi, one can perceive the difference in the significance of the matter. I

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204 情若果真，離者可以復合，死者可以再生(Wu Bing 5.)

205 Kathryn Lowry, in a study of the genre of love letters (*qingshu*) in late imperial China, argues that love letters enlist popular reading materials to conjure *qing*, "feeling" or "desire." According to Lowry, the language of desire is the result of a discursive process of reading. See Kathryn Lowry, "Duplicating the Strength of Feeling: The Circulation of Qingshu in the Late Ming." (Zeitlin and Liu, 239-269.)

> admire Xianyu's heart, which is as pure as water, and far surpasses those sentimental writings that speak of overt emotions.[206]

The author alludes to *The Peony Pavilion* and admires the legend of Liniang's resurrection by the power of love. Unlike Liniang, who internalized the desire of the male and awaited his call to come back to life, Xianyu resisted the call of Mengyu and the entrancement of his desire for her in the portrait. The author's mockery of Liniang's pathos displays a desire to rewrite conventional narrative representations of women. Liniang's subjectivity is inscribed for an imaginary male viewer and awaits affirmation from the male spectator. Xianyu's character, for the author, is more praiseworthy for her resistance to the male gaze, and her refusal of the narrative closure of predestined marriage. By rewriting the scenario of "inscribing the portrait" (寫真), Zheng Danruo reveals the woman's resistance to becoming an object of male connoisseurship. Mengyu's act of calling on Xianyu represents the subordination of the woman's body by naming. When Mengyu and his mother gaze at the painted image, the reincarnated Plum Goddess Xianyu falls seriously ill because of her emotional connection with Mengyu. She blames Mengyu for taking the liberty to summon her spirit, and decides to keep her virginity during her lifetime, despite their predestined relationship. A comparison of Xianyu and Liniang highlights the author's endorsement of women's virginity, which is a form of women's resistance to the marriage system in a patriarchal society. This selected passage also reflects the author's challenge to stereotypical representations of pathetic women in male author's literary works. Zheng Danruo clearly distinguishes her writing

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[206]麗娘昔日離魂事，佳話千秋艷羨稱；試與碧華仙子較，此中輕重可分明。羨 芳心一點清如水，羞煞他 春感秋悲說艷情。1:12, 46.

from the negative stereotypes of sentimental women, and indicates that women here in her work are dedicated to a higher standard of moral integrity.

The current discussion also recalls contemporary art historian Wu Hung's essay on the stereotypes of women in Qing court art in the nineteenth century. In his essay, Wu Hung studies stereotypes that reflect "thematic, stylistic and iconographic generalization in art and literature" (Wu Hung 306). Stereotypes, Wu suggests, should also be contextualized in the "complex historical process in which a uniform pattern of imagination and representation gradually prevails to control not only the fictional characters, but also the self-imaging of the author, reader and viewer" (Wu Hung 307). Wu Hung's discussion, in the present analysis of *Dream*, is helpful for contemporary readers to understand the author's deviation from the literary representation of sentimental women. Zheng Danruo reprocesses Liniang's story in a women-oriented narrative. In this context, the heroine is not constrained by the stereotypes of passiveness and sentimentality. The authorial choice of doing away with the stereotypes of passivity demonstrates a progressive vision of womanhood. Conversely, the readers are impelled to ponder the exemplary heroines beyond any stereotypical concepts of femininity.

The portrait is emphatically associated with the theme of death and resurrection, as is the case in *The Peony Pavilion*. Du Liniang paints her portrait when lovesickness has begun to take its toll on her looks, as a response to her knowledge of her mortality. After she passes away, Liu Mengmei finds the portrait which she buries in the garden. He calls on the painted image, and startles Liniang's spirit. The portrait has a life-giving power, activated by the male viewer's gaze at the painted woman. Likewise, in *Dream*,

the male viewer's gaze at the painted Xianyu is so powerful that it almost captures the spirit of the heroine.

> One night when the mother and son were both viewing the painting, they saw the image of the beauty frequently casting affectionate glances. Turning her shoulder, she seems to come out of the painting, or going into the depth of the picture. Seized by the sight, Mengyu cannot hold back his tears. [207]

The returning of the painted image to life reveals a reversed visual structure, with the painted woman repeatedly flashing a gleam back at the viewers. The unsettling gazes of the painted woman lead to continual raptures in the textual presentation and foreshadow the woman's resistance against her prescribed role. The painted image in the portrait reacted to the male gaze, turning her shoulders and darting frequent glances at Mengyu, as if she were going to say something.

The painted image is located in a place from which the male protagonist and the reader observe her. When the image turns a reversed gaze back, Mengyu is startled by the woman's dismantling gaze. He weeps, hoping to call her name, yet refrains from doing so, for fear of taking her spirit away from her body. The physical being of the woman, the ideal of beauty, appears in sublimated form, as the physiognomic expression of the spiritual. The physical incarnation of the heroine Xianyu in the portrait exemplifies the yearnings of the viewers. Yet the woman casts brooding glances towards and behind the viewer into the distance, dismantling the unilateral visual structure and reversing the direction of the look. In a melancholy mood, she tosses her shoulders, as if to escape into the deep end of the painting, or to flee from it. The motion of the painted woman suggests a sorrowful beauty who suffers from loneliness and estrangement, her celestial purity

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[207] 一宵母子同觀畫，見佳人條轉秋波顧盼頻。轉側香肩入欲出，蘭君驚及淚雙傾。1:11, 172.

perpetually out of place in the surrounding human world. While the story highlights the suture between authenticity and imitation, the portrait here is an ironic reference to a male-oriented desire to frame and control the woman through a subordinating visual structure. This visual structure consists of the male artist who himself is an observer, the painted woman, and the subject of the painting Xianyu who is summoned by the male artist's imagination. The mother's observation of the portrait, in addition, shows another dimension of gender socialization. The mother ponders on the painted woman, assessing her as a future daughter-in-law.

This scenario of resurrecting the painted woman through the spectator's gaze recurs later in the text. After Zhuang Yuan becomes a good friend with Xianyu's father Lin Wu and arranges Mengyu to marry Xianyu, Mrs. Zhuang visits the Lin family to meet with Xianyu. Upon her first sight of Xianyu, Mrs. Zhuang is instantly struck by the resemblance of the portrait to Xianyu's appearance. "Mrs. Zhuang was overjoyed to find that the painted beauty Zhenzhen was her real daughter-in-law!"[208] The textual moment reifies the heroine's image in the illusion of verisimilitude. Yet what Mrs. Zhuang sees as "real" on the portrait has already dissipated. The woman is given the embellished name of "*zhenzhen,*" the aforementioned beauty in a painting who came alive when called upon by a scholar. The affirmation of Xianyu as the legendary painted beauty represents the woman's body as an idealized medium, which stimulates the spectator's desire and attraction, making the woman a culturally inscribed object.

Returning to the former scene of Mengyu making a portrait of Xianyu, I suggest that in this scene Mengyu acquires a "misrecognition" of an imaginary relationship with

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208 夫人又復還驚喜，卻原來畫上真真是那姬. 1:11, 172.

the painted image, in the light of Lacanian understanding of the formation of subjectivity through the mirror stage. The Lacanian imaginary refers to the pre-Oedipal identification of a child with its mirror image before it has acquired a sense of self. In this particular scene, the imagery of the woman implies possible modes of resistance in the visual structure. Xianyu's image is activated and gains life under the gaze of Mengyu and her future mother-in-law. For the viewers of the portrait, and the readers as well, her body seems to make involuntary movements by casting meaningful gazes back. These bodily movements, however, cannot change the fact that her image is a silenced one. Xianyu's painting lacks a voice to counteract the subordination of that body, and consequently she cannot speak back to resist her destined matrimonial bond.[209]

When Xianyu's soul is summoned by Mengyu's portrait and departs from her body, it is her reincarnated celestial sister, the doctor Tao Xianbi, who awakens her from a fatal spell by calling upon Xianyu's childhood name. After seeing the seriously ill Lin Xianyu, Tao Xianbi thinks to herself, "From what I can see, the reason for Miss Lin's illness is none other than that someone seizes her soul by making a portrait of her. Yet where can I find the person who made the portrait, so that the painting can be destroyed, and she can recover? Even though my medicine has some effect, it cannot counter the skills of the painter. She is not simply suffering a temporary illness. When looked at

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[209] The moment is also reminiscent of the story cited by Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀 (1329—1412) of the Ming Dynasty. A young scholar admires a painted beauty so much that he wishes to marry her, if only she could come to life. Later, the spirit of the beauty moves and descends from the painting and visits the young man every night. When the young man's parents hear of this, they suggest he feed the girl a little food. Gradually, the girl is almost fully transformed into a human being, except that she cannot speak a word. (Zhang Jing'er, 493-498)

closely, it seems her facial features are not real."[210] Intriguingly, as Xianyu's disease worsens, her physical body increasingly loses its substance and becomes indistinguishable from the painted image. As the male artist exerts his influence, the woman is gradually displaced from her physical being and becomes merely a sign for the painter's own dreams and desires. The tension between Xianyu's body and the portrait is dramatized to such a degree that the portrait even threatens to take away her life. Under the manipulation of the male artist, Xianyu's presence is reduced to a void space in his imaginary screen. This male-oriented visual structure, however, is disrupted by the female doctor Tao Xianbi, who perceives the effect of the portrait and counteracts the magic of the portrait by calling Xianyu's childhood name given by her parents.[211] Contrary to the story of Zhenzhen, in which the male viewer breathes life into the painted woman by calling her name, Xianyu retains her life by denying the naming act of the male spectator. This potentially disruptive act against the male control is legitimate in Xianyu's view: by using her natal family's name, she fulfills the obligation of filial piety, a moral obligation of higher importance than her submission to the husband.

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210 我觀小姐非他意，實是遭人攝影神。……何從查此丹青手，毀卻其容疾始輕。我妙藥雖然能見效，總然難鬥畫工能。他非是神魂偶失招堪至，細觀他鬢影眉痕盡失真. 1:12, 188.

211 In the text, the twelve flower goddesses are reincarnated as various kinds of talented women, such as female doctor, opera singer, princess, painter, poet, playwright, filial daughter. For instance, a female character Xie Jingyun (謝景韻), who is Mrs. Zhuang'a adopted daughter, expresses her wish to learn both medicine and fortune telling, in order to alleviate the pain of the ailing, and forewarn people who may suffer misfortune. The narrator approves her ambition through Mrs. Zhuang's words, "This girl is clearly born with the ambition of a man. She persuades people in the country to adhere to filial piety, and transforms the declining customs [of the people] into refined habits." (此女分明夫子心. 他勸化鄉人敦孝弟，把頹風挽轉竟成醕. 2:24, 183.) This is just one of the many textual examples that endorse women's right to participate in social affairs outside the inner chambers and affirm their capability to perform as men's equals in the society.

The portraits in *Dream* possess such immediacy that the boundaries between the real and the representational are dismantled. The painted image at first appears to be the product of the male protagonist's imagination. The woman is a reflective image; her presence is only a figurative one.[212] Later, with a burdened conscience, Mengyu burns the painting to rescue Xianyu from the illness: "the image in the painting dissipated in a mere moment, only a faint fragrance of the plum flower is detectable in the air."[213] The burning of the portrait shows the resistance against such narrative impulses and reveals the author's determination to divert from the narrative closure of marriage. The text manifests a subversion of the unrequited love convention. In *The Peony Pavilion,* Liniang's self-portrait is preserved after her death as a proof of her resurrection and marriage with Mengmei. In *Dream*, however, Mengyu's portrait of Xianyu is burnt and dissipates into the air. This might suggest the author's conscious effort to search for an alternative narrative closure, for the heroine's fate is no longer constrained by the pledge of love.

To return to the topic of women's ironized relationship with their painted images in the portraits, I will discuss a textual example that addresses the aforementioned

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212 In the text, painting incorporates distance into daily life and turns the characters' immediate surroundings into allegorical figures of projection. When Mrs. Zhuang's father recovers from a serious illness, she is ridden with anxiety. To please his mother, Mengyu begs her to paint an image of an orchid flower (丹桂) on silk cloth. When Mrs. Zhuang finishes the first painting, Mengyu ventures to suggest, "In the painting there are too many leaves while the flower is less apparent; it is not like the real flower, which has a golden color that shines lastingly." (葉太多來花太隱，不及這金光灼爍斷還連。1:9, 130.) The image of the flower is a figural reference to women in the text; what is embellished in the text is an authorial reference to women's social and cultural visibility of the time.

213 頃刻間 鬟影衣香消毀盡，梅花香氣尚微聞. 1:11, 172.

legendary beauty Wang Zhaojun, who falls victim to the portrait maker's manipulation. The reincarnated flower goddess Xianyu, with her exceptional skills in painting, once crafted a portrait of Wang to applaud her "purity, constancy, loyalty and chastity" (清貞忠烈 2：21，135). She asks her father General Lin to compose a poem on her portrait of Wang Qiang. The poem, reminiscent of Xi Peilan's satirical poem on Wang Qiang's life, goes as follows:

> The melancholy tune of the *pipa* penetrated the Yanmen Gate [at the frontier],
> Across ten thousand miles her chained soul returns to her home country.
> Her tomb is imperishable, so is the Fragrance Creek;[214]
> Never did the portrait bring joy to the beautiful maiden.[215]

Resonant with Xi Peilan's poem, the above passage shows Wang Zhaojun's tragic fate caused by the misrepresenting portrait, indicating the painted image could not actually speak for the woman herself. In the context of *Dream*, this episode appears immediately before Xianyu's illness caused by Mengyu's portrait of her, foreshadowing Xianyu's reluctance to submit to the male viewer's voyeuristic control.

In the context of late imperial *tanci* works, one can already see the challenge and reversal of the scenario of portraits of women as passive objects. In *Destiny of Rebirth*, for instance, Meng Lijun leaves her parents a self-portrait as a surrogate for her person and flees home, exploring new possibilities of life by disguising herself as a man. Likewise, Zheng Danruo's reversal of the portrait scenario reflects a woman in search of

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214 The Xiangxi (Fragrance Creek 香溪) refers to a branch river of the Yangzi river in South China. Legend has it that Wang Qiang was born in a small county by the river and was selected to be a royal consort during the reign of Emperor Yuan of the Han Dynasty (漢元帝 74 BC-33 BC)

215 琵琶淒絕雁門關，萬裏羈魂返故山。青冢香溪同不朽，丹青那得娛紅顏。2:21, 136.

her own desire, rejecting imposed social and cultural frames as encoded in the portraits of women. The authorial narrator criticizes Mengyu for making the portrait of his lover carelessly, "I blame him for often using the portrait without caution; overwhelmed with love, he neglects Xianyu's parents. Addicted with desire, his mind is demeaned and impish. His behavior really puts down the name of scholar and beauty."[216] Xianyu's words indicate that the genuine image scenario was often employed without enough caution in many circumstances, and denigrates the reputation of women consequently. The woman's reluctance of offering her own image as a passive visual object is possibly the reason why Xianyu refuses to become one of the painted beauties in the shadow. When Xianyu is asked by her father to make a portrait of "Hundred Beauties," namely, one hundred noted women in history, she declines to paint her own image among them, even though her parents encouraged her to do so.[217] These textual details display that in

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216 怪他人常以真容為話柄，沒寫作兒女情深目無親。全不曉高堂父母憂其疾，好色心還鄙更輕。名教罪人真可殺，辱沒殺佳人才子盜來名。1:11, 173.

217 In the text, General Li asks his daughter Xianyu to paint a portrait of the legendary Mingfei (明妃 third century), one of China's four classic beauties. When stricken by Xianyu's artistic talent, the General encourages her, saying, "you might as well paint all the legendary beauties since ancient times" (爾但畫盡古美緣 2:23, 160). The portrait of beautiful women is a common motif in *Dream*; the book offers narrative portraits of twelve flower goddesses who descend from heaven to redeem people from a degraded world. Ellen Widmer's study of the "hundred beauties" of the *tanci* entitled *Remaking Heaven* (再造天) might shed some light on the current discussion. In contrast to the well-known novel *Flowers in the Mirror*, which depicts a hundred female characters, the *tanci* work *Remaking Heaven* presents the hundred only in painted form. Two commentators have referred to the novel itself as a painting of a hundred beauties (百美圖) (Widmer 2006, 33-103). The *tanci* work *Remaking Heaven*, in my view, reflects an active reinterpretation of the representations of women in the use of the "hundred beauties" literary formula, rather than focusing on the detailed characterization of individual women. In *Dream*, the formula of "hundred beauties" also appears in a scene in which Mrs. Zhuang, Mengyu and Rengfang's mother Mrs. Song played a poetry game entitled "The Twelve Beauties." In the game, each person brings forth a poetic riddle, in which

the late imperial period, portraits of women and by women carried moral implications and were closely associated with women's moral identity and agency. The following section proposes that portraits are visual mediums through which women tell the tales of chastity and filial devotion from a gendered perspective. Women in the text display an autonomous power, challenging their energy of resistance against the paternal social system through their active management of the portraits.

Visual Stories of Chastity and Filial Piety

In *Dream*, Zheng Danruo's innovative use of the portrait scenario reveals the moral implication of the portraits in the text. These portraits are visual narratives that endorse women's chastity and filial devotion. This chapter discusses three examples of portraits that reflect the author's moral concerns about chastity and filial devotion. To further the discussion of the previous section, I analyze Xianyu's resistance against marriage in light of chastity and filial devotion. This determination to preserve virginity in the name of serving one's natal parents is also seen in the character of Liu Lingjuan (劉令娟), who paints a self-portrait to show her determination to stay unmarried for her lifetime. In these two stories, chastity is an exemplifying form of gendered filial devotion. Along with these stories about chastity, the author also presents the theme of the filial devotion through the portrait of Zhuang Yuan. This portrait, named "Portrait of a Filial Heart," was painted by the talented heroine Xianyu to commemorate Zhuang Yuan's filial deeds toward his parents and his loyal service to the Emperor. In this context,

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the characters of each line contain the name of an ancient beauty. Every line also vividly portrays the appearance and manner of the referred beauty to which it refers

women's artistic authorship is presented as of great value in advocating the moral principle of filial devotion, echoing the author's statement that the transformation of social customs must begin from the inner quarters.

Paintings in the text also display author's moral interpretation of gender relationship in marriage. Zhuang Yuan and Mrs. Zhang have respectively made marriage arrangements for Mengyu, with two talented women, Lin Xianyu and Song Renfang. Both of them, as the narrator reveals, are reincarnated flower goddesses in a predestined bond with Mengyu (2:22, 148). The father Zhuang Yuan has fittingly made a painting of the "three Friends of the Winter," (歲寒三友), referring to the three images of friendship, including pine-tree, bamboo and plum tree. He then put down the birth dates of the male protagonist Mengyu, and his two future spouses Xianyu and Renfang inscribed on the painting, indicating an idealized matrimonial structure. (2:16, 40) Here the allegorical reference to the "three Friends of the Winter" is ridden with implications of chastity and moral integrity. The fourteenth century scholar Hu Han notes, "The gentleman respects the pine tree for its chastity, the bamboo for its straightness, and the plum blossom for its purity." (Brinker 39). The author appropriates this scenario to underwrite an idealized matrimonial structure based on men and women's spiritual companionship, which alters the traditional belief of women's subordinate relationship with men.

Moral obligation, especially women's chastity, becomes one of the most prominent messages that are delivered by the paintings in the text. Liu Lingjuan, a disciple of Mrs. Zhuang, paints a self-portrait to show her determination to remain unmarried for the rest of her life. She tells Mrs. Zhuang, "My teacher, if you want to perceive my ice-pure wish of staying free from marriage, please behold this embroidered

self-portrait."[218] The self-portrait declares Lingjuan's determination and resistance to male-defined social roles through marriage. The author describes Lingjuan's resistance to marriage as revealing the "heart of a sincere child" (赤子之心). Unlike the portrait in *The Peony Pavilion*, which symbolizes the love knot that leads to a consummated marriage, Lingjuan's self-portrait represents an imagined self that opposes the social control of women through marriage. The social emphasis on women's chastity surfaced in Song Neo-Confucian culture in the eleventh century and twelfth century, and became much more intense after the Manchu conquest in mid seventeenth century. In the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, governmental policies rewarding and encouraging widow chastity partially contributed to the cult of marital fidelity. In her study of the late imperial chastity cult, Janet Theiss suggests that many Chinese women in the eighteenth century committed suicide after they were sexually compromised, molested, or raped. (Theiss 68) This concern about maintaining chastity is reflected in Lingjuan's self-portrait, which, especially as it is embroidered on white silk, reveals her wish to preserve her virginity. Lingjuan's idealized image of an integrated self, however, is shattered when she falls victim to her cousin's vicious scheme. In the text, Lingjuan's cousin Jingsheng falls in love with her and bribes her maid into stealing Lingjuan's jade swallow-shaped hairpin for him. Jingsheng then reveals Lingjuan's hairpin to her mother, claiming that Lingjuan has asked the maid to give him the hairpin as a pledge of her affection for him. Lingjuan's parents are persuaded by Jingsheng and decide to marry Lingjuan to him. When Lingjuan discovers her cousin's scheme with the maid, which has contaminated her chaste name, she, enraged by the injustice, vomits blood excessively, and dies

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[218] 師母哪 欲識兒家冰雪誌，但看這 孤高一副繡嬋娟. 3:36, 199.

instantly. Lingjuan's portrait of herself as the "Infant in the North Palace" is an idealized image of feminine autonomy outside of the patriarchal society's social control of women. The image of the woman as an eternal infant suggests that for women, preservation of their virginity is a means of rejecting socialization through marriage.

In late imperial China, virginity also assumes various contextual meanings, reflecting specific social, historical, and cultural conditions. Eugenio Menegon, a scholar in late imperial religious studies, suggests that "religious virginity" symbolized by goddesses and religious nuns, "was concerned less with physiological integrity than sexual renunciation and rejection of the married condition" (Menegon 313). This phenomenon, according to Menegon, is nourished by the principals of Buddhism and Daoism (Menegon 313). The text of *Dream* manifests the influences of Buddhism and Daoism, depicting twelve immortals who descend to earth to redeem the moral trend of the ethereal world. The virgin goddesses are depicted as idealized images, which might appeal to women readers of the time who were victims of imposed marriages. Perhaps in the author's view, virginity is thus a form of "celibate chastity" (Menegon 313) that deserves more appreciation. In the social context of late imperial China, however, virginity was assessed from the male-oriented viewpoint as a guarantee of the purity of the ancestral line in the husband's family. When a girl is disgraced with a promiscuous name before marriage, such as in Liu Lingjuan's case, she has no other choice but to die or commit suicide.[219] Lingjuan's death, in this particular context, shows that she was

[219] One may say that such situation about women's suicide has been much related to Neo-Confucian codes about female chastity. By the time of Ming, however, there were more arguing against women's suicides on account of chastity. For discussion about the Confucian regulation of feminine virtue, see Matthew Harvey, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China*. 2000. Also see Carlitz, 101-125.

already possessed as a piece of property *before* marriage. Consequently, she had no alternative space to claim as her own.

The text praises Lingjuan as a woman martyr, an example of those "chaste women who excel in both talent and virtue" (才德兼優貞烈女 3:36, 218). However, Lingjuan's almost defiant devotion to chastity against her parents' desire shows that she is by no means a passive character. Her death of spitting blood shows a kind of self-inflicted violence, suggesting that only in death could she speak on her own behalf. The portrait is then an object of self-warning for the heroine to guard her chastity for her own sake. It suggests the woman's power to defy her socially prescribed identity. In the above example, the author's interpretation of the cult of chastity focuses on the woman's devotion to moral integrity for her own sake, her potential to renounce marriage and resist social control, and her power of defending herself through death. Feminine virtue, in the author's view, can be used to speak for women's own interest and choices. As Lingjuan suggests, filial devotion to one's natal parents can justify one's wish to stay unmarried. Mrs. Zhuang Lin Xianyu resists a marriage with Mengyu, blaming him for carelessly capturing her image with the portrait. In order to please his parents, he has both put her life in danger and upset her parents. She thinks,

> With all the means to entertain your family, why do you have to make a portrait of me to please your parents? For our predestined bond, I am willing to sacrifice my life. I am disappointed because you took advantage of my passion to please your parents. I am regretful that without true honesty and generosity you could not be truly filial; and that you do not know how to put yourself in my situation and sympathize with me. [220]

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[220] 家庭盡有承歡法，卻如何描我真容悅爾親。論前情縱使甘為知己死，最傷心斷腸父母乍為情。我恨你全無忠恕何稱孝，怎不能以己之心度我心。 1:11, 193.

Filial devotion here is evoked by Lin Xianyu to defy Mengyu's control. This rejection of being physically manipulated also foreshadows Xianyu's insistence on her virginity after her marriage with Mengyu. In the heroine's choice of filial devotion over respect for her husband, the readers may perceive a dialectic of power and resistance. The text, by employing and rewriting the discourse of feminine virtue, suggests that in women's lives there are times "when disobedience is filial and resistance is loyal." (Stone 261) By exploring the conflicts between moral obligations for women and presenting filial devotion as a higher obligation than submission to one's husband, Zheng Danruo suggests a space of women's resistance against the patriarchal system.

To return to the theme of portraiture, I have suggested above that portraits in the present text are visual narratives of chastity and filial devotion. Women characters make portraits to show their wish to preserve their virginity. Their self-portraitures in this light retain a transformative power, as it replaces the fetishizing viewpoint of literati intellectuals with women's own point-of-view. In the aforementioned case, the portrait bespeaks Lingjuan's wish to retain her virginity, and to maintain an autonomous life outside the marriage system. In Xianyu's case, the woman's body, instead of succumbing to the man's exploiting gaze, becomes a dramatized site of resistance. Xianyu's painted image disrupts the male-dominated visual structure by looking back at the viewers. Her real person, resistant to Mengyu's emotional appeal, places filial devotion at a higher level of moral obligation than marital fidelity. In both of the heroines' cases, women appropriate the discourses of women's virtue to speak for their own interests. At the same time, the author's view toward virginity reflects her indignation at the social victimization of women. The twelve reincarnated goddesses all remain virgins, and many

pass away in illness before marriage. The author's depiction of women's celibacy and death suggests the alienation and exclusion of women in their social and cultural surroundings. The goddesses' return to the heavenly realm is only an imaginary alternative to most women's tragic outcomes in the marriage market in reality. This is perhaps the reason why, at the end of the work, none of the reincarnated goddesses wishes to return to the earth as a woman again.

Painting, like poetry, marks women's accomplishments in the late imperial period. The heroine Xianyu, for instance, is asked by her father to paint a portrait of Zhuang Yuan, entitled *Portrait of a Filial Child* (心孝子傳). This portrait represents the theme of filial devotion on several levels. The painted character Zhuang Yuan, the "filial child" to which the name of the painting refers, is applauded as an exemplar of loyalty to the emperor and filial devotion to his parents. For Xianyu to create the painting, she not only pleases her own father Lin Wu, but also fulfills her filial duty to the Zhuang family, for she is soon to be married to Zhuang Yuan's son, Mengyu. Making this portrait is thus Xianyu's personal endeavor, and reflectively endorses her commitment to moral principles.

In the text, this portrait is completed with a "Biography of a Filial Child" composed by Renfang, another reincarnated flower goddess, who later also marries Mengyu and becomes Zhuang Yuan's daughter-in-law. The purpose of this painting, as Lin Wu suggests, is to advocate Zhuang Yuan's good deeds and educate the people of the world. In making the portrait, Xianyu, who has never seen Zhuang Yuan in person, summons her celestial vision in a dream:

> She recalls that one day she dreamed of Zhuang Yuan and his son Mengyu, who closely resemble each other. Since she has met Mengyu in the Luofu Mountain in

> the dream, and still remembers his appearance, maybe she can make a portrait of Zhuang Yuan based on the dream, and meet her father's desire.[221]

Parallel to Mengyu's portrait of her, Xianyu's celestial vision depicts the image of Zhuang Yuan with much vividness. When she finishes the painting, the image of Zhuang Yuan is so lifelike and exuberant that it instantly fills Xianyu's chamber with fragrance. Lin Wu becomes enchanted with the portrait and often gazes at it, praying for the happiness of Zhuang Yuan, as if the image were alive. Later, both the portrait and Zhuang Yuan's biography are copied and circulated for the moral education of the public. This particular incident shows, as the text puts it, that "Transformation of the social customs shall take its beginning in the inner chambers. Such practices will gradually expand their influence to the outside." [222] The text shows that the inner chamber is a space in which women acquire a certain authority by exercising their moral agency. The portrait, created to endorse filial devotion, empowers the artist by giving her a kind of moral authority. [223]

In that she produces an extremely lifelike image of Zhuang Yuan, the heroine displays a fantastic power. In the text, when Xianyu finishes the painting, the painted figure is so vivid that it takes the observing maid by surprise:

221忽憶春庭當日夢，莊公與子竟同顏。仙山會見微堪記，或者摹來和父懷。2: 2, 26.

222風化始, 在閨房, 漸行而出。 1:1, 3.

223 In the text, Xianyu's talent in painting is reflected in her ability to make portraits of loyal officials and distinguished scholars in history. As a preliminary practice for making the "Portrait of a Filial Child," Xianyu painted a picture of the famous Zhuge Kongming (諸葛孔明 181 AD–234 AD), a well-known loyal minister and outstanding military strategist of the Three Kingdoms Period (57BC---668AD).

> Seated by the window, Xianyu contemplates Mr. Zhuang's image from recollection, and thinks, "It is possible to depict this deity under worldly circumstances. I will first try to depict his facial features." Her painting skills are truly distinguished. The painted image gazes with glaring eyes, his spirit coming alive on paper. The clever and appreciative maid is frightened and hurries to Xianyu and calls her, clinging to her dress, "even though your father's order cannot be disobeyed, how can you use your skillful hand to prey on his spirit? If his soul departs from his body, you will be blamed for the consequences." [224]

This scene evokes the custom of "dotting the eyes" (點睛) in traditional Chinese painting; having finished sketching the image of a painted being, the artist dots the eyes and makes the image lively on the page. Similar to this practice of "eye-dotting," the text suggests the artist's command of the painted image. Xianyu's skill in painting, as the maid suggests, is so overpowering that it can take the life of the painted subject. The textual example shows a fissure between the theme of the portrait and the woman's act of making the painting. Although Xianyu creates the painting to show her filial devotion to her own father, her act of painting the image suggests a captivating power over the painted image of Zhuang Yuan, her yet-to-be "father." The scene is also reminiscent of a similar scene in *Destiny of Rebirth*, when the heroine Lijun creates a portrait of herself and asks the maid whether the portrait resembles her likeness. In both scenes, the attending maid represents a bystander's point of view, confirming the heroine's power and skill. In the latter case, the maid enlightens the protagonist of the fantastic power of the portrait to summon the painted person's soul. At this moment, the maid's tone is didactic, warning the talented mistress the disrupting moral implication of the painting. This refined scene is embedded with several visual frames, showing the artist viewing the

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[224] 挑燈端坐倚窗前,把 莊君容態從頭想,又思來凡境何堪此仙.且自揮毫描面目，果然仙筆不同凡。目光如漆神俱現，驚倒聰明解事寰。忙即牽衣呼小姐，雖然父命逆可堪，豈可以傳神妙手傳風靈，倘使他 一旦魂離是爾愆。2: 25, 209.

portrait, the portrait reverting the gaze, and the observing maid, who perceives and articulates the moral implication of the portrait for the readers.

In the above passages, I have focused my discussion on portraits as visual stories of chastity and filial piety. I have suggested that these portraits made of or by women carry an emancipating potential, as women characters appropriate the social discourses of virtue and chastity, and employ filial devotion as a means of renouncing sexuality and marriage. I have also suggested that the woman painter, by creating the portrait out of filial devotion, gains a form of moral authority. At the same time, the text also suggests the artist's aesthetic control over the man's painted image, reversing the hierarchical relationship between the male artist and his objectified feminine subject. The woman becomes the maker and the spectator of the man's painted image; she enlivens his image, but she also has the power to seize his spirit with her magic brush. The text presents the great tension between these seemingly incongruous representations of gender relationships that underlies the theme of moral virtue. Whether didactic in purpose or not, the portraits allow the spectator to interpret them from a moral standpoint. In the following section, I will continue to discuss the ways in which a spectator's viewing of the painted image invites his or her sympathy for the painted image, and conversely modifies the viewer's sense of self.

Portraits and Sympathetic Spectatorship

The author's presentation of portrait viewing and gendered spectatorship, discussed in the previous sections, calls for a close reading of the mobile relation between the portrait and its sympathetic audience. In this section, I will continue to discuss the

relation between portraits and sympathetic spectatorship as represented in *Dream*. The author presents several instances in which the spectators sympathize with and make emotive responses to a painted image. In Mengyu's case, when the male painter realizes that his portrait of Xianyu may put her life at risk, he destroys the painting, showing a capacity to sympathize with the painted woman by shifting to her point of view. In another example, Xianyu's painting of Zhuang Yuan draws emotional responses from Zhuang Yuan's family members. When the portrait becomes a stand-in for the subject, it elicits feelings from the viewers, thus amplifying the viewers' emotional experience. Overall, the text presents multifarious depictions of characters, both men and women, observing portraits of diverse angles. The author's elaborate presentation of the spectator's experience is instructive, augmenting the readers' own awareness of their relations to the painted image and the observing characters.

Although many examples from the authorial insertions carry signs that show the author is predominantly addressing women readers, the actual community of historical readers of *Dream* might have included many men as well. For contemporary readers, it is difficult to collect evidence outside the text to show the gender construction of Zheng's readers, or to answer the question, "who is sympathizing with the women in the text, men or women?" My discussion of spectatorship hopes to elucidate the connections between the general audience of the text, and the particular women-oriented perspective that the author possibly has brought forth with the use of the portrait scenarios. In this regard, a women-oriented perspective does not necessarily imply a community that only includes women readers/viewers. The particular sympathetic perspective in the text is a gendered viewpoint. However, this viewpoint does not exclude men as possible sympathetic

viewers, nor does it imply that all women readers of the time would establish a sympathetic emotive bond with the fictional characters. This women-oriented viewpoint is a gendered perspective unconstrained by the sexuality of the reader/viewer of the text.

Mengyu's sympathy for Xianyu occurs when he realizes that the portrait has caused Xianyu a deep illness and nearly taken her life. Stricken by pain and grief, "he becomes conscientious and burns the painting."[225] Xianyu's illness recalls a similar scenario in *The Peony Pavilion*, in which the enchanted Liniang dies of lovesickness after an imaginary encounter with the scholar Liu Mengmei. [226] Later, Liniang returns to life when called upon by a male viewer, whom Liniang once addressed as the "cure" for her ailment (心上醫) (2:20, 116).

However, the narrative convention of the erotic fused with magic and disease is changed greatly in *Dream*. Love and desire here are secondary to true sympathy for one's companion. Thanks to Mengyu's conscientiousness (良心) and his concomitant act of burning the painting, Xianyu is cured of her disease. The text reveals a case of narrative

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225 幸虧他發現良心畫已焚. 1:11, 193.

226 In *Dream*, several of the female characters avoid arranged marriage by committing suicide or otherwise dying. The female doctor, Tao Zhibi, for instance, dies of illness before her uncle can marry her to a rich family. The narrative trope of women's premature death in the late imperial period has been widely discussed by current scholarship. Rania Huntington has an essay on female suicide and substitution in the Qing "tales of anomalies" (誌怪), supernatural or strange stories about ghosts, fox-spirits, and other strange phenomena. Huntington discusses the late imperial Chinese ideas of interiority by examining powerless individuals at moments of crisis. Because of their spare narrative style and tendency to focus on a single point of view, the *zhiguai* stories, in some ways, allow the least room of any of the narrative or dramatic genres for exploration of the human interior. In contrast with the *zhiguai* narratives, *Dream* contains many detailed descriptions of its characters' psychological features, which reveal the unspoken aspects of the female characters. Death, in this light, becomes another way of speaking for women, a challenge against the representations of the female body as a silent and non-discursive space upon which the male artist/voyeur exercises his power.

sympathy in which the painting facilitates a sympathetic identification between the male artist/viewer and the heroine, whose image has been seized and who suffers a consequent illness. The misguided male viewer finally perceives the interiority of the painting. Through frequent exchanges of gazes with the painted beauty, the male viewer is deeply immersed in that of the painted woman. The hero finally sees beyond the painting and acquires an extended perception. In James Chandler's words, the spectator eventually makes an intellectual exertion beyond the immediacy of the senses and "put[s] himself in the shoes of the other." (Chandler 837) The author projects an idealized relationship between the viewer and the painted beauty, which is defined by what Rae Greiner calls an "extra-sensory intersubjectivity." (Greiner 309) Mengyu's vision, in other words, is amplified when he adopts the viewpoint of the feminine protagonist. [227]

The male viewer evolves into an "impartial spectator" characterized by "not a feeling-into, but a feeling-along-with the state of mind and emotions of another." (Greiner 307) The idealized male spectator is also a part of the larger social and cultural context that influenced the women writers of the late imperial period. It is impossible to prove whether this imaginary male viewer represents the woman author's desire for a wider and more sympathetic audience, including men able to perceive the sentiments of the women authors' minds. Here the literary scenario of the portrait explores the subjectivity of reading and interpretation, inviting the readers to immerse themselves in the worlds of the characters. Like the portrait teaches its viewers to perceive what is beyond the painting, the author teaches her readers to engage themselves in the text with

[227] It is no coincidence that in the text, Meng Yu crossdresses several times as a girl to dance and entertain his parents. The male protagonist is endowed with remarkable mobility in inhabiting male and female gender roles.

critical attention. In this way, Zheng resembles Western fiction authors such as Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, and Jane Austen, who "appropriate, interrogate, and transform the spectator-as-reader trope…as they jockey for critical authority in their novels" (Gardiner 11). In the context of late imperial China, Zheng Danruo's imaginative creation of an idealized male spectator represents the author's desire for a more sympathetic community of audience, including male readers who are capable of empathizing with a woman-oriented point of view. At the end of the text, when Mengyu and the flower goddesses ascend to heaven and unite with his parents, he volunteers to descend into the world again, incarnated as a woman, in order to write the stories of the goddesses into a *tanci* work (4:48, 240). This ending suggests potential gender reversal, when the sympathetic hero could be reborn as a woman in his next life and write the story from a woman's perspective.

To return to the discussion of spectatorship, I will study the following textual scene in which several male characters are engaged in a sympathetic relationship with the image in the painting. After Zhuang Yuan leaves, his family longs for his presence and finds comfort in looking at his portrait. One day, Zhuang Yuan's aged uncle pays a visit and sees the portrait, and, unable to withhold his passion, calls Zhuang Yuan's name.

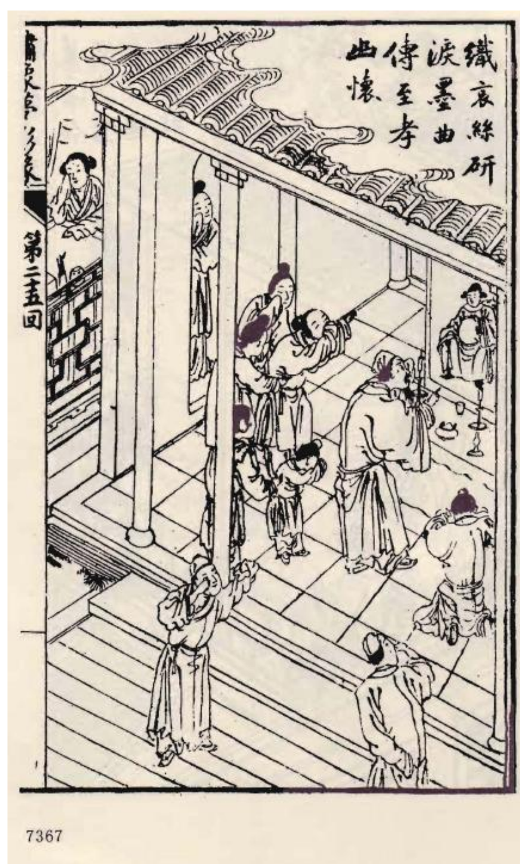

Figure 3 Zhuang Yuan's aged uncle sheds tears upon seeing the vivid portrait. (Jing 7367).

Driven by sorrow and anger, Mr. Zhuang loses control of himself, and cries at the portrait, "My nephew! You are born outstanding and unrivalled in this world, and do not belong here. You should have followed the example of Liu Gang, who took his wife when becoming an immortal,[228] instead of becoming another Mei

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[228] Liu Gang (劉剛): A legendary Daoist alchemist, who ascends to heaven with his wife Fan Yunqiao (樊雲翹). According to *Biographies of the Immortal beings* (神仙傳, fourth century), a work by ancient Daoist Ge Hong (葛洪 284---364), Fan used to outrival her husband Liu Gang with her expertise in alchemy. Lady Fan was a distinguished poet herself, and composed a number of poems on Daoist practices. The author's allusion to this tale, for historical readers of the time who were familiar with the legend, perhaps carries protofeminist implications in this regard. (Ge 129)

> Fu who completely deserted his family.[229] Even though you have ascended to the realm of bliss and reunited with your own father, you will suffer from loneliness, with no companion except your own shadow. Isn't it regretful when two love birds can no longer fly together?" [230]

Occupying the central portion of the painting, Zhuang Yuan's image successfully elicits the old uncle's passion; without anticipating this, the uncle exclaims his thoughts to the portrait (忘其所以). The viewer's involuntary physical response shows the portrait's function of moving observers to action.[231] This pathetic scene of the uncle calling to the image attests to the fantastic power of the heroine, whose skills have resurrected the deceased on paper. At the same time, the old uncle's regret is provoked by a comparison of the portrait of Zhuang Yuan with the family portrait of Zhuang Yuan's parents, which the uncle has seen before. Zhuang Yuan has followed his father's path in searching for the immortal world. However, within the viewer's associative gaze, the

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[229] According to *History of the Han Dynasty* (漢書), Mei Fu (梅福) was a loyal official of the Han dynasty, and was famous for offering honest advice for the Emperor Cheng of the Han Dynasty (漢成帝 51 BCE-7 BCE). Later, to escape from Wang Mang Rebellion, which threw down the Han dynasty, Mei Fu fled to the mountains and became a Daoist recluse to escape from political persecution. Legend has it that he became an immortal at last. (Ban Gu, 2917)

[230] 莊翁悲憤又交加，忘其所以竟對真容叫一聲，我那靜如賢侄啊，本來你絕世風流豈是塵中人物，但也應校攜婦之劉剛，怎竟做棄家之梅福。縱使你身登極樂境界，父子團圓，但是顧影無儔，鶼鶼折翼，亦未必不為缺憾阿。3:2, 198.

[231] Hu Siao-chen argues that Zheng Danruo's infatuation with the portrait is related to the so-called "Ganying guan" (感應觀) of the late imperial period; to the idea, that is, that a portrait's power of disconcerting and capturing the spirit of human beings was evidence of the artist's superb skill. (Hu Siao-chen 2003, 288-289) Anthony Yu also comments, "[E]choing the theory of stimulus and response (*ganying*) that undergirds so much of ancient Chinese thought, what guides Dong's reflections here seems also to be the variant dialectic of latency and activation (Yu 68). Yu also argues that Zheng's imagining of the painted image is related to epistemological conceptions of "dream" and "image." The current discussion, however, will focus on the portrait's power of activating the reader into establishing emotive bonds with the painted image.

portrait implies that in the immortal world, Zhuang Yuan is still suffering from the ethereal afflictions of solitude and separation from his wife and children.

The illustration below offers a vivid depiction of the viewers' individual perceptions. The inscription on the illustration cites the title of the chapter, "imitating the ancient portrait, inscribing the genuine image, [she] repetitively tests her ingenious skill, which summons the soul [of the painted person]."[232] Upon her father's request, Xianyu, before making a portrait for Zhuang Yuan, practiced by copying a portrait of General Zhuge Liang. The illustration below offers a bystander's perspective of the inner chamber, showing Xianyu at the center. The heroine is in the process of creating the portrait of Zhuge Kongming, her eyes fixed on the portrait of the ancient sage on the wall, while a few servants attend to her. The illustration, which was possibly created by a professional painter designated by Zheng's publisher, offers a sound visual interpretation of the corresponding chapter in the text. The portrait on the wall and the new portrait on the desk were half concealed by the pillars of the room and a maid, respectively. In contrast, the woman's action of painting is staged at the center of the scene, suggesting the importance of her artistic skill.

[232]摹古像寫真容疊試通靈妙計. 2:25, 194.

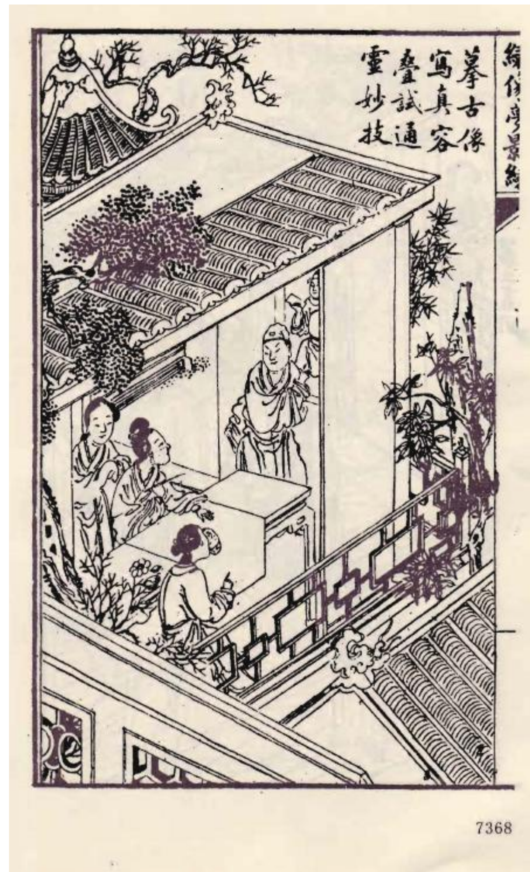

Figure 4 Xianyu making a portrait of Zhuge Kongming. 2:25, 194. (Jing 7368)

The portrait, in the text, constitutes itself as a sympathetic text, with its variable surface reflecting its ability to embody the reader's desire. This desire sometimes displays the reader's attentive reading of the progressive potentials in the painted image. In some textual moments, the text presents women looking at the portraits and making adventurous interpretations. The following example displays the way in which women's spectatorship explores and reclaims the portrait's subversive possibilities. When Xianyu finishes the painting of Zhuang Yuan, her mother, Mrs. Lin, is greatly offended by the resemblance of the portrait to Zhuang Yuan, who will become Xianyu's father-in-law. In

comparison, Xianyu’s friend Yunxian, who is also a reincarnated Goddess, interprets the painting from a much more sympathetic point of view.

> Seeing the portrait, Yunxian is completely enthralled, thinking that she must have seen this person some place before. Then she recalls (having seen him in the immortal world) the deity who resides on the holy Luofu Mountain. It turns out that Zhuang Yuan looks very much like this deity, who is his father. Yet how could Xianyu know of them both?
>
> When Mrs. Lin comes to see the painting, she is astonished as soon as she enters the room. She asks Xianyu if she owns a portrait of Mr. Zhuang. Xianyu replies that the portrait should look exactly like the real person. When Mrs. Lin hears this answer, she cannot suppress her anger, and throws the painting into the stove. Scornfully, she laughs and turns to Xianyu: “Why is it that you were born with such a cold heart? How could you take so much liberty and stir his spirit by inscribing a real person? The painting is so vivid. His flowing headwear seems to suggest that he is about to step out of the painting without being called upon by the observers...In the past, when Xianyu fell seriously ill, [the doctor] said that it was because someone painted her image. Even though such sayings were only half-true, one should be wary of the magic powers of the portraits. When have you ever seen a depicted image painted the same as a real person? You might as well imitate the portraits of the deceased. How dare you paint a person who is still alive!” The mother thinks to herself, “How detestable it is that she does not want to become a daughter-in-law of the Zhuang family, and dares to treat her father-in-law as a stranger. This is all because the General has been too lenient toward her. The father and daughter are both careless in action.”[233]

The portrait itself represents manifold narratives, portraying the painted person’s face as another screen upon which the reader’s imagination is projected. For Yunxian, Xianyu’s sister and one of the reincarnated flower goddesses, the portrait evokes a

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233 韻仙一看渾驚駭，曾向何方見此人。一想羅浮山上客，分明酷似畫中形。卻原來莊公容貌剛如父，姊又從何可見聞。 再看他道服染成魚白色，綸巾垂下帶雙分。手持玉塵同潔瑩，逸態飄然似欲行。何氏夫人來觀畫，入門一見徒然驚。問倩兒可有莊爺像，答道絲毫不異形。湘月怎禁心惱恨，便猛向 圍爐一撒花全焚。連聲冷笑呼文婉，虧你心腸怎樣生。怎竟全然不顧忌，勾魂攝魄畫來真。何須呼喚方能出，巾帶飄蕭競若行。……昔日小姐病深沈，陶姑說有人圖畫，雖則其言辦假真。畫太通靈原可慮，幾會見 畫中人竟似生人。古人遺像何妨寫，怎許他妄把今人繪影神。“可恨他甘心不做莊門媳，竟敢將舅氏看為陌路人。總怪將軍姑息甚，同心父女肆胡行。2:25, 209.

connection between the feminine subject and the image. Misrecognizing the image as someone whom she had seen before, Yunxian gradually recognizes that the painted Zhuang Yuan very much resembles his deceased father, whom she had encountered during her past "life" in the heavenly realm. As Yunxian approaches the painting, the locus of her look moves from the "form" or "body" (形) of the painted image to its "face" (容貌), both of which resemble those of Zhuang Yuan's father. In Yunxian's viewpoint, the painting of Zhuang Yuan revives his father's image, folding the immortal realm into the ethereal world, suggesting the permeable boundary between these spaces.

The same painted image elicits a significantly different response from Xianyu's mother, who is offended by it. In her eyes, the painting threatens the life of Zhuang Yuan, who has been away from home for years, and whose family does not know whether he is alive or dead. At this time, Xianyu has already declined the first marriage proposal of the Zhuang family, and expressed her wish to stay unmarried all her life in order to attend to her parents. The portrait once again reveals Xianyu's disobedience against her parents' wish for her marriage, as she treats Mengyu's father, Mr. Zhuang, as an unrelated person instead of a father-in-law. Xianyu's mother scorns her daughter for her recklessness, saying, "Don't you know that with persistent persuasion, you could have changed your father's mind [in having the portrait made]? This should be the appropriate way of being a filial child. Now you have behaved recklessly to please your father; I am afraid that you have been noted for the shame of unfiliality in heaven."[234] Underneath the mother's reproach is her disapproval of Xianyu's intention to display through the painting her

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[234]你可知幾諫能回父母過，斯為子道孝方稱。如這等胡為迎爾椿庭意，恐天上已先書你忤逆名。2: 25, 211.

determination to preserve her virginity. Xianyu confesses to her father, "I will wait on your side for the rest of my life. Even if the whole world changes, I shall not alter my mind."[235] The text shows a dramatic scene of family dispute over the portrait, underlying which is the conflict between a woman's moral obligations and her free choice about marriage.

The chapter ends with the father's approval of Xianyu's plea to stay unmarried, for he perceives from his daughter's exceptional artistic skill that she was not born a common woman. Xianyu then asks her father to remove her name from the portrait of "three friends in winter," which is a pledge for the matrimonial bond between her, Mengyu, and Renfang. She asks that her name be replaced by that of Xie Yunxian, who is her father's adopted daughter, and an ideal surrogate bride for Mengyu. [236] Praising Xianyu's ingenuous plan, the author notes, "A most outstanding person has a unique mind; [in comparison with Xianyu,] those women who gaze into the mirror and lament their loss of youth are quite derisible."[237] The author's mockery of sentimental women

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[235]唯願終身棲膝下，桑田可變誌難更。2: 25, 213.

[236] The trope of replacement shows the woman's resistance against her socially prescribed role in marriage. In *Dream*, another flower goddess, Renfang, also thinks of herself as a surrogate for Xianyu. "It is really pointless to make me take her place," she says, "like transplanting a flower onto another tree, she should have talked with me about the substitution. If I had known that Goddess Bihua has been born to the Lins, I would have thought of a practical plan for her" (倘使我 鵲巢鳩占真無謂，接木移花合早商。既曉碧華林府寄，須當為彼想良方。2:22,153). The phrase "transplanting a flower onto another tree" (接木移花) occurs frequently in the text, and is often applied to a female character acting as an imitation or substitute for another in marriage. In *Destiny of Rebirth*, the heroine Meng Lijun asks her sister to stand in for her in an imperial marriage before dressing herself in men's clothing and fleeing home. Such textual scenarios of displacement and surrogation draw attention to the multifarious representations of women and their gendered performances in the text and in the immediate cultural context.

[237]第一流人心自異，笑煞那紅顏鏡裏嘆青春。2:25, 213.

is reminiscent of the narcissistic Du Liniang, who laments the absence of her compassionate male companion and weans herself from grief. In *Dream*, however, the relation between the heroine and her painting shows an effort on the artist's behalf to explore a moral identity that transcends social definitions of gender norms. The woman painter's association with the painted image is self-reflexive but not narcissistic; the painting of the "filial child" Zhuang Yuan manifests a surrogate identity of the heroine, who strives to explore a social identity outside regulated spaces.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the relation between portrait and spectatorship by probing several textual scenes in which characters observe and respond to portraits. I have suggested that Zheng Danruo's employment of portraits in her text shows that women may appropriate such paintings to endorse women's chastity and filial piety. These moral values, in the context of late imperial writings, were appropriated by women in their exploration for self-expression. In the textual examples I have discussed, such protofeminist potentials reflect a kind of heroism on the part of the women authors and their readers in the inner chambers. Also, I have suggested that the portraits elicit the viewer's individual emotional experience. Perceptive observers of the portraits may further explore the painted images and discover disruptive potentials within them. The idealized portrayal of the male protagonist as a sympathetic viewer, I have proposed, may be a projection of the author's desire for an expanded, appreciative audience. Simultaneously, "Portrait of a Filial Child" displays the artist's capability of establishing a moral authority, as well as, perhaps, her desire to find a surrogate social identity that

can move beyond the social constraints on women and the norms of femininity. In *Dream*, portraits are vehicles for the communication and representation of a feminine consciousness that seeks expression through intersubjective encounters with viewers/readers.

These portraits of women or by women manifest a new tendency in defining a sympathetic spectatorship that constitutes and reinforces a woman-oriented viewpoint, which can sometimes be adopted by a sympathetic male viewer/reader. This gendered viewpoint reflects that in the late imperial context, women's painted images are ridden with irony and mis/representation. Such mis/representations can be made by male painters who construct stereotypical images of women from a male-centered point of view. In previous times, such as in the story of Du Liniang, the woman internalizes the male other's viewpoint and mis/recognizes the self-portrait as her real self. Her "self" no longer exists for her, and is only brought to life through the male viewer's appreciative gaze. In either of these situations, the woman's image/ self-image is misconstrued. In the tradition of *tanci* narratives, particularly *Destiny of Rebirth*, Meng Lijun's self-portrait before the scene of her crossdressing represents her split sense of self. Lijun longs for a life of freedom, which is not achievable in the inner chambers. The portrait represents a pre-image of Lijun before she is "reborn" as a man, bespeaking her dilemma and lack of identity as a woman. Zheng Danruo's text rewrites these scenarios about portraits/self-portraits, and suggests that the portraits of women or by women can inscribe their authority and autonomous power. *Dream*, in this regard, makes important contribution to the tradition of portrait narratives in *tanci* as well as in the larger context of late imperial literature. In addition, the work *Dream, Image, Destiny* offers a literary portrait of twelve

outstanding women characters, implying the emotive bonds that associate the fictional characters with the historical readers of Zheng's time, as well as the contemporary audience. Perhaps for contemporary readers, reading the work is not unlike General Li's experience of reading Xianyu's poems on legendary beauties. Their emotive bonds with the depicted characters outweigh their concern with the actual portrayal of the women's images. As General Li comments on Xianyu's poems go,

> Who would have expected to meet a person of the same understanding from another dynasty?
> Not to mention that the brilliance of her diction and style is as such.
> Transmitting a beauty's ice-pure heart and delicate appearance,
> Are [indeed] more eloquent than a painting of her face [in reality].[238]

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[238]何期異代逢知己，況復詞華若此妍。傳出冰心兼玉貌，勝如畫取美人顏。1:13, 199.

CHAPTER 4: IN A MAN'S ROBE SHE STRIDES: WOMEN'S CROSSDRESSING IN *A HISTOIRE OF HEROIC WOMEN AND MEN* (俠女群英史 1905)

> Because of my pity for the deteriorating and imperiled in the world,
> I depict the hearts of heroic and valiant women in the inner chambers.
> Even though I cannot dispel the conventions of filial devotion, loyalty, and honesty,
> These events of sadness and joy, departure and reunion, have unusual meanings.
> Exhausting my body and mind, searching for words, I almost forgot the hot summer;
> Eager to compile unofficial histories, I could not fall asleep. [239]

This chapter studies a rare *tanci* text, *A Histoire of Heroic Women and Men* (俠女群英史 1905), written by three sisters. I will interrogate the ways in which the melodramatic narrative in fin-de-siècle *tanci* showcases the politics of sympathy, as expressed through the readers' collective identification with heroic protagonists. I will examine the sympathetic, fetishistic and voyeuristic roles constructed for early modern *tanci* readers. Through an analysis of the subversive gender roles in the text and women readers' fetishistic fascination with the androgynous crossdressers in the story, I will examine how the woman reader/spectator assumes the position of the male viewer in an ambivalent visual sphere of homoeroticism. The melodramatic images of crossdressed women in *A Histoire of Heroic Men and Women* are structured and modeled upon the readers' sympathy, which was closely defined by culturally gendered sentiments of the time. In this chapter, I am especially interested in the following questions. What emancipating

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[239] 因憐世上顛危態，寫出閨中豪俠心。孝義忠貞難脫套，悲歡離合具奇情。枯腸搜索混忘暑，野史貪編寐未成。 *A Histoire*, 5: 28, 59.

potential did the inscription of women's subjectivity in *tanci* hold out to women and men of the late imperial period and early twentieth century? In what ways does the current study of fin-de-siècle *tanci* complement and enrich discussions of the correlation between gendered representation and historical modernity? The text comprises instances of female-to-male crossdressing, mock marriages, and male-to-female crossdressing, and presents many examples of the homoerotic gaze of women crossdressers as it is directed at women. I will study how the perverse sympathy of women crossdressers challenges the male voyeurism often depicted in the text and examine how *tanci* opens up spaces for considering the fissures in and transformations of gendered spaces.

An important issue in this critical reading of *A Histoire* is the question of audience. Little evidence is available about the historical audience and spectatorship of this text. How does a contemporary reader/viewer understand the spectatorship for transvestite performance in the late imperial and early modern period? Is there evidence as to the popularity of women's crossdressing performances among the audience of the time? What signs in the text show that it is aimed primarily at a feminine audience? What responses would women readers of the time have to this text? In what ways does the text engage the readers in productive and meaningful exchanges with the authors? In comparison with earlier *tanci* authors, do the authors of this work imagine their readers in the same way, or do they have a different, or possibly even more progressive vision of their readership? Does the text necessarily reflect an intention to address a "modern" community of readers? In the following sections, I shall address these questions through a contextualized reading of the textual instances of women's crossdressing. I will explore

how readers, historical and contemporary alike, might find sources of empowerment in these potentially subversive textual scenarios.

Authorial Background

A Histoire of Heroic Men and Women (俠女群英史 1905) comprises 10 scrolls (*juan* 卷) for a total of 40 chapters (*hui* 回) and was published in 1905. During this time in China, many progressive feminist journals were also being published and circulated, such as *Women's News* (*Nübao* 女報 1907), edited by the feminist revolutionist Qiu Jin (秋瑾 1875-1907) and *Women's Jiangsu Journal* (*Nü subao* 女蘇報 1899), edited by Chen Xiefen (陳擷芬 1883—1923). The title page shows that *A Histoire* was written by three anonymous sisters who adopted the pen names of Yonglan (詠蘭), Youmei (友梅) and Shuzhu (書竹), who identified themselves as "women scholars from Xiangzhou" (*Xiangzhou nüshi* 湘州女史). The mention of Xiangzhou (湘州) suggests that these authors were from the Changsha area (長沙). One of the prefaces to the book was composed by a man with the literary name of Xin'an (心庵), who was the husband of Yonglan. The second preface was composed by the three women's youngest brother, whose pen name is Mengjü (夢菊). Mengjü was also the editor of this *tanci* work. The two prefaces reveal to contemporary readers that the four siblings were named after Mei (梅), Lan (蘭), Zhu (竹), and Ju (菊), four images that have been frequently used in traditional Chinese poetry. Because none of the authors revealed his or her real name, it is difficult to trace their biographical information beyond what was indicated in the two

prefaces.[240] In his preface, Xin'an (心庵), the husband of Yonglan, offers a political reading of the *tanci*, emphasizing the association between *tanci* and women's self-empowerment in the early twentieth century.

> The title words *xianü* (侠女 valiant women) and *qunying* (群英 heroic men) indicate that men and women heroes are both protagonists in this work. A woman restricted in the women's quarters in her life has a restricted vision, and a limited scope of thinking. Therefore she might seem insignificant, weak and unpromising. She might have wished to travel throughout the five continents and have accomplishments that would be held in admiration for generations. This should be within the grasp of women's power. One can perceive such ambition in this book. I know that this book, upon its publication, will not only enlighten women, but also encourage the aspirations of the young in their careers, who shall then become more resolute, should they choose to read the text. Why is this so? If women can achieve such things, men shall certainly accomplish remarkable deeds! And so one can anticipate boundless possibilities for national rejuvenation; I shall anticipate and witness this rise of a heroic and distinguished people. Hence the purpose of this book is actually to stir and to rouse a new social inspiration![241]

Xin'an's choice of what to emphasize and what to play down are authorial decisions with significant ramifications. The exchange of the male/female and narrator/narrated position is a symbolic event. The woman changes from "my" (the narrator's) gendered, hierarchized "other" into "my" equal, or a political mirror image of Xin'an. The relation between the progressive male intellectual and the three anonymous sisters is an example of the cultural phenomenon that took place in turn-of-the-century China, in which male writers began to project gendered imaginations toward women.

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[240] See Bao, Zhenpei, 2002.295. Also see Hu Wenkai, 825.

[241] 曰‘俠女’,曰‘群英’者,欲兒女英雄兼而有之之意。以女子一生幽囚閨閣中, 眼界之小, 心境之窄,無怪其瑣瑣屑屑,卑弱而不可振。恨不此身曠覽五洲,標名萬古,為女權中之特色,故其誌趣,得於是書見之。夫有其誌而無其事，事至而誌成之。有其事，而無其誌，誌小而事所以不成也。吾知是書之出,天下之有誌者,不獨女子可以振興,即中國少年誌士, 偶一披覽, 當亦奮益加奮。何也? 巾幗且然, 而何況於須眉! 將來民族之振興, 未可限量; 英雄豪傑, 吾將拭目俟之。是書亦開導風氣之意歟! 1:1,1.

Xin'an's reading of the *tanci,* however, seems to be anachronistic. In contrast to other protofeminist *tanci* in the early twentieth century, such as *Pebbles of the Jingwei Bird* (精衛石 1905) and *Tale of a French Woman Hero* (法國女英雄彈詞 1905), *A Histoire* displays a stronger continuity with precursory *tanci* works by emphasizing gender masquerade and crossdressing performance. For contemporary readers, the discrepancy between the progressive husband's preface and the women's text indicates that this *tanci* was published as an embedded narrative, for the main story is presented second-hand through an enclosing frame, the husband's preface. Although the book was published in 1905, just as China was on the threshold of modernity, the texts must have been composed at a much earlier time, considering the remarkable length of the project and the assiduous process of writing as revealed in the authorial comments in the opening and closing sections.

This might also indicate that the publication of the *tanci* was targeted at progressive audiences of the time, although this cannot be proven due to the scarcity of contextual information about this *tanci* work. Xin'an's insistence on the political meaning of the work is reminiscent of many protofeminist writings composed by progressive male intellectuals of the time, including Jin Tian'he (金天翮), who proposes in his work *Bell for the Women's World* (女界鐘 1903), "The prosperity or declination of the world is the responsibility of men, but also that of women." [242] Although we have no information regarding Xin'an's political background, one may suspect that the authors were hesitant to sign their real names because of anxiety about politically-mandated censorship. In this

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[242] 天下興亡，匹夫有責，匹婦亦有責焉. (Jin 12).

preface, Mengjü provides some biographical information about the women authors and claims that this *tanci* work will find its value when it is popularized among women readers in all corners of the world. He notes,

> This work was composed to please women in the inner chambers and offer entertainment for our parents. Yet a gentleman shall submit this writing for publication, so that all the sisters under heaven might share pleasure in reading it; all the parents on earth could share the delight of appreciating this work. Evoking sympathy, admiration, joy, and warm feelings in the readers, this work shall bring reward to my three elder sisters. [243]

He also offers a detailed discussion of the relation between *tanci* and orthodox histories (*zhengshi* 正史):

> When the writing passes widely through the world, and is disseminated through every alley and on every corner, then women in refined chambers may have new songs to sing. As to the remnants of historical records, even the events in mainstream histories have only been heard of, but never observed by anyone in person. However, so long as one has imbued the writing with color and sound, why is it necessary to testify as to whether it is true or false? The readers shall learn its stance of reward for the good and condemnation for the bad, without having to question whether it is mainstream history or *tanci*.[244]

The above passage presents the tension between the official histories and *tanci*, the latter positioned as the opposite of the former. Significantly, the value of the text rests upon its close resemblance to the historical reality which precedes the text, rather than upon its presenting reality *per se*. This passage reveals that *tanci* takes shape by

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[243] 原供姊妹之笑談，博高堂之娛樂，然君子當恕望付棗梨使天下人之姊妹共以此為笑談，天下人之慈親，共得此而娛樂。有感者有慕者有欣者有賞者庶不負姊等。1:1, 2.

[244] 行見流諸海內裏巷播傳.綺閣璇閨又增新唱矣。簡冊之陳跡,雖正史亦可聞而不可見。但寫來有色有聲，何必考若真若假。但取其賞善懲惡何必問正史彈詞。 1:1, 2.

assimilating and transforming other forms.[245] The dynamic interrelation between *tanci* and orthodox histories provides a grid through which it was, and still is, read and shared among women readers in the inner chambers.

Although these two prefaces provide a few references to the authors' lives, the significant lack of contextual information about the sisters' background leads to questions about the authorship of this *tanci* work. Are the authors necessarily women? What textual traces show that the text was written by women? How do the authors interrogate the issue of authorship? Why is this investment in exploring women's authorship at the turn of the century valuable? To answer these questions, I will briefly review the autobiographical narrations inserted in the text. These authorial insertions may reveal something about the authors' process of composing the *tanci*. One of the authors reflects on the scene of the sisters writing together:

> In the inner chambers the sisters have no other distractions,
> In talking about composing books we have increased interest.
> Dividing the lines and locating the insufficiencies,
> When it comes to the middle session, the story is as confused as entangled hemp.
> Always contemplating polished lines and getting closer to perfection,
> We take pains to sift through the words.
> Debating and raising laughter,
> We compete in composing new lines and boast of our own writings. [246]

The passage shows that the three sisters have written and edited their works together, depicting writing as part of their everyday activities. The competition between the three sisters in literary talent is visible in many of the chapters' opening and closing

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[245] The relation between orthodox histories and *tanci* could be considered in view of what Culler called "textual intersubjectivity," for it is the contact and the mutual assimilation of the two that contribute to their respective plentitude. (Culler, 164)

[246]深閨姊妹無他事，談到編書興趣加。分節目，指疵瑕，作至中間似亂麻。總思句句求精美，故而一一費淘沙。爭是否，笑喧嘩，各鬥新辭各自誇。10:40, 56.

lines. In one chapter, the eldest sister discloses a nostalgic feeling for the years before her marriage, and she envies her talented younger sister:

> The scene is that of a lovely spring day,
> and the best time in one's life is one's childhood.
> My intelligent and talented sisters have finished their works,
> I am ashamed of my shallow knowledge, and my difficulties in finding good lines.[247]

These autobiographical narrative segments present details about how the authors produced, edited, and described their work. Though women's authorship of the text cannot be proven because of the writers' use of pseudonyms, the authorial insertions indicate women's collaborative authorship. Each individual chapter is claimed to have been written by one of the three women and gestures toward the topic of the next chapter or volume. In comparison with previous *tanci* written by a single author with either a real or assumed name, *A Histoire* reveals the process of women writing privately together, revising versions for publication. Hu Ying points out that the role of the *tanci* narrator replicates the role of a historian in "explaining her [the woman character] to the world"; resonance between the community of women within the text and the one outside the text is achieved through the latter's reading of or listening to the *tanci*.[248] *A Histoire* likewise displays this meaningful exchange of support and encouragement amongst the three authors as well as between the writers and the readers. The text questions the proprietary figure of the modern author, as it includes work by the three anonymous women authors as well as readerly intervention by their friends in the inner chambers. In the closing

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247韶華明媚三春景，最好光陰是幼年。姊妹敏才詞已就，深愧儂，淺學襟懷得句難。1:1, 19.

248 See Hu's discussion on *Tale of a French Woman Hero* (*Faguo nüyingxiong tanci*法國女英雄彈詞), a *tanci* by Chen Wanlan (陳挽蘭 1887---1917). (Hu Ying 153-197.)

passage of one chapter, the narrator confesses, "Those who are hearing the story are eager to hear what happens afterward. The author herself was even more enchanted than the audience. Her heart entranced, she seemed to become a book worm. Hurriedly she took to [a work as difficult as] catching the fireflies."[249] While the text resists established modes or conventions of reading by opening itself to plural interpretations, it also engages readers as producers of meaning. In a collaborative text, narratives and memories are threaded together, leaving gaps and openings for the other authors, the readers, and the editors to continue the narrative. For women, the text is particularly meaningful as a writerly text of "ourselves [i.e., themselves] writing." *Tanci* can be read as a compendium of women's utopian desire for a communal identity, and its revolutionary potential rests in this ongoing process of collaborative writing.

Synopsis

The text comprises chapters composed by the three women authors in turn, telling the story of a group of erudite women who crossdress and surpass their male peers on the Civil Service Examinations. One of the protagonists, Qing Shunxin (慶順馨), is abducted as a child on the evening of the Lantern festival, and is saved and adopted by a high-ranking official. She then changes her name to Qin Ling (秦淩) and becomes the first on the list of those passing the highest level of the Imperial Examinations. When, still dressed as a man, she reencounters her fiancé Lin Mengyun (林夢雲), she refuses to reveal her true identity. Another protagonist, Pang Yulong (龐玉龍), begins

249 聽書者,也欲早聞下卷事.著書的, 比他聽者更還魔. 心迷恍似書中蠹,意急偏來撲火蛾. 9:36, 89.

crossdressing at birth with her mother's assistance, to gain the right to her patrimony. Eventually she is married to a girl friend who consents to her scheme of mock marriage. Likewise, another protagonist, Su Zixiu (蘇子秀), has enjoyed dressing herself in male attire since childhood. After a family crisis, she is separated from her parents and adopted by a well-off family. To conceal her identity, Su Zixiu disguises herself as a man and, when she meets her fiancé, denies her femininity. An exceptional case is the crossdresser Mu Hualong (沐化龍), who happens to marry a female relative of hers. Mu's fiancé Zheng Hua (鄭華), yearning to disclose Mu's identity, crossdresses himself as a woman and marries Mu as "his" concubine. On the wedding night, Zheng Hua confronts Mu and succeeds in disclosing Mu's true identity. The other women crossdressers in the story, however, do not suffer the exposure of their identity, but marry one or even two wives, and become national heroes who rescue the country from subversion and rebellion. Like *Destiny of Rebirth* (再生緣), *A Histoire* is open-ended. In the last remaining chapter, the author Youmei, after describing a major military success of the crossdressed General Su Zixiu, suggests that she would not pass along the work to her eldest sister Yonglan, who is departing on a long journey to celebrate the birthday of their great-aunt. The story is then broken off at this moment, and no continuing chapters of the work have been discovered so far.

The text embeds the story of Qin Ling in a conversation between two Daoist hermits. From the conversation, the reader learns that one of the hermits once had a vision of the heavenly palace, where rows of heavenly maids were paying tribute to the Queen Mother of the West (西王母). Then the hermit saw the Queen Mother of the West giving out a command, and soon all the deities had changed into male attire and were

bowing to the Queen to thank her for her bounteousness. Several of these crossdressed deities descended to earth, alongside rows of children holding gilded tablets. A few lines of writing on the tablets go as follows: “three times she will rank high in the Exam and exterminate the bandits at the frontier. A woman hero taking the task of saving the nation; exceptional men and heroic women are bonded with chastity and faith.”[250] These inscriptions on the tablets are written in *gatha* (偈, a Buddhist verse), and carry clues about the stories of the heroic women, such as their passing the Civil Examinations, their exterminating the invading bandits, their saving people from danger and poverty, and their fulfilling certain missions for the country. The Queen Mother of the West, in Chinese mythology, is one of the most important goddesses of the Daoist pantheon, a supreme matriarch who governs the other immortals and resides on the sacred mountain Kunlun (昆侖). The beginning of the story thus carries a distinctive protofeminist character. Unraveled through the hermit’s point of view, the story presents the deities who crossdress as men and descend to the Red Dust to affirm the good and rescue people from peril and poverty.

Spectatorship and the History of Women’s Crossdressing

Written in the late 19th century and published in 1905, *A Histoire* perhaps is addressed to a historical audience rather receptive to protofeminist writings. It was in the year 1905 that the feminist writer and social activist Qiu Jin returned to Beijing after receiving education in Japan and devoted herself to revolutionary activities against the

250 另還有柱紅金字牌無數，上邊字跡認難真。只記得，連中三元平虜匪，只記得，扶危濟困廣施仁。只記得，巾幗英雄扶社稷，只記得，奇男俠女矢忠貞。1: 1, 4.

late Qing government. In the same year, the famous writer Liu Yazi (柳亞子 1887-1958) published an essay "On the Future of the Women's Realm" (論女界之前途), in the magazine *Women's World* (女子世界), in which he proposes, "We should imagine a women's world of virtuous mothers and gentle wives, but a women's world of heroes and leaders. We should welcome and applaud the women's world, rather than denouncing and forsaking it."[251]

The publication of this essay was the prelude to a series of progressive activities among women in early 20th century China. Many literary works of the time display a similarly distinctive protofeminist tendency, urging women to step out of the inner compounds and take an active role in social affairs.[252] At the same time, male intellectuals, editors, and book publishers played an important role in editing and distributing protofeminist writings.[253] The current study of *A Histoire*, meanwhile, will adopt a two-fold examination of the text, including a study of the crossdressing tradition

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251 與其以賢母良妻望女界，不如以英雄豪傑望女界；與其以擠排詬詈待女界，不如以歡迎贊美待女界. (Liu Yazi, 57)

252 These protofeminist novels of this time claim to focus on women as their audience. Famous examples are *Flower in the Women's Prison*(女獄花 1904) and *Women's Right* (女子權 1904), Huang Xiuqiu (黃繡球 1905). These progressive writings of the time manifest women's deep concern for saving the nation through self-improvement and reformation.

253 The famous revolutionist and reformer Liang Qichao, for instance, published extensively on Western heroic women, especially on the French revolutionist Madame Roland (近世第一女傑羅蘭夫人傳 1902). Readers' fascination with exemplary women heroes from the West could be seen in the popularity of books on such topics. In the year 1903, Shanghai Guangzhi Shujü (上海廣智書局) published consecutively *Twelve Outstanding Women in the World* (世界十二女傑) and *Ten Exemplary Women in the World* (世界十女傑), suggesting the high demand for such books among the audience of the time. (Liu Huiying, 156.)

in pre-twentieth century Chinese literature, as well as the possible connections between this work and the immediate social and historical environment of the book when published in the early modern period. This voluminous work, although published in 1905, carries ample evidence that suggests it was a years-long collaboration between three sisters in the late 19th century, and was extensively edited by their youngest brother. The text shows a connection with women's crossdressing in the pre-twentieth literary tradition, and opens up a space for the study of its historical and contemporary readership.

The tradition of women's crossdressing can be found in many works in late imperial fiction. In a story entitled "The Maid Li Xiuqing Becomes the Swear-Sister of the Chaste Maid Miss Huang" (李秀卿義結黃貞女), which appears in the short story collection *Illustrious Words to Instruct the World* (喻世明言 1620), author Feng Menglong (馮夢龍 1574-1647) depicts a crossdressed heroine named Huang Shancong (黃善聰). A merchant's daughter, Huang crossdresses as a young man to travel with her father. On their journey, her father falls ill and passes away, yet Huang Shancong keeps up her disguise to preserve her virginity. After seven years, Shancong is reunited with her family. Her relatives think that she must have become the secret wife of her traveling companion, Li Xiuqing. In order to prove her purity, Shancong consents to a private test, the result of which shows that she is still a virgin. The story ends with Shancong's marriage to Li Xiuqing, to which the family has given their blessing. The narrator's stress on women's chastity outweighs the text's acclamation of women's heroism: "For seven years," the narrator explains, "she crossdressed as a man, without showing any tiny trace; upon her return [to the family] she holds her cool and unstirred heart in solitude. I

compiled this tale to educate those in the inner chambers, and cleanse the tales of romance and love."[254] Shancong is compared to heroic crossdressers such as Mulan and Huang Zongjia, who, according to the narrator, are "disguised men without manliness, real women who wear males' hairdress."[255]

This emphasis on women's virtue, however, does not always dominate stories of crossdressed women in fictional works of Feng's time.[256] An example can be found in

Two Story Collections Striking the Table (二刻拍案驚奇) by Ling Mengchu (淩濛初 1580-1644). The story goes as follows. Fei'e (蜚娥), the daughter of a military official, disguises herself as a man, enters into study, and marries one of her schoolmates, a handsome young scholar. Both of them pass the Civil Examination and are appointed to high official positions at the end. The narrator praises the crossdresser's talent, saying,

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[254]七載男妝不露針，歸來獨守歲寒心。編成小說垂閨訓，一洗桑間濮上音。(Feng Menglong 2001, 541).

[255]沒陽道的假男子，帶頭巾的真女人 (Feng Menglong 2001, 530).

[256] Feng Menglong's works are often mentioned together with two works by Ling Mengchu (淩濛初) of the same time. These two authors of the Ming period are famous for their works called *Three Collections of Words and Two Ones Striking the Table* (三言二拍). *Three Collections of Words* (三言) refers to Feng Menglong's three short story collections that were very popular during the Ming dynasty in the 17th century. The aforementioned *Illustrious Words to Instruct the World* is one of the *Three Collections of Words.* The other two works are *Lasting Stories to Awaken the World* (醒世恒言), and *Comprehensive Stories to Admonish the World* (警世通言). These stories, drawn and adapted by the author from tales in previous dynasties, are selected from popular stories of the Ming period. Three Collections of Words is China's first large-sized fiction collection in the premodern period, and offers a comprehensive view of the everyday life of common people and the social environment of the Ming and previous eras.

Two Story Collections Striking the Table (二刻拍案驚奇) refers to two collections of stories that were complied and composed by Ling Mengchu according to the anecdotes, classical literature, and social affairs of the mid and late Ming period. The full titles of these two works are also translated as Amazing Stories: First Series and Second Series.

"In the world, people have praised the women heroes. [However,] they haven't heard of women who are also scholars."[257] This stress on women's talent instead of virtue displays the influence of the culture of talented women writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

A similar example of heroic women crossdressing occurs in "Shang Sanguan" (商三官), one of the stories in the well-known collection, *Strange Tales in the Leisure Studio* (聊齋誌異 1680), by the Qing fiction writer Pu Songling (蒲松齡 1640-1715). In the story, the heroine, Shang Sanguan, disguises herself as a man and kills the murderer of her father. Shang then hangs herself. When a house servant discovers her body and finds that the assassin is a woman, he attempts to rape her dead body. However, as soon as the servant attempts to take off Sanguan's clothes, he is struck by a seizure and dies vomiting blood. The narrator compares the heroic Sanguan to the ancient assassin Yu Rang (豫讓, 5th Century B.C.), who committed suicide after a failed attempt to avenge his murdered master. Although the death of the lustful servant preserves the chastity of the heroine, her body is also endowed with a deadly power, as it takes away the life of the servant who poses a threat to her virginity (Pu 1:3, 373-375).

To distinguish women's crossdressing from men's crossdressing, I will review the Ming play *The Male Queen* (男王後) by Wang Jide (王驥德 1540-1623). This play involves a male character who disguises himself as a woman. It tells the love story of Emperor Chen Qian and a man, Han Zigao (韓子高), who crossdresses as a woman and

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[257] 世上誇稱女丈失，不聞巾幗竟為儒。In the story, "Schoolmates mistook the disguised as the real; the female scholar moves the flower to the tree."(同窗友認假作真，女秀才移花接木. Ling Mengchu 404.)

becomes Emperor Chen's queen. The princess Yuhua is enchanted by the new queen's beautiful appearance, and finds out that the queen is a disguised man. Determined to marry a handsome man like Han Zigao, the princess threatens to hang herself if Han does not agree to have an intimate relationship with her. At the end of the play, the emperor discovers the princess's relationship with his queen. Moved by their love, he encourages Han Zigao to marry Princess Yuhua immediately. Zigao, who is thought more beautiful in women's dress, marries the princess wearing embroidered clothes. The crossdressed Zigao says, "When I was the queen I would not reveal my lotus feet; now as the princess's husband, I am still wearing the embroidered dress. How difficult it is to distinguish the disguised from the original, the false from the real."[258] As a transvestite, Zigao engages in feminine masquerade, playing the role of the emperor's submissive wife. The princess, however, displays an aggressive character, urging the crossdressed Zigao to secretly tie the knot of marriage with her. The play shows the switched gender codes of men and women. Zigao's transvestite performance ridicules stereotypes of feminine identity conceived from a male perspective. Princess Yuhua, on the other hand, plays the role of the man in proposing marriage to Zigao and even threatens to commit suicide in front of him. Male crossdressing is evoked here to mock and subvert gendered stereotypes of women and men. In comparison with the crossdressed Mulan and Lijun, who display women's intellectual and military heroism, Zigao's case presents both male homoeroticism (between Zigao and the emperor) and "a subplot of female homoeroticism" (Volpp 11). The princess falls in love with Zigao while he is dressed in

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[258] 我做娘娘不見金蓮現，做駙馬還將繡帔穿。只恁的假裝喬真偽難分辨. (Wang Jide, 28)

feminine attire, and she marries him while he is still in disguise. The story ends with the marriage of two "women," indicating an intriguing case of women's homoeroticism.

A related example of male homoeroticism occurs in the *tanci* work *Phoenix Flying Together* (鳳雙飛, 1899), written by the nineteenth century talented woman author Cheng Huiying (程蕙英). In this work, Huiying depicts scenes of both male homoeroticism and women's same-sex desire. The male protagonist Bai Ruyu (白如玉) is depicted as an effeminate man, whose sexual appeal attracts the emperor and high officials and nearly topples the nation. Bai's transvestite performance does not involve disguising himself in women's clothing, but represents a case of social crossdressing in a borrowed gender position. Like the "male queen" Zigao, Bai Ruyu changes gender roles and challenges social norms of masculinity and femininity. Author Cheng Huiying's depiction of male transvestite performance, focusing on the satirical representation of effeminate masculinity, is a meaningful intervention in the literary tradition of crossdressing in *tanci*.

This comparative reading of men's and women's crossdressing in late imperial literature calls attention to the important question of critical approach in the current study of *A Histoire*. In her book *The Emerging Lesbian: Female Same-sex Desire in Modern China*, Tze-lan Deborah San describes the phenomenon of "protolesbian" relationships between women in pre-twentieth century China. In her review of current scholarship on premodern women's homoeroticism, San suggests that the scholarship shows "a keen awareness of historicity of sexual categories and caution against modern categories imposed on the past" (San 40). San goes on to review Hu Siao-chen's study of women's crossdressing in *tanci*, Hua Wei's assessment of women's homoeroticism in late Ming

plays, and Dorothy Ko's study of same-sex sentiment within the women-authored poems and writings of seventeenth-century Jiangnan. San also reviews Matthew Sanders' study of illicit sexual relations as described in late imperial law, and Sophie Volpp's study of same-sex desire in late imperial vernacular fiction and drama. San's book thus offers a comprehensive view of the current scholarship of late imperial homoeroticism. My own study of this topic will focus on specific examples of women's homoerotic tendencies as manifested in various literary genres of the late imperial period. San's critical gaze is focused on how women's same-sex desire leads to a contextualized understanding of women's homoerotic literature in the modern period. In the current study, I hope to apply this critical gaze to turn-of-the-century *tanci*, explore the disruptive potentials of women's homoerotic desire, and examine the ways in which such potentials can make meaningful contributions to the study of women's protofeminist writings from both the pre-twentieth century and modern periods.

With the purpose of re-addressing the question of audience and context, a review of current scholarship on women's crossdressing may prove useful, especially as regards how this particular literary phenomenon contributes to an innovative understanding of the issue of audience and spectatorship. Dorothy Ko, in her study of 17th century women authors, notes that "instead of challenging the ideology of separate spheres by mixing and redefining gender roles, these heroines encouraged their women readers to aspire to be more like men" (Ko 140). An important result of these women authors' interventions is that their stories of women crossdressers break down "the century-old divisions between inner and outer and between male and female spheres" (Ko 142). Sui Leung Li, in a study of crossdressing in Chinese opera of the Yuan period (1271-1368), makes the valuable

proposition that women's crossdressing in performance texts reveals an "interactive negotiation between subversion and containment," and the ambivalent desire circulated between stage enactment and the audience (Sui Leung Li 22). Ko and Li's scholarship on crossdressed women both raise the question of women's desire to disrupt and challenge the ideological distinction between the woman's inner or domestic sphere and the man's outer or public sphere. Transgressing the boundaries between the inner quarters and the external society, women crossdressers exploit the possibilities of agency and autonomy by disguising themselves as men. On the other hand, the crossdresser's sexually blended body elicits homoerotic reactions from other women at moments of comic misrecognition.

Such scenarios of women's homoeroticism are abundant in *tanci* works, including scenes of the woman crossdresser gazing at or exchanging ambivalent looks with other women. Androgyny is significantly depicted as a gender subjectivity alternative to the binary gender system. In comparison with *Destiny of Rebirth*, which depicts a woman who crossdresses to escape from marriage, *A Histoire* represents a group of women who disguise themselves as men and surpass their peers on the Imperial Exam. In the tradition of *tanci*, crossdressing was often invoked by late imperial women authors to depict characters who actively take part in constructing their own image by drawing on disparate gender roles. Crossdressing is a strategy for women in literary works, as it was in real life, to renounce marriage (often supplemented by "mock marriages" between women privately agreeing to play the role of an ideal couple), and a way for women to renounce their sexuality.

In the case of *Destiny of Rebirth*'s Meng Lijun, crossdressing represents the rebirth of a new life for the heroine. It endows her with the capacity to transgress the gender hierarchy. In another *tanci* work *Blossom from the Brush* (筆生花 1857), the heroine Jiang Dehua (姜德華) is nearly compelled to commit suicide when she is forced to enter the palace as a royal maid. She is saved by a fox spirit and then crossdresses as a man to explore a new life. A comparison of these two cases of crossdressing, however, shows that women crossdressers' presence is still constrained by the pervasive Confucian ideology. In *Destiny of Rebirth*, Lijun is nearly sentenced to death when the Emperor discovers her crossdressing. The open ending of the work shows that the crossdresser, once disclosed, has no space of her own outside the inner quarters. In the case of Jiang Dehua, even though she is disguised as a man, she has internalized the moral codes of virtue and chastity and is transformed into an exemplary female Confucian intellectual (*nü daoxue* 道學). Even in her male disguise, she adheres to feminine virtue and will not be touched by men, nor will she eat at the same table with men.[259] When Jiang's crossdressing is discovered, the Emperor gives the order for her to marry her former fiancé Lin Wenbing (林文炳). Jiang then is transformed into a virtuous woman who devotes her talent to governing the household and settling disputes between the

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[259] When a male friend of Jiang touches her arm by accident, she is so overwhelmed with anger and shame that she attempts to cut off the arm. This action of self-mutilation driven by an internalized moral code of feminine virtue and chastity makes Jiang not much different from the suicidal widows of the late imperial period, even though she disguises herself as a man. In the author Qiu Xinru's (邱心如) statement in the text, she criticizes Meng Lijun's challenge to dominant moral principles and decides to engage with the crossdressing convention in her own work. However, this moralistic impulse in characterization highlights even more paradoxical aspects of the crossdressed woman, who, even in a man's clothing, cannot shake off the ideological constraints on her mind.

concubines. These stories show that in the late imperial social context, crossdressing was an imaginary means for women to escape prearranged marriage and explore freedom outside the domestic sphere. However, under the pervasive influence of Confucian ideology, women's desire to have an independent life outside the social and gender hierarchies was frequently thwarted by social reality.

Crossdressing, Heroism and Transgressions of Virtue

Following this discussion of historical context, I will now move on to a detailed textual analysis of *A Histoire*, and revisit the questions concerning women's readership and the homoerotic gaze in an analysis of related textual moments. How are conventional moral principles challenged and transformed in the text? How does the text use the literary formulas of crossdressing to redefine masculinity and femininity? Are there moments of irony in these textual scenes? In this section, I will probe into these questions by studying the representation of women crossdressers in *A Histoire*. In particular, the text depicts a group of crossdressed women who display outstanding literary and military gifts. Whereas these crossdressers refuse to revert back to their feminine identity, their male companions spend years waiting for them in vain. The text's dramatic presentation of female scholars and "male widows" challenges the Confucian moral codes of chastity and feminine virtue, and displays a dynamic understanding of gender relations in the late imperial social and cultural context.

In the text, women's crossdressing is often related to heroism. In Chapter 32, Volume 8, when a rebellion against the emperor bursts out, the protagonist Wen Xiaxian disguises herself as a golden-faced immortal, sneaks into the palace, and rescues the

infant prince from the rebellious armies. The textual depiction is imbued with fantastic color. While the besieged palace falls into chaos,

> Suddenly a deity descends from the roof, dressed in a scarlet short jacket and pants; three strands of beard, a face of golden color. In a thunderous voice, he says, 'Don't be afraid. I am a deity who comes to rescue the prince.' Upon saying this, he hurries to approach the Queen, and hastens to carry the prince in his hands. As if flying he steps outside; in a light jump he vanishes like a cloud."[260]

The passage depicts the protagonist as a female knight and loyal official (俠女忠臣) who rescues the prince in a moment of national crisis and secures the future of the country. The text might have been influenced by stories about the woman knight-errant (俠) in traditional Chinese narratives, and is reminiscent of the swordswomen tales in the late imperial vernacular tradition.[261] Wen Xiaxian, the heroine in the above passage, also crossdresses as a swordsman to rescue an honest scholar who is persecuted by a scheming high official. In these two examples, the crossdresser displays a spirit of heroism, loyalty, and uprightness. The subject of the book, as one of the authors, Yonglan (詠蘭), notes, is "the loyal and chaste noble heroes, the heroic women who support the poor and rescue the endangered."[262] In the male's attire, the woman explores the

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[260]忽見那，屋檐飛下一尊神。渾身短打猩紅色，三綹胡須面赤金。高喝一聲休嚇怕，吾神特此救儲君。說畢忙忙趨步進，連忙抱過不消停。步履如飛重出外，將身一縱去如雲。8:32,85.

[261] A detailed discussion of female knights in traditional Chinese literature is Roland Altenburger's book *The Sword or the Needle: The Female Knight-Errant (Xia) in Traditional Chinese Narrative* (Peter Lang, 2009.) In late imperial fiction, a famous example of swordswoman is "Nie Yinniang" (聶隱娘) in *Strange Tales of the Leisure Studio* (聊齋誌異). In *A Histoire*, the authors possibly adopted the tradition of female swordsmen in depicting the crossdressers to emphasize the heroism of the women.

[262]忠贞侠义英雄辈，济困扶危女俊豪. 4:13, 1.

variations of gender roles and demonstrates a notable power to rescue the weak and redress injustice.

In *A Histoire*, scenes of women's crossdressing not only reflect women's heroic spirit, but may also carry rich implications of women's homoerotic sensibilities. In the text, an important example is Su Zixiu (蘇子秀), who is separated from her family during childhood in an accident and is later rescued by a high official. She then crossdresses as a man and passes the Civil Service Exam. Years later, Zixiu meets her fiancé Wu Musu (吳慕蘇), who immediately suspects Zixiu's real identity. However, Zixiu refuses to admit her true identity in front of Wu Musu.

> She thinks to herself, "If you want me to change into feminine attire, that will only take place when heaven topples down and the earth overturns. Those people are most despicable who say that women should follow the doctrines and not venture to make a career like men out in the world. I would rather rely on my talents and enjoy fortune, and entirely dismiss the fact that I was born a woman. I have learned all kinds of arts and have fortunately had my name among the first few in the Exam. I take a vow that I will not change my attire again. What could you do about me then? [263]

The crossdresser in the text is depicted as a gender spectacle and elicits questions about women's spectatorship in late imperial literature.[264] A prominent example of women's homoeroticism can be found in *Destiny of Rebirth*, in which the heroine, Meng Lijun (孟麗君), crossdresses to flee an arranged marriage and refuses to resume her

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[263] 要想月娟重異服，除非是，天翻地覆沒山河。最可惡，說甚女子當遵訓，不該出外效奔波。吾就是自倚才能填富貴，渾忘自是女嬌娥。居然學就全身藝，僥幸微名已得科。 今生誓不將裝改，看你豈能奈我何。9: 34, 24.

[264] Feminist film critic Laura Mulvey explains the way in which female erotic spectacle functions "on two levels" in Hollywood narratives, as "erotic object for the character within the screen story"; and as "erotic object for the spectator within the cinema auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen." (Mulvey, 6)

femininity after she becomes a Prime Minister. When the Emperor suspects Minister "Li" to be the crossdressed Lijun, he devises a scheme with the Emperor Dowager and invites the Minister to the palace and proceeds to get "him" drunk. Then the Emperor Dowager orders two maids to take off Li's shoes to see if Li was in fact a woman with bound feet. The maidens, stricken by the sleeping Minister's ravishing beauty, conjecture about Li's sexual identity. The quasi-theatrical scene of their taking off the crossdresser's boots foregrounds a case of feminine desire, when the readers share with the maids the pleasure of looking at Li's concealed feet. A comparative reading of *A Histoire* and *Destiny of Rebirth*, in addition, raises the following questions. How does women's homoerotic sentiment challenge the conventions of male-oriented scopophilia and fetishism? What does the text reveal about new interpretations and understandings of gendered, and particularly transvestite bodies? What is the larger historical context connected to scenes of women's homoeroticism in the text?

These questions cannot be fully covered in the current study of *A Histoire*. However, a historical and contextualized understanding of women's transvestite performance certainly plays a meaningful and constructive role in contemporary readers' understanding of the topic. The following scene of women's homoerotic gaze, for instance, might carry signs of lesbian desire for contemporary readers. In the late imperial historical context, such homoerotic sensibilities might have carried prototypical signs of lesbianism; but in the text's melodramatic rendering, these same-sex sentiments between women appear much more comical than openly disruptive.

At one point, the crossdressed scholars Qin Ling and Su Zixiu are invited by their male peers to a banquet at a courtesan's house on the outskirts of the city. Receiving

news of the impending visit, the courtesans hurry to dress themselves up for the occasion. The scene of the crossdressers' meeting with the courtesans offers a melodramatic rendering of the liaisons between literati-officials and courtesans, which can be traced to poems and epigraphs dedicated to courtesan performers from the Tang dynasty forward.[265] Courtesanship, one of the most important social institutions of the gender system throughout Chinese history, first appeared during the Spring and Autumn period in China (772-481 BC). During the Tang dynasty, courtesan ownership took two forms: government and private. The aforementioned courtesan's house in *A Histoire* is a private one run by a retired courtesan-turned madam. In literati poems and epigraphs dedicated to courtesans, male poets expressed their admiration for the appearance and skills of the women entertainers. Late imperial works have shown how the courtesans' subjectivity was defined and configured by the literati's poetic imagination.[266] In this text, the author offers a melodramatic rendering of this cultural scenario by staging a homoerotic gaze the women courtesans direct at the literati-officials, who are themselves crossdressers. When the ten courtesans are summoned to meet their distinguished guests,

> Their almond eyes opened wide, casting inquisitive glances. When they saw Gengxiang and Zixiu, they were dazed by their beauty and were completely at a

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[265] A useful reference on this topic is Ping Yao's essay, "The Status of Pleasure: Courtesan and Literati Connections in Tang China (618-907)," 2002.

[266] A relevant reference is Kang-I Sun Chang's essay "Liu Shih and Hsü Ts'an: Feminine or Feminist?" (Kang-I Sun Chang 1994, 170-191). In a review of the female poet Liu Shi (柳是 1618-1664) and the courtesan tradition in late imperial China, the author proposes that the courtesan was "the prototype of the 'talented woman,' whose singing and verse writing, along with her beauty, gave male literati poets the comforting illusion of meeting a goddess in a fairyland—and courtesans hence were called 'goddesses' (*shen-nü*) from the T'ang dynasty forward." (Kang-I Sun Chang 1994,172)

> loss for words. How could a mortal be endowed with such an appearance? One wonders if they were originally deities who descended from heaven. [267]

The narrator reverses the male-dominated visual structure by directing the collective gaze of the women towards the androgynous bodies of the crossdressers. The crossdressers pass as handsome, effeminate scholars. Joining within themselves the antithetical masculine and feminine gender identities, the crossdressers are characterized by their idealized body features, which are oriented toward both men and women audiences. The text stages a comic scene of women gazing at the crossdressers, fully entranced: "Today upon their first sight at their beautiful appearances, the girls were all petrified and pensive, as if they were absorbed Buddhist monks in the mountains. Gazing squarely at Qin Ling and Su Zixiu, they entirely forgot to offer them the fragrant tea."[268] This riveting scene, by eliciting a homoerotic gaze from the women readers, points a way toward an unconventional representation of the woman in comparison to the Confucian ideal of womanhood. Rather than be exposed to an exploitative masculine gaze, the woman's body is disguised and shaped to elicit a subversive desire from the women viewers, both the courtesans in the story and the readers of the text. The textual representation of the crossdresser's body reveals the woman's ironic presence in a highly visual textual interpretation. It is only in a man's disguise that she may obtain her social visibility. Although the spectacle of the crossdresser is available to both a male and a female audience, the text explicitly foregrounds a feminine gaze and desire. *A Histoire*

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[267] 杏眼脕脕仔細睜。看至庚香與子秀，驚得癡呆難出聲。世人哪有如此貌，想是天仙將下塵. 5: 1, 9.

[268] 今朝初見驚人貌，一個個形似深山入定僧， 直視秦陵蘇子秀，全然忘卻奉香茗。5:1, 9.

reveals new possibilities of women's embodiment and spectatorship via an embedded visual structure. Women's exercise of selfhood, in the text, is recurrently mediated through the taking up masculine gender roles.[269]

All the women crossdressers refuse to resume their feminine attire in the text. For example, when the crossdresser Qin Ling is confronted by her fiancé Lin Mengyun, who, to test Qin Ling's true identity, claims that he will abide by their engagement for the rest of his life, Qin Ling senses Mengyun's intention and replies, "I will give you my advice. In the world there are monumental plates that are erected for chaste widows, but I have not seen any temple built in the honor of a loyal husband."[270] This passage contains an explicit mockery of the Confucian doctrine of women's chastity, as it replaces the traditionally passive woman with a husband who awaits her return with chaste piety. The woman flees from her socially prescribed role through crossdressing and cleverly rejects her fiancé's consent to marry. Lin Mengyun, frustrated in his plan, thinks to himself, "How regretful, she is now neither alive nor dead, leaving no trace in the world. How ashamed I am of my own reputation for talent; she is really more intelligent than me."[271] The crossdresser transgresses social and sexual norms, yet paradoxically triggers complicated patterns of desire. By moving across social and economic boundaries, she comes to life through the text's dramatic representation.

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269 For discussions of female spectatorship in theatre, a useful reference is Jean I. Marsden's article "Female Spectatorship, Jeremy Collier and the Anti-Theatrical Debate," *ELH* 65.4 (1998) 877-898.

270 奉勸兄, 節婦牌坊世間有，從來沒見義夫亭. 5:18, 30.

271 無奈是, 不生不死無蹤跡，卻愧吾，枉負多才實不才. 5:18, 32.

Male Widows, Female Warriors

In scenes of mock marriages, then, how does the text reveal a melodramatic confrontation between the crossdressed "husband" and the disguised "wife"? How should such gender reversals be understood in the context of late imperial Chinese society and culture? Does it imply that women have a degree of freedom despite the constraining codes of virtue and chastity? Or is this kind of reversal only the authors' utopian vision toward gender and sexuality? In the following section, I will consider these questions through analysis of several textual scenes. When another crossdresser, Su Zixiu, is appointed the Prime Minister and marries two women, her fiancé Wu Musu waits for her return in futility. In the preface, the editor includes a poem which depicts the scene of Wu Musu offering a sacrifice for his lost fiancée by the Dongting lake.

> The male phoenix rests while the female travels afar, generating a thousand cups of regret. Leaving his official position behind, he comes to commemorate his wife by the Dongting Lake. In vain he composes lines of laments, for the beloved one already made such achievements and was appointed an eminent official.[272]

"A thousand cups of regret" suggests a melodramatic expressive code, emphasizing the overflow of emotions (*chou* 愁). The crossdresser's refusal to resume her feminine identity provokes an excessive emotional response from her fiancé.[273] This raises further questions about the visual paradigm of sympathy in the text, and the

[272] 鳳泊鸞飄萬斛愁，掛冠來祭洞庭頭。潘郎賦就空為悼，秦女功成已拜候. Preface, 7.

[273] Speaking of film melodrama, Thomas Elsaesser describes an "excess" in the "melos" or music of melodrama--a "melos" supplemented by extraordinary and often startling effects. In film, melodrama's "expressive code" of sound and light is sustained through the "exaggerated rise-and-fall pattern in human actions and emotional responses" (Elsaesser 3).

readerly reception of the transvestite performances in the text. The following section investigates how theatrical scenes in *tanci* stage transvestite characters who are themselves both spectators and spectacles. Sympathy takes place for the viewer/reader when theatrical representation establishes a connection between the work and the viewer. David Marshall, when speaking of the visual paradigm of sympathy in a theatrical context, notes that sympathy transcends “the distance and difference between people,” and calls attention to “the theatrical conditions in which people face each other as spectators and spectacles” (Marshall 5). A riveting case of crossdressing as a spectacle takes place when a crossdresser’s fiancé, in order to reveal her identity, crossdresses himself as a woman and marries her as a concubine.[274] The narrator comments,

> The situation is reversed in comparison with their former engagement. To prove their relationship, he came up with a more refined plan. In the flickering candlelight, their shadows sway. Both are abashed by the occasion. Holding up nuptial wine cups, the two are both preoccupied. Another day in the wedding chamber, they shall blame each other, for the groom is married to another groom.[275]

The reversal of gender roles reveals a melodramatic confrontation between the crossdressed “husband” and the disguised “wife” (7: 26, 36). On their wedding night, the fiancé, Zheng Hua, confesses to the crossdresser, Mu Hualong: “I see that you are in high spirits for taking a concubine. How regretful! You have mistaken me for a woman. Have you heard of the ancient story of Mulan? Today I have reversed the case and disguised

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[274] See Taiwanese critic Hua Wei (華瑋) for an analysis of the tradition of *ni’nan* (擬男) in Ming and Qing plays by women. (Hua Wei 622.)

[275]學畫娥眉玉頰豐，原為人婦嫁東風。若依鴛譜原顛倒，以證鴛盟計更工。花燭影搖雙意怯，合歡杯舉兩心忡。洞房他日應相責，太史公婚太史公。7:26, 38.

myself as a woman."[276] The text supplements the narrative convention of "mock marriage" in *tanci* with an antithetical case of transvestism. The text reveals a melodramatic scene in which "the groom is wedded to another groom."[277] The audience is confronted with an epitomic case of theatricality, the challenge of deconstructing the opposition between presence and gendered representation. The crossdresser Mu Hualong is capable of achieving a companionate marriage only because of women's friendship: "It is only because the sisters have deep friendship, that the disguised couple could joyfully celebrate a nuptial union."[278] The opposition between the disguised husband *and* the disguised wife shows yet another transformation of the "mock marriage." The irony is returned to the crossdresser herself, who receives the shock when confronted with a male crossdresser. The text reveals two opposing cases of transvestite performance. Mu Hualong represents the idealized androgynous subject, who in turn represents a union of the handsome scholar and the talented beauty. The male crossdresser, Zheng Hua, who vulgarizes the performance with his "glaring glances" and "eight-inch embroidered shoes," might be a parody of the effeminate male characters in Ming Qing fiction who adopt feminine personae.[279]

Critics have noted that liberal-minded literati, relating women crossdresser's deviant behavior to their own marginal positions, saw in subversive women a symbolic

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[276]吾看兄，今娶偏方多有興。只可惜，誤認天臺做鳳臺。可曉木蘭前故事，今日裏，顛倒其情扮女孩。7: 26, 38.

[277]太史公婚太史公 7: 26, 38.

[278]只因姐妹癡情遂，假夫假婦慶團圓. Ibid. page 39.

[279] The above discussion is associated with the phenomenon of gender inversion in Late Ming culture. A useful reference is Maram Epstein's discussion of the feminization of male characters in Ming Qing fiction (Epstein 269).

Other and proceeded to celebrate gender freedom as a vehicle for self-expression in literature (Zhou 68). The malleable presence of the crossdresser offers the possibility of reading her as a gender spectacle. In *tanci*, the visual structure of male voyeurs gazing at a female erotic spectacle is displaced when crossdressed women become "masculine spectators" within the narrative diegesis; this visual structure furthermore channels the women spectator's gaze into a space which the narrative frames. On his wedding night, crossdresser Su Zixiu cannot help stealing looks at the beautiful bride.[280] Zixiu sympathizes with her "wife": "By pure coincidence, she was wedded to a female husband. She became my spouse, without actually consummating the ceremony."[281] Zixiu's gaze, directed at the bride, imparts a certain quality of voyeuristic mobility as well as the pleasure of watching as a male spectator, but it replaces the libertine's gaze with a sympathetic one. Observing the bride, Zixiu thinks to herself, "It is my fault that she was not treated with justice."[282] The crossdresser's ambivalent gaze at her "bride" is an example of re-inscribing the male gaze, by substituting a woman crossdresser for a male subject. Simultaneously, sympathy is generated through the distance between the crossdresser and her "bride." The crossdresser maintains an intersubjective connection with her bride, who, domesticated and constrained in the inner quarters, could have been her other self if Zixiu did not choose to crossdress as a man.

The interaction between the male gaze and the crossdresser also challenges the conventions of male-oriented scopophilia and fetishism. The crossdresser is capable of

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280 蘇子秀，不住偷睛看玉人。5: 19, 54.

281 無端嫁得雌夫婿，空賦於歸渡鵲橋. 5: 22, 68.

282 是吾有負女多嬌. 5: 22, 68.

evading objectification under the male gaze and renounces possession of the masculine viewing position. An example of this from the text takes place when Lin Mengyun and Qin Ling, both newly promoted scholars, participate in a dragon boat contest on Snowy Lotus-Root Pond. Lin, who suspects Qin Ling to be his crossdressed fiancé, secretly casts interrogative gazes at him. When Qin Ling wins the contest, Lin Mengyun passes "him" a flower made of golden gauze, offering to put the flower behind Qin's eye. When his offer is turned down, Mengyun smiles and looks at his crossdressed fiancée again and again. He ponders,

> How lovely, that porcelain face, half abashed and half amused;
> delicate figure carrying such dignity and grace.
> In movement a willow tree in the wind,
> in repose an immortal child descended from heaven.
> If Qin's male appearance has so much appeal,
> Her looks as a woman must be comparable to those of the Moon
> Goddess.[283]

Lin Mengyu wonders at the audacity of Qin Ling, "My dear cousin is aware that she is a woman. How dare she go so far as to take two wives?"[284] In the text, the crossdresser is endowed with an exhibitionist agency and visual pleasure, an active and controlling subjectivity. Almost flaunting her androgynous visual presence, the crossdresser stages a dramatic performance. Her displayed body, however, is only present in male attire, making the male voyeur inquisitive about her appearance as a woman.

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283 愛煞他，宜喜宜嗔傅粉面，玲瓏玉體態端嚴。行如玉樹臨風態，坐似仙童謫下凡。男裝有此風流貌，女扮應如月殿仙. 4:5, 59.

284 表妹自知女子，何敢跨鳳乘鴛雙偕美眷. 4:5, 48.

The text also exemplifies the case of *la femme fatale* in the Chinese literary tradition and suggesting the need for further consideration of this feminine character type and melodramatic narrative. Readers may perceive the protagonist's image as conflated with the characters of many heroic women in pre-twentieth-century literature, such as the woman warrior Red String (Hong Xian 紅線) in the Tang *chuanqi* story, who penetrates an enemy camp on her own and beheads the general.[285] The trope of the dangerous woman in late imperial literature subverts the patriarchal social ideology that disenfranchises women who transgress social boundaries and whose social power exceeds men's.[286] In *A Histoire*, a pivotal example of *la femme fatale* is the character Wen Xiaxian (文霞仙), who avenges her father's death by beheading his assassin in a restaurant. The author applauds her valiant deeds in a poem:

> With a heroic heart the woman is like a descending goddess,
> Killing the evil one by candlelight in the night.
> Marching into dangerous ground, entering deep into the tiger's cave,
> She avenged an mighty grievance with her sword. [287]

> The text presents a melodramatic depiction of the scene:

> With raised eyebrows and glaring eyes, she thrust the sword in a fatal stroke. It happened that the evil person sat with his back toward her; when he turned back

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285 For the story of the Red String, see Xu Shinian, 378-389.

286 David Der-wei Wang notes that signs of emotive excess in late Qing fiction include not only transgression or mismatching of different categories of emotions but also the trivialization or exaggeration of subjects and forms all out of proportion. (David Der-wei Wang 38-41) In *A Flower in the Sea of Sins* (孽海花) by Zeng Pu (曾樸 1872-1935), Fu Caiyun (付彩雲) is both a promiscuous *femme fatale*, a self-emancipating libertine, while also being an impossible shrew and a revolutionary heroine. Wang relates this excessive expression of sentimental as a signal of the disorder of feeling and even emotional anemia characteristic of late Qing fiction.

287 俠腸紅粉似飛仙，手刃奸徒夜燭前。險地敢辭探虎穴，戴天仇已報龍泉。1:1, 6.

> to look, he almost lost himself in astonishment. Barely did he let out a cry when the blood gushed out, the head hacked down from the body. The woman, after killing the evil person, turned around to have a look, and saw the stationery set on the desk. With a refined hand she took up the brush, and wrote down lines on the powdered wall. In an instant she turned back and threw down the brush. Then she took the head on the point of her sword and swiftly moved out the door. Before the window Lin was very amused. Where did this beautiful woman come from? Look at her! Face like hibiscus, slim as a willow, and yet able to take up a blade in her lovely hands and kill! [288]

Beneath the eyes of the male protagonist, the woman's image is subversive and even predatory. The male victim, however, is blind to the imminent danger. Turning back to confront the woman, he almost loses himself at the sight of her and barely lets out a cry before he is executed. The man's frightened look at the woman is suffused with fear of female malevolence. The text subverts the visual convention of scopophilia in literary and cultural presentations,[289] in which a male viewer takes pleasure in viewing a woman who is objectified under his gaze. The above passage, however, complicates this situation by presenting an active image of the woman, who retains power over the audience by her own enthralling presence. Her act of writing the poem on the wall reveals a capability for self-inscription. The poem is a case of *cangtou shi* (藏頭詩);[290] in this case the protagonist's own name is inlaid at the beginning of the four lines. This act testifies that the heroine, endowed with ruthlessness and erotic appeal, is more than an object of the

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[288]但見他柳眉豎，杏眼睜，手執龍泉下絕情。偏是奸徒身背坐，回頭一看失三魂。呵呀之聲將出口，已是個鮮血淋漓身首分。那女子，斬死奸徒回首望，看見臺前四寶珍。春纖提起羊毫筆，便於粉壁去題文。一揮兒就回身轉，拋下羊毫筆一根，便將首級懸於劍，將身一晃出房門。窗前樂煞林公子，何來這等女釵裙，你看他，面似芙蓉身似柳，竟能個，玉手提刀會殺人。1:1,12.

[289] Laura Mulvey suggests that scopophilia takes "other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze" (Mulvey, 9).

[290] A poem in which the first character of each verse is hidden so that the recipient may guess it.

male gaze. Her inscription of the poem on the wall is a symbolic act of self-naming through writing. The last lines of the passage return the audience to the perspective of the observing male protagonist Lin Mengyu, whose voyeuristic gaze toward the heroine is conflated with the women readers' homoerotic perception of the double-crossing heroine. A similar episode in the text portrays the crossdresser Zixiu, who, when stopping at a convent and finding herself surrounded by nuns who murder passengers for money, cleanses the place by killing the villainous nuns with her sword (1:1, 7).

By appropriating these tropes of femme fatale the writers address the marginalization of the ambitious and self-sufficient women in social and cultural presentations, and depict a group of erudite women who crossdress and travel outside the inner chambers. Jennifer Hedgecook notes that the nineteenth-century British society generalized and polarized women as either virtuous or fallen. However, the femme fatale subverts these dichotomous categories. She convincingly imitates the domestic women, but in fact she is neither a domestic nor a fallen woman. A horizontal reading of the femme fatale motif in the late imperial Chinese *tanci* shows an exploitation of the diverse strategies that ambitious women developed to negotiate socially normalized roles that imprisoned and marginalized them.

Revisiting the Homoerotic Gaze

How does the current scholarship contribute to contemporary readers' understanding of women's homosexual sensibilities? In this chapter, I will suggest an approach to *A Histoire* in the context of women's literary activities in the regional culture of Hunan province. The three author sisters of *A Histoire* lived in Xiangzhou (湘州) city,

today's Changsha, the capital city of Hunan province. In the late 19th century, there was a regional culture known as "Women's Script" (女書) in Jiangyong (江永) county in Hunan. Women of the rural areas created a special language system which consisted of around two thousand symbols. Because this language was only read, written, and circulated among women, few men could read this language. Women in the local area of Jiangyong composed ballad poetry in this language to express their grievances about hardships in life and their good wishes for women friends on wedding occasions. In many of the songs written in "Women's Script," the authors express a strong emotive intimacy with other women. Many of these writings have signs of a feminine homosexual sensibility. Some women became "sworn sisters" for each other, and exchanged poems in "Women's Script" in the inner chambers.[291] According to the local chronicle of Taochuan (桃川), in Jiangyong County in the late Qing, many women of the time forged this "sisterhood" with others, and some practiced and maintained sexual relationships with other women. According to the chronicle of another county in the area, because of the prevalent social custom of prearranged marriage, many women were afraid of the opposite sex and hence are engaged in same-sex love and even sexual relationships.[292]

Tanci, like "Women's Script," also addresses women audience's grievances and concerns, and often relies on women's private circulations in the inner quarters. Although there are no direct references to "Women's Script" in *A Histoire*, the text itself may address a similar historical audience. Also, the references to women's homosexual

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291 Translated works of "Women's Script" are available in Wilt Idema's *Heroines of Jiangyong: Chinese Narrative Ballads in Women's Script*. 2009.

292 Resources for these two local county chronicles are cited from the following website: <http://travel.sohu.com/20041105/n222842306.shtml>, viewed on September 15, 2010.

practices in the region in the late imperial and early modern period suggest the increasing social visibility of women's homosexual practices. The homoerotic sentiments between the crossdresser and other women in the text possibly reflect this evolving social culture near the turn of the century.

The tradition of women's homoerotic sentiments can also be found in many other literary works and historical records. Dorothy Ko notes that in the famous novel *Six Records of a Floating Life* (浮生六記 1808), by the late Qing author Shen Fu（沈復 1763---1826）, the text presents evidence that "a homoerotic liaison between wife and singing girl was accepted and even welcomed by men" (Ko 344). In the original text, the issue of women's same-sex love is reflected in the relation between the wife Yuniang (蕓娘) and a courtesan's daughter Hanyuan (憨園), who is very beautiful and talented despite her humble birth. Yuniang is so attracted by Hanyuan that she proposes her husband take Hanyuan as his concubine, so that she might live in the same household as the girl. The husband laughs at Yuniang's proposal, "Are you going to follow the example of Li Yü's [play] *A Romance: Two Belles in Love*?"[293] The allusion to Li Yü's play of women's homoeroticism suggests the husband's appreciative attitude, as well as the social tolerance for women's same-sex love in the 19th century. [294] *Six Chapters* then

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293卿將效笠翁之憐香伴耶？(Shen Fu 3:29)

The husband's quote alludes to the seventeenth century *play A Romance: Two Belles in Love* (憐香伴 17th century) by the well-known playwright Li Yü (李漁 1610-1680). The play tells the story of two women who are in love with each other. One of them then manages to persuade her husband into taking the other as his concubine, so that she could live with her female companion under the same roof.

294 A similar example of women's homosexual practices of the time can be found in *Classified Notes of Qing-dynasty Unofficial Historical Material* (清稗類鈔 1917) by the

hints at an intimate relationship between Yuniang and Hanyuan, who become sworn sisters and exchange tokens with each other. Later, when Hanyuan is forcefully taken by a powerful family, Yuniang is grief-stricken and soon passes away in illness. This story has been considered by some contemporary scholars to be a distinctive example of women's same-sex love. (Ropp 1985, 98-140)

This consideration of crossdressing and homoeroticism in the text and its socio-historical context invites a reconsideration of the issue of gender. Judith Butler has proposed the question of whether "masculine" or "feminine" dispositions can be traced to an identification, and, if so, of where those identifications take place. She asks, "What are these primary dispositions on which Freud himself apparently founders?"

> What aspects of femininity do we call dispositional, and which is the consequence of identification?... Moreover, how do we identify a "feminine" or a "masculine" disposition at the outset? By what traces is it known, and to what extent do we assume a "feminine" or a "masculine" disposition as the precondition of a heterosexual object choice? In other words, to what extent do we read the desire for the father as evidence of a feminine disposition only because we begin, despite the postulation of a primary sexuality, with a heterosexual matrix of desire? (Butler, 77)

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late Qing intellectual Xu Ke（徐珂 1869-1928). According to Xu, in the late Qing Shanghai, there was a lesbian association named "Mirror-rubbing Gang" (磨鏡黨), which was consisted of women couples who enjoy sexual intimacy with each other just as heterosexual couples (Xu Ke, Volume 38, 114). The term "Mirror-rubbing" (磨鏡) is a traditional reference to women's same-sex love, in contrast with the term "Cutting the sleeve" (斷袖), which refers to male homosexuality. "Mirror-rubbing" suggests that women's secret sexual practices by touching their bodies, which are like reflections for each other in the polished mirror. "Cutting the sleeve," on the other hand, alludes to story of Emperor Ai of Han (漢哀帝 first Century, BC), who was in love with a young man Dong Xian (董賢). One afternoon after falling asleep on the same bed, the Emperor had to leave. He cut off his sleeve rather than disturb the sleeping Dong Xian. (Kang 28) A detailed discussion of the term "mirror-rubbing" and late imperial women's homosexual practices is in Wang Zhongxian. *An Illustrated Dictionary of Shanghai Slang* (上海俗語圖說). 1999. Also see Sang 17 and 104.

Butler's discussion of bodily inscriptions in the context of contemporary radical parody and drag performances introduces new possibilities of reading the gender subversions in premodern writings by women, and their imaginary agency in working against the heterosexual grain within the constraints of patriarchal society. In *A Histoire*, crossdressing becomes a way for women to imagine new possibilities of practicing subjectivities in the social and political spheres. As a woman comments about the crossdresser Zixiu in the text, "Delicate yet capable of heroic deeds, the refined lady could act in the position of a high official."[295] Such crossdressing performances were prevalent in women's writings in the Ming and Qing period and had their predecessors in fiction and in Chinese history. Zixiu's bride in the mock marriage, who'd been a childhood friend of hers, exclaims when Zixiu reveals her crossdressing:

> Who would expect that you follow the example of the extraordinary woman of the Tang times;
> Who would expect that such multiple talents in literature and military affairs,
> Who would expect that you were given such an eminent position in the royal palace and married a refined companion,
> Who would expect that in selecting my companion, I am engaged to you, a woman. [296]

The plot develops around the secret of crossdressing, which is not to be disclosed. When Zixiu's mother finds out that the young official is her long lost daughter, Zixiu pleads with her not to disclose the secret, asking her to pretend that she is still suffering from her daughter's disappearance. Then, Zixiu pleads with her mother to persuade her

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295 弱質能為豪傑士，嬌娃可做翰林臣. 5:19, 56.

296 那知曉 身效唐時奇女子，那知曉 雙全文武棟梁才。那知曉 玉堂歸第婚佳偶，那知曉 雀屏贅你女裙釵。 5:19, 58.

fiancé (who is now her male peer in the palace) to look for another wife and stop interrogating her. Exasperated, she even threatens to commit suicide: “If someone dares to reveal your daughter’s secret of crossdressing, I will instantly take up the sword and slit my own throat.”[297] Here one perceives a resonance to the motif of women’s suicide in late imperial literature. Many late imperial literary works reflect the social custom of chastity-related suicide, such as widows committing suicide after their husbands’ deaths, sometimes prompted by the husbands’ families. Yet, here, this convention was evoked in an alternative situation: the woman threatens to kill herself not in defense of her chastity, but to resist the confinement of marriage, suggesting that she would prefer death to losing the freedom when disguised as a man.

Marriage, in the case of crossdressers, has been replaced by mock marriages forged on the basis of women’s friendship. The crossdressed Zixiu, for instance, talks with her bride about the future of their marriage, saying,

> Since, younger sister, I am only an impersonated man, you will not suffer damage and lose your pure integrity. Even if the titles are forged for the moment, how could this damage your chastity after all? If you follow a disguised scholar for the rest of your life, you would fulfill the wishes of your beloved parents, and avoid being talked about by petty people everywhere. I, your humble sister, have obtained eminence today and will never change this male clothing. … After serving our parents until the end of their lives, we may go to the mountains and look for Buddhist mentors. On that heavenly terrain, we will find an idyllic cave, where we shall take joy in learning the art of alchemy. This is much superior to those women who depend on men for fortune, and spend their entire lives in the silk and brocade chambers. [298]

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[297]若要是有人破女喬裝事，兒即便三尺龍泉自刎喉. 5: 19, 59.

[298]妹本閨娃喬扮者，未為玷辱失冰霜。名暫假，節何傷。終身隨我假才郎，一來順了慈親願，二免人傳處處揚。愚妹現今名已就，此生決不改男裝。……到他年，奉親百歲千秋後，訪師悟道至山崗。天臺覓一桃園洞，同參妙藥樂非常。勝似那，身為女子依人貴，一生老在綺羅鄉。5:19, 57.

These same-sex unions or mock marriages have a long tradition that can be traced to previous *tanci* works such as *Destiny of Rebirth* (再生緣) and *Fledging Phoenixes* (鳳雙飛). Zixiu, by reconfiguring herself as a husband and mate, empowers herself within the structure of marriage and subverts many constraints on her freedom. Zixiu's bride Xuejuan, whose former fiancé passed away before their marriage, determines to keep her chastity but is forced by her parents to marry Zixiu as "his" concubine. There is also a comic scene in which Zixiu, before revealing her identity, teasingly approaches Xuejuan, asking for sexual intimacy. Mimicking the tone of a libertine, Zixiu says to Xuejuan,

> Even if you want to keep your chastity, what fame and fortune could you gain from it? Although I myself have no good looks and outstanding talents, at least I am a good match for you. Since we have completed the nuptial ceremony, we should be a companionate couple, like two lotus flowers born from the same root. Such good marriage has been arranged for me beforehand; it is not I myself who make things happen like this. I bid you take advantage of this marriage and become my mate. If you return home, both Mr. Zhang and our mother will be disgraced.[299]

The crossdresser mockingly pleads for sexual intercourse and rationalizes "his" position by arguing against the social custom of women's chastity. Zixiu's impersonation of the male libertine is so convincing that Xuejuan becomes enraged and attempts to commit suicide to preserve her chastity. This episode is a mockery of the practice of women's chastity-related suicide. And as luck would have it, the women characters' virtue is preserved and left indisputable, as Xuejuan marries a woman, and both of them are able to keep their virginity.

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[299] 雖守節有何名利在人間。下官雖沒才和貌，與卿為偶諒無慚。合丞已成花燭體，自必雙開並蒂蓮。天臺既有胡麻飯，非是劉郎自覓仙。勸卿將就成鸞鳳，如回轉，張公嶽母兩無顏。 5:19, 58.

In a conversation, the male characters Lin Mengyun and Zheng Hua reveal their suspicions that Mu Hualong might be the crossdressed fiancée of Zheng Hua. Lin Mengyun cautions Zheng that since Miss Mu has already married Mu Hualong, the two ladies must now enjoy each other's company in the inner chambers.[300] Lin Mengyun, who had long thought that Qin Ling was his crossdressed fiancée Qing Shunxin, decides to help Zheng disclose Mu Hualong's identity as an example to Qin Lin. He contemplates to himself, "Today women are really deviant, and all think of becoming officials at the court. What could I do to disclose Miss Shui's identity, so that the others will be alarmed while observing by the side?" [301] Crossdressing, for Qin Ling and Mu Hualong, is a marker of a newly acquired identity. Qin Ling is physically strong and well-versed in literature. "Unlike the other delicate women, she was born with a pair of strong arms and has greater strength over others. An exceptional woman who could remember writings with a glance, she even surpasses the poet Xie Daoyun."[302] These crossdressed heroines are not only talented scholars and courageous military leaders, but are also endowed with multiple talents. Su Zixiu knows the art of divination and can anticipate the outcomes of battles. The text depicts her as a feminine counterpart of the famous military leader and scholar Zhuge Liang (諸葛亮; 6:22, 26).

> The Second and Third scholars in the Imperial Examinations were also pondering in private. "Who would recognize me as a woman now? At last I am able to raise my chin, release a breath, and act as an exceptional hero. How detestable are

[300] 二佳人，嫫蝗并室更心欢. 2: 7, 30.

[301] 目下閨娃真作怪，俱欲朝中作大臣。怎能先破水小姐，使彼旁觀心亦驚. 2: 7, 30.

[302] 不似人家嬌弱女，天生臂力勝於人。 過目不忘奇女子，勝過當年謝道韞。1: 1, 2.

> those common people who ridicule women as not human beings. In my view, the saint and the fool are not equivalent; even among men themselves, not everyone can be the same. Some men are bandits and thieves, some men are upright and prominent officials. Among women, there are exemplary women like Mulan and Huang Zongjia; some are ignorant and vulgar shrews. Men and women can both be virtuous or ignorant, how could one use a single standard in assessing them? One exceptional case is my honorable brother Qin Ling, whose good looks ranks first among all the officials and are even hard to find among women. Moreover, his expertise in martial arts and heroism made him a true pillar of the nation. Yet even he does not know about my secret, that a woman could also stride in the lofty sphere of eminence. [303]

The above passage is written in a first-person narrative voice, simulating the combined voices of the two crossdressed women. Remarkably, the passage contains protofeminist reflections on gender equality, referring to famous heroines Mulan and Huang Zongjia. The narrator foregrounds a woman's perspective on gender difference, denouncing prejudice against women's capabilities. The crossdresser Qin Ling is considered an exception among men, who surpasses others in good looks and expertise in martial arts. Unaware of each other's real gender, the three crossdressed women surmise on each other's appearances and achievements. At the moment of the crossdresser's misrecognition of Qin Ling, one can detect the theatrical impulse of irony in the characterization of the crossdresser and the text's exaltation of the androgynous personality. The text shows a comic paradox in which the crossdresser Qin Ling plays the role of a non-male for the other two crossdressers, who perceive "him" as such. On the surface, Qin is an exception among men; underlying the text's ironic representation, "his"

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[303] 榜眼探花人兩個，心中也在暗評論。此時間，誰識我身是女子，且落得揚眉吐氣作奇英。可恨那世間多少庸愚輩，譏笑裙釵不是人。我看賢愚原不等，男子之中豈盡能。亦有強梁為盜賊，也有忠賢作大臣。女子中，亦有木蘭黃崇嘏，也有無知潑賤人。男女各具賢愚性，豈可無端一例評。只有年兄秦殿撰，真個是，男子之中第一人。論美艷，品遍群臣推魁首；女子之中亦罕尋。更兼那，武藝精通多義俠，實是皇家柱品臣。伊家不識吾家事，那曉得，嬌娃亦可步青雲。6:22, 34.

appraisal of the masculine role makes him neither woman nor man, and his feminine appearance passes flawlessly as the effeminate nature of a refined scholar.

The current discussion about gender performance recalls Judith Butler's notion of gender as a process that is continually enacted by the individual, and which denies the possibility of a stable essential self. This process, according to Butler, tends to conceal the lack of a core identity in favor of coherence: "Acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body… That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality" (Butler 1999, 136). How do the readings of crossdressing in *tanci* amplify our understanding of gender and sexuality in and beyond late imperial and early modern China? How does such a scholarship contribute to the study of crossdressing in general? I propose that the performances of the crossdressers expose ways in which gender roles can be negotiated and reconstructed. The female-to-male crossdresser in particular becomes an eroticized and potentially disruptive character, and has to adopt vigorous, spirited, and even exaggerated actions. Mu Hualong "always felt abashed, and behaved with a certain gentleness. She was afraid that people might see through her femininity through her demeanor, so she could only pretend to imitate the liberal behavior of men."[304] The woman's disguised body reveals the ironic relation between seeing and acting. Acting out the masculine role, Hualong observes and imitates men around her. She learns from this observation and responds to the gaze of the others, "feeling the gazes of the others on her, without seeing the others' eyes" (Sedgwick 155).

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304 總覺嬌羞顏靦覥，行藏舉止必文文。 有恐人家猜是女，也只得強效男兒瀟灑形。4:14, 25.

"His" performance, consequently, is constructed and modified in an interactive relationship with the observing audience.

This dynamic interaction between crossdressed women and observing audience in the text sometimes shows much dramatic irony. When Qin Ling ranks first in the Civil Service Exam and becomes the Top Candidate, the Emperor's brother Lord Zhongjing proposes to marry his daughter to Qin Ling, knowing that Qin already has a fiancée (who is actually Qin's own cousin, but does not know about Qin's real identity). Finally Qin Ling is persuaded into taking both women as "his" wives in a joint wedding ceremony. On Qin's way home, the people in the streets vie with each other to see the handsome Top Candidate, praising him as "outstanding both in appearance and talent, and carrying true loyalty; in the Hall of Golden Throne, he dared to reject the Emperor's marriage arrangement for him." [305] Despite the admiring gaze of the crowd, Qin's mind is peppered with worries. "He" thinks, "The wedding night is just in a few days. Who knows how I should make arrangements for two wives?"[306] This textual scenario is in open mockery of the polygamous marriage system, in which the husband is married with several wives. Even though the marriage is that between "Phony Phoenixes," the crossdresser manages in establishing a harmonious relationship with his two "wives" in the house. On the first family gathering the morning after the wedding, the two wives, gazing at the handsome Qin, "could not help but become overjoyed, [pondering,] 'No wonder he has been regarded as the most affable and ideal husband.'"[307] In comparison

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[305]才貌具佳義氣重，金鑾殿上敢辭婚。4：14， 24。

[306]指日洞房花燭夜，卻不知，怎樣安排二玉人 4:14, 24.

[307]二嬌不覺驚還喜，不愧風流佳婿稱。4:15, 39.

with the mock marriage between Meng Lijun and Liang Suhua in *Destiny of Rebirth*, the crossdressers' marriages in *A Histoire* may or may not involve women's mutual understanding or knowledge of the "husband's" disguise. In this example, the crossdresser's performance is so powerful that even the wives are convinced and believe "him." The patriarchal polygamous marriage system is even exploited to the crossdresser's advantage. Not only does Qin Ling enjoy the highest authority in the house, "his" social identity as a married "man" further prevents his fiancé, the suspicious Lin Mengyu from probing into "his" sexual identity. Qin's crossdressing performance is carried out with almost full approval from the people around him.

This interaction between crossdressed women and their fiancés who recurrently evaluate and attempt to identify their sexuality creates many moments of tension and melodrama. After Mu Hualong's crossdressing is disclosed, she is exempted from punishment by the Emperor, but has to tie the marriage knot with her former fiancé.[308] Seeing Mu's reversion to feminine identity, Lin Mengyun becomes all the more anxious to prove that Qin Ling is his former betrothed companion. He ponders, "Even though I tested him several times, his responses were always as sharp as sword blades."[309] Nor

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[308] Mu Hualong's name also indicates her ironic fate. The given name Hualong means "transforming into dragon" suggests of a woman changing into a man, for the symbol of dragon, in comparison with the symbol of phoenix, represents masculinity. At the same time, the surname Mu 沐 in southern dialect might have the same sound with the character *mu* 嘸, which means "no or without." The full name would then suggest "without changing into the dragon." It is possible that the author has chosen this name to suggest Hualong's failed attempt to live a man's life.

[309]也曾數次言相探，怎奈他，出語剛強似劍鋒。8:32, 86.

do his behaviors resemble those of a woman in close examination.[310] After all, how could a crossdresser live in a house with two wives so effortlessly? Likewise, Wu Musu, who is the fiancé of the crossdresser Pang Yulong, suspects Pang is his betrothed bride, but could not imagine "how a woman dared to complete the matrimonial ceremony [with another woman]." [311] The textual moment is reminiscent of Xu Wei's play adapted from the *Ballad of Mulan*, in which the androgynous protagonist confesses, "For seventeen years I was a girl, for twelve years I have been a man. Under the gaze of tens and thousands of people, who could really tell whether I am a man or a woman? Now it is evident that man or woman could not be distinguished with eyes." [312] In *A Histoire*, the literary figure of Mulan has found rebirth in the group of women crossdressers who blend characteristics of male and female genders, striving to explore a social space as men's equals in the patriarchal society. Their bodies are disguised to meet the demand of self empowerment, disrupting social conventions of gender hierarchy and blurring the boundaries between men and women.

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[310] 細觀不像閨娃態. 8:32, 86. Another related fact is that Pang Yulong's wife is none other than Wu Musu's elder sister. It happens that Wu's sister is devoted to Daoist practice and rejects sexual intimacy with men. This gives a convenience to Pang Yulong, who does not have to live in the same room at night with "his" wife. While the couple lives in harmony, Wu Musu, driven by anxiety and doubts, suspects that his own sister has become a conspirator with Pang and intentionally kept him from knowing Pang's true sexuality.

[311] 女身何敢完花燭。4:16, 68.

[312] 我做女兒則十七歲，做男兒倒十二年。經過了萬千瞧，那一個解雌雄辨？方信道辨雌雄的不靠眼. (Xu Wei 224).

Conclusion

In conclusion of the current discussion, I have examined in this chapter the phenomenon of crossdressing, spectatorship and women's homoerotic sensibilities in the tanci work *A Histoire*. The text constructs sympathetic, fetishistic, and voyeuristic roles for women reader/viewer, and invites a reconsideration of the reader as spectator, and of the link between the production of individual sympathy and women's collective sentiments. *Tanci* works, through the production of a feminine spectatorship, present the tensions between social discourses on gender roles and women's desire for a habitable social space. For modern and contemporary readers, the rise of the woman spectator in *tanci* offers an example of the growing visibility and increasing discursive production of women's homoerotic desire at the turn of the century. The construction of the woman's doubled body could be viewed as an alternative way of "speaking the feminine in a subjunctive mode." (Probyn 111) Late imperial *tanci* constructs a locus of women's self-inscription by negotiating correlations between writing and discourse.

The tension between the crossdressers and the public who probe into and repeatedly test the women crossdressers is present throughout *A Histoire*. However, other than the aforementioned Mu Hualong, none of the other women crossdressers are exposed in their secrets. Su Zixiu and Qin Ling become high military officials and play a fundamental role in putting down several regional rebellions. Pang Yulong is married to a princess and becomes the emperor's son-in-law. In comparison with Lijun, who is left with no choice but to revert back to a woman's life, the women crossdressers in this work are depicted as having more freedom and independence to pursue their lives outside the inner quarters. If earlier works display an imagining of women's alternate lives in male

disguise outside the inner chambers, *A Histoire* carries an important implication that crossdressed women can find their places in the social sphere, and that, absent the constraints it placed on a woman, marriage would no longer be an obstacle to them exercising their intellectual powers. The extensive description of women crossdressers in the text indicates that crossdressed women have the potential power to recreate social reality in turn-of-the-century China.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has examined the narrative genre of *tanci* in late imperial China while keeping a close eye on the theme of women's self-empowerment. I have analyzed three *tanci* works, *Destiny of Rebirth*; *Dream, Image, Destiny*; and *A Histoire of Heroic Women and Men*, respectively published in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth century. I have proposed that these *tanci* works, by depicting women's crossdressing, self-portraits, and homoerotic sensitivities, presented a potential to disrupt dominant social and cultural discourses of womanhood in late imperial China. Writing such challenging stories was itself an emancipating act for late imperial women authors, whose literary practices were under strict social regulation in the patriarchal society. For women readers of the time and for those of the contemporary period, reading these stories was and is an empowering experience. By identifying with the heroic protagonists, historical and contemporary readers alike may be inspired to envision a life of autonomy and freedom outside the domestic space. *Tanci* works, I propose, validate women in their immediate historical and cultural landscapes and project rich possibilities for women to reform social reality.

In the Introduction, I reviewed the social and historical context of women's writings in the late imperial period, and discussed the ideological structures that underlie their discourses about womanhood. The Confucian ideology profoundly influences the foundation of gender roles in these texts. In pre-twentieth century China, women's social identity was defined by the ethical principle of "Three Submissions and Four Virtues," which stressed a subordinate relation to the father, the husband, and the son. Their

activities restricted to the domestic inner chambers, women were granted little space and time to develop their interests in literature and art. Didactic texts about exemplary women stress that women's virtue is a more important moral trait than their literary and artistic talent. In some debates about the relation between women's talent and literacy, a few intellectuals, including both men and women, propose that women's literary talent is of equal importance as their virtue. However, the social and ideological regulation of women's speech and writing was constantly present in the pre-twentieth century China. This tension between the Confucian doctrines of women's virtue and women's literary activities in the inner chambers was particularly heightened in the late imperial period, especially after the sixteenth century.

During this period, women's literary activities in the inner chambers achieved a significant degree of social recognition, thanks to the development of educated gentry women's literary activities in the southern provinces of China. In the late Ming dynasty, especially starting with the seventeenth century, many women writers actively participated in literary groups and poetry gatherings. Their social activities can be traced in writings by open-minded male elite intellectuals, some of whom were instructors for these talented women authors and played an important role in collecting and publishing women's works. For a reader in the contemporary period, such records of women's writings and literary exchanges suggest that the domestic inner quarters were intricately connected to the external social sphere, and that the boundaries between the two spaces were porous, shifting in various historical periods. My study of women's *tanci* narratives took its departure from this review of historical context.

I then moved on to an overview of the tradition of *tanci* narratives in the late imperial period. After an introductory examination of the relation between *tanci* and China's oral narrative tradition, I focused on the *tanci* works written by a group of gentry women writers in the southern provinces of China from the seventeenth century to the early twentieth century. My analysis of the selected *tanci* works took as its concern the progressive values of these narratives by women, and considered how such narratives might have been empowering for readers of the time, as well as how they might be so for contemporary readers. I gave particular attention to the theme of crossdressing and discussed how, in the fictional space, crossdressing endows women characters with a power to explore an innovative social identity. Reading stories of women crossdressers in the context of pre-twentieth China, I proposed that *tanci* writings of crossdressers are potentially protofeminist and carried an emancipatory power in and of themselves in the patriarchal society.

The individual chapters of this dissertation discussed such protofeminist features of late imperial *tanci.* Throughout the dissertation, I took up again the issue of crossdressing, and considered as well women's authorship, literary portraits of women and by women, women's spectatorship, and homoeroticism, as such topics proved relevant to the texts at hand. Such themes have come up repeatedly in my close reading of these *tanci* works, creating a cyclical connection underlying this dissertation. In Chapter 1, I considered the classic *tanci* work *Destiny of Rebirth* by the eighteenth century author Chen Duansheng, and discussed the themes of self-portrait, crossdressing, and authorial voice in this work. My analysis compared two scenes in which the protagonist looks at her own image in the mirror, before and after she crossdresses as a

man. These textual examples show that, in *Destiny of Rebirth*, crossdressing empowers the protagonist to pursue a life of autonomy outside the inner quarters, and to explore her life as the equal of men in the social space. *Destiny of Rebirth*, together with preceding stories about women crossdressers, shows that crossdressing in the fictional space as in reality enables women to explore an alternative subjective position outside the domestic sphere. Lijun's subversive act challenges the Confucian ideological codes on women's gender roles, and inspires women readers to conceive of an unconventional lifestyle. However, the author's challenge of the cult of virtue and chastity also led to controversies among conservative readers, some of whom strongly disapproved of Lijun's unconventional acts, especially her refusal to revert back to a woman's life at the end of the work. The authorial insertions in the introductory sections of the chapters reveal a concern with such expectations, as does the author's reluctance to end the story with the union of Lijun and her fiancé Shaohua in a polygamous marriage. In my analysis, I proposed that the author's dilemma in concluding the work reflects the incommensurable distance between the author's progressive vision of women's social autonomy, and the unsympathetic social climate which constrained women's choices for alternatives outside the inner quarters.

Author Chen Duansheng's anxiety about women's social space finds resonance in another *tanci* work: *Dream, Image, Destiny* (hereafter *Dream*). This *tanci* work, published a century after *Destiny of Rebirth*, shows a similar pursuit for a space for self-expression. My analysis of *Dream* in Chapter 2 discussed how the authorial insertions in the text demonstrated a feminine voice, which invites the readers of the text to establish a sympathetic relationship with the author. In her authorial statements, author Zheng

Danruo reflects on the difficulties of writing and her hardship in finding appreciative audiences. These difficulties further emphasize the social and ideological constraints on women's speech and writing activities during the period, which also resonated in the confessions and grievances of precursor women authors who suffered analogous hardships in writing and publishing their works. I proposed that author Zheng Danruo's reflection on the ethical issues in writing reveals late imperial women authors' shared anxiety for bringing forth a voice which truly would speak for women writers and readers of the time.

Zheng Danruo's moralizing emphasis on feminine virtue and chastity is an effort to revise the male elite literati's discourses on feminine virtue. I have suggested that Zheng's innovative interpretation of women's virtue might be oriented toward the female reading public of her time, many of whom had been under the influence of the prevailing social discourses about women's ethical duties. These abundant authorial insertions in *Dream* provide evidence that Zheng Danruo's work appropriates and revises the male literati's discourse about feminine virtue to bring forth the author's distinctive voice. This voice expresses the writer's grievances against injustice and appeals for the readers' sympathetic identification with the authorial narrator and the fictional character. The prevalent use of the first person "I" in these authorial insertions further calls attention to the woman author's presence and self-construction in *tanci*. Compared with the crossdressed Lijun, who is reborn with a new social identity by disguising herself as a man, Zheng Danruo justifies her literary authorship by appropriating elite discourses of virtue to validate her own purpose of writing in the patriarchal society. This authorial voice also finds enrichment in a dialogic relationship with the readers of the text, many of

whom sympathize with the author about women's difficulty in acquiring social acknowledgement for their literary achievement. Unlike *Destiny of Rebirth*, *Dream* concludes with the happy reunion of the flower goddesses, reincarnated in the immortal world. This utopian vision, however, is in stark contrast with the author's tragic personal life. Her suicide in the Taiping Rebellion serves to underline the fact that a space for a woman author was not yet obtainable in such a political and social climate.

In the following chapter, I explored the visual space in *Dream*, and discussed how literary portraitures in the text invite the reader to sympathize with the women characters and establish an emotive association with the fictional women in the diegesis. I argue that portraits invite reader sympathy and literally depict alternate possibilities for the self-actualization of women in the late imperial period. I compared the presentation of women in portraitures by male literati intellectuals with women's own tradition of making and writing about portraits. I suggested that Zheng Danruo's text enriches traditions of portraiture, and presents the painted woman's power to interact with the viewers and elicit sympathetic identification from them. In Zheng Danruo's text, women characters make portraits to display their resistance to marriage, their filial devotion to parents, and the preservation of their virginity. This gendered perspective underlying the portraiture of women draws attention to the fictional characters as empowered subjects, who employ paintings to tell stories of filial devotion and chastity. Such a gendered perspective also evokes a sympathetic relationship with the women readers in the inner quarters of the time and in the contemporary period. Historical and contemporary readers interact and sympathize with the fictional women, and are invited to explore their own places in the story's diegesis. Author Zheng Danruo's transformation of the portrait conventions

makes an important contribution to the tradition of *tanci* and late imperial literature, drawing attention to the intense moral implications of women's painted images and their potential power to disrupt dominant social discourses about womanhood.

My final chapter revisited the tradition of women's crossdressing in the rare text *A Histoire of Heroic Women and Men*. Resonant with Chapter 1's discussion of the progressive potential of women crossdressers, I considered multiple examples of crossdressed women in *A Histoire*, comparing its presentation of crossdressing with precursor narratives about women disguised as men in *tanci* and other late imperial literature. In contrast with the crossdressed heroines in the previous *tanci* works, most of the women crossdressers in *A Histoire* do not revert back to their feminine identity, but continue to conduct their lives as men's social equals. These women's actions challenge the Confucian ethical discourses about virtue and chastity. In the text, women crossdressers are depicted as heroic scholars and warriors who support the good and punish the evil, and rescue the country at times of national crisis. In their private lives, crossdressed women manage to marry other women, and are sometimes married to more than one wife. Their former male fiancés are depicted as "male widows" who wait for the crossdressers' return in vain. Such subversion of the gender hierarchy suggests that crossdressed women of the time might have enjoyed more social tolerance and have enjoyed certain freedom to exercise their social and political power. At the same time, the text also carries rich examples of homoerotic sensitivities between crossdressers and other women, who may or may not be aware of the crossdressers' real sexuality.

The women's same-sex desire as depicted in the text resonates with similar scenes in previous *tanci* works, as well as with historical homoerotic practices among women in

the late nineteenth and early twentieth century China. In my analysis, I reviewed these examples, and suggested that literary depictions of women's homoerotic sensibilities might be a reflection of or address to the women readers of the time. This hypothesis, however, does not seek to impose an anachronistic reading on the text, nor does it intend to equate late imperial women's same-sex desire to lesbianism in a contemporary historical context. Rather, my analysis aims to study crossdressing and women's homoeroticism as protofeminist traits in late imperial women's writings, and critically reflect on their progressive meanings for their historical readers as well as for readers in the contemporary period. Reading these progressive stories of and by women allows contemporary readers to reflect on issues of women's agency, empowerment, and social identity from a enriched and contextualized perspective.

The authorial introspection and self-reflection embedded within these texts are of women who proclaimed their competence to write in the male-dominated literary terrain. These authors' dilemmas and anxieties about writing are a possible reason for the unfinished quality of many *tanci* works. For a contemporary reader, the unfinished works offer textual margins, that is blank conceptual areas which have been exiled from the center, and which invite readers to actively participate in continuing the narrative. In this space of the marginalia resides the nexus of reciprocating interpretation and communicative reproduction. Each *tanci* author assumes the role of a historian who not only cultivates appreciative readers of her work, but also leads the readers toward self-empowerment by disrupting extant narratives, and by writing tales of one's own.

My experience of collecting, translating and analyzing the texts also shows that *tanci* works are not isolated in themselves, but are closely interrelated with the other

literary genres of the time and previous times. For a contemporary reader, a contextualized reading of the text calls for a critical assessment of the oral traditions that nurtured the development of *tanci* in its beginning stage, and the literary writings by late imperial women authors which reflected women's shared hardship in partaking literary activities. Also, contextualized study of *tanci* would include an overall review of the relation between *tanci* and the canonical literatures by male literati writers. The dialogue between *tanci* and these multifarious literary traditions and cultures would contribute to a situated understanding of the literary status of this unique genre. More importantly, a situated reading of *tanci* would encompass a social and historical study of women's gender roles in the patriarchal Confucian society. Social and ideological discourses about women's virtue and chastity constrained women's intellectual pursuits and restricted them to the domestic space. Such social and historical background lay behind women authors' anxiety to search for a space of self-expression through literary endeavors.

Reflecting on my own position as a critic, translator, and reader of *tanci* works, I have made the following findings. Reading late imperial protofeminist stories in a contemporary context requires a critical assessment of one's own critical language in writing and presenting these women authors and texts. The meanings of these pre-twentieth century and early modern works are contingent upon specific social and cultural landscapes as well as the historical negotiation and inscription by women of their social presence. The contents of these texts also express universal concerns of women regarding agency, autonomy, freedom, and self-expression, which are themes of enduring importance in feminist studies of modern and contemporary materials in a range of cultural contexts. This dissertation recognizes the long-lasting values of *tanci* in both

Chinese women's literary tradition, and in the tradition of women's narratives in a global context. Many of the challenges about authorship, self-expression, and freedom in decision-making are still germane for women in the contemporary period. The historical task of contemporary readers of *tanci* is therefore three-fold: to retrieve the voices of earlier authors from obscurity, to empower themselves with the help of these voices, and to integrate the predecessors' insights into visions of new possibilities of social change.

In future research on *tanci* works, I will extend my study to the following topics. Currently *tanci* works are extant in handcopied editions, letter press editions, engraved wood block editions, lead print editions, and lithographical editions. The theme of visuality in *tanci* texts demands exploration, especially by comparing and analyzing the different editions of illustrated *tanci* works in relation to the development of the printing technology of the late imperial period since the Ming dynasty. Classic *tanci* works such as *Destiny of Rebirth*; *Dream, Image, Destiny*; and *Blossoms under the Brush* were usually published with woodblock illustrations depicting important scenes from the texts. These illustrations, inserted at the beginning of each chapter, provide evidence for the interconnectedness of *tanci* narratives and the Ming-Qing publishing enterprise, and the complex mechanism of readerly reception as affected by the correlations between literary texts, art, and print culture of the time. The nineteenth century also saw the advance of new printing technology (the mechanized lithographic press) in China, especially in Shanghai. This new technology led to more modern printing of *tanci* works in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[313] A diachronic study of the various editions of

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[313] A few examples of *tanci* works published with lithographical versions include *Jade Glass* (玉杯記), by Shanghai shiyi shujü (上海石益書局) in 1908; *Pearl Affinity: A True Story of Filial Piety and Loyalty* (孝義真跡珍珠緣) by Ma Rufei (馬如飛), published by

the same *tanci* work could lead to valuable discoveries about the circulation of *tanci* among the audience across various historical periods.

Two other topics as regards *tanci* could be of import. One is the relation between protofeminist *tanci* stories with women's presses in early twentieth century China. These progressive *tanci* works evolved from traditional *tanci* writings under the influence of modernization and the introduction of Western literature in translation. *Tanci* writers in the early twentieth century resorted to this traditional genre to advocate for women's enlightenment and education. Many of such stories were published or cited in women's journals and magazines and thus were circulated to a wide audience. Quite a few of these stories also reflect an aspiration toward an idealized womanhood inspired by women heroes in Europe and America and suggest a desire to achieve a spiritual solidarity with Western women peers. A study of these *tanci* stories may enrich the current study in Chinese women authors' social mobility and their desire for social change at a period of historical transition. Another meaningful research topic is related to the use of technology in disseminating traditional literary texts. In the late 1920s, with the introduction of the radio industry in the southern areas of China, especially in the cities of Shanghai, Suzhou and Hangzhou, many *tanci* stories were adapted for radio programs and gained wide popularity among the local audience. These broadcasted *tanci* stories and introductory songs, thanks to the popularization of electronic media, consolidated their traditional readership and gained access to audiences in a wide range of social classes and geographical locations. The use of technology in the dissemination of *tanci*

Shanghai shujü (上海書局) in 1896 and *Dragon and Phoenix Destiny of Rebirth* (龍鳳再生緣) by Chen Duansheng, published by Shanghai dacheng shujü (上海大成書局) in 1927. (Sheng 263-475)

elicits questions about the expanded roles of the audience, who would not only be listeners or readers of the text, but inspired to sing and perform of these narratives after hearing them from the radio. Such expansion of the audience' roles, conversely, would demand an enriched critical understanding of the literary, social, and cultural values of *tanci* narratives as they continuously evolve through shifting societal contexts. This ongoing evolution of *tanci* narratives provides an even greater impetus for critical evaluation of them as protofeminist works that would broaden and deepen contemporary feminism's calls for greater empowerment of women in the global context.

APPENDIX A. LISTS OF CHARACTERS IN PRIMARY TEXTS

Destiny of Rebirth (再生緣)

Meng Lijun 孟麗君: crossdressed protagonist.

Li Mingtang 酈明堂: Lijun's pseudonym after she crossdressed as a man.

Huafu Shaohua 皇甫少華: Lijun's fiancé.

Liang Suhua 梁素華: daughter of Lijun's wet nurse, Lijun's sworn sister, who later was adopted by Minister Liang and was married to Lijun by the Emperor.

Xiang Nanjin 項南金: a woman from a rich family who pretended to be the crossdressed Lijun.

Rong Lan 榮蘭: Lijun's maid, who also crossdressed and accompanied Lijun on her adventure.

Dream, Image, Destiny (夢影緣)

Zhuang Yuan 莊淵: male protagonist who retired from palace service and fled into the immortal world. Father of Zhuang Mengyu.

Mrs. Zhuang 莊夫人: Zhuang Yuan's wife, who was also the literary mentor of several young women characters.

Zhuang Mengyu 莊夢玉: male protagonist, who had a predestined relation with the twelve flower goddesses who descended to the earthly world to assist him in redeeming morality in human society. Mengyu married two of the reincarnated goddesses, Lin Xianyu and Song Renfang.

Lin Xianyu 林纖玉: Zhuang Mengyu's predestined companion. She was the reincarnated Premium Flower Goddess (Kuifang xianzi 魁芳仙子) and was known for her talents in painting and poetry.

Tao Xianbi 陶纖碧: also a reincarnated flower goddess. She was an orphan raised up at her uncle's house, and became a well known female doctor.

Song Renfang 宋紉芳: Zhuang Mengyu's other wife. She was a sister of Xianyu's in their previous lives, and had descended to the earth to complete the task of cleansing people's heart, together with the other flower goddesses.

Lin Wu 林武：an imperial general, father of Lin Xianyu and a close friend of Zhuang Yuan.

Xie Yunxian 謝韻仙：a minor character who refused marriage arranged by her parents and became a disciple of Mrs. Zhuang.

Han Liwan 韓麗婉: a daughter of a high official, who was dedicated in changing her family's lavishing life style. She rescued a crossdressed opera singer Ruan Lianqing 阮莲清 from the persecution of the troupe and supported Ruan to look for her lost brother.

Ruan Lianqing 阮蓮清: an opera singer who was abducted in childhood and was sold to an opera troupe. She crossdressed as a man to protect her chastity. Later she was rescued by Han Liwan and managed to reunite with her family.

A Histoire of Heroic Women and Men (俠女群英史)

Qin Ling 秦淩： crossdresser, whose original name is Qing Shunxin 慶順馨. She was engaged to the male protagonist Lin Mengyun in childhood. Born with great physical strength and multiple talent, Qin Ling later passed the Civil Service Examination and became a military leader of the country.

Lin Mengyun 林夢雲: male protagonist, Qin Ling's fiancé. Lin had suspected Qin Ling to be the crossdressed Qing Shunxin, and had interrogated Qin Ling about her sexuality many times.

Wen Xiaxian 文霞仙: a heroic protagonist who avenged her father's death by beheading her father's murderer.

Pang Yulong 龐玉龍: a protagonist who crossdressed to obtain her family title as a male descendent. She became a friend of Qin Ling, without knowing that Qin was also a crossdresser.

Mu Hualong 沐化龍: a crossdresser who was appointed as an official but was later disclosed by her fiancé Zheng Hua 鄭華.

Su Zixiu 蘇子秀: a crossdresser who passed the Civil Service Examination together with Qin Ling and Pang Yulong. Zixiu was originally engaged to Wu Musu 吳穆蘇.

Wu Musu 吳穆蘇: a male protagonist, a friend of Lin Mengyun. He was engaged to Su Zixiu in their childhood. After Zixiu was later lost by her family in an accident, she crossdressed as a man and changed her name. When Wu met Zixiu in the Imperial Palace after the Examination, he suspected Zixiu to be his fiancée but was frustrated by Zixiu's denial of their relationship.

APPENDIX B: SELECTED TRANSLATIONS OF *TANCI*

Opening Lines from *Destiny of Rebirth*.

In December [314] snowflakes are tossed by the wind; the ink so easily freezes[315] and it cannot be taken away from the fire.

Afraid of the west wind that penetrates the windows and doors, I often watch the morning sun shining in my room.

The plum flowers blossom in late December, announcing the approach of the New Year. Enchanted by reading, I have not noticed the changing season and my surroundings.

Having deserted my needlework for long and wasted much time, I have followed my mother's example and become heartily committed to writing.

This work has much value, for I, like other women in the private chambers, write from a tradition of extensive family learning[316].

Reluctant to give my writings to the uncultured to read, I only offer this preserved work as a gift for my well educated female friends.

Little by little I have put together three volumes of *Destiny of Rebirth*; now I will continue my story to demonstrate in length my endless affection for writing.

季冬時節雪花飛，硯墨凝冰火不離。每怯西風穿戶牖，常看曉日照庭扉。梅花破臘年光近，書卷娛情景物移。已廢女工徒歲月，因隨母性學癡愚。蕓窗紙筆知多貴，秘室詞章得久遺。不願付刊經俗眼，惟將存稿見閨儀。再生緣，編來不覺交三集，且續前文盡興余。3:9, 235.

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[314] In this translation, the months all refer to the months in Chinese lunar calendar, which is roughly a month later than the Western calendar.

[315] Traditional Chinese writing is done with the so-called "Four Treasures of the Study" (*Wenfang sibao* 文房四寶): writing brushes, dark calligraphy ink, a special handmade paper for calligraphy (*xuanzhi* 宣紙), and an ink slab. In a nutshell, the inkstone (*yan* 硯) is a sort of stone on which water is turned into ink by the rubbing of an ink stick. It is generally made of stone of a smooth and fine-grained variety.

[316] In imperial China, "family learning" (家學) is an important way for women to acquire education in ancient and classical literature. Particularly, *jiaxue* implies a family tradition of learning that defines their class status and influences of family members, who grow up surrounded by books and learning. Discouraged to go to public schools, women especially those of gentry class were educated by private teachers or family members. Women writers of elite class often claim they are heirs to extensive family learning.

The scenery by the sea is unlike that of the capital city in the north; the month of October feels like early spring.

The cold flowers are still bathed in droplets of rain; a fading evening glow slightly conceals the hazy rainclouds.

At nightfall I overhear the birds' song by the window. Through long nights I lean on a pillow and listen to the sound of rolling sea waves.

In peaceful times one does not need to write lavish praises for the world; a gifted brush may compose most subtle and unconventional writings.

Many a story is contained in seven-character lines; one single chapter is pregnant with thousands of meandering feelings.

Sometimes, the author's style reveals a pleasant mood, addressing romantic themes of flowers and moonlight, at another time it becomes as breathtaking as the sound of howling winds and turbulent waves.

Thus writing is like making melodies by playing the ancient *pipa*[317], by eliciting harmonious resonance from the three instruments of drum, *qin* and *se*[318].

Writing, at a slower pace, is like a thin fog that veils the Milky Way, at a climactic moment words can be rapid torrents gushing down jade-colored cliffs.

My thoughts and feelings have been fully infused in the book; upon self-reflection and self-criticism I composed this *tanci*.

海上風光異帝京，孟冬天氣似初春。寒花尚著疏疏雨，落霞還遮淡淡陰。日暮隔窗聞鳥語，夜長欹枕聽潮聲。佳時莫贅升平象，妙筆仍翻幻化文。七字包含多少事，一篇周折萬千情。才如笑自吟香態，又轉興風作浪聲。好似琵琶傳曲調，再同琴瑟鼓和鳴。慢來薄霧飄銀漢，急處飛流下碧嶺。閑緒閑心都寫入，自觀自得遂編成。詞登十一曾收句，時值清明且續音。今日之期交廿六，又不知，此朝起手哪朝成。12:45, 765.

In November the weather is quite cold, even though the day is clear and sunny, the wind gentle.

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317 *Pipa*: 琵琶，traditional plucked musical instrument.

318 *Qin* 琴：ancient seven-string plucked music instrument. *Se* 瑟, ancient fifty-string plucked music instrument. Both *qin* and *se* have been recorded in the earliest Chinese poetry collection *Book of Songs* more than 2500 years ago. In ancient times, the harmonious sound of *qin* and *se* played together represents good friendship or mutual understanding between people. One's true friend is also called his *zhiyin* (*zhi* means to know, *yin* means music or sound), that is, a person who understands the other's voice or true self.

The green mountains lay side by side beyond my windows; the yellow chrysanthemum flowers withered and fell overnight, covering the steps.

Chirping pleasantly, a pair of magpie birds flew into the woods; the lingering moon's shadow permeated the window curtains.

Without snow this cannot be called a winter month; to watch flowers, the best time is in a bright sunny day.

For long I have abandoned my embroidery, and have been reluctant to take up my needlework. Sitting by the window in the study room, I have been reading in solitude.

Since the whole work has not come to an end, I cannot yet abandon my writing. After finishing the last chapter I need to compile a new one.

Writing is a daily ritual, just like the cloud and rain which transforms from one day to another, or the colors of dawn, so like brocade, stretching across the sky at sunset.

The previous chapter is finished; the next one is bound to be started. Hence I must take up my colored brush and bring to a close the *Destiny of Rebirth*.

仲冬節候已交寒，猶是風和日暖天。當戶青山多掩映，覆階黃菊乍雕殘。鵲聲悅耳雙穿樹，月影依人半透簾。無雪不成冬令月，看花好在冶陽天。久疏繡譜慵招線，長伴書窗靜展篇。全本未終難半廢，一回既畢要重編。翻雲覆雨朝朝是，散錦飛霞日日然。前集已完登後集，少不得，彩毫須了再生緣。13: 49, 821.

In the last month of the year, the sky is bright and clear, the sunshine radiant.

There is remnant snow in the deserted courtyard; a warm wind infiltrates the newly-opened deep courtyard.

The newly born birds are kept out of the window of the quiet studio; the morning sunbeam shines on my inkstand and melts the frozen ink.

My new brush overflows with fragrance and moisture; the dry ink stick, when dissolved in water, leaves dark strokes on paper.

One cannot leave a task unfinished in the middle; since I have started my *tanci*, I am determined to complete this work.

My boundless feelings will be expressed without constraint; word by word I will put the unpolished draft into order.

Without reserve I devote my spirit to the brush, and infuse my passion and thoughts entirely in the book.

This is like the Weaving Maid Goddess[319] who boasts her expertise in making silk work, or a peacock that displays its colored tail.

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319 The Weaving Maid was a legendary goddess who was the seventh daughter of the Heavenly Emperor. The Weaving Maid was known for her incomparable weaving skills and taught women on the earth to make threads with cotton and to weave cloth.

This three-inch[320] pointed brush in my hand will bring into being multitudes of events in the *Destiny of Rebirth*.

歲暮時光正季冬，晴明天氣日曈。閑庭未掃留殘雪，深院初開動暖風。姣鳥隔窗書幌靜，曉暉臨案硯池融。新毫試處含香潤，舊墨研來落紙濃。做事未成難半廢，編詞已起要完工。情長不斷滔滔接，語雜無收慢慢窮。盡放精神來筆上，全收意興到書中。倒同那，天孫織綿千絲巧；就如同，孔雀開屏五色重… 仗我尖尖三寸管，做成了，再生緣內事無窮。14:52, 860.

On the twentieth day of January, the weather is clear, the scenery delightful.

The beaming sunshine gradually melts ice, a gentle wind brushes through the budding willow branches.

First I hear twittering young birds through the window, but do not notice the plum flowers blossoming right in front of my window.

Walking under the moonlight, singing on the way, I stop by a country road. Women descend from perfumed sedan chairs to look at the street lanterns.

In between the painted beams, a pair of blue swallows is busy building their spring nests; on the book shelves, a few small flies embellish the jade-colored window gauze.

The beautiful scenery, clear and refreshing, is all the more inviting to the eye. Likewise my heart is full of ample and pleasant feelings for composing poetry.

Taking up my colored brush, I choose this auspicious moment to renew the tale. Taking up another piece of writing paper, I will continue my previous story, like laying out a piece of brocade as bright as rosy clouds.

This is like the Weaving Maid Goddess who prepares the threads for making silk artwork; or like a legendary many-colored dream flower blossoming beneath the Yangzi river. [321]

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[320] The "three-inch brush" is one of the habitual sayings in traditional Chinese. The word "three" is a general expression and does not necessarily refer to a real number. For instance, a proverbial phrase goes as such, "three-inch manipulative tongue" (三寸不爛之舌), which is often used to describe someone's exceptional eloquence.

[321] The original text goes as "就猶如，江生五色夢中花." The expression "Dream Flower" (夢中花) is recurrently used in women's poetry and prose in the late imperial period. I am not sure if there is a legend or allusion related to this image. The "river" mentioned here possibly refers to the Yangzi River in South China. However, further research will be done before this reference is confirmed.

孟春二十動韶華，天氣晴明景物佳。麗日融融冰解凍，和風拂拂柳抽芽。初聞隔戶啼嬌鳥，末見當窗放杏花。踏月行歌停綺陌，觀燈遊女散香車。畫梁間，一雙紫燕營春壘；書架上，幾個新蠅點碧紗。淑景澄鮮臨眼媚，詩情美滿入懷佳。揮采筆，重編後話有清興；展瑤箋，再續前文布綺霞。就猶如，仙女機絲織上錦；就猶如，江生五色夢中花。詞終十四今朝接，提起王親一少華。15: 57, 952.

Prefaces to *A Histoire of Heroic Women and Men* (1905)

Preface by Mengjü (夢菊)

The nature of words indeed is infinite. Countless people have established themselves as writers, although their writings vary in quality. In rewarding the kind and punishing the evil, and in depicting the heart and soul, classics such as *Shiji*, *Hanshu*, *Zhuangzi*, and *Lisao* are truly epitomes of literature. Various fictional works and popular histories are also certainly fit for reading. Even the genre of *xiaoshuo* and *tanci* are not unworthy of appreciation, since they are rich in their depictions of objects in detail, and of the nuances of worldly affairs. The origin of these works in rhymed seven-character lines has not yet been conclusively demonstrated. Perhaps they were composed by poets who inherited the conventions from the *Shijing*. Literary writers and scholars in any case are too contemptuous of this genre to use it themselves, and rarely does one see this genre taken up in the writing of women in the inner chambers. This book, *Xianǘ qunying shi*, was collaboratively composed by my three sisters, Youmei, Yonglan, and Shuzhu. The women who were addressed collectively as "heroic women" in this work are all broadminded. One can almost hear their diction, and can admire their ingenious ideas, the innovative topics of their writing, and their beautiful style—as if the recounted events had been meticulously engraved and portrayed in paintings, or perceived and heard [by the audience themselves]. A work like this calls forth applause and tears, joy and lament. It addresses the current affairs of the world, with metaphors of persuasion against wrongdoing. Reading this text in

the breeze, while taking fragrant tea and hot wine—this is indeed enough to dispel loneliness and to pass time.

My eldest sister Youmei, second sister Yonglan, and third sister Shuzhu, are all endowed with great talent in literature. Aside from needlework and embroidery, they are all in addiction to the study of literature and histories. By the flowering bushes, they compete in poetry composition; under the moonlight they engage in chess contests. At times they read *tanci*, and imitate the style in their own writing. Rather than depicting the artificiality of some women, their writings reveal a valiant spirit of loyalty and filial devotion. Their words are elegant and endowed with far-reaching meanings. Their work has well surpassed other writings in many regards.

In my leisure time after teaching at school, I have edited their words and corrected errors, and thus become familiar with the writings of my sisters. The writing was originally made to be enjoyed by women at home in their rooms, or offered as entertainment for parents. Yet a gentleman now submits the writing for publication, so that all the sisters under heaven can share the pleasure in reading it. And all the parents on earth can share this work and be entertained. Evoking sympathy, admiration, fellow-feeling, or appreciation in readers, this work will bring reward to my three sisters. I devoted myself so much to the editing of this piece that I have forgotten to use the fan in summer, or to stay close to the stove in winter. My sisters agreed with my intention, and generously gave me their consent for publication. When the writing is disseminated widely in the world and reaches every alley and every corner, women in their refined chambers will have new songs to chant. As for the events in ancient records and bamboo scrolls, one may still learn about them in official histories—but

cannot directly experience them. So long, then, as the writing at hand has been endowed with color and sound, why does one need to prove with evidence whether it is true or false? If readers absorb its advocacy of the good and its condemnations of the evil, what need is there to question whether it is official history or *tanci*? In *Xianű qunying shi*, the authors' insights are unlimited. The critiques and judgments in this work, in comparison with those in classics such as *Shiji*, *Hanshu*, *Zhuangzi*, *Lisao*, are certainly not inferior. How many texts are superior to this work? And how many texts are inferior to this work after all? Texts are as countless as the sand in the Henghe River. Words are themselves infinite. But comparing this *tanci* with other *tanci* works, I believe that it is bound to be a success! Hence I have composed this preface.

[Composed] Two days before the Flower-Dawning Day, in the Thirty First Year during the reign of Emperor Guangxu, [that is,] the year of Zhanmeng when a great famine took place. [322]

Preface composed with prudence by the authors' brother Mengjü. (1:1, 2)

文之為文，無窮盡也。著作之家，不知凡幾。優劣不同，賞善懲惡，紓寫性靈，則一史漢莊騷，固文之至大，稗官野乘，固瀏覽所宜。既小說彈詞也不無可觀，其刻褸物情摹繪世態有足，娓娓動人者以七字為韻，不知何自始。蓋詩人之旨樂府之遺音也。文人學士鄙而不為，出於閨閣，亦不多觀。俠女群英史者，為吾友梅詠蘭書竹三姊所共作也。女曰俠英至群磊落襟懷可以想見其辭瞻其意巧，標新立異，綺麗風流，如刻如畫，如見如聞。可泣可歌，可欣可嘆，寫世上情寓勸愆意，茶香酒熱把此臨風最足消寂寞破聊賴也. 吾友梅長姊詠蘭次姊書竹三姊具擅詠絮清才各報風雅誌趣，女工而外，篤好書史。花間賭句，月下敲棋。偶讀彈詞，相與仿作而兒女無脂粉態英雄抱忠孝心。托詞既雅，寄

322 *Zhanmeng* (旃蒙) is a unit of the year in traditional Chinese calendar. The time here refers to the year of 1905, the year of *yisi* (乙巳) during the Reign of Emperor *Guangxu* (光緒 1871-1908) in traditional Chinese calendar. The Flower-Dawning Day refers to the festival of *Huazhao* (花朝) in traditional China, which is February 12 in lunar calendar and is traditionally celebrated as the birth date of the hundred flowers on earth.

意遙深。有非他本所及。余散塾之余，較字證訛，得襄其事。因為三姊曰此作也。原供姊妹之笑談，博高堂之娛樂，然君子當恕望付棗梨使天下人之姊妹共以此為笑談，天下人之慈親，共得此而娛樂。有感者有慕者有欣者有賞者庶不負姊等。署不揮扇，寒不親火，煞費苦心也。三姊以為然，慨然共允之。行見流諸海內裏巷播傳 綺閣璇閨又增新唱矣。簡冊之陳跡 雖正史亦可聞而不可見。但寫來有色有聲，何必考若真若假。但取其賞善懲惡何必問正史彈詞。蚓俠女群英史其中褒貶不謬，詩人諷誦之旨較之以史漢莊騷固品斯下矣,而高之者，其幾多耶。恒河沙數正以見之。文之為文，無窮盡也。以彈詞而較彈詞，吾知俠女群英史為必傳矣。是為序。

光緒三十一年歲在旦蒙大荒落花朝前二日。1:1, 2.

Preface by Xin'an shi (心庵氏)

In China there is no such thing as women's rights. Hence women are among the weakest. Even though there are some upright and ambitious women, they are often burdened with the trivial affairs of the inner chambers and the inherited old conventions, and are not capable of reform. Hence it is necessary to establish a literature so that women in the world might change their feeble and backward lifestyle, stimulate their minds, and enliven their hearts. Then women's rights will take form. However, the social culture in China mostly would not advocate women's education. Although there are some women who are literate, most of them can only read the popular genres of *tanci* and fiction. To promote women's rights, then, it is proper to enlighten them with fiction written in seven-character libretto, so that it will be more approachable and intelligible. Take *Xianü qunying shi* as an example. Its importance cannot be underestimated. It deals with the themes of loyalty and filiality, chastity and candor, joyful reunions and sorrowful separations, which are explored respectively in depth. The main purpose of the book is to illustrate how women and men, youth and elders, are all aspiring toward righteousness, with a particular emphasis on women's power of self-determination. The writing process of this book was an assiduous, a collaboration by my wife's eldest sister Youmei, younger sister Shuzhu, and my wife Yonglan. To entertain their parents, they composed this book during their spare time in the inner chambers. All of them are erudite in history and classics and proficient at composing poems. Hence various forms of verse and prose in the book may well rival the works of precedent writers. Their approach to composing the line and choosing diction has also been fully contemplated.

The so-called "xianü" (侠女) and "qunying" (群英) in the title suggest that men and women heroes are depicted in this work. A woman restrained in the secluded chambers all her life suffers a restricted scope of vision and an inadequate scale of thinking. No wonder she seems inconsequent, frail, and hopeless. She might have wished to travel throughout the five continents and achieve a fame that lasts for generations! Such desire shall be the characteristic of women's rights. This book is born with a similar ambition. For those who have the ambition and yet no responsibility, once responsibility is given, the resolution to carry it out will follow. As to those who have been given responsibility, if they have no ambition or have only a very weak determination, they cannot accomplish the necessary work. I perceive that this book, upon its publication, will not only enlighten women into progress, but also encourage young and aspiring people in their career, making them more resolute should they happen to read this text. Why is this so? If women can achieve such things, men shall certainly accomplish remarkable deeds as well! And so one can anticipate boundless possibilities for national rejuvenation; here I anticipate and witness to this rise of heroic and distinguished people. Hence the purpose of this book is to stir and to rouse a new social inspiration!

I have heard that the book would be published, and when the writers asked a preface from me, I took up the task and have written down a few words. For those the inner chambers who share the same aims, they shall certainly agree with me.

Composed by Xin'an of the Hanjiang city, on the Flower-Morning Day, in the year of Yisi during the reign of Emperor Guangxu.[323]

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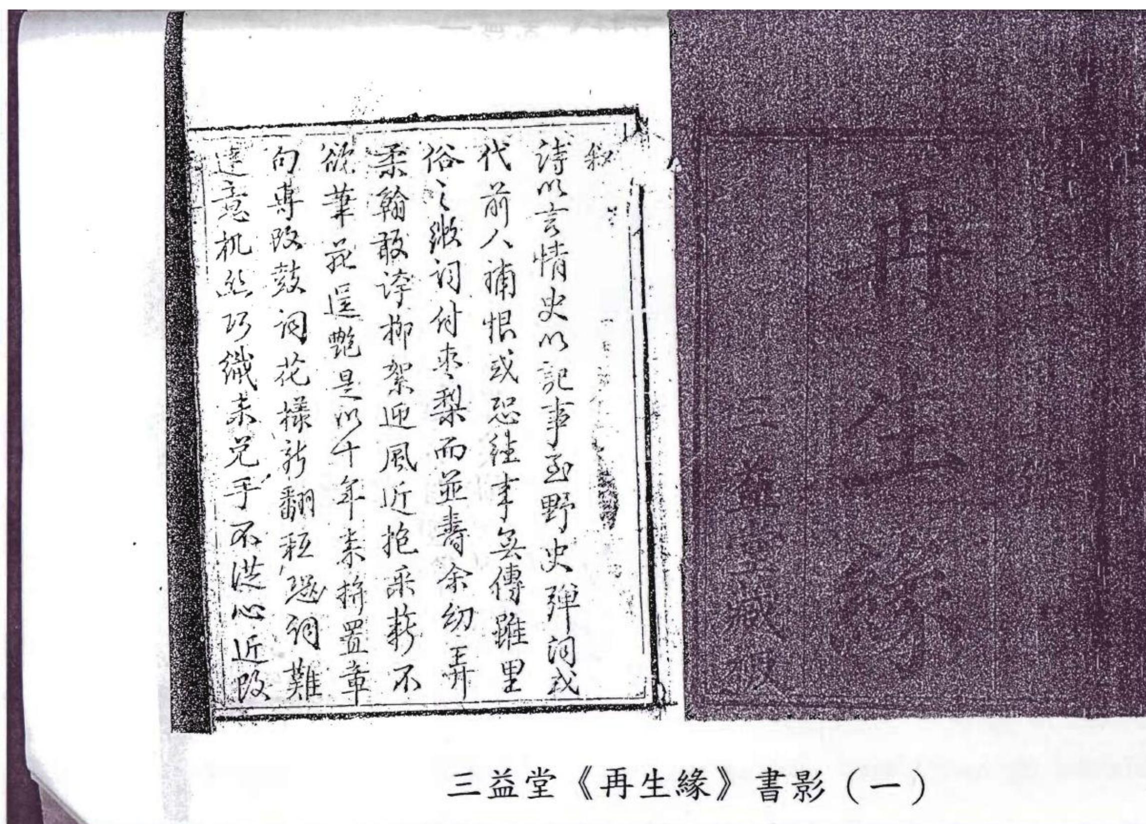
[323] Hanjiang (邗江) in the late imperial period refers to today's Yangzhou area in central Jiangsu Province.

中國無女權, 故女子為最卑弱, 即或有光明磊落, 誌趣不凡者, 亦狃於閨閣之瑣屑, 習俗之相沿, 而不可革。是必立一說以挽回卑弱之習, 使天下女子足以鼓蕩其心胸, 活潑其心誌, 而中國之女權乃出。然中國風氣，半多不講女學。間有粗通文墨，亦不過能讀盲詞小說而已。欲振興女權，亦仍以七字小說開導之。似覺淺近而易明。如俠女群英史一書，其關系匪輕矣，其間寫忠孝節義，寫悲歡離合，無不曲盡其妙，大旨謂天壤間無論男婦老幼均期於光明正大而後已。而於女子自主之權力為尤重。是書之成亦良苦矣，是書為友梅大姨，書竹三姨及內子詠蘭三人合作，以閨閣之余間博高堂之歡笑。三人均博通經史，長於吟詠，故書中詩詞歌賦，亦能追步前人。其命意遣詞，俱甚深遠。曰‘俠女’, 曰‘群英’者, 欲兒女英雄兼而有之之意。以女子一生幽囚閨閣中, 眼界之小, 心境之窄, 無怪其瑣瑣屑屑, 卑弱而不可振。恨不此身曠覽五洲, 標名萬古, 為女權中之特色, 故其誌趣, 得於是書見之。夫有其誌而無其事，事至而誌成之。有其事，而無其誌，誌小而事所以不成也。吾知是書之出, 天下之有誌者, 不獨女子可以振興, 即中國少年誌士, 偶一披覽, 當亦奮益加奮。何也? 巾幗且然, 而何況於須眉! 將來民族之振興, 未可限量; 英雄豪傑, 吾將拭目俟之。是書亦開導風氣之意歟!聞全書將欲付梓開雕而索序於余，爰不揣冒昧廖記數言於簡端，閨閣中有同誌者，當深以為然。 1:1, 1.

APPENDIX C: BOOK COVERS

Front cover of *Destiny of Rebirth*, published by Sanyi tang (三益堂) in 1850, with Hou Zhi's preface. Image at the courtesy of Fu Sinian Library, Academia Sinica. Taipei.

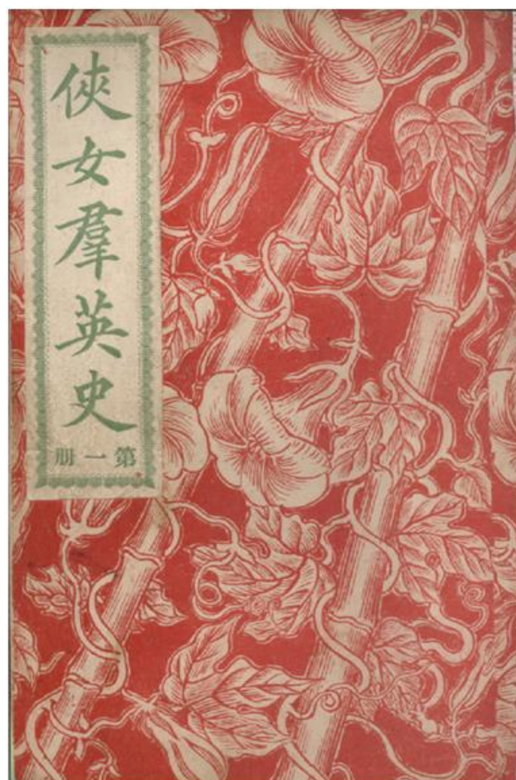


叙

詩以言情史以記事至野史彈詞或
代前人補恨或怨往事無傳雖里
俗之微詞付棗梨而並壽余幼弄
柔翰敢詩柳絮迎風近抱采蘋不
欲筆花逞艷是以千年未拈置章
句專攻鼓詞花樣新翻秖迴翔難
遣意机然巧織未免手不從心近攻

三益堂《再生緣》書影（一）

On the left, book cover for *A Histoire of Heroic Women and Men*. On the right, first page in Chapter 1, Volume 1. On the far right is the information of the author "female scholar Yonglan from Xiangzhou" (湘州詠蘭女史). Image at the courtesy of Fudan University Library, Shanghai.



俠女羣英史卷之一　湘州詠蘭女史著
第一回　美郎君路逢俠女　奇女子夜報父仇
風和日麗花朝近　燕語鶯歌韻最精　苔痕初見堦前綠　草色旋看簾內青　長
晝永　午風清　姹紫嫣紅艷早春　手足同心無限樂　高堂俱慶喜何深　或向
花窗勤繡作　或於花下共聯吟　蘭閨稽古供談笑　膝下承歡慰老親　父爲服
官身出外　母操家政日紛紜　暇時愛看彈詞曲　恨少新奇婉婉情　余姊妹
欲博慈親生笑面　姑將戲筆作閒文　書名俠女羣英史　寫出了　離合悲歡萬
種情　男有扶天匡國手　信哉緯武又經文　女無脂粉閨娃態　冰雪爲姿鐵石
心　君義臣忠安社稷　父慈子孝樂家庭　閨房靜好諧琴瑟　夫婦皆賢著令名
報父仇　弱女能爲豪俠事　平外虜　書生也作督兵臣　巾幗中　姣娃亦得
登金榜　有志者　老年猶得占頭名　讚揚忠孝褒賢俊　評論前人勸後人　耳
聽忠良增感歎　情關孝義長酸辛　龍吟虎嘯誇征戰　鳳舞鸞歌慶太平　眞個
是　空中樓閣憑心造　眞個是　幻裏功名信口云　閨中若有知音者　不厭巴
詞試一聽　閒言表過書歸正　要把那　其中之事細言明
天下山川之廣名境甚多惟浙江山水之秀較他省更勝城內城隍山畔之熱閙繁華
城外西子湖邊之山光水色從前坡老白傅尙難形容得盡

俠女羣英史卷一　第一回　一

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