THE FEMALE REWRITING OF GRAND HISTORY:

THE *TANCI* FICTION *JING ZHONG ZHUAN*

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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This dissertation has examined the *tanci* fiction *Jing zhong zhuan*, or *A Biography of Dedication and Loyalty*, authored by a gentry woman writer Zhou Yingfang in the late nineteenth century. I argue that by adapting the well-known patriotic story of General Yue Fei in Chinese history, Zhou Yingfang suggests new directions in grand historical narrative in her own voice and from her own perspective. Negotiating the writing conventions of earlier legends, she turns the stereotyped masculine image of Yue Fei into a hero in both public and domestic settings. In addition, she adds many detailed episodes from Yue Fei's family life and portrays virtuous women in a chaotic historical period, paralleling the conventional narration of wars and politics. Although often (mis)read as a text that inspires nationalism, *Jing zhong zhuan* actually redefines significant values in late imperial China, including the importance of family and the complex relation between filial piety and political loyalty. The *tanci* also enriches the notions of female virtues, expanding them from chastity to beauty, learning and management skills. Employing *tanci*, a unique genre that is closely associated with and quite dominated by women, Zhou Yingfang demonstrates her gendered consciousness in relationship to late nineteenth-century Confucian family dynamics and her self-representation and literary engagement within grand historical narratives. My dissertation sheds light on the dynamics between

women's writing and historiography, as well as on the discourses of patriotism and emerging nationalism at the turn of the twentieth-century in China.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation attempts to capture a moment in the history of women's writing in late imperial China. In the global picture, while women writers in the west were drawing increasing attention,[1] their Chinese sisters in the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) were also recording their experiences and feelings and creating fictional works in both poetry and narratives. The genre of *tanci* fiction (*tanci xiaoshuo* 彈詞小說) has been recognized as one of the most significant literary achievements by women in late imperial China. My dissertation studies one particular woman-authored *tanci* fiction *Jing zhong zhuan* 精忠傳 (a biography of dedication and loyalty), written by a gentry woman Zhou Yingfang 周穎芳 (1829-1895), a native of Zhejiang Province. *Jing zhong zhuan* is a legend about the twelfth-century military general Yue Fei 岳飛. In my dissertation I will discuss this woman author's alternative writing of the heroic historical figure, her gendered consciousness in relationship to Confucian family dynamics, and her self-representation and literary engagement in grand historical narrative. I will also re-evaluate the *tanci* version in the circulating genealogy of the Yue Fei story. *Jing zhong zhuan* has for the most part been absent from relevant studies of the literary treatment of Yue Fei,[2] reflecting more or less the lower status

[1] Women writers such as Jane Austen (1775-1817), Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855), Emily Bronte (1818-1848), and George Eliot (1819-1880), as well as Edith Wharton (1862-1937), established a well recognized women's writing tradition in the West.

[2] The observation is mainly based on recent scholarly work in the four journals of *Yue Fei yanjiu* 岳飛研究 (Hangzhou : Zhejiang guji chubanshe,1988, 1992, 1996, 2004 and 2008); Lu Rucheng 陸汝誠, "A Study of Yue Fei Studies since the Late Qing*"* 清末以來之岳飛研究 (PhD diss., University of Hongkong, 1995); Zhang Huoqing 張火慶, *Shuo yue quan zhuan yanjiu* 說岳全傳研究 (Taipei: Huamulan wenhua chubanshe, 2007); and Wang Zhendong 王振東, "Shilun Yue Fei xingxiang de yanbian: yi guojia yu minjian de hudong wei zhongxin de kaocha" 試論岳飛形象的演變：以國家與民間的互動為中心的考察 (MA thesis., Shangdong University, 2008).

of women-authored *tanci* narratives. Under the influence of the May Fourth discourse, Chinese women were regarded as merely helpless victims of Neo-Confucianism. This reduced image of pre-modern women was also related to negative social practices such as foot binding, arranged marriage, and polygamy. The talent of pre-modern Chinese women was completely ignored and suppressed during this period of male-dominated criticism. It has become necessary, therefore, to re-investigate the rich corpus of *tanci* written by late imperial women and to rethink the writing of a Chinese literary history with an emerging women's voice that challenges, subverts, and sometimes echoes the male-authored hegemony. In particular, the *tanci* narrative *Jing zhong zhuan* authored by the late nineteenth-century woman Zhou Yingfang, sheds light on the dynamics between women's writing and historiography, as well as on the discourses of patriotism and emerging nationalism at the turn of the twentieth-century China.

Exploring Women's Writing in Late Nineteenth-century China

Challenged by the emerging Western influences since the late nineteenth century, intellectuals of twentieth-century China often constructed Chinese modernity as a negation of tradition. In the field of literature, modern Chinese literary criticism stands in opposition to classical works nurtured in that tradition. For example, Mao Dun 茅盾 (1896-1981) consistently deplored traditional vernacular novels and even regarded the narrative techniques of *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 (Water margin, completed in the fourteenth century) and *Hong long meng* 紅樓夢 (Dream in the red chamber, 1784) as too elementary for modern writing,[3] though the influence of *Hong long meng*

[3] Mao Dun, *Hua xia zi* 話匣子 (Shanghai: Liangyou tushu gongsi, 1934), 177-84.

and other classics have been noticeable even in contemporary fiction.[4] Doubly marginalized by intellectuals, women's work and women's recreations are almost invisible before the twentieth century. The May Fourth discourse labels women in late imperial China as a silent group within the context of Neo-Confucian oppression. The value of women's writings has long been suppressed by mainstream critics such as Hu Shi 胡適 (1891-1962), who said, "During the last three hundred years there were many women writers, but their achievements were rather poor. Most of their works have no value at all." [這三百年中女作家的人數雖多，但她們的成績實在可憐得很。她們的作品絕大多數是毫無價值的。][5]

In fact, since the sixteenth century, commercialization and urbanization in China's Jiang'nan area provided women with increased access to print texts, circulated from family to family in the form of manuscripts and hand-copied or block-printed books. By the eighteenth century, learned women enjoyed both a unique reading place within the domestic domain of the family as well as a share of high culture. Although before the twentieth century only a small privileged group of women had the opportunities to become literate and chose to write, their work serves to challenge the male-centered literary narration in China's long history, with significance has yet to be fully elaborated.

[4] For example, *Hai shang hua liezhuan* 海上花列傳 (Biographies of Shanghai Flowers, 1894) written by Han Bangqing 韓邦慶 inherited the sense of disillusion in the narrative from *Hong long meng*. Ailing Zhang 張愛玲 (1920-1995) also acknowledged *Hong long meng*'s influence on her writing. On the other hand, the Hong Kong-based martial art writer Jin Yong 金庸 made one of his fictional heroes Guo Jing in *Sh diao yingxiong zhuan* 射雕英雄傳 (The legend of the condor heroes) the descendant of Guo Sheng, one of the 108 outlaws in *Water Margin*. Another contemporary novel, *Fei du* 廢都 (The deserted city, 1993) by Jia Pingwa 賈平凹 is also believed to be influenced by the classical Ming fiction *Jing ping mei* 金瓶梅 (Plum in the golden vase).

[5] Hu Shi 胡適, "Sanbai nian zhong de nü zuojia" 三百年中的女作家, in *Hu Shi zuopin ji* 胡適作品集 vol.14 (Taipei: Yuanliu chubanshe, 1986), 167.

Research has revealed the strong desire of women in late imperial China to participate in the literary culture. Chinese scholars since the Republican period have started to compose a history of women's literature,[6] and, in the past 20 years, North American scholars have conducted more detailed studies on women in imperial China and their literary pursuits. In addition to anthologies, research conducted by Dorothy Ko and Susan Mann also provides new perspectives toward understanding the fluid nature of gender relations in late imperial China. [7] Ko studies women and their culture in seventeenth-century China, presenting these women as neither victims nor rebels. She indicates that within the rigid boundaries of the Confucian gender system, a number of social and economic transformations enabled a limited group of women to obtain independent space, but without having to challenge the Confucian norms openly.[8] Mann continues to explore the lives and culture of women in the "long eighteenth century" and suggests that as far as women's learning is concerned, the Ming-Qing political transition barely signifies. The advent of the Manchu Qing replacing the Ming was not just another "dynastic cycle"; instead, the High Qing stands as a unique moment in Chinese women's history and their literary achievements.[9]

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[6] Monographs on women's literature in China published during the Republican era include the following: Xie Wuliang 謝無量, *Zhongguo funü wenxue shi* 中國婦女文學史 (first edition 1916); Tan Zhengbi 譚正璧, *Zhongguo funü wenxue shihua* 中國婦女文學史話 (first edition 1930); Liang Yizhen 梁乙真, *Zhongguo funü wenxue shigang* 中國婦女文學史綱 (first edition 1932); Tao Qiuying 陶秋英, *Zhongguo funü yu wenxue* 中國婦女與文學 (first edition 1933).

[7] Representative anthologies include: Kang-i Sun Chang, Haun Saussy, and Charles Yim-tze Kwong, *Women Writers of Traditional China: An Anthology of Poetry and Criticism*, (Stanford University Press, 1999). Susan Mann and Yu-Yin Cheng, *Under Confucian Eyes : Writings on Gender in Chinese History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). W. L. Idema and Beata Grant, *The Red Brush : Writing Women of Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center : Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2004).

[8] Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers : Women and Culture in Seventeenth-century China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994).

[9] Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

In the long classic Chinese literature tradition, it is not unusual for male writers to borrow women's perspectives and manipulate the "literati-feminine" voice.[10] Some scholars have been studying how late imperial women writers reworked male-authored conventions even as they deployed them. Both Maureen Robertson and Grace S. Fong emphasize the role of female agency in women's writing, especially in poetry. Robertson sums up several methods of female self-presentation in which women authors created new feminine voices that constructed a new discursive space within the boundaries of a male-dominated language. They challenged the conventions of the literati-feminine voice, manipulated the male audience's desires and interests, controlled and neutralized the male gaze, and expressed shifting ambiguities in constructing a female relationship with the language of affection.[11] Similarly, Grace Fong explores the question of how late imperial women, as an ideologically subordinated group, manipulated gendered representation in their writings. She looks into the work of several women poets and illustrates how their writing practices embody and exemplify female agency, which theoretically then creates a space of female subjectivity where women could position themselves in history.[12]

However Robertson and Fong mainly focus on the genre of poetry, a tradition that has been dominated by males and a fashion that has been shaped by male desires. As Kang-yi Sun Chang reminds us, while women anthologists working during the late

[10] This term comes from Maureen Robertson's 1992 essay "Voicing the Feminine: Constructions of the Gendered Subject in Lyric Poetry of Medieval and Late Imperial China." She defines the term as a masculine written tradition that the male-authored text "indicates the eye of the voyeur in their presentation of passive, narcissistic women, romanticized suffering, and displays and inventories of boudoir furnishings and clothing." Full citation is included in the working bibliography attached.

[11] *Ibid*.

[12] Grace S. Fong, *Herself An Author : Gender, Agency, and Writing in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008).

Ming and Qing made an effort to set up different critical standards and evaluative norms for women's poetry, their contemporary male canon still excluded most women writers and relegated them to a marginal status.[13] Recently, other scholars have begun to investigate women-authored texts in more genres in the hope of finding their own voices distinct from the canonical discourses. Maram Epstein summarizes women's literary production in eighteenth-century China, including poetry, religious Daoist and Buddhist texts, Confucian moral tracts, drama, prosimetric narrative drum songs, and criticism. She calls readers' attention to the use of conventional motifs in each genre as a way to distinguish the unmediated voices of women.[14]

As Dorothy Ko and Susan Mann boldly suggest, in spite of the Ming-Qing transition, the period of "late imperial China" was a relatively stable coherent period in terms of social, economic, and cultural continuation spanning the establishment of the Ming Dynasty (1368) to the fall of the Qing Dynasty (1911). Within the timeframe of "late imperial China," women's writings and literary consciousness were steadily developing.[15] Wai-yee Li studies the images of women – the femme fatale, the victims, and the heroines – during the fall of the Ming and observes the transformation of those images that received increasingly reinforced aesthetic attention. She believes that the transformation of female images indicates a shifting cultural attitude during the Ming-Qing transition, serving as mediation between nostalgia and irony, loss and reconciliation of the male writers.[16] Other scholars turn

[13] Kang-I Sun Chang, "Ming and Qing anthologies of women's poetry and their selection strategies" in Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang, *Writing Women in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), 147-70.

[14] Maram Epstein, "Bound by Convention: Women's Writing and the Feminine Voice in Eighteenth-Century China," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*. 26.1 (2007): 97-105.

[15] See Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*. Mann, *Precious Records*.

[16] Wai-yee Li, "Women as Emblems of Dynastic Fall in Qing Literature" in Dewei Wang and Wei Shang, ed., *Dynastic Crisis and Cultural Innovation : From the Late Ming to the Late Qing and*

to the historical concerns of women authors when facing dynastic crises. Siao-chen Hu argues that the sixteenth-century woman-authored work *Tian yu hua* 天雨花 (The heaven rains flowers, prefaced 1651) presents a strong political statement, with the author expressing her thoughts on moral and political issues by influencing her female audience.[17] Kang-I Sun Chang examines women's observance of war and other political issues in their poetry and elaborates how they transformed poetry from passive experience to active engagement.[18]

Recent investigations of the dynamics between women's writing and historiography also stem from a larger background of the decline of imperial China, especially since the second half of the nineteenth century. During this period China underwent a series of social crises and political upheavals, including Qing's civil war the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), the two Opium wars (1839-1842, 1856-1860) and the treaty of Nanjing (1842) that opened China's coastal areas to the West, as well as the tensions leading up to the First Sino-Japanese war and the subsequent treaty of Shimonoseki (1895). All of these events mark the late nineteenth century as a stage of rapid change in the unfolding of China's history. The political turbulence in the late nineteenth century abruptly fractured the tradition of women's writing as the emerging concepts of modernity gradually began to influence the consciousness among China's upper-class and literati elite. Susan Mann presents evidence of the witnessing by gentry women of the troubles and reforms in the nineteenth century.

Beyond (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center : Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2005), 93-150.

[17] Hsiao-chen Hu, "The Daughter's Vision of National Crisis: *Tianyuhua* and a Woman Writer's Construction of the Late Ming" in *Dynastic Crisis and Cultural Innovation: Form the late Ming to the Late Qing and Beyond*, 200-34.

[18] Kang-I Sun Chang, "Women's Poetic Witnessing: Late Ming and Late Qing Examples" in *Dynastic Crisis and Cultural Innovation: Form the late Ming to the Late Qing and Beyond*, 504-22.

Mann observes a sense of urgency from their writings and points out that though male reformers disregarded their efforts, this generation of women writers were the bearers of the "new women" into the upcoming twentieth century.[19] Grace S. Fong analyses the *ci* lyrics by Lü Bicheng 呂碧城 (1883-1943) and argues that Lü has an ambiguous subjectivity that falls between tradition and modernization.[20] Joan Judge reads women's biographical texts around 1900 to examine the different constructions of the emerging Chinese modernity.[21] The rediscovery of pre-Republican Chinese women's poetry and other writings by recent social and cultural historians and literary scholars has led to new critical and methodological approaches, reoriented and shaped research agendas, and shifted the terms of historical inquiry.

In this dissertation, I would like to adopt a different approach from the above. I look back into this period of rupture as represented in *Jing zhong zhuan* and ask how we can interpret the writing of this individual gentry woman Zhou Yingfang at this moment. How did she manipulate her writing concerns to make use of traditional plots and aesthetics while giving voice to a new political anxiety in the late nineteenth century? How did she balance her position between conventional themes and her own gendered consciousness? These are questions I consider in the following chapters. Before diving into details of the author Zhou Yingfang and her seventy-three-chapter-

[19] Susan Mann, "The Lady and the State: Women's Writing in Times of Trouble During the 19th Century" in Grace S. Fong and Ellen Widmer, ed., *The Inner Quarters and Beyond : Women Writers From Ming Through Qing* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), 283-313.

[20] Grace S. Fong, "Alternative Modernities, or a Classical Woman of Modern China: The Challenging Trajectory of Lu Bicheng's (1883-1943) Life and Song Lyrics" in Grace S. Fong, Nanxiu Qian, and Harriet Thelma Zurndorfer, ed., *Beyond Tradition & Modernity: Gender, Genre, and Cosmopolitanism in Late Qing China* (Leiden; Boston, 2004), 12-59.

[21] Joan Judge, *The Precious Raft of History : the Past, the West, and the Woman Question in China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008).

length *Jing zhong zhuan*,[22] it is necessary to examine the unique genre of *tanci* in women's writing traditions.

Tanci and Women-authored *Tanci* Fiction

The Chinese term *tanci*, or "plucking lyrics,"[23] first seen in the Ming *biji* 筆記 miscellany *Xihu youlan zhiyu* 西湖遊覽志余 (Additional remarks on the tour of the West Lake, 1547) by Tian Rucheng 田汝成 (1503-1557),[24] originally refers to a form of Chinese spoken and sung literature (*shuochang wenxue* 說唱文學).[25] Also known as "Southern lyrics (*nan'ci* 南詞),"*tanci* performance has been very popular in southern China since the Ming and Qing dynasties and continues to be a living form of popular entertainment today in the lower Yangtze Delta area.[26]As a performing art/, *tanci* includes four integrated parts: speech (*shuo* 說), narrative (*biao* 表), plucking [strings] (*tan* 彈), and singing (*chang* 唱). Like storytelling, *tanci* performance has

[22] In *Jing zhong zhuan*, the original Chinese character referring to each division is *juan* 卷. I use the term "chapter" in the dissertation.

[23] Mark Bender translates *tanci* as "chantefable narratives." See Mark Bender, *Plum and Bamboo: China's Suzhou Chantefable Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

[24] Tian Rucheng 田汝成 describes the scene of tide-watching at the Qiantang River in Hangzhou in *Xihu youlan zhiyu* as follows: "At the time actors played acrobatic games, ball games, gambling, drum songs and *tanci* performance. It was crowded and noisy (其時優人百戲，擊球，關撲，漁鼓，彈詞，聲音鼎沸)." See Zhou Liang 周良, *Suzhou pingtan jiuwen chao* 蘇州評彈舊聞鈔 (Nanjing shi: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1983), 84.

[25] For further discussion on the origins and development of *tanci* performance, also see Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸, *Zhongguo su wenxueshi* 中國俗文學史 (Beijing: dongfang chubanshe. 1996); Chen Ruheng 陳汝衡, *Chen Ruheng quyi wenxuan* 陳汝衡曲藝文選 (Beijing: Zhongguo quyi chubanshe, 1985); Ye Dejun 葉德均, *Songyuanming jiangchang wenxu* 宋元明講唱文學 (Shanghai: Gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1957); Sheng Zhimei 盛志梅, "Tanci yuanyuan liubian kaoshu"彈詞淵源流變考述, in *Qiushi xuekan* 求是學刊 31, no.1 (2004): 94-101.

[26] Suzhou-style Plucking Lyrics (*Suzhou tanci* 蘇州彈詞), sometimes called "Suzhou storytelling," today refers to a performance with storytelling and ballad- singing in the Suzhou dialect. It is flourishing in Suzhou and also enjoys great popularity in Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces as well as in Shanghai.

been seen as commercial entertainment, catering to the taste of both common people and gentry classes, which arose together with the ongoing urbanization in Jiang'nan, the rich agricultural area which contains the Nanjing-Yangzhou-Hangzhou triangle with Suzhou at its center. Women from the lower classes learned to sing *tanci* to make a living. According to Tian Rucheng, since the Ming, "blind men and women in Hangzhou learn to play *pipa* and sing historical stories, in order to make a living" 杭州男女瞽者，多學琵琶唱古今小說、平話，以覓衣食.[27] His son Tian Yiheng 田藝蘅 (b. 1524) records that "The so-called blind teachers are blind women who learn storytelling and music from childhood. They are pretty, skillful, humorous and quite impressive" 更有瞎先生者，乃雙目瞽女，自幼學習小說詞曲，彈琵琶為生，多有美色，精技藝，善笑謔，可動人者.[28] Female *tanci* performances were common not only in public places but also in women's inner chambers. It became popular to invite *tanci* singers to sing in upper-class households. Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716-1797) portrays the fashion of inviting blind women *tanci* singers to feasts in Hangzhou.[29] In the legend of Xiaoqing 小青, it was said that during her last days Xiaoqing asked women *tanci* performers to sing in her residence close to the West Lake.[30] In *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢, *tanci* performances are seen at family banquets and celebrations; only the visit of Granny Liu can distract the girls from *tanci* storytelling.[31] In a teasing tone, the mid-Qing scholar Mou Gen 繆艮 (b. 1766) also describes his wife's strong

[27] See Tian Rucheng, *Xihu youlan zhiyu* vol. 21 on "Embroidery Women, Dressers and Blind Teachers" 繡花娘•插戴婆•瞎先生. Collected in Zhou Liang, *Suzhou pingtan jiuwen chao*, 7-8.

[28] *Ibid*., 235.

[29] Recorded in Yuan Mei 袁枚, *Sui yuan shi hua* 隨園詩話, vol. 5. Collected in Zhou Liang, *Suzhou pintan jiu wen chao*, 242.

[30] Recorded in "The Biography of Xiaoqing" 小青傳 in Zhang Chao 張潮, *Yuchu xinzhi* 虞初新志 vol. 1. See Zhou Liang, *Suzhou pintan jiuwen chao*, 86-87.

[31] See *Honglou meng* Chapters 39, 43, 54, and 62.

enthusiasm for *tanci* performances: "My sweet dreams are often interrupted, because of her women friends singing *tanci*" 好夢惺忪容易斷，怪他女伴唱盲詞.[32]

With the rapid commercialization and urbanization in the Jiang'nan area, gender relations changed accordingly. Although still confined by Confucian gender regulations, gentry women expanded their space within the Confucian family construction. Despite the fact that some male literati frowned on women's *tanci* singing, the female performers not only provided a way for gentry women to pass long afternoons, but also brought in to them news from outside. In the late Ming *chuanqi* drama *Fengliu yuan* 風流院 (The courtyard of romance), the Imperial Lady does not want the blind singing woman to repeat stories of loyal ministers, filial sons, heroic and chaste women, or romance (忠臣孝子，烈女貞姬，星前好事，月下佳期) but recent news (近日的新聞).[33] In addition to bringing the outside world closer to the inner chambers and providing a view of lower-class life, these (il)literate female performers would become part of literary club pleasures of gentry women, even a source of inspiration for their writings. For example, a talented Hangzhou woman, Ling Zhiyuan 凌祉媛 (1831-1852), once composed a poem to a famous *tanci* singing girl and explicitly praised her performance as more valuable than the literati poetry gathering.[34]

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[32] Zhou Liang 周良, *Suzhou pingtan jiuwenchao zengbu ben* 蘇州評彈舊聞鈔增補本 (Suzhou: Gu wu xuan chubanshe, 2006), 223.

[33] Zhu Jingpan 朱京藩, *Fengliu yuan chuanqi* 風流院傳奇, Act 7. See Zhou Liang, *Suzhou pingtan jiuwen chao*, 237.

[34] In Ling's original poem, she wrote "wearing a beautiful hairdo, she enjoys a high reputation of singing in the drinking house (*shuang huan sheng jia zhong qi ting* 雙鬟聲價重旗亭)." Here the Chinese word *qi ting* 旗亭 could simply refer to urban drinking houses, but also a more likely literary reading of the allusion of *qi ting hua bi* 旗亭畫壁, a Tang anecdote. Famous poets Wang Changling 王昌齡, Gaoshi 高適 and Wang Zhihuan 王之煥 once bargained their reputations in an inn when they were entertained by a group of singsong girls. They made the rule that whoever's poem was song by the most beautiful girl would win. As a result, Wang Zhihuan stood out by his *The Lyrics of Liangzhou*

Although *Tanci* narratives developed from the singing scripts, they gradually became a distinct genre from performing *tanci*. In fact, Republican scholar Zhao Jingshen 趙景深 (1902-1985) categorizes all *tanci* texts into two groups: singing *tanci* (*chang ci* 唱詞) suitable for performing and literary *tanci* (*wen ci* 文詞), for reading.[35] Focusing on the stories, literati writers made their *tanci* works suitable for desk reading and thus closer to the genre of fiction. Gentry women in Jiang'nan enjoyed not only the advantages of material wealth, but also a prosperous culture including a tradition of women's learning and writing. From gentry women, who were a keen audience for *tanci* performance, emerged a group of outstanding women writers who actively participated in literary *tanci* writing. In my dissertation, I will use the term *tanci* to refer to women-authored *tanci* fiction, the novel-length prosimetric narratives written by women for a primarily female audience or, to quote Zhao Jingshen, "of women, by women, and for women."[36] Women-authored *tanci* fiction is normally written in verses of seven-character lines or an alternation of verse and prose passages.[37]

The aesthetics of poetic verses serve as a culturally expected medium to express feelings and thoughts. Women writers often found themselves encouraged to write self-expressive lyrics.[38] Similar to poetry with its restricted lines and formats,

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(涼州詞) sung by the most beautiful one wearing a delicate *shuanghuan*-style hairdo. In this sense, the woman poet rejected the conventional fantasized literati-courtesan narcissism, but highlighted the female *tanci* performer's talent of performance.

[35] According to Zhao Jingchen, texts lacking speech with a third person narrative are defined as literary *tanci*. See his *Tan ci xuan* 彈詞選 (Beijing: Beijing zhongxian tuofang keji fazhan youxian gongsi, 2007), 6.

[36] Zhao Jingshen, *Tan ci kao zheng* 彈詞考證 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1967), 1.

[37] One of the earliest *tanci* fictions, *Er'shiyi shi tanci* (二十一史彈詞, *Tanci* of the Twenty-one Dynasties) by Yang Shen 楊慎 (1488-1559), a male author, is written in ten-character lines.

[38] Chang, Saussy, and Kwong, *Women Writers of Traditional China*, 4.

tanci verse narratives thus became a style that women freely adapted to suit their own literary and social settings. Ellen Widmer reviews the early history of fiction in late imperial China when women began to get involved in fiction production and consumption. In her book, the genre of women-authored *tanci* is considered as the earliest form of women's narratives.[39] By the mid-Qing, *tanci* gradually became distinguished as a "gendered" genre with a unique aesthetics through its special appeal to women audiences, readers, and writers.[40] Within the framework of romance, women-authored *tanci* created works of a more serious nature, based on the writers' own lives within the Confucian family system. Among the earliest acknowledged woman-authored *tanci* are *Yu chuan yuan* 玉釧緣 (Bond of the jade bracelets) [41] and the trilogy of *An bang zhi* 安邦志 (Record of pacifying the country), *Ding guo zhi* 定國志 (Record of stabilizing the state) and *Feng huang shan* 鳳凰山 (The hill of phoenix).[42] Other representative early women *tanci* writers and *tanci* texts include Tao Zhenhuai's *Tian yu hua*;[43] Chen Duansheng's *Zai sheng yuan* 再生緣 (Karmic

[39] See Ellen Widmer, *The Beauty and the Book: Women and Fiction in Nineteenth-century China*, Harvard East Asian monographs (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center : Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2006), 68-101.

[40] See Siao-chen Hu, "Literary Tanci: A Women's Tradition of Narrative in Verse" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1994), 1-14.

[41] *Yu chuan yuan* was co-authored by a mother and her daughter. According to Siao-chen Hu, the earliest edition of *Yu chuan yuan* was published with a preface dated in 1842. But it must have been written before 1770 when Chen Duansheng started writing *Zai sheng yuan*, since *Zai sheng yuan* is a sequel to *Yu chuan yuan*. See Hu, Literary Tanci, 19-20. Meanwhile, Republican scholar Fan Yanqiao 范煙橋 (1894-1967) believes that *Yu chuan yuan* is the earliest *tanci* that we have access to today. See his *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shi* 中國小說史 (Taipei: Heluo, 1979), 158.

[42] Little is known about the authorship of the trilogy. Tan Zhengbi assumed the author is a man. But today more evidence in the text proves female authorship. Scholars agree that the writer must be a woman based on its women-centered writing and the insertion of the author's self-referential information. See Bao Zhenpei 鮑震培, *Qingdai nü zuojia tanci xiaoshuo lungao* 清代女作家彈詞小說論稿 (Tianjin: Tianjin shehui kexue yuan chubanshe, 2001), 87-88.

[43] There are some disputes about the authorship of *Tian yu hua* and the pseudonym Tao Zhenhuai. Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸 concludes that the text was not likely written by a woman author due to the intense political content in the text and the focus on a male protagonist Zuo Weiming. See Zheng, *Zhongguo su wenxue shi*, 534-55. However, recent research on *Tian yu hua* by Siao-chen Hu and

bonds of reincarnation, 1770);[44] Huang Xiaoqin 黃小琴's *San shengshi* 三生石 (The stone of three lives, 1865) and *Chi yu lianhua* 赤玉蓮花 (Lotus of red jade, 1781); Hou Zhi's *Jin shang hua* 錦上花 (Flowers on brocade, 1813) and *Zai zao tian* 再造天 (Heaven restored, prefaced 1826). Moreover, the beginning of the Daoguang 道光 reign (1821) to the end of Tongzhi 同治 reign (1874) witnessed a flourishing circulation and publication of women-authored *tanci*, such as *Bi sheng hua* 筆生花 (Flowers growing from the writing brush,1857) by Qiu Xinru 邱心如; *Liu hua meng* 榴花夢 (The Dream of pomegranate flowers, 1841) by Li Guiyu 李桂玉;*Meng ying yuan* 夢影緣 (Bond between dream and shadow, 1843) by Zheng Zhenhua 鄭澹若; *Zi xu ji* 子虛記(Records of nonexistence, 1883) by Ou Shang 藕裳; and *Jinyu yuan* 金魚緣(Bond of the gold fishes, 1865) by Sun Deying 孫德英.

Before 1900, there were two conflicting views toward *tanci*'s influence on women. Conventional judgment about this genre was still quite negative. Male literati expressed scornful attitudes towards women's *tanci* writing, considering them to be ridiculous and focused only on romance. Fiction was long considered threatening to the social orders in late imperial China, but *tanci* fiction (as well as *tanci* performance) was extremely dangerous because it might undermine female virtues. Tian Yiheng condemns *tanci* in his miscellany: "Extravagant women from wealthy families spend their time on nothing but hiring these singers and keeping them in the boudoirs. They hold feasts with the singers day and night, and call the singers teachers" 大家婦女，

Maram Epstien supports the author Tao Zhenhuai is a woman. See Siao-chen Hu, "The Daughter's Vision of National Crises: *Tianyuhua* and a Woman Writer's Construction of the Late Ming*"* in David Der-wei Wang and Shang Wei, eds., *Dynastic Crisis and Cultural Innovation*, 200-234. Maram Epstein, "Patrimonial Bonds: Daughters, Fathers and Power in Tianyuhua," *Late Imperial China*, 32, no. 2 (2011): 1-33.

[44] Written by Chen Duansheng 陳端生 (1751-ca.1796) and completed by Liang Desheng 梁德繩 (1771-1847). The earliest edition was dated in 1822.

驕奢之極，無以度日，必招致此輩，養之深院靜室，晝夜狎集宴飲，謂之曰先生.[45] Others feared that the texts would arouse female desires and make women neglect their family duties: "*Tanci* fiction is most harmful to women. Women are superficial and low in nature. They become addicted once they start reading *tanci*"至於為害閨門者，彈詞尤甚。女子之性，多近鄙猥，一見彈詞，便生嗜好.[46] Another mid-Qing member of the literati, Zhang Zilin 張紫琳, attributed women's illiteracy to the popularity of *tanci*. He records in his miscellany *Hong lan yi cheng* 紅蘭逸乘 (Miscellany from the red orchid, 1822) that women in the Wu area were not allowed to receive education, in order to prevent them from reading *tanci* fiction.[47] Even intellectual women themselves could internalize the negative discourse and be critical of women reading and writing *tanci*. Kang Tongwei 康同薇 (1879-1974), daughter of Kang Youwei 康有為, comments in her 1898 essay *Advantage and Disadvantage of Women's Education* (Nüxue libi shuo 女學利弊說): "The most refined women chanted on spring flowers and the fall moon in the form of *shi*-poems and *ci*-lyrics, while women of less refined talents immersed themselves in novels and *tanci* stories" 然其上者，春花秋月之辭，繽紛于楮墨。其尤下者，且以小說彈詞之事，陸沉于其間.[48] As one of the earliest women receiving a Western-style education and active in political movements, her criticism reflects urgency at the

[45] Zhou Zhao 周召, *Shuanqiao suibi* 雙橋隨筆, vol. 6. See Zhou Liang, 240.

[46] See Zhou Liang, 106.

[47] "近日吳中風俗, 女子多不識字, 恐其識字句，通文理，愛看盲詞小說也." See Zhang Zilin, *Hong lan yi sheng* 紅蘭逸乘. Collected in *Cong shu ji cheng xu bian* 叢書集成續編 vol. 51 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1994), 908.

[48] Collected in Lü Meiyi and Zheng Yongfu, ed., *Zhongguo funü yundong, 1840-1921* 中國婦女運動史 1840-1921 (Zhengzhou shi: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1990), 166-67.

dawn of the twentieth century to embrace a new Westernized modernity at the cost of completely negating China's past. Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸 (1898-1958), one of the leading Chinese literature scholars after the May Fourth period, acknowledges the existence of women-authored *tanci* fiction, but reduces the value as merely entertainment:

> *Tanci* was women's favorite, so women who had nothing to do in their life picked up the text to read, or watch the performances to kill time…*Tanci* met the need of the above-middle class women who were restrained within their chambers…Gradually, women with literary talents felt this was an opportunity to present their poetic skills and voice their frustration.[49]

Zheng Zhenduo's assumption about the literary production of gentry women represents a typical May Fourth discourse: gentry women were regarded as an idle group and they were motivated to write merely to display their talents or to grumble. This simplified and biased view reduces the actual complexity of women writing in late imperial China.

On the other hand, late imperial women writers and their supporters had an entirely different vision of their *tanci* writing. They believed in the value of *tanci* to help women through introspection and self-cultivation. Chen Tongxun 陳同勛, nephew of Qiu Xinru, promoted the educational function of *tanci* in his preface to *Bi sheng hua*:

> Following anecdotes, unofficial history, dramas and opera scripts, *tanci* is not an elite art. But ancient people had their particular intentions. Not everyone reads anecdotes, unofficial history, dramas or opera scripts. But *tanci* is enjoyed by both elites and commoners. The circulation of *tanci* in women's chambers will help instruct women and children. This is quite meaningful. [彈詞一道，由稗官、野史、雜劇、院本而降，似無足貴，然古人立意甚深。稗官、野史、雜劇、院本，未必人人博覽而群觀也。不若彈詞，雅俗共賞，高下咸宜，流傳閨閣，可以教導人家兒女，意甚盛也。][50]

[49] Zhenduo Zheng, *Zhongguo su wenxueshi* (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe : Xinhua shudian jingxiao, 1996), 514.

[50] Chen Tongxun 陳同勛, preface to *Bi sheng hua* in Qiu Xinru, *Bi sheng hua* (Taipei: Sanmin shuju gufen youxian gongsi, 2001), 1.

By adjusting to the popular market of *tanci* and responding positively to the requirements of its readers,[51] some gentry writers targeted the creation of *tanci* as a method to teach about women's virtue, which anticipated professional women writers in modern China, as well as foreshadowing the nationalist discourse on the educational function of classical texts. The author of *tanci* fiction *An bang zhi* states that her writing "helps young women in the boudoir spend long days, but won't arouse their desires" 但許蘭閨消永晝，豈教少女動春思. She is clearly aware of the entertainment function of *tanci* but cautious about potential accusations by justifying her moral authority. Tao Zhenhuai 陶貞懷 (c. 1651), in her early-Qing *tanci* narrative *Tian yu hua*, also portrays disapproval of *tanci* from the perspective of a male authoritative character, Zuo Weiming 左維明. In chapter 25 of *Tian yu hua*, Zuo regards *tanci* as being "no more than secret love affairs under the moon or on the Blue Bridge (月下偷期、藍橋密誓)" or even "pornographic and erotic lyrics (淫詞豔曲)." But the preface fully embraces the educational functions of *tanci* in the context of orthodox ritual and music:

> I wrote *tanci* to cultivate righteous sensations and warn against evil thoughts. Music teaches what ritual cannot educate; *yuanben* presents what music cannot persuade; *tanci* extends to what cannot be included in *yuanben*[52]…Lingering on pavilions and towers is not as meaningful as getting lessons from inner chambers. Under the moonlight with breeze, when hot tea is ready and incense is burning, it is a good time for friends to get together discussing right and wrong.
>
> [何之演彈詞也？亦感發懲創之義也。蓋禮之不足防，而感以樂；樂之不足感，而演為院本；廣院本之所不及，而彈詞興…… 亭榭之流連，不如閨閣之勸諭。又使茶熟香溫，風微月小；良朋宴座，促膝支頤，其為感發懲創多矣。][53]

[51] Details about the market and commercial publishing of *tanci*, see Ellen Widmer, "The Trouble with Talent: Hou Zhi (1764-1829) and Her Tanci *Zai zaotian* of 1828," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews*, 21(1999): 131-50.

[52] *Yuanben* is the singing opera in north China during the Jin Dynasty (1115-1234), which has been regarded as one of the earliest opera styles in Chinese history. *Yuanben* also refers to its written scripts.

[53] See Tao Zhenhuai, *Tian yu hua*, (Zhengzhou shi: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1984), original preface.

Another woman *tanci* writer Zheng Danruo 鄭澹若 (1811-1860) was fully aware of the connotations of her choice to write *Meng ying yuan* in *tanci*. She realized that as male writers had dominated most literary styles, but the genre of *tanci* was the expertise of women writers, even their privilege in the classical writing tradition. Rather than be a mere follower of canonical male writers, Zheng saw it as an opportuntity to take a leading role in *tanci*, a women-centered genre, as she says:

> I wonder: *chuanqi*-drama is mostly authored by famous writers. The place has been taken. Fiction is also written by gifted men of letters. How can my writings compete with them? I need to consider carefully whether I want to be the prestigious in my own field, or to follow behind greater leaders. I would rather employ *nan ci* (*tanci*) to express myself.
> [但思量、傳奇半出名人手，難以爭先著祖鞭。小說亦閑逢才子作，安能下筆鬥其才。雞口牛後須斟酌，倒不如、掃盡南詞獨寫懷。][54]

Zheng Danruo's ambitious statement undermines the modern scholar Zheng Zhenduo's previous discussion on women's association with *tanci* as being unimportant. Also, as Tan Zhengbi (1901-1991) observes:

> Women only achieved literary success in *tanci*. Male writers have dominated the fields of poetry, *ci* and *qu* lyrics, or fiction; but not *tanci*. Among several great *tanci* works, such as *Tian yu hua*, *Bi sheng hua*, or *Zai sheng yuan*, which was not written by a woman?
> [歷來女性成功的作品，只有彈詞。詩、詞、曲、小說的世界，總為男性占先，獨有彈詞，幾部著名的偉大的彈詞，像《天雨花》、《筆生花》、《再生緣》，那一部不出於女性之手？][55]

Historically, since the 1930s, women-authored *tanci* has raised great interest among readers and scholars. For example, Republican readers juxtaposed the *tanci* fiction *Tian yu hua* with the vernacular novel *Honglou meng*.[56] Another *tanci*

[54] Tiaoxicuanxiasheng, *Meng ying yuan* (Taibei: Wenhai chubanshe youxian gongsi, 1971), 1.

[55] Tan Zhengbi, *Zhongguo nüxing wenxue shi* 中國女性文學史 (Tianjinshi: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 2001), 413.

[56] Jiang Ruizao 蔣瑞藻 (1891-1929) in his book quoted the verse by another Qing scholar Yang Rongshang 楊容裳 (1753-1815) that *Tian yu hua*, *Honglou meng*, and nine famous operas written by his contemporary drama writer Jiang Shiquan 蔣士銓 are juxtaposed ("南花北夢，江西九種"). See

narrative *Zaisheng yuan* was highly valued by Chen Yinque 陳寅恪 (1890-1969), a renowned scholar of Chinese history and literature, as a reflection of women's pursuit of freedom and independence.[57] Three masterpieces of women's *tanci* (*tan ci san da* 彈詞三大) were selected: *Tian yu hua*, *Zai sheng yuan* and *Bi sheng hua*. Despite his contempt of *tanci*, Zheng Zhenduo still regards the genre as significant as the Greek epics from the perspective of popular literature.[58]

With their acknowledged female authorship, their manner of addressing sentiments in women's lives and their elaboration of women's experience, *tanci* narratives, as well as their paths of circulation, provide an excellent context through which to study women and their self-representation in late imperial China. Women-authored *tanci* first circulated within families and friends, functioning almost as "female textbooks,"[59] and most likely encouraged the emergence of the earliest female authors of vernacular novels in China. Additionally, during the process of *tanci* manuscript editing and circulation, women writers and readers created networks that exploited the opportunities within their extended families and circles of friends to pursue literary and intellectual activities.

Jiang Ruizao, *Xiaoshuo kaozheng xubian* 小說考證續編 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1984), 396.

[57] Chen Yinque 陳寅恪, *Lun Zai sheng yuan* 論再生緣 (Xianggang Jiulong: Youlian chubanshe, 1959), 85. About Chen's study on *Zai sheng yuan*, Yu Yingshi 余英時 (1930-) also writes several articles to argue that the high valuation of the *tanci* subtly represents Chen's pursuit of freedom and independence in mainland China in the 1950s. See *Yu Yingshi fangtan lu* 余英時訪談錄 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2012).

[58] Zheng Zhenduo, *Zheng Zhenduo wen ji* (Beijing : Renmin wenxue chubanshe: Xinhua shudian Beijing faxingsuo faxing, 1959), 399.

[59] The term "female textbooks" comes from *Xiaoshuo conghua* 小說叢話 by Di Pingzi 狄平子 (1872-1942) in which he argues that the ideologies embedded in *tanci* fictions helped shape women's thoughts ("然人之讀之者，目濡耳染，日積月累，醞釀組織而成今日婦女如此之思想者，皆此等書之力也，故實可謂之婦女教科書"). Zheng Zhenduo also uses the same term to show how female *tanci* works as an educational textbook of literacy as well as of domestic affairs.

Influenced by the May Fourth sentiment to promote popular culture (*tongsu wenxue* 通俗文學), some Chinese scholars in the Republican period shifted their attention from classical poetry to *tanci*. Comprehensive studies on *tanci* during this period were primarily from the following two approaches: either to place the genre in the context of late Qing fiction reform and emphasize the educational function of *tanci*; or to treat the genre as a form of popular literature, focusing on the performance feature of *tanci*. Scholars explored its origins and development, collected *tanci* texts, and compiled bibliographies.[60] However, these early researchers did not clearly distinguish *tanci* performance scripts from women-authored *tanci* fiction, but paid more attention to the acceptance of the art form among the masses.

Women-authored *tanci* has received increasing academic attention in recent decades. As early as 1974, Toyoko Yoshida Chen's dissertation investigates the fictional representation of women's lives via the three major women-authored *tanci* fictions: *Zaisheng yuan*, *Bi sheng hua* and *Tian yu hua*. Chen is also the first person to suggest studying women's *tanci* within the history of Chinese literature as well as in the global picture. She predicts the results will yield some of the most exciting historical, literary, and interdisciplinary scholarship both in the West and greater China.[61] But further research on this rich and unique genre of women's narratives did not continue until almost twenty years later, when Siao-chen Hu's dissertation and her

[60] Representative works include: Zheng Zhenduo, "Cong bianwen dao tan ci 從變文到彈詞" (1932) and "Xidi suo cang tan ci mulu 西諦所藏彈詞目錄", a bibliography of his collections of *tanci* fiction (published in *Zheng Zhenduo wenji*); Tan Zhengbi 譚正璧, *Zhongguo nüxing wenxue shi* 中國婦女文學史 (1935) and *Tanci xulu* 彈詞敘錄 (1981). A Ying 阿英 *Tanci xiaoshuo pingkao* 彈詞小說評考 (1937) and *Nü tanci xiaoshi* 女彈詞小史 (1938); Zhao Jingshen 趙景琛, *Tanci xuan* 彈詞選 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1947) and *Tanci kaozheng* 彈詞考证 (Taibei Shi: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1967); Chen Ruheng 陳汝衡, *Shuoshu xiaoshi* 說書小史 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1936); Hu Shiying 胡士瑩, *Tanci baojuan shumu* 彈詞寶卷書目 (Shanghai: gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1957), etc. Full citation is included in the working bibliography attached.

[61] Toyoko Yoshida Ch`en, "Women in Confucian Society : A Study of Three T'an-tz'u Narratives" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1974), 13.

following books examine quite a few *tanci* texts and explain their romantic and domestic nature. Hu argues that women-authored *tanci* fiction could be thought of as the feminine counterpart of *xiaoshuo* (traditional Chinese vernacular fiction), the male-dominated vernacular fiction in late imperial China.[62] At the same time, Mark Bender's dissertation focuses on the classical *Zaisheng yuan*. He investigates Meng Lijun's story as both a written text and an on-stage performance.[63]

In the new millennium, more scholars are participating in the study of this less-explored genre while adopting a variety of methodologies and approaches. In mainland China, in contrast to Republican scholars, Bao Zhenpei clearly defines women-authored *tanci* as lengthy fictional narratives and locates her study within the context of women's literature. Thus she differentiates this gendered genre from the popular *tanci* performance.[64] Sheng Zhimei focuses on *tanci* texts and performances in the Qing dynasty and regards the prevalence of *tanci* as part of the Jiang'nan cultural legacy. Sheng's book also discusses cross-dressing themes in women-authored *tanci* texts.[65] A third scholar currently active in *tanci* study is Qin Yanchun, who further enriches the research vision of women-authored *tanci* by considering its influence on the later Mandarin Ducks and Butterfly literature.[66]

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[62] Hu, *Literary Tanci: A Women's Tradition of Narrative in Verse*; *Cainü cheye weimian: jindai zhongguo nüxing xushi wenxue de xingqi* 才女徹夜未眠 – 近代中國女性敘事文學的興起 (Taibei: Maitian chubanshe, 2003).

[63] Mark A Bender, "Zaisheng Yuan and Meng Lijun: performance, context, and form of two *tanci*" (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 1995).

[64] Bao Zhenpei 鮑震培, *Qingdai nü zu jia tanci xiaoshuo lungao* 清代女作家彈詞小說論稿 (Tianjin: Tianjin shehui kexue chubanshe, 2002).

[65] Sheng Zhimei 盛志梅, *Qingdai tanci yanjiu* 清代彈詞研究 (Jinan: QiLu shushe, 2008).

[66] See Qin Yanchun 秦燕春, *Yuanhu wenren de minjian qingjie – yi an'tou tanci ji pingtan yanchu fazhan wei zhongxin* 鴛蝴文人的民間情結—以案頭彈詞創作及評彈演出、發展為中心, *Suzhou daxue xue bao: zhexue shehui kexue ban* (蘇州大學學報: 哲學社會科學版), no.5 (2005): 98-103.

In Taiwan, two theses on Qiu Xinru's *Bi sheng hua* have been published since 2007. Chen Wenxuan provides an overall introduction to this text and looks into the narrative techniques Qiu employs in her writing.[67] Qiu Jingyi further adopts a gendered position to explore the relationship between *Bi sheng hua* and previous women-authored *tanci* texts. Additionally, by comparing *Bi sheng hua*, *Zaisheng yuan* and other *tanci* works, she investigates the diverse fictional representations of marriage among women writers in late imperial China.[68]

Two dissertations in English of women-authored *tanci* fiction appeared in 2010. Wenjia Liu studies a late nineteenth-century *tanci* text *Feng shuang fei* 鳳雙飛 (Two male phoenixes flying together, 1899), written by Cheng Huiying 程蕙英. Her dissertation concerns issues including desire, sexuality, gender politics and women's subjectivity from the woman author's perspective.[69] Li Guo conducts a critical reading of the feminist potential in *Zaisheng yuan*, *Meng ying yuan* and *Xianü qunying shi* 俠女群英史 (A history of heroic women and men, 1905). She examines subjectivity, gender representation, and self-empowerment embedded in women's *tanci* texts.[70]

My dissertation contributes to the emerging study of women-authored *tanci* fiction by placing a close reading of the *tanci* text *Jing zhong zhuan* within the larger context of the unsettled and transitional period in the late nineteenth century. While

[67] Chen Wenxuan 陳文宣, *Qiu Xinru "Bi sheng hua" yanjiu* 邱心如筆生花研究 (Taibei Xian Yonghe Shi: Hua Mulan wenhua gongzuofang, 2008).

[68] Qiu Jingyi 邱靜宜, "Qiu Xinru jiqi *Bi sheng hua* yanjiu"邱心如及其筆生花研究 (Thesis., National Sun Yat-sen University, 2006).

[69] Wenjia Liu, "The *tanci Feng shuangfei* : a female perspective on the gender and sexual politics of late-Qing China" (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 2010).

[70] Li Guo, "Tales of Self Empowerment Reconnoitering Women's *Tanci* in Late Imperial and Early Twentieth-Century China" (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 2010).

most women-authored *tanci* could be somehow categorized as scholar-beauty narratives,[71] *Jing zhong zhuan* is an exception. As its name suggests, this *tanci* concerns the legend of Yue Fei 岳飛 (1103-1142), the famous military general who fought against the Jurchens to defend the Chinese Southern Song Dynasty. Since his death, Yue Fei has evolved into a standard epitome of loyalty in Chinese culture; he became a legendary symbol of loyalty and patriotism during the period of political weakness. Today Yue Fei is widely seen as a patriot and national hero in China. But in *Jing zhong zhuan* the woman author Zhou Yingfang rewrote the story by inserting a large number of episodes about the general's family life. She constructed a gendered representation of family dynamics to cater to her contemporary audience, mostly women. I argue that the manipulation and negotiation of the masculine themes in her rewriting of the Yue Fei story reveal the flexibility of the Confucian moral code to late imperial Chinese women. By adopting the patriotic theme of the military general, the woman author fully embraced and supported orthodox values. Meanwhile, the new heroic image of Yue Fei as well as representations of the women in the Yue household presented in *Jing zhong zhuan* suggest the author's effort to create alternative ideal masculinity and femininity in late nineteenth century China. She is not so much resisting the Confucian gender relations, but constructing a new vision of gender roles that differ from the dominant male discourses on history, family, and patriotism. In other words, *Jing zhong zhuan* is another literary example that enriches our understanding of women's lives and values in late imperial China.

[71] Regarding the common themes of women-author *tanci* fiction, see my Chapter III, 95-99.

Zhou Yingfang: A Gentry Woman Writer

Like other writing women in late imperial China, Zhou Yingfang, the author of *Jing zhong zhuan*, belonged to the special group of talented women, a distinct social and cultural category in Chinese history. The phrase *talented women* is a direct translation of the Chinese word *cainü* 才女, which was widely used during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. During this period Chinese women had to develop many traditional skills. Those skills not only served the domestic setting like weaving, spinning, embroidery, household managing, but also included intellectual talents such as painting, calligraphy, classic studies, and literary writing. According to Evelyn Sakakida Rawski, literate women in the nineteenth century made up roughly 2-10% of the total Chinese population, and in some economically and culturally advanced areas like Jiang'nan, the rate might have reached as high as 25%.[72] Among them, the privileged minority born into elite households normally did not need to worry about livelihood, so talented women in gentry families typically represented "women of talent, knowledge, intellectual independence and moral strength, whom women in subsequent periods repeatedly invoked as inspiration."[73] Especially in the Ming-Qing period, talented women in the Yangtze Delta area were highly educated and very active in literary production. They participated in reading and writing, and constructed a community through poetry exchange, manuscript circulation, letter correspondence or even physical literary salons.

[72] Evelyn Sakakida Rawski, *Education and Popular Literacy in Ch'ing China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michgan Press, 1979), 6. Some late Qing intellectuals, such as Song Shu (1862-1910) and Zheng Guanying (1842-1922) deliberately distorted the data and claimed that in China only one percent of males were literate and only one in 40,000 females. Song and Zheng employed the artificial data to raise public awareness of the importance of female education.

[73] See the introductory chapter to *Different Worlds of Discourse: Transformations of Gender and Genre in Late Qing and Early Republican China*, edited by Nanxiu Qian, Grace S. Fong, and Richard J. Smith, (Leiden; Boston, 2008), 12.

The recent rediscovery of talented women in gentry households such as that of Zhou Yingfang, a small and privileged group of intellectual women in late imperial China, has been radically challenging the canonized May Fourth discourse about traditional Chinese women as victims. Regrettably, Zhou Yingfang did not leave behind many words about herself for modern readers. Many female *tanci* authors added semi-biographical information to the main texts in their *tanci*, but Zhou kept the narrative flow and did not interrupt it by inserting any self descriptions.[74] Although she completed the *tanci* in 1895, the manuscript was not publicly circulated until the 1930s, when Shanghai Commercial Press 商務印書館 published it in 1932 and again in 1935. Any previous study on Zhou Yingfang and her literary engagement has been heavily based on the two prefaces published with the first edition of *Jing zhong zhuan*. However, the prefaces provide only fragmentary information about her native Hangzhou and her conjugal family, the Yan 嚴 in Tongxiang 桐鄉.

Republican scholars Tan Zhengbi 譚正璧 and Ye Dejun 葉德鈞 (1911-1956) have made significant contributions to the investigation into Zhou Yingfang's biography in their studies. Tan's extensive research on women writers indicates that Zhou's mother Zheng Danruo 鄭澹若 (1811-1860) herself authored a *tanci* narrative titled *Meng ying yuan*.[75] This discovery expands the view of Zhou's individual literary production into that of a family tradition. Ye further explores Zhou Yingfang's family. Quoting from *Ran zhi yu yun* 然脂余韻 (The remaining elegance from burned candles, 1918), a miscellany that records hundreds of female poets in the

[74] In particular, early women authors of *tanci* usually inserted lines describing their daily life and writing process. For example, *Yu chuan yuan*, *Zaisheng yuan*, and *Bi sheng hua* all insert semi-autobiographical lines. Discussions see Siao-chen Hu, "Cainü cheye weimian: Qingdai funü tanci xiaoshuo zhong de ziwo chengxian 才女徹夜未眠—清代婦女彈詞小說中的自我呈現," in *Jindai zhongguo funü shi yanjiu* 近代中國婦女史研究, 3 (1995): 51-77. Bao Zhenpei, 103-15.

[75] Tan Zhengbi, *Zhongguo nüxing wenxue shihua* (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 1984), 443.

Qing dynasty, Ye notices that Wang Yaofen 王瑤芬 (1800-1883), a talented woman from Wuyuan 婺源, exchanged quite a few poems with both Zheng Danruo and Zhou Yingfang.[76] He points out that Wang Yaofen was Zhou Yingfang's mother-in-law. Hsiao-chen Hu studies Zheng Danruo's *tanci* text *Meng ying yuan*, and rearranges the previous fragmentary biographical accounts about Zhou Yingfang. She sketches several crucial events in Zhou's life, especially the deaths of her mother Zheng Danruo in 1860 and her husband Yan Jin 嚴謹 in 1865.[77] Hu does not investigate in depth the mother-daughter bond between Zheng and Zhou due to the lack of further information.

The previous research on Zhou Yingfang's biography has suggested the existence of a broad female reading community connecting Zhou's natal and conjugal families, and even probably extending beyond. But questions still remain about Zhou's life trajectory. For example, her family background and education level are not clear and we still do not know much about her marriage and its impact on her literary accomplishments. The exploration of her biography is significant in our understanding of women in elite households in the highly commercialized Jiang'nan region in the late nineteenth century.

In this introductory chapter I will map out an outline of Zhou Yingfang's biography and attempt to contextualize her life within the larger historiographical repositioning of women in Chinese history. I collected materials from the following sources: primary records about Zhou Yingfang in local gazetteers from her native Hangzhou, her marital Yan family residence in Tongxiang 桐鄉 (also in Zhejiang

[76] Ye Dejun, *Xiqu xiaoshuo congkao* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 747.

[77] Hu, "Wanqing qianqi de nüxing xiaoshuo: fei zhengzhi wenben de jiedu 晚清前期的女性小說—非政治文本的解讀," *Zhongguo wenshizhe yanjiu jikan* 中國文史哲研究集刊, 11 (1997): 89-135.

Province), and Shiqian 石阡 (Guizhou Province) where her husband served; writings concerning the Yan family genealogy; poetry collections by her female family members; other miscellanea mentioning talented women in the Qing Dynasty, especially *Ran zhi yu yun*, because it includes several clues to investigating the more detailed records of Zhou's female relatives. I also analyze a body of secondary sources by recent scholars to help understand the complex relations in the extended family and the social-historical background of late imperial China. These fragmentary textual threads ultimately lead to a possible reconstruction of Zhou's life. In other words, I will reconstruct a complex and rich picture of the life of the talented woman Zhou Yingfang within the larger context of the women-centered cultural geography of Jiang'nan in the late nineteenth century.

Zhou Yingfang, courtesy name Huifeng 蕙風, was born into a prominent Hangzhou family on the fifth day in the fourth month in 1829. Her native city Hangzhou is frequently associated with talented women. In addition to the natural beauty around West Lake and a continual prosperous economy, this city also boasts a rich historical and cultural heritage. The earliest recorded female poet in Hangzhou can be traced back to Zhu Shuzhen 朱淑真 (1135-1180) in the Southern Song Dynasty. Since the late seventeenth century, Hangzhou had been quite well known for the poetry communities of highly literate women, for example, the Banana Garden Society (*jiaoyuan shishe* 蕉園詩社), and the poetry club organized by the female students of Chen Wenshu 陳文述 (1771-1843). During the Qing Dynasty, Hangzhou was also a city with a flourishing urban life, where *tanci* performance as a form of recreation was quite popular among upper class families.[78] Significantly, General Yue

[78] For details about *tanci* performance in Hangzhou, see Zhou Liang, *Suzhou pingtan jiu wen chao*.

Fei was closely associated with Hangzhou's local history. Though he spent most of his life fighting on the northern borders of the empire, he was buried in Hangzhou and the city enjoyed his cultural legacy. Later people built a temple near West Lake to honor him. The legend of General Yue Fei has been popular primarily among the mass population and circulation was mostly through oral tradition, such as drama performance, storytelling or *tanci* singing.[79] Since the late Ming, more literati poetry inscriptions appeared in the mausoleum of Yue Fei.[80] In his poem "Ye Yue wang mu" 謁岳王墓 (Visiting King Yue's tomb), the early Qing poet Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716-97) portrays women paying their respects to Yue Fei:

華表凌霄落照遲	The marble pillar reaching the sky, reflecting the sunset.
一朝孤憤萬年知	His loneliness and frustration is known for thousands of years.
梨花寒食燒香女	With pear flowers blossoming, women pray and burn incense during the Cold Meal festival.
纖手都來折檜枝	They reach their delicate hands and pick the cypress branches.[81]

The continual prevalence of Yue Fei references also suggests a more sophisticated appreciation of the legend among Jiang'nan literati communities in the context of the post-Taiping restoration. In these texts, the prosperity of Hangzhou in Southern Song was projected as a re-imagination of the High Qing glories and the hope to bring the hero back was clearly expressed in their writings.

Zhou Yingfang's grandfather, Zhou Shu 周澍, served as the governor of the Yun'nan area. Her father, Zhou Xigao 周錫誥, was a tribute student by purchase (*fu*

[79] Details also see my chapter II, 51-59

[80] The most famous literati among them were Yu Qian 於謙 (1398-1457), Wen Zhengming 文征明 (1470-1559), Xu Wei 徐渭 (1521-1593), Zhang Dai 張岱 (1597- ca. 1684) as well as Emperor Qianlong (r. 1736-1795). For a more detailed list on inscriptions in the mausoleum of Yue Fei, see *Yue Fei mumiao yin lian* 岳飛墓廟楹聯 (Hangzhou Shi: Hangzhou shi Yue Fei mu (miao) wen wu bao guan suo, 1981).

[81] Cypress is also called *kuai shu* 檜樹 in Chinese, which contains the same character as Qin Hui 秦檜.

gongsheng 附貢生). [82] He received a lower rank official posting but died at a young age.[83] Based on the poetry exchange between her mother Zheng Zhenhua and her mother-in-law Wang Yaofen, we know that Zhou Yingfang had a brother who also excelled in academics and won the *xiucai* 秀才 degree in 1851. More significantly, Zhou's mother Zheng Zhenhua 鄭貞華, courtesy name Danrao 澹若 or Jiaoqing 蕉卿, was the daughter of Vice Censor-in-Chief (*zhongcheng* 中丞) Zheng Zuchen 鄭祖琛 (1784-1851), a devoted Buddhist. In his official post in Guangxi Province, he released Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全 instead of executing him when Hong was first arrested for organizing the Taipings in Guangxi Province. Soon Hong organized more troops and led the Taiping rebellion which almost ended the Qing reign. Historical records condemned Zheng for having ignored his duty; he was removed from his official post in the end of 1850 and died the next year. Nonetheless, the Zhengs were a typical scholarly and righteous family. Just before his disastrous decision to release Hong, Zheng was appointed as the Grand Mentor of the Manchu heir apparent (*taizi shaofu* 太子少傅). Influenced by the family's intellectual tradition, Zhou's mother enjoyed a reputation for being extremely talented. She authored a poetry collection *Lü yin lou ji* 綠飲樓集 (Poetry from the drinking green mansion).[84] Under the pseudonym of Shaoxi cuan xia sheng 苕溪爨下生 (a *qin* scholar from Shaoxi), she published her *tanci* narrative *Meng ying yuan* 夢影緣 , a story about a predestined relationship

[82] See the Yan Family Pedigree. Yan Chen *Qingxi Yan shi jia pu* 青溪嚴氏家譜: [10 juan]. China: s.n., 1892.

[83] This statement is based on the fact that Zhen Danruo was entitled as *ru ren* 儒人, a title for wives of Qing officials ranked level 7 to 9. See Shi Shuyi 施淑仪 (b. 1877), *Qingdai guige shiren zheng lüe* 清代闺阁诗人徵略 in Wang Yingzhi 王英志, ed., *Qingdai guixiu shihua congkan* 清代閨秀詩話叢刊 (Nanjing Shi: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2010), 2137.

[84] See *Ran zhi yu yun*, vol. 3. According to Hu Wenkai's record, *Lüyin lou ji* was published around 1833.

between two heavenly spirits, Premium Goddess (*kuifang xianzi* 魁芳仙子) and Dream-Reclusive Deity(*mengyin zhenren* 夢隱真人), as well as their reunion in the mundane world. The circulation of *Meng ying yuan* brought her great literary fame in the Qing. [85] In contrast to criticism by mainstream May Fourth scholars of *Meng ying yuan*'s extreme refinement and its immortal theme,[86] Ailing Chang showed a particular interest in this *tanci* work.[87] Zheng Danruo herself represented a fascinating example of the High Qing women's literary tradition. Her scholar-gentry family background provided her with unusual learning opportunities. According to Tan Zhengbi, Zheng was actually more than a typically talented, rather erudite woman. She was knowledgeable in history, Buddhism, Daoism, medicine, divination as well as planchette writing (*fuji* 扶乩). In addition to literary writing, she was also an extremely delicate and refined woman. Judging from her pseudonym, she was gifted in musical performance.[88] She might also have learned elegant painting skills from her father, who once left her one of his paintings, *Xi yuan xie zhao tu* 西園寫照圖 (Portrait of the west garden). In *Meng ying yuan*, Zheng Danruo portrays an ideal life of elite women during the High Qing:

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[85] One of Zhou Yingfang's relatives, under the pseudonym of *Zuoyue chuisheng lou zhuren* 坐月吹笙樓主人, once commented that "Ms.Zheng Danruo wrote *Meng ying yuan* in a splendorous and ingenious language. She reformed the genre of *tanci* (昔鄭澹若夫人撰夢影緣, 華縟相尚、造語獨工, 彈詞體為之一變)." See the preface of *Yu xuan cao tan ci* 娛萱草彈詞 (Shanghai: Shang wu, 1931).

[86] For example, Zheng Zhenduo dislikes *Meng ying yuan*. He thinks the writing is a parade of the writer's talents and quotes Tan Zhengbi's comment that the *tanci* is "aloof as the writer does not live in the mundane world (酸冷似不食人間煙火)". See Zheng, *Zhonguo su wenxue shi*, 380. For more detailed study on *Meng ying yuan*, see Li Guo and Siao-chen Hu.

[87] Ailing Zhang mailed *Meng ying yuan* to Professor Chen Shixiang 陳世驤 in the hope of raising his interest in this book. See Ailing Zhang's letter to Zhuang Xinzheng 莊信正, Apr 11, 1967. In Chuang, *Zhang Ailing laixin jianzhu* 張愛玲來信箋注 (Taibei Xian Zhonghe Shi: INK yinke wenxue zazhi chuban youxian gongsi, 2008).

[88] The literary meaning of *Cuan xia yu* 爨下余 (remains from the stove) refers to the famous tail-burnt seven-string zither (*jiaowei qin* 焦尾琴).

> [Zhuang Mengyu] played the flute and performed the gesture of Royal Madam Xiang;[89] she plucked the *qin* melody and learned the look of Boya.[90] She picked lotus and played drums in a boat; she climbed a rockery to chase the moon. When she composed a new poem, she often invited her mother- and sisters-in-law to reply; when she played chess, she would ask them for advice. When her nephew asked her help with characters, she became a strict teacher nurturing the child. She taught history and made careful explanations; luckily her children were intelligent in nature…
> [弄笛巧半裝瀟湘子怨，操琴學為伯牙容。采蓮戲鼓中流棹，捉月還登疊石峰。得句常邀娘嫂和，敲棋更請婦姑同。阿咸以字里相問，又裝作嚴師幼童。傳授春秋施講解，慶郎資性亦玲瓏……][91]

Born into such an elegant upper class family in Hangzhou, Zhou Yingfang seems to have been deeply influenced by her mother. The relation between the mother and the daughter is a perfect testimony of female education in elite family and literary activities among women in the late imperial Jiang'nan region.[92] Bearing the imprint of *jiaxue* 家學 (family learning) tradition, Zhou also engaged in literary pursuits from an early age and was proficient in history and poetry.

The Yan family into which Zhou Yingfang married in Tongxiang, a town about fifty miles southeast of Hangzhou, was a powerful literati-official family, once called "the Yan millions" 嚴百萬. When Zhou Yingfang entered the family, the Yans

[89] In early Chinese legend, when King Shun 舜 died suddenly during his trip to the South, his two concubines E'huang 娥皇 and Nüying 女英 went on the journey to look for him in great anxiety and sorrow. When they found his tomb in the Xiang place (today's Hunan Province), they died of lament. Later the metaphor of Royal Madam Xiang comes to refer to (desperate) love.

[90] Boya 伯牙, with the surname of Yu 俞, was an excellent *qin* musician during the Spring and Autumn Period or the Warring States period. He is associated with the *qin* pieces *Gao shan* 高山 (high mountains) and *Liu shui* 流水 (flowing water). Boya is also a symbol of ideal friendship in China. He and his friend Zhong Ziqi 鐘子期 represent the term *zhiyin* 知音, a close, mutual understanding and sympathetic friendship.

[91] See chapter 15, *Meng ying yuan*. (Taibei: Wenhai chubanshe youxian gongsi), 19.

[92] Important to this study is also the way in which the mother-daughter relation between Zheng Danruo and Zhou Yingfang highlights the blurring boundary between traditional *guixiu* talented women and "new women" in the modern period. Zheng's life experience suggests that mothers as "inner chamber teachers" who educated their daughters in gentry households during late imperial China were foreshadowing modern independent female teachers and educators.

were not as wealthy as they had been, but still very influential in the area.[93] Zhou's father-in-law, Yan Tingyu 嚴廷鈺, had been a prefectural magistrate (知府) in Shunning 順寧, Yun'nan province. Her mother-in-law, Wang Yaofen 王瑤芬 (1800-1883), was the daughter of a high official, Wang Fengsheng 王鳳生 (1776-1834). Wang Yaofen was renowned for her skills in poetry, calligraphy, and painting and authored a poetry collection *Xie yun lou shichao* 寫韻樓詩鈔 (Poems from the elegant writing tower).[94] Zhou's three sisters-in-law, Yan Shaohua 嚴少華 (b. 1834), Yan Yonghua 嚴永華 (1836-1891), and Yan Chenghua 嚴澂華 (1840-1869), were all considered extraordinarily talented women and had each authored a poetry collection. After he became a student of the Imperial College (*tai xuesheng* 太學生), Zhou's husband, Yan Jin 嚴瑾 (1827-1865), had no further luck in the civil examinations, but his family helped him purchase a position as an Assistant Magistrate (*xian cheng* 縣丞) in Guizhou, one of China's most ethnically diverse areas, both then and now. Yan Jin soon manifested his real talent in military leadership and received prompt promotions. Starting in 1856, Yan Jin suppressed the Taiping rebels in Guizhou and caught quite a few local bandits within the larger area of Guizhou and Yun'nan. By 1863, he had become the prefectural magistrate in Sizhou 思州.[95] Zhou Yingfang's father-in-law Yan Tingyu died in 1852 while he was posted in Yunnan. After his death, the family

[93] See the Yan Family Genealogy. Yan Chen 嚴辰, *Qingxi Yan shi jia pu* 青溪嚴氏家譜: [10 juan]. China: s.n., 1892.

[94] According to Yan Yonghua, the collection had first been published when they resided in Guizhou and burned during the Miao rebellion. The second edition was published by Jing jiang qui shu 京江榷署 in 1871, with seven more poems.

[95] The ancient town of Sizhou 思州 is Cengong 岑鞏 country in the east part of Guizhou Province today.

moved back to Tongxiang for a few years until Yan Jin received his assignment in Guizhou, when they traveled once again with him and lived in his official residence.

Like many other gentry women in late imperial China, Zhou Yingfang and her family members formed a reading community and frequently exchanged poetry writings. Although Zhou Yingfang's poetry collection *Yan xiang ge shicao* 硯香閣詩草 (Poetry from the studio of ink fragrance) is not extant, her literary activity can be traced through the poems written by her mother- and sisters-in-law. Quite a few titles in their collections reflect the frequent poetry exchanges within the family. In Yan Yonghua's *Ren lan shi shichao* 紉蘭室詩鈔 (Poetry from the virtuous chamber), she records chanting poems in response to Zhou's writings.[96] Wang Yaofen's *Xie yun lou shi chao* records that Zhou composed poems about osmanthus flowers and an 1850 poem appreciating a flowering plum tree. Together they wrote poems to celebrate family gatherings and special occasions including the mid-autumn festival (*zhongqiu* 中秋), the Double Ninth festival (*chongyang* 重陽), the Seventh Evening of July (*qixi* 七夕), or merely casual moments such as embroidering or an inner chamber evening of drinking. [97] Based on these fragmented accounts, Zhou Yingfang got along well with her in-laws. In fact, these poetry exchanges were even extended to other members of the Yan and Zhou families. Both Wang Yaofen and Yan Yonghua also wrote poems in response to Zhou's mother, Zheng Danruo. Hu Wenkai 胡文楷 (1901-1988) examined Wang Yaofeng's collection *Xie yun lou shi chao* and found that Zheng Danruo was one of the two inscribers for this 1871 collection.[98] This group of

[96] The collection was first published in 1896, and second edition in 1919. See Hu Wenkai, *Lidai fuü zhuzuo kao* (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1957), 601.

[97] See Yan Yonghua's poetry collection *Ren lan shi shichao*. The texts are available online through the McGill-Harvard-Yenching Library Ming-Qing Women's Writings Digitization Project.

[98] Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao*, 194.

talented women, including mother/mother-in-law, sisters/sisters-in-law, extended across two families and constituted a large reading community.[99]

Before 1865 Zhou Yingfang lived a quite comfortable life similar to other gentry women in upper-class households. She gave birth to three daughters and one son. However, the Taiping rebellion marked a major transition in her family fortunes. In 1860 her mother Zheng Danruo committed suicide by swallowing poison when the Taiping rebels took over Hangzhou. By this time Zhou resided in her husband's official residence in Guizhou with her mother-in-law Wang Yaofen and two sisters-in-law. She was overwhelmed with sorrow when she learned the news.

However, the Yan family situation changed dramatically after the Shiqian (石阡) attack by the Miao rebels in the fourth month of 1865, when Zhou's husband Yan Jin died in the battle. During the riot when Yan Jin was leading the soldiers and fighting on the city wall, another group of rebels broke into the city and attacked his official residence. According to the Yan Family Genealogy, once Zhou's mother-in-law Wang Yaofen heard the rebels, she immediately made the servants jump over the walls to carry Zhou's four children to hide in a commoner's house. Then she led Zhou and the Yan daughters to the lotus pool attached to the residence in order to drown themselves, but as the water was shallow in early spring, they were rescued.

After Yan Jin's death, Zhou Yingfang and the rest of the family in Shiqian mingled with other refugees and fled the town. Yan Jin's elder brother Yan Chen 嚴辰 later managed to meet them along the way and eventually helped them settle down back in Zhejiang. The sufferings along the trip and the pain of losing a family member

[99] This textual relationship also extended to the male members and friends of the family, including the late Qing scholar Yu Yue 俞樾 (1821-1907) and the two preface authors of *Jing zhong zhuan*: Li Shu 李樞 and Xu Desheng 徐德升.

were portrayed in detail by Zhou's sister-in-law, Yan Yonghua in one of her poem series.

瘴霧蠻煙路欲迷 The road is obscured with miasma and smoke from barbarians;
荒村野店聽雞鳴 The chicken's crowing is heard in the deserted village.
只知當道橫罷虎 We know only bears and tigers hunting on the way;
又說嚴城急鼓鼙 Mere news comes that the city is guarded and ready for war.
饑鼠夜深背鐙出 Hungry rats appear in the late dark night;
怪禽落日向人啼 At sunset strange birds cry at people.
加餐還祝慈闈健 Eating, we pray our dear mother is in good health;
早晚歸程指浙西 And our return journey leads to the West of Zhejiang. [100]

Since Zhou Yingfang's poetry collection *Yan xiang ge shi chao* has not been handed down, her voice is not heard in this family tragedy. But it is easy to imagine the multiple burdens of taking care of her children, carefully serving her mother-in-law, and looking after her young sisters-in-law while enduring the unbearable pain of losing her husband and transporting his coffin. When Zhou Yingfang and the other family members finally arrived in Zhejiang province, they found their old residence in Tongxiang had been destroyed during the Taiping rebellion. They had to live with Yan relatives, the Ma (馬) family in the neighboring Haining (海寧) County. Here they spent a lot of time with their cousin Yan Dian 嚴鈿, who also enjoyed a reputation of being a talented poet.[101] In *Ren lan shi shi chao*, Yonghua left several poems recording their friendship and writing practices. However, after the Yan family moved back to Zhejiang, Zhou Yingfang's name was never again mentioned in

[100] This is the fourth poem in the series with a long title: Records during the return journey with mother after the Miao rebels left. They attacked Shiqian on the fourteenth day of the fifth month in 1865 and Shuhe died in battle. I carried mother out of the wall and the rest followed. Hearing the rebels coming, the whole family committed suicide in the lotus pond behind the residence. The rebels said: "Yan is a righteous official. We must not offend his family." Therefore we survived. (乙丑五月十四日叛苗陷石阡叔和兄巷戰死節余亟負母逾垣出餘人從之既聞賊將到全家投署後荷池中賊相謂曰嚴太守清官眷屬不可犯也遂得免賊退后奉母旋里途中紀事).

[101] See the Yan Family Genealogy. Yan Chen, *Qingxi yanshi jiapu:* [10 juan]. China: s.n., 1892. and *Tongxiang xianzhi* (Shanghai Shi: Shanghai shu dian, 1996).

Yonghua's poetry. One possible reason could be that in 1867, at the age of 31, Yan Yonghua married a prominent official Shen Bingcheng 沈秉成 (1823-1895).[102] Shen was posted as governor of the Suzhou area in 1871. Since Shen's new official residence was located in the city of Suzhou with a comfortable climate and refined culture, Yan Yonghua invited her mother to move out of Haining and live with them there.

Oddly, despite the records of the many exemplary women in the Yan family who received court awards (*jingbiao* 旌表), including his mother as a "woman of longevity 壽婦" and his sisters as "women of talents 才女," Zhou's brother-in-law Yan Chen failed to include her in the local gazetteer *Tongxiang xianzhi* 桐鄉縣志 (Tongxiang gazetteer, 1877) that he composed.[103] In the *Qingxi yanshi jiapu* 青溪嚴氏家譜 (The Yan family genealogy, 1892), Yan Chen simply recorded her as "the wife of Jin" (*jin fu* 瑾婦) when "[mother] led her and the two daughters to jump into the pool."[104] Yan Chen neglected Zhou's *gegu* 割股 filial acts in serving her sick father-in-law,[105] her chaste suicide attempt in Guizhou, and her writing project *Jing zhong zhuan*. Ironically, other women in the Yan family are acknowledged and

[102] According to the biographies Yan Chen wrote for his family.

[103] Yan Chen (1882-1893) was probably the most prominent person in the Yan family. He won the *jinshi* degree 進士 (a metropolitan graduate) in 1859 and served first in the *Hanlin* 翰林 Academy, then as a secretary in the Ministry of Justice (*xingbu zhushi* 刑部主事). He soon resigned from his post and went back to Tongxiang, where he was active in charitable activities. During the 1864 famine across Jiang'nan, Yan Chen collected contributions and purchased rice from Shanghai to help the local poor. He also helped organized several educational institutes. Starting in 1877, Yan Chen spent ten years compiling a single-authored Tongxiang gazetteer. In 1892, he completed a second major work: *Qingxi yanshi jia pu* 青溪嚴氏家譜 (The Yan family genealogy).

[104] Yan Chen, *Qingxi yanshi jiapu*, 790.

[105] According to Xu Desheng's preface, when her father-in-law was sick in bed, Zhou Yingfang and Yan Chenghua practiced the *gegu* ritual (cutting a piece of flesh from the body and mixing it with medicine) in the hope of curing him. The *gegu* flesh-cutting is regarded as an extreme filial act by popular Confucian norms.

glorified in the gazetteer: Wang Yaofen is categorized as long-lived virtuous mother; Yonghua and Chenghua as filial daughters and talented writers. But Zhou's chaste and filial virtues, as well as her literary talents, were excluded from the record, and she was reduced to the single identity as Yan Jin's wife, while other women in the family got extensive biographies.

Silence and neglect can be equally as powerful and informative. Today we have no clear evidence why Yan Chen refused to include Zhou Yingfang in his local gazetteer, denying her talents and wifely loyalty and attempting to make her invisible. As the single author of the gazetteer, a family authority and influential local elite, Yan Chen arbitrates and defines how exemplary women and their families should behave. Based on his texts, I assume that he either considered Zhou not filial enough because she did not commit *gegu* a second time with Chenghua[106]-- though in another occasion in the genealogy, he boasted that "Women in our family were all capable of extraordinary filial piety (吾家女士亦能奇孝)"[107]-- or he thought that as a married woman, Zhou had failed in her duty to honor the Yan family by not following her husband in death. In various writings Yan Chen repeatedly re-created the moment in Guizhou: "[mother] led the wife of Jin and two daughters to jump into the lotus pool" 自率瑾婦及兩女投荷花池. His patriarchy-centered narration erases Zhou's agency in face of crisis, while it highlights his mother and sisters in the public spotlight. Since Zhou's mother Zheng Danruo committed suicide to avoid possible humiliation when the Taiping rebels took Hangzhou in 1860, Zhou's survival from Shiqian leaves her in

[106] In 1870, Wang Yaofen fell ill and Chenghua practiced *gegu* ritual again. Wang miraculously recovered but Chenghua died of an infection. Yan Chen was grieved by the loss of his sister. While writing a biography for Chenghua, he hinted at a problematic relationship between Zhou Yingfang and the Yan family after she lost her husband. Yan Chen also seems superstitiously resentful that Zhou did not participate in *gegu* this time, resulting in Chenghua's death. See "Youmei Zhixiang Xiaozhuan 幼妹穉薌小傳" (Biography of my youngest sister Zhixiang) in *Qingxi yanshi jiapu*.

[107] Yan Chen, *Qingxi yanshi jiapu*, 790.

a vulnerable situation of being judged in the Yan family discourse. Yan Chen could have hoped that she would have acted the same in order to prove her loyalty to her husband and, additionally, to the Yan family. Obsessed with suicide out of loyalty, Yan Chen places a high value on his sisters' attempted suicides in order to defend their physical chastity and he seems to suggest that Zhou had the moral obligation to sacrifice her life for Yan Jin as a political martyr, since Han Chinese governing elites would expect that act according to Confucian rituals.

The absence of Zhou Yingfang testifies to the political struggles in the elite households, as Lu Wenjing has investigated. Lu reminds us that when a righteous man suffered due to political reasons, all his female relatives were expected to display courage and strength. His wife, in particular, should share his fate.[108] As we will see in chapter III of this dissertation, in *Jing zhong zhuan*, Zhou Yingfang actually responded to the patriarchal expectation of female martyrdom and expressed an alternative definition of female virtue, as well as the dilemma between the patriarchal demand of filial piety and the restraints in her own marital family. Based on her definition of female virtue, martyrdom is not the only value that defines a woman's life. Her *tanci* suggests that chaste widowhood is more meaningful than martyrdom and can grant women moral superiority.[109]

[108] Lu Wenjing, *True to Her Word: the Faithful Maiden Cult in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2008), 45.

[109] I further discuss Zhou's attitude towards female martyrdom in my chapter III, 130-34. On the other hand, Tian Rukang argues that female suicide is shown to be related to male anxiety through a psychological mechanism of vicarious morality. By praising the suffering and tribulations of females who faithfully submitted to the prevailing code of values, males considered themselves as sharing in their fulfillment of moral duty, and in fact regarded this transfer of virtue to them as equally moral. See his *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity* (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1988), xiii.

In Her Own Image: The Construction of Self-Representation in *Jing zhong zhuan*

Zhou Yingfang views her personal identity in quite a different manner from how the Yan discourse defines her, and her own life practice rejects his enthusiasm to promote the cult of martyred women. In fact, after 1871, Zhou lived in Haining alone with her children. We do not know whether she still received support from the Yan family, but she certainly had no one to rely on from her natal family. Li Shu 李樞, who wrote one of the prefaces for *Jing zhong zhuan*, described Zhou's reclusive life in Haining as "living a frugal but virtuous life, and devoted to her duties of serving her mother-in-law and raising her children" 含冰茹蘗之中, 惟曲盡其事長撫雛之責. However, there is no sign that Zhou was financially disadvantaged living as a widow in Haining.

As a mother, Zhou could have considered herself successful. Her son Yan Kaidi 嚴開第 first became a governor in Guangdong Province. All three of her daughters married officials.[110] The eldest daughter Yan Xingzheng 嚴杏徵, courtesy name Lanchu 蘭初, authored *Lü xiao lou shichao* 呂蕭樓詩鈔 (Poetry collection from the bamboo flute tower). According to Hu Wenkai, another daughter Yan Shouci 嚴壽慈 studied semantics and became a famous painter in the Republican period. She later resided in Shanghai with her husband and took a teaching position there.[111]

As Widmer observes, it was not unusual for talented women to resume their writing once their childbearing years were over.[112] In her spare time in Haining, Zhou

[110] See Yu Yue 俞樾 (1821-1907), *Chun zai tang yinglian lucun* 春在堂楹聯錄存 (Couplet Records from the Spring Hall) (Taibei Xian Yonghe Zhen: Wen hai chubanshe), 1969.

[111] Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao*, 601-02.

[112] Ellen Widmer, *The Beauty and the Book*, 4.

was still active in literary pursuits with her relatives. Her studio name Yanxiang ge 硯香閣 (Studio of ink fragrance) reveals her consciousness of literary production. Zhou's chaste life as a widow did not preclude her engaging in traditionally masculine themes in her writing, such as heroes and history. In addition to writing poems, Zhou read extensively and was clearly drawn to the vernacular *xiaoshuo* fiction *Shuoyue quanzhuan* 說岳全傳 (The complete biography of Yue Fei, 1744), which provided the basic for her *tanci*.[113] During this period she authored her poetry collection *Yan xiang ge shi cao*, and ultimately the substantial 72-*juan tanci* fiction *Jing zhong zhuan*. The preface author Li Shu portrayed the long writing process: "[She] wrote the fiction off and on for twenty-eight years in her cottage, as a recreation in difficult times" 二十八年中或作或輟, 風雨蓬廬, 消遣窮愁幾許. Zhou completed *Jing zhong zhuan* in 1895, thirty years after her husband's death. She composed a poem reflecting back on her marriage and her life as a widow and mother:

教子成名慰九泉 The success of our children through my education can comfort the dead.
佳兒端不負君賢 Our good children indeed will not betray your reputation.
怪他天上輕離別 I can only bemoan that in heaven he treated parting so lightly.
棄我于今三十年 And has left me alone now for thirty years.[114]

In contrast to her total absence from the Yan family discourse, the lyrics could be read as a powerful statement of the woman author's self-assessment. In contrast to Yan Chen's narrative, Zhou Yingfang first expresses a faithful affection towards her husband who died thirty years before. Additionally, she takes great pride in carrying on her family duties: mourning her husband and educating their children to be

[113] *Shuoyue quanzhuan* was written by a Hangzhou literati Qian Cai 錢彩 (fl. 1729), and then revised and prefaced by Jin Feng 金豐 in the Qianlong reign (1736-95). More details see my chapter II *From "tianxia" To "tianshang"*, 51-59. It is worthy noticing that *Shuoyue* was once banned in the Qianlong reign period (1736-1796), but by 1868 Zhou had read the fiction and started her rewriting.

[114] This poem is recorded by her family friend Yu Yue in *Chunzai tang yinglian lucun*.

successful. Her wifely fidelity and her husband's political loyalty together represent the two sides of this honorable elite family. By displaying her literary talents, her wifely and motherly virtues, and portraying herself in this poem embracing both public and domestic virtues, Zhou legitimizes her identity as a woman writer with a strong sense of honor and fulfillment, after successfully completing her household obligations.

Her peaceful life of raising her children and continuing to engage in literary production after early hardship flies in the face of Yan Chen's definition of female virtue. In the *tanci*, Zhou Yingfang demonstrates a strong sense of moral authority and cultural identity as a woman writer of the governing class. First, she is highly conscious of her identity as a writer. In contrast to other women *tanci* writers who inserted (semi-)autobiographical information in the texts to record and insist on their authorship, [115] both Zhou Yingfang's *Jing zhong zhuan* and her mother Zheng Danruo's *tanci* narrative *Meng ying yuan* 夢影緣 are narrated almost entirely by an independent third-person voice of the rhetorical "narrator." Still, occasionally Zhou Yingfang shares a few writing moments via self-referential vocabulary. Beginning from chapter 57 in *Jing zhong zhuan*, after Yue Fei is murdered, the woman author no longer remains distant from her narration, but attempts to communicate with her imagined readers and fully expresses her emotions. Instead of maintaining a complete third-party narrative perspective, she now occasionally brings herself into the verses.

[115] Qiu Xinru, for example, reveals most of the information about herself to readers in her *tanci* fiction *Bi sheng hua*. At the beginning and ending of each chapter, Qiu persistently inserts lines about her family and personal emotions and presents the readers with her writing process. Similarly, *Yu chuan yuan* (preface dated 1842), *Zai sheng yuan* and *Zai zao tian* all interweave their authors' personal and private details within the chapters. Hsiao-chen Hu discusses this convention in women-authored *tanci*, and argues that the (semi-)autobiographical fragments in women-authored *tanci* demonstrate their efforts to preserve authorship when writing was still considered a transgressive action for women in late imperial China. See her *Cainü cheye weimian*: *jindai nüxing xushi wenxue de xingqi*. However, further exploration remains in order to discover to what extent women's autobiography is authentic and/or performative.

Sometimes she records the writing process "[I] waited for three months before writing one word, and finally [I] managed to finish thirty-one chapters" 蟾圓三度詞難就, 卅一書章強績成 (64. 600). But rather than directly using the first person "I" (*wo* 我), Zhou also employs classical allusions to enrich the reader's imagination about her identity as a gentry class writer.

On the other hand, women *tanci* writers also acknowledged the rhythmic, poetic nature of *tanci*. They referred to themselves as lyricist (*ciren* 詞人), and their writings as "new lyrics" (*xinci* 新詞). For example, in one of her semi-biographical sections, Chen Duansheng recalled moments when she "felt like composing new lyrics" 每尋閑緒寫新詞 .[116] Qiu Xinru addressed herself as a *ciren* in her *tanci* work *Bi sheng hua*. Similarly, in *Jing zhong zhuan*, Zhou Yingfang depicts herself as a *ciren* 詞人 lyricist, which demonstrates her clear understanding that *tanci* is a special genre associated with lyrics and poetry.

> 詞人至此心俱碎 The lyricist's heart is broken at this moment.
> 拈毫愁寫不平鳴 The brush cannot describe her outcry against the injustice.
> 事到難言須諒我 You must forgive me when the story develops to the point of unmentionable pain.
> 慢從下回續前文 In the next chapter I will slowly continue the previous story. (57. 536)

In *Jing zhong zhuan*, in addition to using the term *ciren* to refer to the author herself, the *ciren* narrator almost becomes a special character and speaks in a voiceover. Zhou Yingfang's self reference here does not separate the author from the narrative. On the contrary, the *ciren* actively participates in the narrative, giving comments on the fictional episodes as well as the historical events. But instead of imposing value judgments or moral commentaries on characters, as we often seen in male-authored vernacular fiction, the *ciren* narrator in *Jing zhong zhuan* does not

[116] Chen Duansheng, *Zai sheng yuan*, chapter 1.

lecture the audience on how to "correctly" understand the story. She communicates with her audience, faithfully records the writing process, and fully expresses her emotions.

Before Zhou Yingfang, many women *tanci* writers simply placed themselves in a domestic position and were apologetic about their engagement with writing. For example, the author of *Yu chuan yuan* claims her motivation to be "writing the *tanci* for my own entertainment; I am not expecting any sympathy from the lyrics" 修就彈詞惟自玩, 曲中亦不望誰憐. Chen Duansheng justifies her writing *Zai sheng yuan* as "I know it is not beneficial; but I only aim for entertaining my parents" 原知此事終無益, 也不過、暫博慈親笑口開. Or as Qiu Xinru portrays her dilemma between writing and daily life: "How shall I have additional mood to pick up the pen; as a result, all I have is a mixed mind with poetry and daily necessities" 那有余情拈筆墨, 只落得、油鹽醬醋雜詩腸.

In contrast, Zhou Yingfang is much more aggressive in terms of being aware of her identity as an author. She never has any contrite expressions. Sometimes she refers to herself using the term *guancheng* 管城 (City of Guan)[117] or *songshi* 松使 (messenger from the pine), both referring to the brush pen and further signifying her identity in the group of literati (*wenren* 文人).

管城松使幾停留 My brush pen stopped several times,
寫到辛酸萬斛愁 When I came to the sorrows and distress.
弔古傷今同涕淚 I shed tears for mourning the past, and lamenting the present.
烏啼月落不勝秋 Autumn is here, with cawing ravens and the sinking moon.[118] (60. 562)

[117] Brush pen is also called *guancheng* 管城 or *guan cheng zi* 管城子 in classical Chinese. The Tang poet Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824) first used this term referring to the brush pen in his essay *Mao ying zhuan* 毛穎傳 (Biography of Mao Ying).

[118] References listed in the text provide chapter (first number) and page number (second number).

The self-referential vocabulary here serves as a medium between reader and writer. Zhou attempts to negotiate and construct her own identity in a tradition of classic lyricism, employing regular rhythms in her verses. Meanwhile, she establishes a context of historiography with a sense of writing authority by placing herself within a grand narrative of past and present. In addition, using allusions of "City of Guan" or "messenger of the pine" does not merely establish lines of affiliation with ancient literati elite. These allusions also anticipate an audience of good education and communication. She creates a sense of verbal authority by repeating the allusions and entering the literary traditions, where she is competing with male writers.

Zhou describes her moment of muse as "The brush stops several times, in order to collect jade-like language from the heaven of affection" 管城松使幾回停，要集情天玉字文 (66. 621). Her pursuit of refined language challenges writing and narrative writing as a male privilege. The effort she put into writing could be regarded as a female version of what Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716-1797) describes, "The heart will not feel peaceful until the poem has been revised a thousand times" 一詩千改始心安. She justifies her indulgence in emotions through the following lines:

管城空抱千愁恨 The brush pen is burdened with tons of sorrows;
缺願難填意網然 And frustrated that the wish could never be realized.
下卷詞文猶繾綣 Lyrics in the next volume are still deeply emotional.
凌霄鶴駕恨難攀 I regret that I cannot follow the crane cart into the clouds. (59. 533)

莫怪管城書草草 Do not blame the brush for writing carelessly.
事逢掃興懶成吟 When the story becomes disappointing, [I am] reluctant to write.
孤鶴梅清甘寂寞 The lonely crane and the chilly plum are willing to live in obscurity.
天南地北剩哀情 Sadness is overflowing the world. (65, 608)

The comfort and confidence that Zhou Yingfang expresses as a woman writer are not completely new in the late nineteenth century. Since the eighteenth century, talented women had already begun authoring and even publishing their literary works.[119] However, fictional writing, due to its low status, was less accepted among gentry writers. As its name shows, the genre of *xiaoshuo*, or small talk, was considered inferior to history and poetry. Even in male-authored vernacular fiction, narrators refer to themselves as "*xiaozi* 小子 (literally, small boy)" or "*zaixia* 在下 (literally, the humble me)."[120] Also *xiaoshuo* fiction writers were called *baiguan* 稗官 (official of lower-ranking), an expression derived from collectors of local anecdotes employed by the imperial court to get access to the public. Fiction had long been considered threatening to social orders; *tanci* fiction was extremely dangerous to traditional female virtues. But Zhou Yingfang takes great pride in her fictional *tanci* writing. As a writer of *tanci* fiction, Zhou not only participates in literary genres that previously belonged to men, but also presents her ability to "author-ize" herself in the writing.

Zhou Yingfang completed *Jing zhong zhuan* in 1895 and died that same year at the age of sixty-six. The manuscript was first circulated among a close circle of family and friends.[121] When her son Yan Kaidi went to his official post in Guangdong Province, he carefully carried the manuscript with him. He asked a family friend, Xu Deshe 徐德升, to proofread the copy and write an endorsement in 1900. Twelve years later, Li Shu 李樞 wrote a second endorsement. When *Jing zhong zhuan* was first

[119] During Ming and Qing many women-authored works were published with the help of their male relatives. For discussions see, for example, Judith T. Zeitlin, "Shared Dreams: The Story of The Three Wives' Commentary on The Peony Pavilion," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (Jun., 1994), 127-79.

[120] Examples could be found in Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574-1646) *Sanyan* 三言 stories.

[121] See Li Shu's preface.

published by Shanghai Commercial Press 商務印書館 in 1932, rather than using professional editors, the copy was once again proofread by Zhou's son Yan and his wives, as well as Zhou's three daughters, a sign that the children took pride in their mother's literary legacy. The two endorsements were also included in the print version as dual prefaces.

Zhou's literary pursuits within the dynamics of her natal family and her conjugal family present another picture of the female reading community in the Jiang'nan region. The summary of her biography highlights the complex identities of elite women at this transitional moment: they maintained their traditional roles as expected, while their literary accomplishments intellectually engaged in the rapid social transformations of late Qing China. Meanwhile, although the male-authored narratives about gentry women in late imperial China reveal their efforts to continue to regulate women within the traditional Confucian boundary, Zhou's own writing proves that educated women like her were not simply acted upon by patriarchal demands. As we will see, Zhou defines the meaning of virtue according to her life practice.

The Chapters

In this project I will frequently compare the woman-authored *tanci* narrative *Jing zhong zhuan* and the earlier male-authored texts about Yue Fei, especially the vernacular fiction *Shuoyue quanzhuan*. Close readings of both texts tease out Zhou's insertion of a female voice into the narration of grand history, a field of rhetoric commonly thought of as closed to women during the late-imperial period. This introductory chapter introduces the genre of women-authored *tanci* fiction and explores the biography of the author of *Jing zhong zhuan*, the late nineteenth-century

elite woman Zhou Yingfang. Her self-identification as both a widow mother and woman writer demonstrates a flexible model of the relationship between late imperial orthodox values and the diverse ways in which how women accepted the norms in practical life.

Chapter II goes back to the textual sources of the *tanci* narrative *Jing zhong zhuan* and its structural renovation. Stories about the actual historical figure Yue Fei had been circulated in various forms before Zhou Yingfang's *tanci* rendition. By examining and comparing *Jing zhong zhuan* and other earlier versions of the Yue Fei stories, particularly the early Qing vernacular fiction *Shuoyue quanzhuan*, I discuss how Zhou inserts a great deal of her own fictional creations while retaining the basic historical narratives. For example, and most obviously, *Jing zhong zhuan* deletes the karmic explanation of the Jurchen's invasion of the Song and the false charges made against Yue Fei and replaces the narrative frame with the belief in immortal afterlife held by late imperial women. By doing so, Zhou attempts to deliver a moral lesson to the audience. Meanwhile, *Jing zhong zhuan* directly inherits some of the unrefined language from the vernacular fiction *shuoyue* when depicting the malicious minister Qin Hui and his wife. The clear division between poetic elegance and occasional vulgar vocabulary reinforces the contrast between virtue and decadence. The woman author establishes her authoritative position by making a distinction between legacy and creation. The chapter also attempts to examine *Jing zhong zhuan* in the broad context of the *xushu* sequels.

Chapter III and Chapter IV go into details about characterization in the new story of Yue Fei. *Jing zhong zhuan* constantly parallels familiar battle stories with invented family scenes of the Yue household and actually gives priority to domestic themes over the hero's stereotypic military actions. Employing fictional lyrics and

verses, the *tanci* redefines virtues of both men and women: for example, filial piety replaces loyalty as the core value for the empire; while beauty, talent, and management abilities override chastity as new criteria for women. Chapter III explores Zhou Yingfang's enthusiasm regarding domestic details and her invented utopia-like women's space carved into the *tanci* text. Zhou perceives the position of women in history not merely as passive and marginalized characters; women in *Jing zhong zhuan* stand out both in the domestic sphere and in public. In addition to their loyalty and chastity, their beauty and talents, their management skills, and their political heroism together shape the history and culture of their time. Although she does not openly challenge orthodox gender relations, her writing suggests greater possibilities for women in defining their own roles in everyday life practice.

Derived from the conventional image of a general who embraces incredible masculinity and gains great military achievements, the character of Yue Fei in *Jing zhong zhuan* demonstrates more than a mere symbol of devotion and loyalty. The hero now enjoys a new image of a perfect model of scholar, official, and hero of family happiness. Chapter IV investigates not only Yue Fei's scholarly charm, but also his domestic roles as a son, husband, and father. The masculine general becomes *qing*-oriented; the *tanci* elaborates his feelings and emotions. Beyond imperial loyalty in the public sphere, filial piety is the highest value among family members in their domestic life and foregrounds political loyalty. In addition, *Jing zhong zhuan* rewrites some episodes that are potentially offensive to female audiences. Other masculine heroes in the original legend of Yue Fei are rewritten to be tender in domestic settings, a characteristic that parallels their prowess on the battlefield.

Chapter V shifts from *Jing zhong zhuan*'s textual details to the larger context of its varied reading responses. The *tanci* was completed in 1895 and first circulated

among families and friends. With its patriotic topic of Yue Fei, late Qing and early Republican intellectuals and May Fourth scholars tended to read the *tanci* as a political allegory conveying nationalist significance. In these nationalist readings, the invading Jurchens were the ancestors of the Qing Manchu rulers, and the image of the military general Yue Fei as a Chinese resistor was used in the 1930s and 40s to evoke intense nationalist sentiment. In chapter V I study four scholarly commentaries on the *tanci* narrative *Jing zhong zhuan*. All four scholars placed the woman author Zhou Yingfang within the group of nationalist writers and used her work as evidence that literature was a vehicle for socio-historical reflection. None of them mentioned the gendered historical narration, domestic details, or the utopia of women's space. Instead, they rejected her alternative aesthetic vision. I argue that Republican scholars deployed the image of the heroic Yue Fei from the *tanci* to cultivate national spirit among every reader in an age of a rising patriotism. In teaching the audience how to read the narrative, the commentators secured their leadership role in the public arena. Only a woman scholar, Tao Qiuying 陶秋英 (1909-1986), deliberately neglected *Jing zhong zhuan* in her monograph, which might likely be read as a bargaining chip between the dominant discourse of China's nationalism and intellectual independence.

The concluding chapter IV further discusses the dynamics between the woman writer Zhou Yingfang and her rewriting of the historical story. *Jing zhong zhuan* provides an alternative version of historiography from a woman's perspective, and anticipates more engaging women writers in the twentieth-century China.

CHAPTER II

FROM *TIANXIA* TO *TIANSHANG*: THE STRUCTURAL REVISIONS OF *JING ZHONG ZHUAN*

This chapter investigates how the *tanci* narrative *Jing zhong zhuan* differs from other Yue Fei accounts, especially the vernacular fiction *Shuoyue*. I start with a study on the textual sources of *Jing zhong zhuan* and then discuss its structural innovations. Considering the internalization of, as well as the resistance to, orthodox language in women's texts, I look into the negotiation of writing strategies in *Jing zhong zhuan*'s narrative text. I will frequently use the vernacular *Shuoyue* as a reference to critique the *tanci* rewriting, in order to present how Zhou Yingfang tells a story from a woman's perspective and expresses the women character's "self."

Since *Jing zhong zhuan* is a celebrated legend rewritten primarily in verse form, the language is mostly refined, or at least regulated for the elite taste. In addition, the woman author Zhou Yingfang invents detailed episodes about the general and creates a textual space for women in the Yue household. She removes the karmic narrative frame in *Shuoyue* and replaces the theme with a request for immortality. The alternative language usage, among poetic lyrics, verses with theatrical features and unrefined prose, shows her attempt to rewrite the Yue Fei story into the discourse of elite women and to set up those women as moral models. This new narrative frame sheds light on the spiritual and emotional world of elite women in late imperial China. The artistic exploration in *Jing zhong zhuan* also suggests her complete awareness of the various sources of the Yue Fei story.

It also should be noted that unlike other women-authored *tanci*, Zhou Yingfang does not insert self-referential discourse in *Jing zhong zhuan*. Shall we

interpret this as an imitation of male narrative tradition, or an effort to revise women-authored *tanci* fiction? Finally, I discuss the dialogic relations between *Jing zhong zhuan* and other texts and the possibility of interpreting the *tanci* as a sequel.

General Yue Fei: Circulation as the Symbol of Dedication and Loyalty

Yue Fei as well as many other military officers and ministers portrayed in both *Shuoyue* and *Jing zhong zhuan* were historical figures from China's Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279). While the Song was a highly civilized empire ruled by Han Chinese, their neighbor the Jurchen 女真, a subject tribe within the Liao 遼 Empire from the north, rebelled against the Liao and established their own state, the Jin 金 Dynasty (1115–1234). Observing the weak military of the Song, the Jurchens invaded the Song territory from the north in 1125 and again in 1127. In the second battle, Jurchen soldiers not only occupied the Song capital at Kaifeng 開封, but also captured the retired Emperor Huizong 徽宗, his successor Emperor Qinzong 欽宗 and most of the imperial court. Since the second invasion was during the short Jingkang 靖康 reign period, the incident is known as the Humiliation of Jingkang 靖康之恥. After the Song empire lost control of northern China, the remainder of the imperial court withdrew south of the Yangtze River and re-established itself under the self-proclaimed Emperor Gaozong 高宗 (1127-1162) in the new capital of Lin'an 臨安 (now Hangzhou), where the Southern Song dynasty continued for another 150 years.

Yue Fei, style name Pengju 鵬舉 (literally eagle-flying), was born in Tangyin, He'nan (河南湯陰), in 1103. Rather than the mythologies surrounding his birth,

several sources suggest he was born into a tenant farmer's family.[122] He joined the Song army in 1122 and gradually gained a reputation for organizing a loyalist force and repeatedly defeating the Jurchen invaders on the empire's northern borders. His military accomplishments secured the survival of the Southern Song Dynasty. Despite his humble background, Yue Fei and three other Southern Song military generals, Zhang Jun 張浚 (1097-1164), Han Shizhong 韓世忠 (1089-1151) and Liu Guangshi 劉光世 (1089-1142), are called "The Four Generals of the Song Restoration" (*zhongxing sijiang* 中興四將).[123]

Immediately after the end of the Song, some scholars explicitly point out, Emperor Gaozong played a decisive role in the injustice done to Yue Fei. Although the general was committed to recapturing the lost northern territory for the empire, the emperor feared that Yue's military success might cause the Jurchens to release Emperor Qinzong from Manchuria, threatening his claim to the throne.[124] The emperor and his closest chancellors, including Qin Hui, were secretly making peace with the Jurchens. In 1141 Emperor Gaozong sent twelve edicts in the form of gold plaques to Yue Fei, recalling him back from the frontier to Lin'an. Qin Hui imprisoned the general and eventually arranged for Yue Fei to be executed along with

[122] See the biography of Yue Fei in *History of Song* vol. 365, section 124 (宋史岳飛傳); and T.L.Yang *General Yue Fei* (1995). Complete citation listed in bibliography.

[123] The notion of *zhongxing sijiang* originates from the Song artist Liu Songnian 劉松年 (1174-1224)'s painting with the same title.

[124] See Emperor Gaozong's biography in The History of the Song (宋史高宗本紀), composed by Yuan scholars. In his essay *Song lun* 宋論 (On the Song), the seventeenth-century scholar Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619-1692) suggests that Emperor Gaozong was incapable (非大有為之君) and felt deeply threatened by Yue Fei's reputation (主忌益深). Modern historians have stopped idolizing Yue Fei as a symbol of dedication and loyalty, but discuss his weakness in character. An interesting conversation on Yue Fei's personality can be found in Deng Guangming 鄧廣銘 *Yue Fei zhuan* 岳飛傳 (Biography of Yue Fei) (Beijing: Shenghuo, dushu, xinzhi sanlian shudian, 1955); Wang Zenyu 王曾瑜, *Yue Fei xinzhuan* 岳飛新傳 (A new biography of Yue Fei) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1983); and Gong Yanming, ed., *Yue Fei yanjiu* 岳飛研究 (Beijing : Renmin chubanshe, 2008).

his eldest son Yue Yun 岳雲 and his subordinate Zhang Xian 張憲 on false charges of rebellion. Two decades later, in 1169 Yue Fei was granted the posthumous name *Wumu* 武穆 by Emperor Xiaozong 孝宗 (r. 1162-1189) and in 1211 the posthumous title of Prince of E (鄂王) by Emperor Ningzong 寧宗 (r. 1194-1224).

Since the time of Emperor Xiaozong, the image of Yue Fei has evolved into a standard model of loyalty and dedication. During the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), the Mongols' attitude towards Yue was somehow ambivalent. Invading China and replacing the rule of the Song Han Chinese, the Mongol government was reluctant to praise Yue Fei on a grand scale. But Yuan historical writings still treated him as a talented military general.[125] Yue Fei's mausoleum was destroyed during the Song-Yuan wars but his descendants together with the local government rebuilt the mausoleum.[126]

When Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328-1398) reunited China in 1368, he stated that "All people in the four seas are my children" 四海蒼生，皆吾赤子.[127] It was quite natural to promote Yue Fei as a patriotic hero, especially with official support in the Ming (1368-1644). By the late Ming, the historical hero Guan Yu 關羽 had been granted the title of "Saintly Emperor Guan the Great God Who Subdues Demons of the Three Worlds and Whose Awe Spreads Far and Moves Heaven" 三界伏魔大帝神威遠震天尊關聖帝君, while Yue Fei was called "Saintly Emperor Yue the Great King Who Subdues Demons of the Three Worlds with Magnificent Methods of

[125] See the Yuan composed Biography of Yue Fei in *History of Song* vol. 365, section 124 (宋史岳飛傳), collected in Li An 李安, *Yue Fei shi shi yanjiu* 岳飛史事研究 (Taibei Shi: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1977), 249-66.

[126] See Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀 (1316-?), "Yue E wang"岳鄂王 in his *Nancun chuo geng lu* 南村輟耕錄, (Beijing: zhong hua shu ju, 1959).

[127] See *Mingshilu* 明實錄, *Taizu gaohuangdi shilu* 太祖高皇帝實錄, vol. 63.

Loyalty and Filiality" 三界伏魔大帝忠孝妙法天尊岳聖帝君. By juxtaposing Guan Yu and Yu Fei, the Ming court downplayed any ethnic conflicts in the Yue Fei legend.

The Manchu Qing rulers were descendants of the Jurchens. In the early stage of the Qing, Emperor Kangxi 康熙 still remained conservative in his comments on Yue Fei. But the Qianlong emperor 乾隆 connected Manchus with the Jurchen past and fully confirmed Yue Fei and his heroic actions. Qianlong personally visited Yue's hometown of Tangyin and the mausoleum in Hangzhou. The emperor, who enjoyed his own poetry skills, also wrote poems in praise of Yue Fei: "It was the opportunity to restore [the dynasty]; who would expect he made all efforts in vain" 正可乘機事恢復，誰知虛力廢經營. In another poem, the Qianlong emperor comments that "The Great Wall was undermined from inside; even the trees on [Yue Fei's] tomb hold their regrets to this day" 萬里長城空自壞, 至今冢樹恨難平.[128] In addition to his intention to reduce the ethnic tension between the Manchus and Han, Qianlong promoted Yue Fei as a hero with absolute loyalty to his emperor, highlighting the bond between the emperor and his ministers (*jun chen zhi yi* 君臣之義).

Yue Fei's experience also inspired a series of literary outpourings. The unfair execution soon aroused a mixture of sorrowful and furious feelings among the public. Shortly after Yue Fei's death, popular stories about the general's military achievements and the imposed injustice started to circulate, mostly in oral form. Hong Mai 洪邁 (1123-1202) briefly wrote about Yue Fei's death in his collection of strange tales (*zhiguai* 志怪) *Yi jian zhi* 夷堅志 (Records of Yijian).[129] According to a

[128] Zhou Yingfang borrows the phrase "The Great Wall is undermined from inside 長城自壞" (63. 597). Direct textual borrowing is quite normal in both vernacular fiction and *tanci* fiction.

[129] Hong Mai, *Jian yi zhi* 夷堅志 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1994), 282.

Southern Song miscellany *Meng liang lu* 夢梁錄 (Records of a fond dream), audiences in Hangzhou welcomed storytellers who specialized in Yue Fei's heroism.[130]

After the Mongols overthrew the Song and established the Yuan Dynasty, a storytelling script *Da Song Xuanhe yishi* 大宋宣和遺事 (Old incidents in Xuanhe Period of the Great Song Dynasty) began to circulate. The script contains 294 chapters but Yue Fei briefly appears in only one chapter as a historical figure, not a mythological creation. Yue Fei's story was later adapted to *zaju* 雜劇 opera. The two operas that most represent the two popular themes in the Yue Fei legend are *Song dajiang Yue Fei jingzhong* 宋大將岳飛精忠 (Dedication and loyalty: General Yue Fei of the Song), elaborating his military talents, and *Dizangwang zheng dongchuang shi fan* 地藏王證東窗事犯 (Ksitigarbha discloses the conspiracy under the east window), portraying the karmic punishment that Qin Hui receives in the underworld. [131]

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, a number of *chuanqi* 傳奇 dramas based on Yue Fei began to circulate, with developed characters and episodes of patriotism. After Feng Menglong's editing, *Jing zhong qi* 精忠旗 (The flag of dedication and loyalty) became the best known. [132] *Jing zhong qi* is also the first text that explains in

[130] See Wu Zimu 吳自牧 (fl. 1207)'s *Meng liang lu* 梦梁錄 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 1984), 196. Another Southern Song writer Luo Ye 羅燁 also recorded storytelling about Yue Fei in his *Zuo weng tan lu* 醉翁談錄 (Records of Drunk Talk).

[131] The author of *Song dajiang Yue Fei jingzhong* is unknown. See Wang Shipu, *Guben yuanming zaju* Volume 8 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yingshuguan, 1977). *Dizangwang dongchuang shi fan* was written by Kong Wenqing 孔文卿 (1260?-1341?), collected in Zheng Jian 鄭騫 ed., *Jiaoding Yuan kan zaju sanshi zhong* 校訂元刊雜劇三十種 (Taipei: shijie shuju, 1962). In addition to these two, other *zaju* operas about Yue Fei include the following anonymous works: *Yue Fei dapo taihang shan* 岳飛大破太行山, *Yue Fei sanjian xia jinying* 岳飛三箭嚇金營, etc. See Zhuang Yifu 莊一拂, *Gudian xiqu cunmu huikao* 古典戲曲存目匯考 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982).

[132] *Jing zhong qi* was written by an unknown writer Li Meishi 李梅實 and edited by Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1565-1645/6). Feng published the edited version in his *Mohanzhai xinqu shizhong* 墨憨齋新曲十種. Other *chuanqi* drama about Yue Fei in Ming and Qing include the following works: *Yue Fei polu*

detail how the two words "*jing zhong*" 精忠 (dedication and loyalty) had been associated with Yue Fei: the general received a flag, bestowed by Emperor Gaozong to epitomize his contributions to the empire, embroidered with the two words.

Xiong Damu 熊大木 (fl. 1561) during the late Ming collected more stories about Yue Fei. His long novel *Da Song zhongxing tongsu Yanyi* 大宋中興通俗演義 (Popular romance of the reviving of the Great Song) is the first to tell a complete story of Yue Fei with abundant characters and plots. Instead of focusing on Yue Fei, the novel is chronologically structured, and narrations about the general only occupy one fourth of the text. Yet the novel includes a variety of official narratives, tales, and myths in the 75 chapters, providing plenty of materials and setting up the basic narrative structure for future Yue Fei stories.[133] During the Wanli 萬歷 reign (1573-1620) Yu Huayu 于華玉 edited Xiong's *Yanyi* and published *Yue Wumu jinzhong baoguo zhuan* 岳武穆盡忠報國傳 (Yue Wumu served the country with devoted loyalty), which established the theme of dedication and loyalty in Yue Fei's story. Similarly, Zou Yuanbiao 鄒元標 (1555-1624) composed *Yue Wumu jing zhong zhuan* 岳武穆精忠傳 (The biography of Yue Wumu with dedication and loyalty).

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dongchuangji 岳飛破虜東窗記 and *Jing zhong ji* 精忠記 by unknown writers, *Xu jing zhong* 續精忠 by Tang Zichui 湯子垂, *Jinpai ji* 金牌記 by Chen Zhongmai 陳衷脈, *Yin jue ji* 陰抉記 by Qing xia xian ke 青霞仙客, *Niutou shan* 牛頭山 by Li Yu 李漁, *Ru shi guan* 如是觀 by Zhang Xinqi 張心其 and *Duo qiukui* 奪秋魁 by Zhu zuochao 朱佐朝.

[133] Xiong owned a bookshop called *Zhong zheng tang* 忠正堂 (The Hall of Loyalty and Integrity). The text of *Da Song zhongxing tongsu Yanyi* was also circulated under quite a few different titles, including *Dasong Yanyi zhongxing yinglie zhuan* 大宋演義中興英烈傳, *Wumu wang Yanyi* 武穆王演義, *Da Song zhongxing Yue wang zhuan* 大宋中興岳王傳, *Wumu jing zhong zhuan* 武穆精忠傳, *Song jingzhong zhuan* 宋精忠傳, *Yue Wumu wang jing zhong zhuan* 岳武穆王精忠傳, *Yue Er Wumu jing zhong zhuan* 岳鄂武穆精忠傳, *Jing zhong zhuan* 精忠傳, etc. The various titles also suggest Xiong's influence on the market of popular romance as a publisher in late Ming. For more discussion of Xiong's publication pattern (熊大木模式), see Chen Dakang 陳大康 *Mingdai xiaoshuo shi* 明代小說史 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 2000), 262-81, 563-78; "Gudai tongsu xiaoshuo chuanbo moshi jeqi yiyi 古代通俗小說傳播模式及其意義", *Wenxue yichan* 文學遺產 (Feb. 2000): 99-140. Also see Hui-Lin Hsu, "Revision as Redemption: A Study in Feng Menglong's Editing of Vernacular Stories" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2010), 21-35.

According to Zheng Zhenduo, Yu was not pleased with *Yanyi*'s fictional representations of the characters and restored its fictional description to official historical narration, while Zou broke Yu's rigidness by adding limited imaginary scenes and supernatural stories about Yue Fei. Compared with Yu's dry narrations, Zou's version restores the reading delights. Another Ming *chuanqi* drama *Xu jing zhong* 續精忠 (Loyalty and dedication: a sequel) imagines revenge against the Jurchens led by the second generation of the Yue family, especially Yue Lei and his friends.

Early circulation of the Yue Fei stories share common themes -- his unjust death, his dedication and loyalty -- as well as a series of minor heroes. Zheng Zhenduo lists two reasons why Yue Fei was extremely popular during the Ming. First, like the Song, the Ming also suffered dual crises of treacherous court officials and threats from the Mongols. Thus people had a nostalgic feeling for capable officials. Second, after invasions by Jurchens and Mongols, by the Ming period, patriotism among Han Chinese had been raised high. Yue Fei, as a cultural symbol of defending the Han identity, was worshipped and even deified.

In the early Qing, Qian Cai 錢彩 (c. 1729) and Jing Feng 金豐 further revised Yue's accounts and authored the 80-chapter vernacular fiction *Jing zhong Yanyi shuoben Yue wang quan zhuan* 精忠演义说本岳王全传 (Romance of dedication and loyalty: the storytelling script of the complete biography of King Yue; prefaced 1684), hereafter shorted to *Shuoyue* 說岳全傳.[134] As the most influential and comprehensive fictional version of the Yue Fei story, *Shuoyue* inherits and elaborates on the earlier

[134] The earliest version of *Shuoyue* seen today is from *Jinshi Yueqing tang* 金氏余慶堂 in 1684，noted "composed by Qin Cai Jinwen from Renhe; edited by Jin Feng Dayou from Yongfu (仁和錢彩錦文氏編次，永福金豐大有氏增訂)". Preserved in HKU libraries. Some scholars believe it was revised after being banned during the Qianlong reign. Also see Du Yingtao and Yu Yun, eds., *Yue Fei gushi xiqu shuochang ji* 岳飛故事戲曲說唱集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1957).

records with careful selection, refinement, and critique. It adds more fighting scenes and develops impressive characters. Even today, storytelling actors create their performances based heavily on the text of *Shuoyue*.[135]

Under Manchu rule, nothing was more potentially subversive than the Yue Fei story, as it was so easily taken as an expression of anti-Manchu sentiment. Thus it is not surprising when *Shuoyue* was banned during the Qianlong reign (1736-1795).[136] But the ban did not stop the fiction from circulating, and even the Qing government had to cope with the problem by incorporating the Yue Fei cult into its own ideology of loyalty. Emperor Qianlong wrote "Yue Wumu lun" 岳武穆論 (On Yue Wumu), in which he praised Yue Fei as a loyal hero as brilliant as the sun and the moon.

Shuoyue also enters the debate as to whether characters in historical fiction should be more truthful or creative. Regarding the conflicts between reality and the fictional imaginary, Jin Feng, in the preface, states that aesthetics in fiction writing is located in the struggling balance between historical reality and creation.

> Fiction writing is not supposed to be completely based on creation, nor completely on reality. Pure creation leads to absurdity and cannot satisfy the intention to explore history; pure reality reflects limited ability and cannot gain popularity.
> [從來創說者，不必盡出于虛，而亦不必盡由于實。苟事事皆虛，則過于誕妄而無以服考古之心；事事忠實，而失于平庸而無以動一時之聽。][137]

[135] Liu Lanfang 劉蘭芳 (1944-), a popular *pingshu* 評書 storyteller in contemporary China gained her reputation by performing *The Biography of Yue Fei*, based on the vernacular fiction. In addition, Qian Cai and Jin Feng are both natives of Hangzhou, where quite a few women *tanci* performers boasted their skills in singing the stories of the general and the Southern Song dynasty (*shuo zhao jia* 說趙家). In fact, scholars argue that the vernacular fiction *Shuo Yue quan zhuan* indeed originated from the *huaben* 話本 story-telling tradition of the Yue Fei legend.

[136] See Wang Xiaochuan 王曉傳, *Yuan Ming Qing sandai jinhui xiaoshuo xiqu shiliao* (Beijing: Zuojia chubanshe, 1958).

[137] Jin Feng's preface was dated in 1684.

This statement further develops the theory of Jin Shengtan 金圣嘆 (1608-1661) that "in writing history, language is only a vehicle that serves to convey historical facts" 以文運事. In writing fiction, the writer "follows his creative impulse, and language is not just the means of representation; it is also a way to create themes" 因文生事, 順著筆性去，削高補低都由我.[138]

C.T. Hsia categorizes *Shuoyue* into the genre of military romance in classical Chinese literature and summarizes that this genre focuses on a "conventionalized overconcern with a special type of human activity" and leads to "the neglect or stereotyped representation of ordinary human concerns and passions."[139] After centuries of circulation, the heritage of Yue Fei's legend had reached a fullness of fictional details by the time Qian Cai and Jin Feng completed *Shuoyue*.

The *Tanci* Fiction *Jing zhong zhuan*

By the time Zhou Yingfang wrote *Jing zhong zhuan*, traditional Chinese *xiaoshuo* fiction had reached its mature stage. As Maram Epstein's study on literary *tanci* shows, women-authored *tanci* fiction shares various compositional aesthetics, motifs, and themes in common with *xiaoshuo* novels.[140] Meanwhile *tanci* fiction also

[138] Jin Shengtan, *Du diwu caizi shufa* 讀第五才子書法, collected in Guo Shaoyu 郭紹虞 ed., *Zhongguo lidai wenlun xuan* 中國歷代文論選 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2001), vol.3, 245.

[139] The term *military romance* is defined by C.T. Hsia, referring to a popular genre in traditional Chinese fiction that "tells of an individual, a family, a brotherhood, or a new dynastic team engaged in a large-scale campaign or a series of such campaigns." He illustrates *Shuoyue* in particular as one of the most famous military romance novels. For details see Hsia, "The Military Romance: A Genre of Chinese Fiction" in his *On Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 135-36.

[140] Maram Epstein, "Bound by Convention: Women's Writing and the Feminine Voice in Eighteenth-Century China," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 26.1 (2007): 97-105.

challenges and resists certain prevalent narrative techniques in Chinese fiction.[141] Rooted in a widely circulated legend, *Jing zhong zhuan* is well constructed within the conventions of previous Yue Fei texts, particularly *Shuoyue* and the basic storyline of *Jing zhong zhuan* is largely based on that of *Shuoyue*. The attached appendix B provides a plot summary of the *Jing zhong zhuan*. Fifty-three out of 73 chapter titles in the *tanci* are exactly the same as those from the vernacular text, or with only slight adjustments of words. However, this does not mean *Jing zhong zhuan* is a work lacking in originality; after all, *Shuoyue* borrows extensively from numerous other sources as well. Zhou Yingfang rewrites the vernacular novel in the form of *tanci* verses and makes some significant changes in terms of both characters and narrative structure. In *Jing zhong zhuang* she provides a "competing reading" of earlier Yue Fei stories, especially the parent text *Shuoyue*. At the beginning of the *tanci* she highlights the changes in her rendition, saying that she "would write new tunes to the old music" 敢將古調翻新調 (1. 1).[142] The new tunes include many invented episodes about the general and his family. One distinct divergence in this rendition is the expanded space for women -- Zhou inserts many family scenes from the Yue household. Chapters 38 to 41, 69, 72 and 73, completely new from any other previous Yue Fei stories, describe the general's domestic roles as a son, husband, and father, and celebrate

[141] Keith McMahon discusses several compositional devices in traditional Chinese fiction, especially interstice and recurrence. See his *Causality and Containment in Seventeenth-century Chinese Fiction* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988), 17-25.

[142] Rewriting seems to be popular among late Qing intellectuals. Zhou Yingfang's family friend Yu Yue 俞樾 (1821-1907) published his heavily edited version of *Sanxia wuyi* 三俠五義 (Three knights and five stalwarts). He says in the preface: "Why should I be afraid of making changes? When the spirit moved me I made changes. " See his 1884 preface to Qixia wuyi 七俠五義 (Seven knights and five stalwarts), quoted in *Zhongguo lidai xiaoshuo lunzhu xuan* 中國歷代小說論著選 Huang Lin 黃霖 and Han Tongwen 韓同文, eds., (Nanchang Shi: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 1982), 631. For further scholarly study on rewriting in late Qing, see Wu Zequan 吳澤泉 "Wanqing fanxin xiaoshuo kaozheng 晚清翻新小說考證," *Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan yanjiusheng yuan xuebao* 中國社會科學院研究生院學報, 1 (2009): 77-82.

female virtues such as beauty, learning, and management, as can be seen in the chapter titles:

Chapter 38	The Yue family review the past at the party of fairy Penglai; Yue Yun's marriage gives delight to the family 言往事蓬瀛雅集完原配衣錦承歡
Chapter 39	At the feast celebrating victory the marshal arranges marriages for his officers; Lady Li visits her natal family to arrange her father's adoption 慶華筵賢主帥賜婚議宗嗣國夫人歸省
Chapter 41	Yue Yun invites his mother-in-law to live with them; Yue Fei sees his destiny in a coma 雲公子迎養慰鸞儔岳少保離神證仙果
Chapter 69	Little heroes tear down Su Quan's temple; gentry women pick up red beads to compose poetry 拆孫祠英雄逞武拈紅豆淑女題箋
Chapter 72	The Lane of Filiality receives eternal sacrifice; the Jintuo garden is forever bathed with imperial honor 孝弟里千秋俎豆金陀園百世承恩
Chapter 73	Yue Fei's tomb is offered sacrifice and noble titles; a drinking feast is held at the *Qing* pass with extreme happiness 祀圣廟墓頂加封進霞觴情關集樂

In other parts of *Jing zhong zhuan*, despite using the same chapter titles from *Shuoyue*, Zhou Yingfang rewrites wars and politics into verse and narrates stories of family and domesticity. Yue Fei's mother, wife, and daughter, who are silent and faceless in other histories, are endowed with personality and even authority in the *tanci* version.[143] To a certain degree, adopting the same chapter titles only serves to highlight *Jing zhong zhuan*'s distinct narratives.

Secondly, to a large extent Zhou Yingfang rescues the character of Yue Fei from being reduced to predictable dimensions as in previous accounts. The fluid nature of the vernacular fiction, which is primarily based on oral traditions, grants her

[143] For example, chapter 15 "Emperor Gaozong ascended the throne in Jingling; Yue Fei drew a boundary with his friends" 宋高宗金陵即帝位, 岳鵬舉劃地絕神交 and chapter 16 "Wang Zuo made an attempt to become friends on a pretext; Yue Fei's mother used tattoo to instruct her son" 結義盟王佐假名, 刺精忠金萱訓子 stress the authority of Yue Fei's mother. For details on the insertion of narratives dedicated to topics about women, see my next chapter "Celebration of Women's Virtues in Details."

tanci adaptation more creative space to integrate historical writing and literary creation. Between the constantly paralleled battle stories and the invented family scenes, she gives priority to domestic themes over the more stereotypic military action of the hero. In addition to the classical characterization of General Yue Fei as a military leader of absolute loyalty and a typical Confucian hero who suffers from injustice and disorder,[144] Zhou fully employs her imagination and portrays him as a perfect model of scholar, official, and a source of family happiness.

Remarkably, the narrative in *Jing zhong zhuan* jumps back and forth between events taking place in different localities, not only across physical spaces, but also across gendered spaces of the public and private spheres. In contrast to the completely war-oriented narration in *Shuoyue*, before Yue Fei even gets involved with state affairs and politics, Zhou finds opportunities to elaborate on his family and marriage.

Although Yue Fei wins first prize in the imperial military competition, he is trapped by the treacherous minister Zhang Bangchang and forced to leave the capital. *Shuoyue* summarizes the years when Yue Fei is rejected by the imperial court in one brief sentence: "Yue Fei lived in poverty with his mother and wife. Their life was quite desolate" 單有那岳家母子夫妻，苦守清貧，甚是淒涼.[145] In the *tanci*, however, juxtaposing with the political emergency in which Zhang Bangchang betrays the Song and offers Emperor Huizong and Emperor Qinzhong to the Jurchens, Zhou invites her readers to focus on Yue Fei's story by indicating "I put down the irrelevant words and return to the story; now the lyrics go back to the village of

[144] As for the difference between a typical Confucian hero in orthodox Chinese novels and individuals in romance stories, C. T. Hsia explains the features of the Confucian hero this: "The Confucian hero differs from the lover and the sensualist in that he seeks self-fulfillment through selfless dedication to the cause of justice and order. A defiant individualist with a passion for service, he is the dominant figure in historical and chivalric novels." See his *The Classic Chinese Novel: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 29-30.

[145] Qian Cai and Jin Feng, *Shuoyue quan zhuan* (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 2009), 118.

Forever Peace" 按下閑文歸正傳，詞中聽表永寧村 (14, 112). Rather than urge the hero to the battlefield immediately, she holds the narrative pace and fills in the gap with a long elaboration of a harmonious family life in the Yue household:

> 幸得歸來春日好 It was fortunate to return in the beautiful spring.
> 金萱無恙樂晨昏 His mother was healthy and enjoyed her days.
> 相莊鴻案神仙侶 The couple loved and respected each other like Liang Hong and Meng Guang.[146]
> 瀟灑林泉共奉親 They enjoyed their reclusive life and served their elders. (14. 112)

In the depiction of domestic subject matter that continues for half the chapter, Yue Fei returns from the capital in spring and cares for his aged mother with his wife. In fall he has his first son, Yue Yun 岳雲. He also spends a lot of time reading and practicing martial arts with his sworn brothers. With friends and family around, he gradually gives up his original ambition until General Zong Ze 宗澤 writes to inform him of the recent humiliation Song received from the Jurchens (14. 112-3; 15. 124-126). Similarly, when Yue Fei first resigns his post and returns to Tangyin, *Shouyue* spends only eight characters to cover the years of his temporary retirement: "The whole family enjoyed their reunion with joy" 一門共享家庭之福.[147] The narrative in *Shuoyue* concentrates on the hero and aims at driving him back to the public sphere. *Jing zhong huang*, however, equates public achievements with virtues in the boudoir.

As a military romance, *Shuoyue* juxtaposes Yue Fei against other characters. The narrative shifts back and forth among Yue Fei and Yue Yun; his sworn brothers

[146] The allusive quotation *xiangzhuanhong'an* 相莊鴻案 here refers to the virtuous couple Liang Hong 梁鴻 and Meng Guang 孟光. Every meal Meng Guang served her husband food on a tray raised to eyebrow level to show respect and affection for him. The couple lived a pastoral life and remained loving their whole lives long. See Lee, Lily X. H, A D. Stefanowska, Sue Wiles, and Clara W. Ho. *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Women* (Armonk, N.Y: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), 182-3. In *Fu sheng liu ji* 浮生六記 (Six records of a floating life, 1808), Shen Fu 沈復 employs the same allusion: "[we have been] treating each other with courtesy for twenty-three years; the affection increased with the years" 鴻案相莊廿有三年, 年愈久而情愈密.

[147] Qian Cai and Jin Feng, *Shuoyue quan zhuan*, 272.

Wang Gui 王貴, Tang Huai 湯懷, Zhang Xian 張憲 and Niu Gao 牛皋; Prince Wushu 兀術 and his advisers; as well as Emperor Gaozong and the treacherous ministers. Jing Feng, the editor of *Shuoyue*, claims in the preface that the purpose of the writing is to demonstrate equally "Yue Fei's loyalty, Qin Hui's treacherousness, and Wushu's brutality" 岳武穆之忠，秦檜之奸，兀術之橫. Yue Fei does not appear in every chapter in *Shuoyue*, making a place for historical background or heroic actions of other characters.[148]

In contrast, *Jing zhong zhuan* focuses primarily on Yue Fei and his family in the narrative. Zhou cannot avoid other characters as an integrated part of the Yue Fei legend, but differentiates clearly "main biography" (*zhengzhuan* 正傳) from "idle words" (*xianwen* 閑文). This shows her effort to gentrify the Yue Fei legend from folk tales and vernacular fiction while targeting a more elite readership. The term *main biography* derives from the "biographic-thematic type" (*jizhuanti* 紀傳體) in Chinese historiography from the time of *Shiji* 史記. This literary type conveys a sense of orthodoxy and historical significance, while "idle words," similar to "small talk," or another name for fiction, suggests a more leisurely reading experience. Zhou deliberately distances her work from conventional Yue Fei stories by highlighting the compact structure and her subtle authoritative tone.

Similarly, in chapter 37 of the *tanci*, when the narrative switches from Wushu losing a battle to Yue Fei's return home, the verses again remind the readers to ignore trivia but pay more attention to the general: "My lyrics do not talk about idle matters; Please listen to how the Command-in-Chief returns to Tangyin" 詞中不敘閑文事，聽言元帥轉湯陰 (37. 327). This phrase marks how the narrative style changes from a

[148] Yue Fei does not show up in chapters 12, 15-20, 32, 38-39, and 45 in *Shuoyue*. Chapters 63-75 are completely devoted to his friends' revenge after Yue Fei's death.

sense of emergency regarding the situation in the capital to the relaxing family scenes. In *Shuoyue*, however, what the narrator "will say no more about" (*an xia bu biao* 按下不表)" usually refers to the general's family affairs. It seems the only narrative purpose of *Shuoyue* is to urge the hero to return to his battlefield.

After Yue Fei's death, *Shuoyue* spends another nineteen chapters describing how the second generation of heroes seeks revenge for their fathers and eventually completely defeats the Jurchens, a plot derived from *Xu jing zhong*. In contrast, following the same storyline, *Jing zhong zhuan* after chapter 60 is devoted to women's experiences in the Yue household, as well as to the military adventure of Yue Fei's second son Yue Lei. Overall, *Jing zhong zhuan* primarily focuses on Yue Fei and his family, while *Shuoyue* presents the imagery of a group of heroes.

From *Tianxia* to *Tianshang*: The Immortal Quest of *Jing zhong zhuan*

One of the most noticeable deviations in Zhou's work from *Shuoyue* and other versions of the Yue Fei story is her abandonment of the retributive framework. As C. T. Hsia observes, classical Chinese fiction often employs *baoying* 報應 karmic narratives to rescue, resurrect, or deify the heroes, reflecting the pursuit of ideals and an effort to restore order. He concludes that "given the prevalence of injustice in China, it is more likely that the virtuous people suffer while the wicked continue to prosper. Therefore moral retribution or *baoying* is resorted to as a plausible theory to account for apparent injustice." [149]

[149] C. T. Hsia, *The Classic Chinese novel: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 29.

As C.T. Hsia reveals, the law of karmic retribution or *baoying* in Chinese historical fiction has a dual function of both background and narrative frame.[150]As early as in Hong Mai's *Yi jian zhi* 夷堅志, Yue Fei's fate as determined by karma is unavoidable, because he was a pig monster (豬精) in a previous life and cannot escape from his destiny of being killed in this life.[151] In the sixteenth-century *Yanyi* composed by Xiong Damu, karmic retribution becomes a constant theme in the Yue Fei accounts. Xiong borrows supernatural legends to explain the unfair treatment Yue Fei receives. *Yanyi* mythologizes Yue's birth as the incarnation of Garuda the Great Brilliant King of Gold Wings (大鵬金翅明王). The replacement of the pig monster by a Garuda not only deifies Yue Fei, but also tallies with the official historical record: "When [Yue] Fei was born, a swan-like big bird flew above the house singing. That is how he got the name Fei (fly)" 飛生時，有大禽若鵠，飛鳴室上，因此為名.[152] In *Yanyi*, Qin Hui and his wife are tortured in hell and will never get redemption. The late Ming short novel *You fengdu Hu wudi yinshi* 游豐都胡毋迪吟詩 (Hu Mudi intones poems and visits the netherworld) explains the karmic connection between Emperor Gaozong and Yue Fei. Another seventeenth-century *chuanqi* drama *Ru shi guan* 如是觀 (This is the Way) displaces the relation between Song and Jin into the discourse of karma cause-effect.

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[150] For example, in *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 (Water margin), Song Jiang 宋江 is a demon star (*mojun* 魔君) sent to earth to cause a disturbance. But eventually since the fate of the Song Empire has not ended (*qishu weijin* 氣數未盡), the *Shuihu* heroes receive amnesty as a way to follow Heaven's rule and serve the Song emperor. In another popular fiction *Fengshen Yanyi* 封神演義 (The investiture of the gods), the dynastic fall of Shang 商 (1523-1027 BC) is interpreted as doomed by its fate and/or heavenly wills (天意已定, 氣數使然).

[151] Similarly, in *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋志異 (Strange stories from a Chinese studio) authored by Pu Songling 蒲松齡 (1640-1715), Qin Hui is portrayed as a swine in his afterlife. A family kills a pig for a feast, but after pulling out the hair, they find the words "the seventh life of Qin Hui" (秦檜七世身) on the pig's skin. The cooked meat stinks so much that even dogs will not touch it. See "Qin Hui" in *Liaozhai zhiyi*.

[152] It was recorded in "Biography of Yue Fei" 岳飛傳 in *Song shi* 宋史 (The history of Song).

Similarly, *Shuoyue* begins with a conventional historical theme of the rise and fall of dynasties (天運循環, 有興有廢), then introduces the karmic relationship linking each of the main characters: Yue Fei, the Song emperors, Wushu, Qin Hui and his wife. *Shuoyue* consolidates all previous karmic narratives and organizes a threefold karmic narrative frame. First, Emperor Huizong of the Northern Song is the reincarnation of the Immortal of the Long Eyebrow (長眉大仙) from the heavenly court. He is interested in the gods and immortals and calls himself "the Emperor, Lord of the Dao" 道君皇帝. On New Year's Day Emperor Huizong is worshipping the Heavens. He is supposed to write "the Great Jade Emperor" 玉皇大帝, but misplaces a dot, so that now it reads "the King Dog Emperor" 王皇犬帝. The Jade Emperor is furious and sends the Dragon of the Red Whiskers (赤須龍) down to earth. He was born into the family of the Jurchen leader in the north and later invades the Central Plains (*zhongyuan* 中原) and disturbs the Song dynasty, causing the people to suffer the ravages of war.

Secondly, the Buddha is sitting atop the nine-level lotus throne to lecture on the sutra. Just as he is getting to the heart of the sermon, a Female Bat (女土蝠) lets out a smelly fart. The Buddha is benevolent and forgiving and does not mind at all. However, the fart annoys a guardian spirit above the Buddha's head, Garuda the Great Brilliant King of the Gold Wings (大鵬金翅明王). He pecks the Female Bat once on the head with his beak and she is killed. Her soul travels to the Eastern Lands (東土) where it is reincarnated. She becomes a daughter of the Wang family and later marries Qin Hui who persecutes the righteous Yue Fei to avenge her grudge. The Buddha, afraid that the Dragon of the Red Whiskers could not be subdued, sends the Garuda to the mortal world to repay his debt and protect the Song dynasty until it reaches

eighteen rulers as fated. When he has fulfilled his work, he will be allowed to return to Heaven and achieve spiritual immortality.

Thirdly, on his way to be reincarnated as Yue Fei, the Garuda injures the left eye of the Iron Backed Dragon King (鐵背虬王). The dragon rolls into the depths of the Yellow River to hide. When Yue Fei is born, the dragon creates a flood to drown him, but kills many other innocent people. Because he violated the laws of Heaven, the Dragon King is beheaded, but his soul is reincarnated as Qin Hui, who later murders Yue Fei at the *Fengbo* Pavilion (風波亭), in order to avenge this grudge.

In *Shuoyue*, the multiple karmic narrative frames explain the positions of the Song Dynasty and the Jurchens, as well as the fate of each character. Within the karmic narrative, this is originally a personal conflict between the Jade Emperor and Emperor Huizong. Huizong paid his own debt by dying in the Jurchen desert; this punishment should not affect the reign of the Song. But since the Jade Emperor represents the Mandate of Heaven, and Huizong rules the earth, the personal conflict expands to involve immortals and common people. In the heavenly land, the Dragon of the Red Whiskers, born in the land of the Jurchens who will cause trouble to the Song, needs to be challenged by the Garuda who is assigned to protect the Song. In the mortal world, Wushu (the dragon of red whiskers) invades Song and emprisons Emperor Huizong and Emperor Qinzong; Wang's daughter (the female bat) marries Qin Kuai (the dragon of iron back) and conspires to murder Yue Fei (the Garuda). The karmic bonds are both heavenly and personal. The whole *Shuoyue* is structured within such a narrative frame: the Northern Song is doomed and the Southern Song will be established. At the personal level, internal sequels arise from previous incarnations. Those who, like Qin Hui, betray their country for personal gain will meet their ultimate doom. In a rhetorical way, the narrative frame of karmic

retribution in *Shuoyue* represents the Mandate of Heaven, as well as what Keith McMahon calls the theme of "containment" in vernacular fiction.[153] It acts as a moral boundary and confirms the author's didactic vision that "everything has been determined by the heavenly will, and life has been arranged according to fate" 萬事皆由天數定，一生都是命安排.[154] The karmic cycle provides the audience with some comfort to soothe their frustration toward the injustice. This set of narrative frames also clearly signals *Shuoyue*'s approach to time as cyclical.

Remarkably, according to Xu Desheng 徐德升, one of the endorsers of *Jing zhong zhuan*, Zhou Yingfang was particularly dissatisfied with the mythical framework when she read *Shuoyue*. She thought it blurred the boundary between good and evil.

> With a born spirit of loyalty, Madam Zhou admired Guan Yu in the Han Dynasty and Yue Fei in the Song. She lamented her husband's death while he was serving the court. During her spare time, she read the fiction of Yue Fei. She disagreed with the theme of retribution such as the garuda or the Girl-Bat. She said: "Good and evil do not exist together. When unrighteous people dominate, gentlemen will suffer. If everything is covered by the discourse of retribution, how shall we distinguish right and wrong, and encourage integrity?"
> [周夫人素慕漢關壯繆宋岳忠武之為人，忠義之氣，根于性成；而又痛夫子沒于王事，暇日排悶，偶檢閱精忠傳說部，因內有俗傳大鵬女土幅，冤冤相報等事，不然其說，嘆曰："從古邪正不并立。小人道長，君子道消，若再飾以果報，則將何以辨是非而勵名節?"][155]

According to Xu, Zhou Yingfang thinks that karmic retribution neither explains nor corrects the injustice done to the loyal general. It treats the moral decadence of the Southern Song court as inevitable. Moreover, allowing injustice in the name of karma will not help with moral rectification, which is Zhou's major concern in *Jing zhong*

[153] For more on the theme of karmic retribution in Ming-Qing fiction, see Keith McMahon *Causality and Containment in Seventeenth-century Chinese Fiction* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988), chapter 1.

[154] Qian Cai and Jin Feng, *Shuoyue quan zhuan*, 5.

[155] See Xu Desheng's preface.

zhuan. Unlike *Shuoyue*, or other male-authored vernacular fiction which emphasizes karma to enhance moral teaching, *Jing zhong zhuan* juxtaposes the orthodox moral requirement of praising good and punishing evil with the private space of family intimacy. Zhou even subtly criticizes the notion of the Mandate of Heaven. She uses the phrase "favor for selfish motivations" 私心偏愛 to express her disappointment that Yue Fei could not rejoin his family sooner because of the Jade Emperor's personal bias (41.374). *Jing zhong zhuan* thus shows dissatisfaction towards dynastic politics and questions the popular concept of karmic justice. As we will see in the discussion below, in *Jing zhong zhuan*, Zhou develops her own religious framework. She transforms moral capital into a promise of seniority and reward in the heavenly world. The new narrative frame also inspires a unique aesthetic elegance.

First, Zhou rewrites some of the *baoying* karmic themes in the Yue Fei legend into a completely different narrative frame. Rather than exploring Yue Fei's previous life, *Jing zhong zhuan* integrates other religious traditions associated with women in late imperial China – especially Daoist myths and immortals – as a decorative touch. She removes the Buddhist karmic discourse and replaces it with a quest for immortality.[156] The narrative moves back and forth between the mundane world and the immortal wonderland. Zhou designs a rough tripartite division among the Southern Song empire (realism in the fiction), the women's private sphere in the Yue

[156] The Daoist immortal discourses also reflect the religious engagement popular among upper class women in late imperial China. Zhao Shiyu 趙世瑜 argues that religious activities were intertwined with women's entertainment. For lower class women, religion became a metaphorical way to solve problems in everyday life; for gentry women, religion provided spiritual sustenance, especially among widows. See Zhao Shiyu, "Mingqing yilai funü de zongjiao huodong, xianxia shenghuo yu nüxing yawenhua 明清以來婦女的宗教活動、閒暇生活與女性亞文化", in Zheng Zhenman, and Chen Chunsheng, *Minjian xinyang yu shehui kongjian* 民間信仰與社會空間 (Fuzhou Shi: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 2003), 148-82. On the other hand, Zhou's interest in religion most likely comes from her mother Zheng Danruo. Her grandfather Zheng Zuchen was a devoted Buddhist as well. Zheng's *tanci* fiction *Meng ying yuan* was completed in 1843, before the Taiping Rebellion or any political crisis. Thus her privileged family background might have saved her from a hard life that needed Buddhism as the only source for the release of grief.

household (a realistic utopia), and the immortal wonderland (a utopian fantasy).[157] Several characters in *Jing zhong zhuan* are hermits or people who adopt a life of reclusion. They represent the pursuit of a non-political, peaceful, and undisturbed lifestyle. Yue Fei's father-in-law, Magistrate Li Chun is one of them. The *tanci* introduces him as a descendant of the esteemed Tang poet Li Bai 李白, who is also known as Poet Immortal (*shi xian* 詩仙). In addition to his honest administration, Magistrate Li lives a simple life, like the legendary hermit Lin Fu 林甫 who took a plum blossom as wife and cranes as children. The secluded life as a deliberate choice of the magistrate forms a sharp contrast with Yue Fei, who always refuses to withdraw from political affairs. Even when his best friend Zhang Wan 張完, another recluse, warns him that "all colors and sounds are nothing but illusion" 聲求色相皆虛妄 (43. 393), the general replies that he "has not completed his mundane affairs of rescuing the two emperors from the Jurchens" 許國有心迎二帝 (43.293). However, ultimately, he still sets out "to enjoy reading in the mountains"借庇名山作臥游 (43. 393) after defeating the invading Jurchens. The removal of the karmic framework in *Jing zhong zhuan* undermines the weak explanation that Yue Fei's tragedy is merely a result of conflicts from his previous life. The general is no longer a passive victim of his predestination, nor is he blindly loyal. He is a true hero who makes a deliberate commitment and seeks self-fulfillment regardless of worldly happiness or the state of his karma.

[157] This argument is inspired by Ellen Widmer's discussion on *Shuihu houzhuan*, See *The Margins of Utopia: Shui-hu Hou-Chuan and the Literature of Ming Loyalism* (Cambridge, Mass: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1987), 171-76. Considering the fact that Zhou Yingfang only started to write the *tanci* in the 1860s while *Shuihu houzhuan* had circulated since 1664, it is possible that Zhou was aware of this narrative, or even somewhat influenced by it.

Zhou even draws an analogy between the domestic scene in the Yue family and the *Penglai* 蓬萊 fairyland: [158] "The inner garden was like the *Penglai* Heaven; only immortals lived in such a wonderful land"內中宛似蓬萊府, 住得瑤池不老春 (37. 328). Within this new narrative framework, death in *Jing zhong zhuan* is not always frightening or grieved. Virtuous women of the Yue family ascend to the immortal land after death. Yue Fei's mother, wife, daughter, and daughter-in-law all become immortals in Heaven and receive great honors. For example, Zhou portrays the death of Yue Fei's mother as an action to attend the annual heavenly peach banquet.

卻好瑤池逢勝會	It was the moment when a grand feast was held at the Jasper lake,
太君證果正飛升	When the lady achieved immortality and ascended to heaven.
空中仙樂頻頻奏	The heavenly music was played repeatedly in the sky.
鶴駕鸞驂辭世塵	The lady bid farewell to the mundane on a fairy carriage with cranes and phoenix.
巾幗完人千古少	She was a perfect woman once in a thousand years.
福全德備兩堪稱	Her fortune and her virtue were equally known.
降生武穆非常傑	She gave birth to Yue Fei, the outstanding general.
福國王封聖母尊	In the Land of Happiness she was rewarded as a goddess.
上壽已登仙府籍	Her longevity was recorded in the registration book of the fairy land.
人間極品太夫人	She was a lady with supreme virtues in the mundane world. (42. 372)

Similarly, at the end of *Jing zhong zhuan*, Yue Fei's wife and daughter-in-law die on the same day, both greeted by messengers from Heaven:

太君頃刻歸天界	The lady ascended to heaven in a second.
仙樂飄飄處處聞	The heavenly music was floating in the air.
鞏氏夫人同跨鶴	Lady Gong followed her on the crane's back.
孤鸞對鏡免傷神	She was relieved from feeling lonely every time she faced the mirror.
(太君是)雅素宮妝新挽髻	Lady Li was wearing a plain imperial dress and a new hairdo.

[158] Mt. Penglai in Chinese mythology is often said to be the fairyland in the east, a base of the Eight Immortals and where they hold banquets.

(夫人是)玲瓏花樣縞衣裙	Lady Gong was in a white dress with exquisite decorations.
(更有)錦繡光生云采集	The silk was as beautiful as clouds.
(見那)流蘇色蕩月華新	The tassels reflected the color of a new moon.
仙女金童前引導	Fairy attendants were leading their way.
靈香馥郁到天庭	The strong fragrance of burning incense reaches the heaven. (73. 702)

The theme of pursuing immortality shapes *Jing zhong zhuan*'s aesthetic concerns. Cranes are the mount of immortals and symbol of longevity. Ascending to heaven means celestial transformation. Obtaining eternal life in *Jing zhong zhuan* means leaving behind the *tianxia* 天下, the worldly affairs and political ambitions repeated in all previous Yue Fei legends. The glorious religious depiction above suggests that rather than the Confucian ritual of sorrowful mourning, the belief in immortality helps elite women get disentangled from sad emotions. As Susan Mann reminds us, late imperial Chinese women in old age turned to religious disciplines for transcendence or immortality. Especially among upper class women, religious and aesthetic imagining intensified with advancing age.[159] Hu Ying also suggests that during the turbulent political years of the late nineteenth century, religious practice among gentry families could be helpful in "mediating the traumatic experience of losing a close friend to violent death, a deeply troubling emotional experience that happened in the larger context of a particularly turbulent time."[160]

Secondly, *Shuoyue* deconstructs the affairs and ambitions in the mundane world with the concluding message from the famous *Diamond Sutra* in the end:

一切有為法 All conditioned phenomena,
如夢幻泡影 Are like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, a shadow,
如露亦如電 Like dew or a flash of lightning;

[159] Mann, *Precious Records*, 69.

[160] Hu Ying, "Tossing the Brush? Wu Zhiying (1868-1934) and the Uses of Calligraphy," in Nanxiu Qian, Grace S. Fong, and Richard J. Smith, ed., *Different Worlds of Discourse*, 82-84.

應作如是觀 Thus we shall perceive them.[161]

The vernacular fiction converts the historical event back to an illusion that the Garuda descends to earth and comes back, but nothing changes in heaven. The ending brings an air of naive fantasy; disillusion camouflages the despair about injustice and disorder. In contrast, *Jing zhong zhuan* reinforces family values and arranges a happy reunion for the entire Yue family in the immortal land. Because of their extraordinary virtue, the family is exalted to immortals. Yue Fei's father becomes the Immortal of Purple Clouds (紫雲仙尊), and his mother now is the Immortal of Fortune Land (福國夫人). The couple and their children will reunite in heaven (41. 372-4; 42. 375-6; 73.704-5).

The general and his followers are all assigned positions in the immortal land. The following lines also show Zhou's preference for intensive details, a narrative feature that I will discuss further.

日月襟懷天可鑒	Heaven could understand [Yue Fei's] mind as broad as the sun and the moon.
上帝欽加褒奬文	The Heavenly Emperor rewarded him with commendations.
太白金星傳玉旨	The Grand Gold Star brought the imperial decree from the Jade Emperor.
九龍金殿會君臣	In the Nine-dragoned Palace, the emperor and his subjects had a meeting.
鈞天樂奏群仙敘	With the heavenly melody, immortals greeted each other.
金堦拜倒精忠帥	General Yue Fei paid his respect from under the gold stairs.
九重玉帝降綸音	The Jade Emperor issued an imperial edict from his throne.
……	
全忠全孝仁兼義	You have demonstrated virtues of loyalty, filial piety, benevolence and righteousness.
合領情關第一津	You will be the leading person in the domain of *qing*.
天門四帥卿推首	You rank at the top of the four generals guarding the heavenly gates.
正符印綬總元勳	You will be given the main seal to be the commander-in-chief.
雷部屬卿麾下管	The department of Thunders will be under your command.
更董情關政府情	You will also take charge of the domain of *qing*.

[161] Qian Cai and Jin Feng, *Shuoyue quan zhuan*, 494.

張憲岳雲皆上宿 Zhang Xian and Yue Yun also became immortals in Heaven.
亦歸雷部佐卿行 They were assigned to the department of Thunders assisting you." (66. 622)

The last chapter of *Jing zhong zhuan* elaborates the family gathering in heaven and presents a utopian picture that "all loyal officials and filial children are immortals" 忠臣孝子即是神仙 (73. 704). Rather than resulting in a better reincarnation, good virtues are rewarded by honors and, more importantly, family reunion: "the family reunites in Heaven; and their descendants are high-ranking officials for hundreds of generations" 天上則一家團聚, 人間則百代簪纓 (73. 704). Heaven has its own way to respond to extraordinary deeds. The family reunion after wars and chaos in the mundane world highlights family values triumphing over the conventional Buddhist and Daoist teachings on enlightenment and detachment.

The virtue of "family first" in *Jing zhong zhuan* reinforces Zhou Yingfang's filial emphasis and provides a solution for the conflict between filial piety and loyalty. In chapter 45, in order to reward Yue's great filial respect, the Daoist sage Chen Tuan arranges for the spirit of Yue Fei to meet shortly with his deceased parents, who encourage him to serve the emperor with dedication and loyalty. When the general successfully completes his task in *tianxia*, the mundane world, he will become an immortal as well and rejoin his parents in heaven. Imperial loyalty becomes a means to demonstrate filial piety and to reach the ultimate goal of family reunion. As illustrated previously, in *Jing zhong zhuan*, death is transcended by immortality, and loyalty and filial piety receive blessings from heaven. In Zhou's authoritative tone, the pleasure of family outweighs the value of historical judgment.[162]

[162] However, there might still be hidden irony in the "happy ending" in Heaven, as Zhou writes: "I still hope to write more after completing the *tanci*, but the people and the days are long gone" 彈詞擱筆猶思續，爭奈人天萬事空 (73. 704). Despite the splendid heavenly rewards, she cannot help expressing

Siao-chen Hu once suggests that Zhou's disinclination to use the karmic retribution framework has to do with the anti-Manchu sentiment that was rising again in the late Qing.[163] However, I argue that the rewriting of the karmic narrative frame implies Zhou's acknowledgement of the Manchu rulers. In *Shuoyue*, the rulers of the Song dynasty, who were Han Chinese, represent the Mandate of Heaven. Emperor Taizu of the Song (宋太祖) establishes a dynasty lasting for over three hundred years (三百余年基業),[164] while the invasion of Jurchens is the karmic punishment caused by Huizong's writing error. In other words, *Shuoyue* still considers Jurchens the alien "Other," or barbarians. The vernacular fiction calls the Jurchen emperor "the head of wolves" 狼主 and depicts Jurchen soldiers as monsters: "Their faces are blue with red hair; teeth are shown from their harelips. They look truly bizarre" 藍青臉，朱紅發，竅唇露齒，真個奇形怪樣.[165] Since Jurchens are considered the ancestors of the Manchus, it is not surprising that *Shuoyue*, with a theme of condemning the Jurchens, was banned in the early Qing. However, removal of the karmic operations in *Jing zhong zhuan* rationalizes the painful dynastic transition that Qian Cai and Jin Feng might feel in the beginning of Qing. The Jurchen-Manchu ethnic consideration does not play a significant role in the *tanci*. Zhou Yingfang even makes an effort to rectify the demonized image of the Jurchens. The Jurchen prince Wushu 兀术, who is a "giant who can excavate the mountain" 開山力士 and "incarnated devil" 混世魔王 in

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a sense of emptiness and ambiguity about her time, after her own family tragedies and when Qing China was increasingly on the decline.

[163] She also admits that since Zhou's husband died for the government and was posthumously granted a high official rank, it is risky to call her an anti-Manchu nationalist. Hu, "Wanqing qianqi nüxing tanci xiaoshuo shitan: fei zhengzhi wenben de zhengzhi jiedu 晚清前期女性彈詞小說試探—非政治文本的政治解讀," *Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiu jikan* 中國文哲研究集刊, 11 (1997): 114-5.

[164] Qian Cai and Jin Feng, *Shuoyue quan zhuan*, 1.

[165] *Ibid.*, 85.

Shuoyue, now becomes a more forbearing and caring ruler from the north.[166] The image of Wushu in the *tanci* presents masculine prowess and heroism.

面如火炭雙眉豎 His red face was like burning charcoals, with raised eyebrows.
眼若銅鈴氣若虹 His eyes were as big as bronze bells, with a rainbow-like momentum.
丈二身材誠奇偉 One *zhang* and two *chi* in height, he was truly robust and strong.
名稱兀术小英雄 His name was Wushu, our little hero. (10. 79)

This new image of Wushu is now endowed with a great deal of raw energy. To a certain degree he can be seen as the "other" Yue Fei. Wushu also demonstrates virtuous characteristics, such as affection, care and responsibility, but not confined to Han Confucian ethics. In *Jing zhong zhuan*, he is exactly the opposite of the incompetent and morally suspect Chinese Song emperors. He draws a clear line between loyalty and treacherousness and is much more righteous than Emperor Gaozong and most of his subjects. When the treacherous minister of the Song bribes him with singing boys and beautiful maidens, the Jurchen prince immediately rejects the offer (12. 100-101). Meanwhile, Gaozong is indulging in his desires, taking concubines and making poor judgements.

In addition to personal virtues, in *Jing zhong zhuan* the Jurchen prince seems more likely to represent Heaven's mandate as a ruler of integrity. In contrast to Emperor Gaozong's lack of upright feelings, Wushu is an ambitious and righteous political leader. He is the person who tells the truth about the situation in Southern Song: good officials are being prosecuted by treacherous officials, or "the bow is put away once the birds are gone; the hunting dog is killed once the hunting is done" 忠臣反被奸臣害，鳥盡弓藏獵狗烹 (30. 265). When he learns of Yue Fei's death, rather than feeling lucky, he expresses his sincere respect, but laughs at the self-destructive

[166] Qian Cai and Jin Feng, *Shuoyue quan zhuan*, 85.

behavior of the Song emperor, who "destroyed the Great Wall and allowed tragedies to arrive" 長城自壞招禍殃 (63. 597). He also has a benevolent heart toward the common people, which is missing among most Song officials. He persuades Lu Deng 陸登, the Song military governor of a frontier town, to surrender, reasoning that it would protect the common people from disaster (10. 81). The image of such a virtuous Jurchen leader creates a powerful satire on the moral failure of the weak Han Chinese. Wushu does not have a seat in the immortal land, but the *tanci* still considers him a "legend in history" 千秋美談 (70. 684). *Jing zhong zhuan* thus works through *Shuoyue*'s unconscious discomfort with the alien Manchu, but establishes a solid tone about the recognition of the non Han rulers of the Qing dynasty. To a certain degree *Jing zhong zhuan* attempts to neutralize the sensitive ethnic discourse in the Yue Fei legend.

In *Jing zhong zhuan* Zhou Yingfang downplays the karmic narrative structure but establishes an alternative value system. Attention shifts from karmic retribution in the *tianxia* mundane world to the *tianshang* immortal wonderland. She expresses the mainstream moral faith praising good and punishing evil by cultivating basic family virtues, especially filial piety. Moreover, when the discourse of the karmic cycle is removed, time proceeds linearly in a regular forward-moving manner. *Jing zhong zhuan*'s use of linear time is another pronounced departure from that of *Shuoyue*.[167] Again the developed authoritative moral and spiritual voice in *Jing zhong zhuan*

[167] Meanwhile, Zhou does not completely delete the discourse of fate/destiny (*shu* 數). She confirms the power of karma, especially when the treacherous officials receive punishment. The *tanci* fiction records some previous karmic narratives. For example, in chapter 32 when Zhang Bangchang is executed by the Jurchen Prince, Zhou comments that it is the retribution from the ruler of Heaven (*tiangong baoying* 天公報應); chapter 65, titled "Hu Di addresses the injustice done to Yue Fei and travels in the underworld; Shi Quan fails to assassinate Qiu Hui and is executed in the market" 鳴不平胡迪游陰曹, 刺元惡施全棄集市 borrows the late Ming short novel describing Scholar Hu Di's witness of Qin Hui being punished in the underworld. Chapter 65 also briefly introduces the karmic bond between Emperor Gaozong and the Jurchen Prince that has been circulated widely in folklore.

demonstrates the woman author's moral confidence, as well as her writing as a product of classical learning. If we consider *Jing zhong zhuan* as a sequel in a broader context to *Shuihu* (which I will discuss later in this chapter), she challenges the conventional structuring of sequel writing which often has an enhanced emphasis on karmic retribution to reinforce moral teaching.[168]

Language Innovation in *Jing zhong zhuan*

In *Jing zhong zhuan*, the elite woman writer Zhou Yingfang makes an effort to adapt the Yue Fei legend into *tanci* narrative with artistic exploration. The variable language styles in the *tanci* fully demonstrate her awareness of the diversity in late imperial Chinese literature, including vernacular fiction, storytelling scripts, poetic lyrics, as well as theatrical performance.

1. Verse and Prose

Jing zhong zhuan is written in an alternation of verse and prose passages, not unusual among women-authored *tanci* texts,[169]but Zhou Yingfang employs this unique format to clearly distinguish her work from the vernacular *Shuoyue*. She borrows lines from the vernacular fiction and directly inserts them as prose passages, which she uses for transitions or subplots. The majority of *Jing zhong zhuan* is still completed in seven-character verses. This verse form grants the rewriting an overflow

[168] For example,*Shuihu houzhuan* 水滸后傳 (The water margin: a Sequel) authored by Chen Chen 陳琛 (1477-1545) and *Xu jin ping mei* 續金瓶梅 (Plum in the golden vase: a Sequel) authored by Ding Yaokang 丁耀亢 (1599-1669) both employ the discourse of karmic retribution to explain their characters' actions and destiny.

[169] Tao Zhenhuai's *Tian yu hua* is written mostly in verses, with only the speeches in vernacular language. *Zai sheng yuan* is written completely in verses. *Tanci* narratives written in the nineteenth century, such as *Meng ying yuan*, *Bi sheng hua* and *Feng shuang fei*, alternate verse and prose passages. In particular, the anonymous *tanci* narrative *Zhou jin tang ji* 晝錦堂記 (Records of the Midday Embroidery Hall), much earlier than *Jing zhong zhuan*, also parallels vernacular historical records and fictional lyrics.

of powerful feelings and emotions. Although poetry was originally a male-dominated genre with certain rules and restrictions, woman poets enriched the genre with new conventions and emotions in the lyrics.[170] In women-authored *tanci*, the most popular form in verse is the seven-character lyrical line, which is end-stopped and independent, but logically shapes the story. Compared to prose, the use of verse enables the author to emphasize the creative force of language and the freedom of perception. Tan Zhengbi connects the verse form of *tanci* with women's talent for music. He writes:

> Women have artistic tendencies. They are not only fond of literature because of their abundant emotions, but skillful at verse with their gifts of music. [女性大都偏富于藝術性，她們不獨因富於感情而嗜好文學，也因有音樂的天才而偏長於韻文。][171]

Tan assumes that because of the poetic and lyrical nature of *tanci*, it seems quite natural that when Chinese women first attempted to engage in the writing of fiction, they picked up *tanci*, rather than vernacular fiction, as the medium for their literary expression of emotions and feelings.[172]

In *Jing zhong zhuan*, Zhou Yingfang creatively blends lyricism and vernacular narrative. The vernacular narration she employs from *Shuoyue* forms the storyline, while the poetic and lyrical verses elaborate the details in Zhou's own words. The *tanci* participates in a set of stylistic and rhetorical conventions, while still using vernacular language as an adequate vehicle for plot development. This very deliberate

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[170] See Grace Fong, *Herself the Author: Gender, Agency and Writing in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2008).

[171] Tan Zhengbi, *Zhongguo nüxing de wenxue shenghuo* 中國女性的文學生活 (Taipei: Hua yan chubanshe, 1995), 299.

[172] Gu Dong Ming further argues for the poetic nature of classical Chinese fiction. He believes that aesthetically, the deep structure of Chinese fictional art rests on poetry. He also defines poetic fiction (or poetic narrative) as fictitious narrative that possesses the characteristic features of poetry and aspires to be poetry in fictional form. See his *Chinese Theories of Fiction: A Non-Western Narrative System* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 117.

juxtaposition of the vernacular narrative and a much more refined lyricism poses a challenge to all previous male-authored Yue Fei legends. In addition to enriching the plot by adding domestic scenes in Yue Fei's household, the *tanci* narrative *Jing zhong zhuan* also reforms the way in which the story is told from the perspective of language styles. The verse narrative in a southern tone with a rhythmic effect seems to rebel against the masculine themes of war and politics in a Mandarin vernacular story.[173]

The integration of prose and lyrical verse in *Jing zhong zhuan* offers Zhou a great opportunity to manifest her poetic talents and better express her thoughts and commentaries. She seems to enjoy her lyrical indulgence and expects approval from her imagined audience. In addition, via verse passages *Jing zhong zhuan* attempts to aestheticize Yue Fei's legend and cater to the gentry audience. In chapter 7 when the Yue household, together with their friends' family, moves back to Yue's native town Tangyin, Zhou first incorporates the prose narrative paragraphs from the vernacular *Shuoyue* to describe their journey. Then she elaborates the intense emotional struggles of Yue Fei's mother in lyrics.

梧桐紅葉山如誓	The *wutong* tree and the red leaves reminded her of their vows as a couple.
風景依稀舊日村	The village held vague scenes from the past.
鹿門偕隱人何在	"Where is the one who promised to live in seclusion in the Lumen Mountain with me?"
雙影空懷月一輪	In vain she missed their joined shadows under the moon.
眼前雖有佳兒婦	Although now she was surrounded by her great son and daughter-in-law,
傷心難覓九原人	Yet she could never find the man who now lies in the grave.
院君進得中堂上	The Lady entered the middle hall.

[173] Similarly, Han Bangqing's *Hai shang hua liezhuan* 海上花列傳 (Biographies of Shanghai flowers, 1895) is written in two languages: the story unfolds in limited classical Chinese but all dialogues are in the Wu dialect. The employment of the southern Wu dialect is considered a resistance to the official Mandarin from the north. See Tang Weijie 汤惟杰, "Haishang mengyu liang sheng hua: lun *Hai shang hua lie zhuan zhong* de su bai celue yu Zhang Ailing de fanyi yitu 海上夢語兩生花——論《海上花列傳》中的蘇白策略與張愛玲的翻譯意圖", *Wenyi zhengming* 文藝爭鳴, 05 (2008): 138-45.

難免悲啼哭失聲　She could not control her tears and lost her voice.
眾多女眷齊齊勸　The women in the household all comforted her.
院君難以住悲聲　The Lady could not stop her tears. (7. 45)

The first four lines are highly lyrical and are refined enough to stand out as an independent seven-character quatrain (*jueju* 絕句), in spite of the use of conventional metaphors of landscape such as "red leaves," "the Lumen Mountain," or the lonely moon. The poetic language for the descriptive occasions temporarily interrupts the story narrative, but reveals the inner thoughts of the character. The neat compositional structure also suggests aesthetics of poetry. In other versions of the Yue Fei story, Lady Yao is merely a widow and mother of the hero. Her private feelings as a woman are never revealed, nor draw any attention from male authors. In the *tanci* adaptation, Zhou employs lyrics to project her own life experience onto this woman and to help voice her complex feelings, especially the nostalgia for her lost affectionate marriage, which might be buried deeply for a long time. Meanwhile, paired against the vernacular narration, the rhythmical sounds of verses provide not only a visual picture, but also an audio effect when communicating with her audience.

The verse passages in descriptions of women characters sometimes serve to express Zhou's own inner struggles and laments as a widow:

斷雁孤鴻悲獨往　A separated goose flew alone with sorrow.
凄風冷雨滯蘭城　She was stuck in the city by the bitterly cold winds and rain.
自從抱得離鸞恨　Since the day the couple was separated,
冷透塵心悟道心　The Madam dropped her wish in the secular world, but seeks a spiritual life.
難決須臾輕一死　She could not decide if she should kill herself and follow him.
尚有南陽白發親　Her aged father still lived in Nanyang.
全局強持非易易　It was a difficult task to take care of the overall situation.
斑斑修竹剩啼痕　Her tears marked the bamboo.
……
綠鬢紅顏獨憔悴　Her beautiful face was wasting away in the mirror.
春花秋月斷腸吟　She chanted heartbroken poems, facing spring flowers and

the autumn moon. (68. 640)

In the guise of a sentimental language with fancy phrasing and literary allusions, the woman author implies reality -- that for her family to survive against all hardships, the noble solution for a chaste widow is a martyred death. Robert E. Hegel suggests that in poetry, the "self" is projected or reflected more directly in the persona of the poet.[174] The above lines likely also reflect the experiences of the woman writer when she was facing a similar situation in Guizhou. Surprisingly, instead of the conventional excuse of carrying on her husband's family line, the reasons here which prevented her from suicide are explained and reinforced primarily through appropriate emotion of filial piety, a responsibility for her natal family. Repeatedly, via poetic language pouring out all her feelings, the narrator reveals quite common but neglected emotions to her contemporary gentry audience and a lost world to our modern readers. These rediscovered emotions usually mean tears and can never be adequately recounted from dusty history. On the other hand, the aesthetic intentions of using lyrics and the exaggerated lyrical vocabulary such as "wasting away" 憔悴 or "heartbroken" 斷腸 almost invite a narcissistic sentimentalism. No doubt they are lines and phrases either borrowed or adapted from the clichés of the literary language.

Although women-authored *tanci* used to be closely associated with oral performance traditions, a privileged writer like Zhou Yingfang does not need any commercial storytelling skills to attract an audience or pursue profits.[175] Like other women writers, she also inherits a literary tradition which places great emphasis on classical poetry. Her fictional writing presents a strong classical taste. Compared with

[174] Hegel, Robert E, and Richard C. Hessney, *Expressions of Self in Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 27.

[175] For the relationship between women-authored *tanci* and the commercial book market during mid-Qing, see Ellen Widmer "The Trouble with Talent: Hou Zhi (1764-1829) and Her Tanci *Zai zaotian* 再造天 of 1828." *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews*. 21 (1999): 131-50.

the vernacular *Shuoyue*, the *tanci* version makes an effort to gentrify the Yue Fei legend by creating a sophisticated interiority for the female characters, restoring the prestige and dominance of the classical poetic tradition in her rendition.

2. The Performative Features

Occasionally *Jing zhong zhuan* also integrates typical performative features, and deliberately adopts the "storyteller's manner" or "opera performance manner." An extremely sentimental tone is expressed in later chapters after Yue Fei is executed on some groundless charge; his friends and officers mourn in deep lamentation:

> *Following the Commander* we served the emperor fighting across the country; *following the Commander* we were ready for battle at any time; *following the Commander* we rode on horseback regardless of the weather; *following the Commander* we rescued the ungrateful emperor on Bull Head hill; *following the Commander* we secured half of the empire from Lin'an after a hundred battles; *following the Commander* we pushed deep at the forefront and recovered three towns; *following the Commander* we recaptured Huaixi and Xiangjun; *following the Commander* we took great troubles to guard the empire; *following the Commander* we repulsed the enemy and restored peace in Zhuxian.
> *We only wish* that the Commander received imperial rewards when he went to the capital; *we only wish* that the garrison town of Zhuxian could be guarded; *we only wish* that reports of victories would be sent into the camps; *we only wish* that we could fight straight onto Huanglong and stop the war.
> *Who would expect* the achievement was given up half way; *who would expect* twelve gold plaques dismissed the strong army; *who would expect* the commander was framed by unjust charges; *who would expect* this was the way the emperor rewarded a subject who rendered outstanding contributions.
> *It is most grievous* that banners and flags now become nightmares; *it is most grievous* that Mountain Tai collapsed and people suffered; *it is most grievous* that the country's backbone broke and the world falls dark; *it is most grievous* that the jade crossbeam and the Great Wall fell apart overnight.
> *From now on*, we all become lonely swans, and the inspiring spirit in the camp only exists in memory; *from now on*, nobody is able to give orders in the battlefields, nor submit his request to fight for the empire; *from now on*, the camps will become ruins between the rivers and mountains, and we make dubious peace with the Jurchens; *from now on* the dream to drink at Huanglong is completely broken; and in this desolate land where can we find a loyal soul?
> [(隨元帥)南征北戰勤王事，隨元帥枕戈待旦論交爭，隨元帥風雨無辭常走馬，隨元帥牛頭山上保昏君，隨元帥百戰臨安迎半壁，隨元帥長驅直

入復三城，隨元帥淮西收復兼襄郡，隨元帥固石巖頭救小君，隨元帥歷盡千辛扶社稷，隨元帥朱仙退敵水澄清。
(惟只望)元帥入都承御澤，惟只望重鎮朱仙要口津，惟只望旗門共論紅旗捷，惟只望直搗黃龍洗甲兵。
(誰又曉)功成中廢遭奸陷，誰又曉金牌十二散雄軍，誰又曉無端冤獄興風浪，誰又曉天家如此獎功勳。
(最傷心)望斷旌旗成惡夢，最傷心泰山傾去眾無生，最傷心棟樑材折乾坤暗，最傷心玉柱長城一夕傾。
(從此后)將們俱作孤飛鳥，虎帳雄風隔幕云。從此后對壘沙場誰作主，更誰為國請長纓。從此后殘山剩水空營地，妙策平戎尚警金。從此后痛飲黃龍成畫餅，荒涼何處覓忠魂。(61, 572)][176]

Rather than serving as a medium for serious ritual purposes, the laments here are sophisticated with long and refined poetic elaboration of emotions and feeling. In addition, they produce a visual effect of the performing scene. The words highlighted in italics, which are rarely seen in any other *tanci* works, serve as functional words in the narrative, but are also meant to be read out in stage performance. This theatrical style of *Jing zhong zhuan* is most likely influenced either by the popular verses from *tanci* performance or some local opera.[177] By mixing opera speech lines and poetic lyrics, Zhou demonstrates her efforts to gentrify Yue Fei's story while simultaneously maintaining the liveliness of the legend. Meanwhile, the genuine and strong mourning sentiment established in the lyrical lines here challenges C.T.Hsia's conclusion that Ming and Qing novels pay little attention to mood and atmosphere.[178] The long

[176] Italics mine.

[177] I assume the most influential local opera of her time was the early form of *yueju* 越剧 (Shaoxing opera), originating from the folk and ballad singing in Zhejiang during late Qing. In contrast to Beijing opera, *yueju* is known for specializing in love dramas and employing female performers playing male roles. For a complete discussion about *yueju* and its cross-dressing performance, see Jiang Jin, *Women Playing Men:Yue Opera and Social Change in Twentieth-century Shanghai* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009).

[178] Chih-Tsing Hsia, *The Classic Chinese Novel: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 14. But scholars also have different opinions. For example, Ellen Widmer believes that Chen Chen's descriptions of nature and of the emotional lives of his characters in *Shuihu houzhuan* 水滸後傳 (Shuihu: a sequel) were "hailed as breakthroughs in history of the Chinese novel." See her *The Margins of Utopia: Shui-hu Hou-Chuan and the Literature of Ming Loyalism*, 6.

laments compete with the suppressed emotions of the earlier Yue Fei stories and sharpen the aesthetic sensibility in the narrative.

In short, compared with the vernacular *Shuoyue*, the lyrical narrative of the *tanci* fiction *Jing zhong zhuan* helps explore the inner worlds of the characters. The emotive language encourages audiences to indulge their personal feelings during the intervals of the long chapters about battles and politics. Meanwhile, inserting lyrics fully expresses the author's talents in classic poetry and refreshes the conventional descriptions of Yue Fei in the vernacular language. By narrating her story with various styles, Zhou manages a balance between highly refined poetic lyrics and popular theatrical expressions in order to attract a broad range of audiences: both elite readers and commoners, as she writes in the first chapter that "every woman and child will know the name of the hero" 婦孺皆知英雄名 (1.1).

3. Unrefined Language

Jing zhong zhuan absorbs a variety of sources, including the living tradition of oral literature. Occasionally, Zhou Yingfang uses vulgar language or the inclusion of indecent plots in the *tanci*. Since the Ming, novels inherited the traditions of the storytellers and historiographers and used vernacular language from time to time. Writing fiction in the colloquial language also reflects the prestige and dominance of the classical poetry tradition. Thus to differentiate their writings from low class storytelling scripts, most women authors of *tanci* texts are known for a refined and elegant language. As Siao-chen Hu suggests, in practice, women generally avoid vulgar language and uninhibited description.[179] The language of *Jing zhong zhuan* is overall noble and graceful, especially when portraying the general and his family. But

[179] Hu, *Cainü cheye weimian*, 1-12.

surprisingly, once in a while Zhou Yingfang does not hesitate to add plots that seem to entertain only the philistine, using unrefined language. The abrupt change of her narrative tones marks a sharp contrast with most other women-authored *tanci* fiction.[180]

Almost half of the vulgar language directly derives from the parent text *Shuoyue*, which is written in a colloquial style and integrates some stories of low taste. The *tanci* includes part of the vernacular narrative along with the original use of unrefined vocabulary. But Zhou Yingfang also invents descriptions that would seem out of place for a highly educated upper class woman. Particularly when the story comes to the treacherous chancellor Qin Hui and his wife, Zhou never hesitates to adapt certain folkloric narration in descriptions of them. For example, in chapter 64, Niu Gao attempts to assassinate Qin to avenge Yue Fei. The mission fails but Niu does hit Qin's eye when he is trying to reach his chamber pot. Thus Qin has night soil spread all over his clothing. In chapter 68, Qin Hui receives punishment from Heaven. In most versions of the story, the skin ulcer on Qin's back bursts and eventually kills him, a sign of the peck by the garuda. Thus his death is once again integrated into the karmic frame. However, Zhou rewrites his last moment into quite a horrifying scene: his lower body is swallowed into the earth, while his upper body struggles to escape. Zhou literally portrays the image of "being destroyed by earth" (*dimie* 地滅). The death is so dreadful that after witnessing his Grand Chancellor being torn apart, Emperor Gaozong falls ill and soon dies. Women-authored *tanci* such as *Tian yu hua* and *Zai sheng yuan* do mention wars and violence, but such a bloody and disturbing depiction is very rare among gentry writers. Zhou claims that she is "borrowing the pen to execute Qin Hui, and venting her anger" 借筆誅秦氣略申 (67. 637). By

[180] Cheng Huiying also includes some bawdy descriptions in her *tanci* narrative *Feng shuang fei*.

introducing the folk tale, she expresses her own criticism of historical figures and shortens the distance between her writing and the mass audience (*furu* 婦孺). As a gentry writer, she is conscious and cautious about her adoption of folktales.[181] She warns the readers that historians might treat her version of the story as ignorant talk (訛語) and writes this folklore only in vernacular narration. Thus she still manages to divide elite style and popular interests.

Zhou Yingfang also makes a great effort to justify her usage of the vulgar details:

> 墨痕香處寫忠貞 The fragrant ink records loyalty and chastity.
> 忍使霜毫作穢文 But I have to write the filthy words with my brush.
> 遺臭留芳千古事 A notorious or celebrated reputation lasts for a thousand years.
> 怪儂長作不平鳴 That was why I speak out against injustice. (64. 600)

After Qin Hui and his wife die, Zhou finally feels she can return to her elegant writing style with a cultivated taste. She writes with relief: "My writing brush is clean with the case closed; now I am writing with a brand-new brush with fragrant ink finely ground" 結卻此案兔毫清, 濃磨香墨開新管 (68. 660). Again the clear division between poetic elegance and unrefined language reinforces the contrast between virtue and decadence. Zhou Yingfang establishes her authoritative position by writing in different tones.

Conclusion: *Jing zhong zhuan* as a Sequel

I end this chapter with a discussion of the *tanci* narrative *Jing zhong zhuan* as a sequel response to the vernacular fiction *Shuoyue*. Regarding the relation between literary creation and commentary tradition in late imperial China, David Rolston has

[181] Rewriting popular stories to appeal to the broad audience is also seen in the friends' circle of Zhou Yingfang. For example, the Yan's family friend Yu Yue 俞樾 (1821-1907), the renowned Qing scholar who wrote an elegiac couplet for Zhou Yingfang, edited and published the *Qixia wuyi* 七俠五義.

perceptively pointed out that many traditional fiction writers were influenced by commentaries during their reading and make implicit attempts to liberate themselves from the impact.[182] Critical studies of how women writers internalize and negotiate the commentary traditions in their writing are still in their infancy. Scholars, including Siao-chen Hu and Ellen Widmer, have just begun to suggest that intertextuality plays an important role in the writing and reading of women-authored literary *tanci*. Women authors not only make direct comments on previous works, but also write sequels and imitate and criticize other works.

In his book *Mingmo Qingchu xiaoshuo shu lu* 明末清初小說述錄, the historian of Chinese fiction Lin Chen 林辰 proposes two definitions of the term *xushu* 續書, or sequel in English. Narrowly defined, *xushu* refers to only what is usually understood as an "extension" (*yinshen* 引申) or "further elaboration" (*Yanyi* 演義) of a previous work in terms of characters and plot development. He broadly defines *xushu* as a sequel "that can be characterized as an expansion, abridgement, and rewriting of a previous work for the purpose of improvement."[183]

Siao-chen Hu argues that *Zai sheng yuan* is a sequel to the anonymous *Yu chuan yuan*, and *Zai zao tian* is a sequel to *Zai sheng yuan*. She also suggests that Qiu Xinru was uncomfortable with the female power in *Zai sheng yuan* and wrote *Bi sheng hua* to rectify the Confucian family order.[184] In her recent book she further discusses the intertextual relationship between *Xiao Jinqian* 小金錢 and *Yu chuan*

[182] See David Rolston, *Traditional Chinese Fiction and Fiction Commentary: Reading and Writing Between the Lines* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1997), 1-24; 105-30; 229-42.

[183] Translation is quoted from Martin Huang, see his *Snakes' Legs: Sequels, Continuations, Rewritings, and Chinese Fiction* (University of Hawai'i Press 2004), 3. Lin Chen illustrates sequel examples, such as *Xin lieguo zhi* 新列國志 (New records of countries) as a sequel to *Lie guo zhi*; *Sui Tang Yanyi* 隋唐演義 (Romance of the Sui and Tang dynasties) as a sequel to other biographies of the Sui and Tang Dynasties, and *Shuoyue* as a sequel to the previous Yue Fei stories.

[184] Hu, *Cainü cheye weimian*, 58-64.

yuan 玉釧緣. Her research demonstrates how the intertexual connections in these works shape their internal dialogue. Ellen Widmer examines the shifting evolution of various themes in *Zai sheng yuan* by Chen Duansheng and *Jin gui jie* 金閨杰 (The Heroine from the golden boudoir, prefaced 1822) edited by Hou Zhi 侯芝 (1764-1829), and then in *Zai zao tian* 再造天, a sequel of *Jin gui jie*. By delineating textual filiations, she further explains how women *tanci* writers not only comment on previous works, but also actively participate in feminine literary creativity.

Widmer also indicates that this form of women-authored intertextual dialogue in the form of writing sequels is not limited to women-authored texts. Women writers respond to male-authored fiction in their writings. She has examined *Honglou meng ying* 紅樓夢影 (In the shadow of dream of the red chamber, 1861) as a sequel of *Honglou meng*. The author Gu Taiqing 顧太清 (1799-1876) borrows scenes from *Honglou meng* to serve her own purpose of replicating upper class poetic practice. The sequel is written in a classic vernacular *zhanghui* 章回 (chapter)-narrative form.[185] Significantly, *Mengying yuan*, the *tanci* authored by Zhou Yingfang's mother, Zhen Danruo 鄭澹若, continues the story of the 100 flower spirits from *Jing hua yuan* 镜花缘 (Flowers in the mirror, 1818) and elaborates on their female talents. The intertextual links between these two works call for further scholarly attention.

The complex intertextual relations of *Jing zhong zhuan* have never been studied before. Based on Liu's broad definition of *xushu* sequels, I treat *Jing zhong zhuan* as a sequel of *Shuoyue* based on the critical edition of the narrative framework and the enriched domestic themes in the *tanci*. In addition, since a large number of characters in *Shuoyue* claim to be the descendants of the *Shuihu* heroes, and the

[185] Ellen Widmer, *The Beauty and the Book*, 181-216.

character Niu Gao, Yue Fei's sworn brother, is clearly portrayed as an imitation of Li Kui 李逵, *Jing zhong zhuan* could be further regarded as a female textual response to the masculinized story of *Shuihu*. As we will continually see in the rest of the dissertation, I argue that Zhou Yingfang is always self-consciously assuming a dual role of author and reader. *Jing zhong zhuan* is both a rewriting of and a commentary on earlier Yue Fei legends.

Jing zhong zhuan is more than Zhou Yingfang's adaptation of male-authored *xiaoshuo* fiction. The *tanci* also communicates with family members and anticipates intimate *zhiyin* 知音 readers, who respond with new writings of their own as prefaces, comments, or editing. When *Jing zhong zhuan* was first published by Shanghai Commercial Press in 1931, the text was released along with two prefaces by family friends, the evidence of family editing, and five responsorial poems by Zhou Yingfang and her family. The five poems (translation see Appendix C), sharing the same ending rhyme words, discuss Yue Fei's achievements and significance in Chinese history. Zhou summarizes her work as a "colorful writing" (艷筆), enriching the biography of Yue Fei. Her family members respond with their reading experience and comments on Yue Fei. The *tanci* text thus engages more readers to participate in the Yue Fei legend by providing extra-textual commentaries. Zhou as an elite woman writer encourages further intellectual activities among the family through her writing.

In addition, *Jing zhong zhuang* can also be read as a textual response to her mother's *tanci* narrative *Meng ying yuan*. As introduced previously, her mother Zheng Danruo was a woman scholar profoundly erudite in history. She showed particular interest in Yue Fei, as expressed in *Meng ying yuan*:

鳥盡弓藏例最嚴	It is most cruel when officials with contribution are repaid by being dismissed.
傷心我欲哭蒼天	I cry to heaven with a grieved heart.

世間多少不平事	How many injustices exist in this world?
仗何人、巨手能回造化權	Who will bring back the power of heaven with his magic hand?
從古忠奸遭際別	Loyalty and treacherousness should be distinguished through the ages.
“莫須有”案太紛煩	The false accusations are disturbing.
豈忠良合喪奸邪手	It is not that loyal officials should be killed by vice and treachery.
總蒙蔽君王亂圣懷	It is the emperor that is fooled and makes unwise decisions.
水落終當清見石	Truth will prevail eventually.
圣明天子辨忠奸	The emperor of great insight and wisdom distinguishes good and evil.
鋤奸圣舉超千古	The action to eliminate the wicked is recorded in history.
暢飲盡忠烈士懷	Let us make a toast for the martyr.
巾幗人偏懷義憤	But the woman still feels indignant at the injustice,
花開花謝總無干	Which cannot be relieved with flowers blooming and fading.
一編青史三回復	I pause several times when writing this period of history.
有淚何嘗肯妄彈	But I will not shed my tears easily.
漫道酒能澆塊壘	Do not say wine can help reduce frustration.
遣愁還賴管城尖	It is through the tip of my brush pen that I will relieve my sorrow.
替往古忠良把冤仇報	I am writing to avenge the upright person in the past,
公案重翻再戮奸	Reversing the verdict and exposing the treacherous.
一笑此功難頂冒	With a laugh, the contribution cannot be replaced.
原仗個中人有力回天	Someone who is capable saved the situation. (Meng ying yuan, chapter 30)

Without knowing the source of the above lines, one would think they are from *Jing zhong zhuan*. Indeed, Zhou Yingfang seems to inherit a strong sense of righteousness and the active engagement in historiography from her mother. The intellectual connection between mother and daughter in Zhou’s family suggests the complexity of women’s domestic roles in late imperial China. Their intimate and intellectual bond also plays a significant role in women’s literary engagement,

particularly *tanci* writing in late imperial China.[186] Siao-chen Hu indicates that "mothers" served a dual role in women's writing: in reality, mothers were first and foremost talented women themselves, so they were potential intellectual teachers and passionate audiences in women's communities. They educated daughters and nurtured their interests in their writing. In return, as daughters and/or daughters-in-law, female *tanci* authors often legitimized their writing motivation using the filial pretext to amuse their mothers and/or in-laws.[187] Even before *Jing zhong zhuan*, the late Ming *tanci* narrative *Yu chuan yuan* was co-authored by a mother and a daughter.[188] Zhou, however, continues her mother's legacy of a strong interest in history and authors her own work on Yue Fei. By independently choosing the historic topic of Yue Fei, she develops her family writing themes on upholding justice; but as a late Qing woman writer, her *tanci* work foreshadows a sense of anxiety and crisis in the following years.

Thus *Jing zhong zhuan* creates a system of intertextual dialogues with a variety of works, including historical records, theatrical performance, and vernacular

[186] In contrast, Simone de Beauvoir believes that women writers usually identify with their fathers, who have high expectations of them and encourage their writings. See Elizabeth Fallaize, *Simone de Beauvoir: a Critical Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998), 1-7; 111-20.

[187]Siao-chen Hu, *Cainü cheye weimian: jindai Zhongguo nüxing xushi wenxue de xingqi* (Beijing Shi: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2008), 9. For instance, in the first chapter of *Bi sheng hua*, Qiu Xinru describes her writing motivation as "This is simply to please my mother for a time"聊博我北堂萱室一時歡. *Bi sheng hua*'s endorser, Yun yu nüshi 雲腴女士, also emphasizes Qiu's writing as a filial action: "At the time her mother was sick, Qiu Xinru's brows were furrowed with sorrows; she sat in the west chamber to structure the story, flowers blossomed from under her wrist"當北堂之善病, 愁鎖眉峰； 坐西閣以構思， 花生腕底. Chen Duansheng in *Zai sheng yuan* claims that "I know this is of no use; but I am only aiming for a laugh from my parents"原知此事終無益, 也不過暫博慈親笑口開. The impact from mothers could be so intense that after their mother's death, the writers were so grieved that they could not complete their writing. After Chen's mother died, she waited twelve years before she continued to write *Zai sheng yuan*, as she explains in later chapters: "Ever since my mother passed, I abandoned my brush pen"自從憔悴萱堂後, 遂使蕓湘彩筆捐. As a low-profile and intimate genre, *tanci* provides a better perspective to explore the dynamics between mother and daughter.

[188] Chapter 31 of *Yu chuan yuan* claims that "[t]he daughter composes magnificent lines with her brush pen; the mother writes wonderful language with a jade pen"女把紫毫編異句, 母將玉緒寫奇言. Based on its domestic theme and the epilogue by Xihu Jushi 西湖居士, both Siao-chen Hu and Bao Zhenpei treat *Yu chuan yuan* as a female authored text. See Siao-chen Hu, *Cainü cheye weimian*, 32-37, 93-100. Bao Zhenpei, *Qingdai nü zuojia tanci xiaoshuo lungao*, 86-87.

fiction, as well as other woman-authored *tanci* narratives. Despite the inclusion of some fantastic and supernatural motifs, the overwhelming focus in the *tanci* is still on ordinary human characters and not larger-than-life heroes and heroines. The following two chapters of this dissertation will investigate characterizations in *Jing zhong zhuan*, showing how far the woman author departs from conventional writings to explore her own, highly original literary imagination.

CHAPTER III

CELEBRATION OF WOMEN'S VIRTUES IN DETAILS

Male-authored vernacular fiction in late imperial China often depicts women as sources of corruption and fatal threats to men's integrity.[189] However, one of the distinct differences between *Jing zhong zhuan* and other Yue Fei accounts is that women are portrayed as significant and indispensable in the story, as well as in history, while the characters of the companion heroes, such as Wang Gui, Tang Hui, and Niu Gao, retreat to a secondary status. This chapter focuses on the fictional women's space carved out in *Jing zhong zhuan*, where women take great control of their bodies and their lives. While embracing mainstream values, Zhou Yingfang offers a different fictional representation of the gender practices of her time. As a result, *Jing zhong zhuan* is, to a large extent, a women-centered text of considerable scope and significance, focusing on how women's lives should be told from Zhou's own vision. The genre of *tanci* occupies an ambiguous position in the canon and is regarded primarily as women's literature, a position which allows for emphasis on the interest and complexity of prevalent domestic details in *Jing zhong zhuan*.

The lives of women within the Confucian family have been presented in many fictional texts in late imperial China. The late Ming novel *Jing ping mei* portrays women in a polygamous family with a misogynist tone. The Grand Prospect Garden (大觀園) in the mid-eighteenth century masterpiece, *Hong long meng*, reflects a

[189] For discussions about late imperial vernacular fiction negative portrayals of women, see Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses: Orthodoxy, Authenticity, and Engendered Meanings in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass: Published by Harvard University Asia Center, 2001); Ding Naifei, *Obscene Things: Sexual Politics in* Jin Ping Mei (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); as well as Keith McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists: Sexuality and Male-Female Relations in Eighteenth-century Chinese Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995) and *Polygamy and Sublime Passion: Sexuality in China on the Verge of Modernity* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010).

women's utopia from the viewpoint of the male author Cao Xueqin (1715 – 1763).[190] Since late Ming, female narrators, who had seldom appeared in Chinese fiction previously, began to emerge and created a textual space for women's voices.[191] *Tian yu hua* may be the first woman-authored text which deals extensively with the life of women in Confucian families via domestic episodes. Women *tanci* writers Qiu Xinru 邱心如 and Hou Zhi 侯芝 uphold the Confucian moral code. In *Bi sheng hua*, Qiu even creates an idealistic world where women's virtues prevail: They are virtuous according to Confucian ethics, but powerless. As Toyoko Yoshida Chen analyzes in her dissertation, good wives in *Bi sheng hua* dare not stoop to the tactics of concubines because of their pride as women from good families. They suppress their anger and endure insults in order to preserve their virtue.[192] *Jing zhong zhuan*, however, invents an idealized domestic space around the Yue household, in which women negotiate gender norms to pursue their own interests while dealing with the Confucian teachings on family harmony.

Both Liu Jihua and Susan Mann have explained the intensification of the requirement of chastity for women after Song with the influence of Neo-Confucianism, the steady expansion of the state canonization system from the Yuan Dynasty onwards, and the culmination of the cult under Qing.[193] By the end of the

[190] For discussions about *Jing Ping Mei*, see Ding Naifei, *Obscene Things: Sexual Politics in Jin Ping Mei* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002) and Keith McMahon, *Causality and Containment in Seventeenth-century Chinese Fiction* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988). For discussions about *Honglou meng*, see Louise P. Edwards, *Men and Women in Qing China: Gender in the Red Chamber Dream* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994) and McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists: Sexuality and Male-Female Relations in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Fiction* (Durham: Duke University, 1995).

[191] About women and fictional writing in late imperial China, see Ellen Widmer, *The Beauty and the Book*.

[192] Toyoko Yoshida Chen, "Women in Confucian society a study of three T'an Tz'u narratives", 308.

[193] Liu Jihua 劉紀華, "Zhongguo zhenjie guannian de lishi yanbian 中國貞節觀念的歷史演變" (1938), in Bao Jialin 鮑家麟, ed., *Zhongguo funüshi lunji* 中國婦女史論集 vol.4 (Taibei: Daoxiang chubanshe, 1995), 101-129. Also Susan Mann, "Widows in the Kinship, Class, and Community Structures of Qing

nineteenth century, similar to previous dynasties, the Manchu rulers of Qing China judged men on a variety of criteria; for women the standard was based heavily on sexual chastity. In addition, under the Confucian gender system in the late imperial period, female virtue was also largely measured by a woman's performance in serving her parents, in-laws, and family interests. As we have seen in Zhou Yingfang's case in the Yan Family Genealogy, women appeared in genealogies only as wives and mothers, and after death were in some areas remembered on the domestic altar.[194]

But for late imperial Chinese women themselves, female virtues are not limited to chastity, purity or obedience only. Strength, endurance, generosity, forbearance, competence, flexibility and mobility also make up womanhood. Francesca Bray argues that in late imperial China, propriety and hierarchy were materially spatialized by the notions of inner and outer, as was gender. She explains that the Chinese house compound was designed and constructed corresponding to the integrated gendered hierarchy: orthodox notions restricted women to an inner space and men to an outer space.[195] Spatialized Chinese ethical relations and this inner/outer distinction, indeed limited the access of women to public life and the outside world.

Dynasty China," *The Journal of Asian Studies*. 46.1 (1987): 37-56. Since the 1920s scholars have investigated the chastity cult in Ming and Qing; their works include the following: Chen Dongyuan 陳東原, *Zhongguo funü shenghuo shi* 中國婦女生活史 (1928), reprinted by Shanghai shu dian, 1990. Mark Elvin, "Female Virtue and the State in China," *Past and Present*, no. 104 (1984): 111-152. Tian Rukang , *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity: A Comparative Study of Chinese Ethical Values in Ming-Ch'ing Times* (Leiden: Brill, 1988). Hu Fagui 胡發貴, "Qingdai zhenjie guannian lunshu 清代貞節觀念述論", Qingshi yanjiu ji 清史研究集 vol.7 (Beijing: guangming ribao chubanshe, 1990).An Bilian 安碧莲, "Mingdai funü zhenjieguan de qianghua yu shijian 明代婦女貞節觀的強化與實踐" (PhD diss., Chinese Culture University, 1995). Du Fangqin 杜芳琴, "Mingqing zhenjie de tedian jiqi yuanyin 明清貞節的特點及其原因", *Shanxi shifan daxue xuebao* 山西師范大學學報 (Shehui kexueban 社會科學版), 4 (1997): 41-46. Liu Changjiang 劉長江, "Mingqing zhenjie guannian shanbian shulun 明清貞節觀嬗變述論", *Xinan minzu daxue xuebao* 西南民族大學學報 (Renwen shekeban 人文社科版), 12 (2003): 214-17.

[194] See my introduction chapter, 24-39.

[195] Francesca Bray, *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 49-59, 237-73.

However, women stood both at the margins and at the center within this family system. Dorothy Ko highlights that "cults of domesticity and motherhood may have been promoted first by male literati, but they acquired concrete meaning only as women embraced the ideals for their own reasons. Their affirmation of the Confucian tradition, or their interpretations of it, did not simply serve the interests of the patriarch."[196] This restriction served somehow to exclude men from the domestic realm. Thus a *guixiu* talented woman's appropriate location was at the center of that domestic realm. In other words, Ko suggests that the seclusion was not isolation. The power of women lay primarily in the domestic realm, underneath the surface of the old gender norms, working indirectly on conventional principles and undermining the old restrictive boundaries.

Meanwhile, a new vision of womanhood, shaped by the Jiang'nan urban society but more notably by the widening education of women, is represented in *Jing zhong zhuan*. The highly educated gentry women were still at home, but the content of domestic life differed from our impressions. They served according to the Confucian rituals, but they also had a secure place in which to develop their own culture. The best way to understand women's definition of virtues is through their own writings, which helps correct the distortions shaped by the singular male gaze on a society dominated by Confucian norms. *Jing zhong zhuan* provides testimony for how a late imperial woman articulates the values and meanings of her time. In her text, Zhou Yingfang seems quite happy to adopt the orthodox Confucian norms of virtue, such as chastity, loyalty and political martyrdom, as the highest ideals for women in

[196] Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 19.

nineteenth-century China.[197] But the way in which she narrates the story defamiliarizes the familiar historical terrain. In her adaptation of the legend of Yue Fei, she brings in more feminine touches through her domestic details, setting the story apart from the conventional masculine themes of war and violence. To a large extent, the description of domestic life stands as an independent text and the detailed narration composes a subtext to the original martial story and historical fiction. The hero's mother, wife and daughter, as well as other distinguished women, who are faceless and silent in other texts, are now endowed with personality and authority in the *tanci* version, along with strength, endurance, generosity, forbearance, and competence.

Beauty and Learning

At least before the Song, talented women were recorded in history because of their wisdom and learning. The most famous of them, including Ma Lun 馬倫 (fl. third century), Cai Dan 蔡琰 (162-239) and Xie Daoyun 謝道韞 (349-409), have been known for their eloquence in argument (*caibian* 才辯). By the fourteenth century, Neo-Confucianism required that women should be chaste and quiet (*zhenjing* 貞靜); eloquence and learning were no longer considered a virtue for them. Lisa Raphals indicates that female virtue, mostly spousal loyalty, was frequently used to define male honor in imperial China.[198] During late imperial China, filial piety remained a central moral requirement for both men and women. For women, an additional

[197] It is worth noticing that Zhou is particularly conscious about class hierarchy. In chapter 39, she compares two maids with Yue Fei's daughter Wen and judges them to be "secondary beauties" (二等美人). In fact, all her female protagonists are established as women from upper class families.

[198] Lisa Raphals discusses how women emerged as intellectual, moral, and political agents traced back to Warring States texts. See Lisa Ann Raphals, *Sharing the Light: Representations of Women and Virtue in Early China* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1998).

requirement of chastity was as significant as filiality. In other words, while filial piety was applied to both genders, chastity was a virtue required only for women. *Jing zhong zhuan*, however, presents women's virtues in a much broader definition, especially highlighting their talents of learning and management, with the integration of feminine beauty.

In *Shijing* 詩經 (the Book of Odes), male authors and audiences appreciated beautiful women with a focus on physical appearance. For example, the poem of *Shuoren* 碩人 (the grand lady) portrays Lord Zhuang's wife in sensuous details:

> 手如柔荑 Her fingers were like the blades of the young white-grass.
> 膚如凝脂 Her skin was like congealed ointment.
> 領如蝤蠐 Her neck was like the tree-grub.
> 齒如瓠犀 Her teeth like melon seeds.
> 螓首蛾眉 Her forehead cicada-like ; her eyebrows like [the antenne of] the silkworm moth.
> 巧笑倩兮 What dimples , as she artfully smiled!
> 美目盼兮 How lovely her eyes , with the black and white so well defined ![199]

However, feminine beauty was also long considered as threatening and dangerous in imperial China. Beautiful women appear mostly in the form of prostitutes, shrews or femmes fatale. Particularly in ghost stories, they are often fox spirits and harm innocent young scholars. On the other hand, women's own expectations of beauty might be quite different from the male definition. For example, the Eastern Han woman scholar Ban Zhao (45-117) connects women's beauty with purity. In her influential *Nü jie* 女誡 (Admonitions for women), she challenges the male definition by asserting that the ideal woman's beauty does not rely on physical qualities:

> To wash and scrub filth away; to keep clothes and ornaments fresh and clean; to wash the head and bathe the body regularly; and to keep the person free from disgraceful filth, maybe called the characteristics of womanly bearing.

[199] Translated by James Legge in The Chinese Classics, vol. 4 (1898), accessed April 17, 2013, http://etext.virginia.edu/chinese/shijing/AnoShih.html.

[盥浣尘秽，服饰鲜洁，沐浴以时，身不垢辱，是谓妇容.][200]

Before *Jing zhong zhuan*, feminine beauty, physical or external, had never been celebrated so passionately and publically, or with a much more authoritative narrative tone. The *tanci*'s first deviation from *Shuoyue* or standard Yue Fei stories is the portrait of Yue Fei's wife, Li Xiao'e 李孝娥. The brief mentioning about Yue's marriage in *Shuoyue* develops into a lyrical celebration of female virtues with altered significance:

閉月羞花不待云 Outshining the moon and putting flowers to shame, her beauty had no words to be described.
天生絕世無雙女 She was truly an unrivalled young woman.
慧質蘭心秀出群 With crystal heart and noble spirit, she was exceptionally elegant.
詠絮簪花稱獨步 She was gifted in poetry and calligraphy,
賢良德性更無倫 Her virtues of kindness and grace were without parallel. (4, 22)

Zhou Yingfang's elaboration on feminine charm is filled with affection shown by elders. When it comes to Yue Fei's daughter Yue Wen, *Jing zhong zhuan* never hesitates to elaborate on her beauty. She is portrayed as "a rare flower of nine years old, with a peony-like look and jade-like spirit" 九齡姣小瓊花蕊, 牡丹為質玉為神 (38. 330). As Ko suggests, in women's inner chambers, mothers, daughters, and friends are not at all shy about discussing their bodies and looks.[201] The Zhangs, another Hangzhou gentry family whose daughter is engaged to Yue Fei's fourth son Yue Zhen in *Jing zhong zhuan*, demonstrate how beauty and virtues are involved in daily conversation between and among women of different generations and status. After Yue Fei's death, Yue Zhen's fiancée Miss Zhang is about to visit the general's

[200] Translated by Robin R. Wang in her *Images of Women in Chinese Thought and Culture: Writings from the Pre-Qing Period through the Song Dynasty* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co, 2003), 185.

[201] Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 166.

mausoleum.[202] Before she leaves with her mother, Grandmother Zhang, who is supervising her grandchildren's education, holds her hand and says: "Don't rush; let me take a look at how you are dressed today" 待我看看今日怎生打扮 (69. 688). Then in a delightful tone, the woman author depicts her dazzling beauty:

這回喜溢太夫人 Granny Zhang was greatly pleased,
細看姣娃果出眾 When she saw her beloved granddaughter of outstanding excellence.
麗色艷姿尤奪目 Her stunning beauty dazzled everyone's eyes.
新妝更勝畫中人 Her fresh makeup was better than a painting.
青絲挽就神仙髻 The black hair was dressed fancifully.
數朵名花壓鬢云 Precious flowers were placed in her hair.
稱體羅衣秋月白 She was dressed in a well-tailored moon-white garment.
凌波淡淡紫霞裙 Her skirt was light purple, as if she was riding the waves.
金鑲寶釧垂黃袖 Gold bracelets were shining in her yellow sleeves.
元色云肩巧繡精 Her black shawl had refined embroideries.
姣娃不喜濃妝艷 The pretty young woman did not like rich colors.
天然風韻秀無倫 Her natural elegance was unparallel in the world.
不短不長偏嫵媚 Perfect in size, she was truly charming and lovely.
宜嗔宜喜態娉婷 With joy or anger, she was always graceful. (69. 668)

Here Miss Zhang's beautiful appearance and womanly deportment are fully embraced as an expression of admirable inner qualities. Rather than worrying about the potential danger brought by her beauty, the grandmother takes great pride in her grand-daughter's attraction and tells her daughter-in-law with a laugh: "Keep an eye on her from harassments by lascivious youth" 勿使狂蜂浪蝶侵 (69. 668). In this late

[202] Recent research has suggested that women were not in any rigorous physical sense residentially secluded as conventionally believed. As Susan Mann suggests, "…a visit to a temple or shrine to burn incense was the most respectable reason for young women to leave home." See Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century*, 57. Mark Elvin provides more information about women's outdoor activities in late imperial China: in the second lunar month, "many women go out for excursions, which is known as treading the green"; on the third day of the third month, "the women escape to the outside, which is called escaping to the green"; on the fourth of the eighth month, when the festival of washing the Buddha's body took place, "men and women eat vegetarian food and gather together." See Mark Elvin, "Blood and Statistics: Reconstructing the Population Dynamics of Late Imperial China from the Biographies of Virtuous Women in Local Gazetteers," in Harriet Thelma Zurndorfer, ed., *Chinese Women in the Imperial Past: New Perspectives* (Leiden [Netherlands]; Boston, 1999), 151-52.

Qing women's discourse, the ultimate fear of a threat toward female chastity in the conventional gender norm turns into a light-hearted joke.

In *Jing zhong zhuan*, beauty is always integrated with other virtues, particularly learning and talents. Although among the Qing scholars whether a woman should develop her poetic talent was still a hotly debated issue,[203] women's learning was widely seen as a compatible attribute of womanhood among the Jiang'nan reading public. In addition, rather than the image of a stern female instructress, represented by an earlier woman scholar Ban Zhao, *tanci* fiction often took as a model the delicate female poet Xie Daoyun, who became famous for her lines about graceful willow catkins when she was still a child.[204] In *Jing zhong zhuan*, Miss Zhang is passionately characterized as a beauty with extraordinary literary talent and high intelligence.

才夸道韞詩清艷 She was as gifted as Xie Daoyun, composing pure and elegant poetry.
簪花更勝衛夫人 Her calligraphy was even better than that of Madam Wei.[205]
生成閉月羞花貌 Her beauty outshone the moon and shamed the flowers;
那更文才如許清 Not to mention her lucid literary talents. (69. 667)

[203] Scholarship that explores women's learning in the Qing includes the following: Chia-Lan Chang, "Family Matters: Women's Negotiation with Confucian Family Ethics in Qing and Republican China" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2007). Susan Mann, "*Fuxue* (Women's Learning) by Zhang Xuecheng (1738-1801): China's First History of Women's Culture," *Late Imperial China*, 13, no. 1 (1992): 40-62; *Precious Records*. And Guan Zixu 管梓旭, "Lun qingdai nüxing wenxue chuangzuo de hefaxing 論清代女性文學創作的合法性", *Jianna wenxue: jingdian yuedu* 劍南文學：經典閱讀 2 (2012): 164-65.

[204] One example in which women-authored *tanci* sets Xie Daoyun as an ideal gentry woman with both beauty and talent include chapter 3 of *Tian yu hua*, "It is well known that you are more talented that Daoyun"久知小姐才過道韞. Other examples include*Tian yu hua* chapter 4 and chapter 8; preface of *Zai sheng yuan* by Hou Zhi; *Bi sheng hua* chapter 18, *Jing wei shi* chapter 1 and chapter 4, etc. Contemporary scholar Xia Xiaohong 夏曉虹 explicitly compares Qiu Jin to Xie Daoyun; see her "Qiu Jin yu Xie Daoyun 秋瑾與謝道韞", *Beijing daxue xuebao* 北京大學學報 (zhexue shehui kexue ban 哲學社會科學版) 01 (1999): 91-98. Meanwhile, it is worth noticing that Miss Zhang is a native of Changzhou, a place with prosperous women writers and rich in women's culture activities.

[205] Madam Wei, or Wei *furen* 衛夫人 (272 – 349), was a master of calligraphy in Eastern Jin Dynasty. She authored the "Diagram of the Brush Battle" (筆陣圖), a theoretical debate about calligraphy. She was also a teacher of the most famous calligrapher Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–361).

In the verses the young woman's talents are defined with an aesthetic sensibility. Beauty and talent are valued and become an integrated component of her personal, social, and cultural identities.

Meanwhile, rather than being powerful or transgressive, beauty and talent in *Jing zhong zhuan* have been tamed within domestic settings. Different from male authors who usually associate women's writing talents with themes of lovesickness, loneliness or illness, Zhou Yingfang shows how the gentry family nurtures women's erudition. In addition to Miss Zhang from Changzhou, Yue Fei's daughter Yue Wen is another example of good looks and learning. In the *tanci*, Wen is referred to as the Scholar of the Orchid (*lanshi* 蘭史), a popular name that talented women often adopted to describe themselves in late imperial China. At the age of eleven she is "clever and sensible, and aesthetically pleasing to her parents" 善窺親意性聰明 (40. 352). She absolutely wins her father's favor and shows an equal intellectual competency.

岳爺深喜平陽女	Lord Yue deeply loved his princess-like daughter.[206]
父女清淡論古今	The father and the daughter had a brilliant conversation about history.
月映晶簾明似鏡	The crystal curtains were as bright as the mirror under the moon.
桂花風送透芳芬	The osmanthus flowers let out aroma in the breeze.
蟾光最好中秋景	The moon looked most beautiful during the Mid-Autumn Festival.
詩思悠然乘興吟	It was the time for muse to visit and compose poetry.
父女出庭同步月	The father and the daughter walked together in the moon light.
瑤階玩賞暢悠情	Enjoying the beautiful view and talking cheerfully. (40. 353)

[206] The Chinese characters *pingyang* 平陽 here should refer to Princess Zhao of Pingyang (平陽昭公主, 598-623). She was the most honorable daughter of Li Yuan 李淵, the first emperor of the Tang 唐 Dynasty. She helped her father Li Yuan seize military power and in person led a women's army (娘子軍) in the campaign to capture the Sui capital Chang'an in 617. But meanwhile, it is said the famous Tang poet Li Bo's daughter was also named Pingyang. See Li Bo, *Ji donglu er zhizi shi* (寄東魯二稚子詩 To my two little children in East Lu).

As suggested here, Wen wins her father's favor not only for being pretty and clever, but for her learning in history and poetry.

Women's Management Skills

It is also worth noticing that early in *Jing zhong zhuan*, the moral hierarchy in an ideal family should be "parents are kind, sons are filial, and daughters-in-law are capable" 親慈子孝婦賢能 (14. 112). In other words, *Jing zhong zhuan* mostly values competence of a woman in the household, rather than her chastity, filial piety or even literary talents. Compared with other younger women *tanci* writers, Zhou Yingfang demonstrates a more realistic life attitude in her text. Her appreciation of women's management capabilities grants a considerable range of flexibility to gentry women in late imperial China and might even anticipate the upcoming successful business women of the next fifty years in the Jiang'nan area.[207] Two situations in the *tanci* are associated with construction of women's management skills: how they deal with family calamities and how they arrange daily events in the household.

1. Women in a Time of Family Calamity

The Confucian view that a woman should submit to the men around her -- fathers (-in-law), husbands, and even sons -- restricted female behaviors. But what if there is no man to submit to? Discourses that link women in power to social chaos and decline prevail in many Ming-Qing novels. Novels such as *Honglou meng* underscore

[207] Susan Mann's recent book *The Talented Women of the Zhang Family* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007) further examines women's roles in house management and family financial plans in late imperial China. In addition, contemporary Chinese woman writer Wang An'yi 王安憶 (1954-) continues to explore this theme in her latest fiction *Tianxiang* 天香 (Beijing: renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2011), in which women in a declining literati family perform embroidery, execute works of art, and market the products of their artistic creativity.

women's ability to manage their family economy, particularly in large households. For example, C.T. Hsia connects Wang Xifeng's evil power with her womanhood, accusing her of being driven by subordination to manipulate and protect her own self-interests.[208] Women's meddling in male affairs, specifically in their husbands' financial transactions, has been viewed as a sign that a man was dominated by his wife. *Jing zhong zhuan*, however, embraces Wang Xifeng's transgressive lifestyle as evidence of women's virtue, stretching the boundary of women's power from "rice and salty" matters to delicate house management and decision making.

While Yue Fei, Yue Yun, and later Yue Lei are fighting on the frontier, women in the Yue household replace husbands and fathers as the authorities, educators and financial managers. Especially in the second half of the *tanci*, after the deaths of Yue Fei and Yue Yun, women do not exist only as victims of violence brought by war; they are loyal, strong, and intelligent in the face of calamity. Their courage, intelligence, and virtues are celebrated in the *tanci* text.[209] When Yue Fei's wife Lady Li and her family are trapped in Lin'an, she acts like a real noble woman. Bearing the great sorrow of a series of deaths in the family -- losing her husband, her son, and her daughter in succession -- she does not collapse but hides her emotions well. The Yue army wants to rebel and avenge Yue's death, but Lady Li successfully controls the situation and reminds them that the Yue family is known for being loyal. Meanwhile, she secretly sends a letter to Tangyin to inform Yun's wife of the upcoming danger. Zhou imagines the situation of directing servants completely from an upper-class woman's perspective: "she was a heroine with extraordinary talents,

[208] Hsia, *the Classic Chinese Novel: A Critical Introduction*, 26.

[209] To a certain extent, Zhou Yingfang is more radical than other women t*anci* writers because she celebrates femininity directly, instead of some "male" experience that brings honors and distinction via cross-dressing.

who did not reveal her joys and sorrows in front of the servants" 巾幗奇才女丈夫, 不形喜怒對諸奴 (61. 567).

On the other side, Yue Yun's wife Lady Gong has obeyed her mother-in-law's earlier instruction and sends her natal family away so that they will not be involved in the crisis. Receiving the secret letter from Lin'an, the whole household falls into a panic, but Lady Gong is the first person to calm down. She sends a message to Nanyang where Yue Fei's third son Yue Lei resides, asking him to escape immediately. Then she compiles an inventory of the family property, waiting calmly for further news. [210] Later she leads her family to join her mother-in-law in Lin'an, and from there, everyone in the Yue household sets out in exile.

After showing how women manage large households with courage and wisdom in moments of crisis, *Jing zhong zhuan* creates further drama surrounding the virtue of women. When the Yue household arrives in Yunnan, the local governor is attracted to Lady Gong's beauty and schemes to kidnap her. She attempts to commit suicide to protect her chastity and the family reputation. This deliberately complicated plot reflects the woman author's high moral expectations and her effort to balance women's capabilities with concern about their virtue. Unlike male-authored fiction, which requires chastity as the only defining measure of women's virtue, *Jing zhong zhuan* challenges this monopolistic criterion by juxtaposing the ideals of chastity with other abilities.

The characters of Lady Li and Lady Gong in *Jing zhong zhuan* provide an alternative discourse on daughters-in-law as motifs of obedient victims or potential

[210] The orderly arrangements might also give us a sense of the traumatic memory of the time Zhou's maternal grandfather Zheng Zuchen was arrested.

decay found in many Ming-Qing vernacular novels.[211] To a certain degree *Jing zhong zhuan*'s narration of capable and devoted daughters-in-law could also be regarded as a response to *Honglou meng*, in which Wang Xifeng's problematic management contributes to the collapse of the Jia family. In the *tanci*, elite women in the Yue household are capable of caring for the old, educating children, managing property, and conducting family rituals. In addition, when needed they are also good leaders on the road, as we will see later.

2. The Utopia of Domestic Details: Banquets, Weddings, and Childbirths

Another situation in which women often have influence and gain actual control is during family rituals, especially events such as banquets, weddings, and childbirth. Before we take a close look at the *tanci* text, I would like to first review the application of a unique narrative technique in women-authored *tanci*: domestic details. The term *domestic details* refer to the excessive descriptive richness with a deliberately slow narrative pace in *tanci* narratives.[212] Occasionally, details even prevail over the storyline. The first generation of *tanci* scholars, mostly May Fourth intellectuals, simply considered this narrative feature unhealthy, denouncing it as a fatal aesthetic flaw and connecting it with women's lack of broad viewpoints. The word *rongchang* 冗長 (prolixity) is frequently employed when talking about women's

[211] The most famous representations of troublesome daughters-in-law include *Honglou meng* discussed above and*Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻緣傳 written by Xia Jingqu 夏敬渠 (1705-1787), in which a malicious daughter-in-law attempted to castrate her father-in-law. For details see Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses*, 136-42.

[212] Further discussions on "feminine details" and "domesticity," see Hu, "Literary *tanci"*, 272-311; Ray Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity: the Politics of Reading Between West and East* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail* (Newyork: Methuen, 1987); and Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and domestic fiction: A political history of the novel* (Oxford University Press, 1987).

tanci.[213] But different voices soon appear. As mentioned before, Zheng Zhenduo harshly criticized Zheng Zhenhua's *tanci* fiction *Meng ying yuan* for its superfluous details. However, another renowned Chinese scholar, Tan Zhangbi, defends the refined description and lengthy narration in *Meng ying yuan* and argues that the detailed elaboration is indeed an "advanced literature technique" (*shangdeng de wenxue fangfa* 上等的文學方法). He suggests:

> It is not a flaw of the writer, because the writing style like this is truly an advanced literary technique. We might have the same feeling when we read long Western novels. The reason [why we do not appreciate it] is that we are not qualified to understand this type of literature, since we are used to "casual books" of low taste, simply a record of everything.
> [這不能說是作者的短處，因為這樣的寫法倒是上等的文學方法， 我們讀西洋長篇小說時也會起這感覺，原因是在于我們沒有鑒賞這種文學的素養，因為我們看慣了那些膚淺的低級趣味的記事式的"閑書"的緣故。][214]

It is worthy noticing that Tan parallels women's *tanci* narrative with long Western novels. As a classical narrative mode, women's *tanci* was judged out of date with the May Fourth agenda of Westernization and modernization. Siao-chen Hu suggests that the tradition of oral performance might be one of the reasons why details are so crucial in *tanci.*[215] On the stage, without details story-singing would not attract the audience nor last for days.[216] She also studies how detail is denounced by the May Fourth discourse, where "denunciation of the detail of *tanci* is part of the modernist rejection of old China; and the superfluous detail in *tanci* violates the modern concept

[213] See Zheng Zhenduo, *Zhongguo su wenxue shi* (Beijing: dongfang chubanshe, 1996), 518.

[214] Tan Zhengbi, *Zhongguo nüxing wenxueshi*, 446.

[215] Hu, "Literary *Tanci*", 273.

[216] For example, when the mid-Qing *tanci* singer Ma Rufei 馬如飛 (b. 1817) performed Zhenzhu ta 珍珠塔 (The pearl pagoda), he lingered on one single scene for a continuous eighteen days. See Sheng Zhimei, *Qingdai tanci yanjiu*, 130-37.

of 'good' literature."[217] But she provides no further discussion on the unique aesthetics of detail in women-authored *tanci* fiction. Rey Chow, however, associates detail with femininity and explores the complex relation between fictional details and femininity in the different context of emerging Chinese modernity. She argues that detail is a gendered method of differentiation that presents an intellectual fascination in ancient China and that this unique writing style is systematically compelled to disappear in modern China. [218]

In fact, the focus on detail and particular moments in fictional writing does not originate only from female-authored *tanci*. This narrative feature has started since the late Ming period, as we can see in *Jing ping mei* and some of Ling Mengchu's short novels.[219] While traditional commentators stress the economical style of literature, women's detailed elaboration in *tanci* continues to subvert the orthodox aesthetics in Chinese literature.

In the Republican era, A Ying in his *Tanci xiaoshuo ping kao* 彈詞小說評考 (Commentary and Study of *Tanci* Narratives, 1937) provides six criteria of *tanci* fiction, with one of them being "the story's development should not be immediately apparent to the audience. It is necessary to create something unexpected and unimagined by the audience and make them surprised and happy." The choice to rewrite a historic story, especially when the audience is already familiar with the plot, does not have to mean a repeated narrative with little originality. In *Jing zhong zhuan*, Zhou Yingfang adds more details with a great emphasis on women's eminence in intelligence and moral virtue and carves out an independent female space parallel to

[217]Hu, "Literary *Tanci"*, 274-75.

[218] Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity*, 84.

[219] For a relevant discussion also see Wai-yee Li, "The Collector, the Connoisseur, and Late-Ming Sensibility," *T'oung Pao*. 81.4 (1995): 269-302.

the background of the martial story and grand historical narration. In fact, her creativity is seen not only in the domestic episodes, but in her language innovation as well. Through a lyrical narrative with rich details, she establishes an idealized women's community and reconstructs a lively picture of domestic reality. Compared to Chen Duansheng, who completed the first seventeen volumes of *Zai sheng yuan* in only two years, Zhou Yingfang might not have been a rapid writer for her 73-chapter work. But Chen did most of her writing before the age of twenty, while Zhou started after the age of thirty-six, when she had had four children to take care of. In other words, from the perspective of a wife and mother with authority in the family, *Jing zhong zhuang*'s domestic detail differs from other *tanci* authored by younger women writers. In the following section I will discuss detailed scenes of banquets, marriages, and childbirth in *Jing zhong zhuan*, as they are major events for late imperial gentry women and represent women's significant roles in family affairs.

Scenes of eating and drinking in Ming-Qing vernacular fiction are often employed to maintain and enhance the physical prowess of male heroes. In *Shuihu zhuan*, the *Liangshan* heroes are often witnessed "biting big chunks of meat and drinking large bowls of wine"大塊吃肉大碗喝酒 as a distinct part of their lifestyle. The feast scenes also suggest their hierarchical ranking. In *Jing zhong zhuan*, however, instead of serving as an aspect of masculinity and heroism,[220] banquets and wine-drinking become frequent boudoir occasions and the opportunity for women to exchange their writings and refresh their friendship. These women's activities have been long ignored and oppressed by other narratives. In chapter 40, Yue Fei's daughter Yue Wen has a brief reunion with her two sworn sisters before they follow their husbands to the capital. The three women, with other female family members,

[220] Another notion of wine in traditional fiction is its association with sex, as indicated by the word *jiu se* 酒色 (alcohol and sex).

spend a lot of time together talking and holding banquets every few days. A detailed moment in the inner female domain helps represent their emotional and intellectual bond in an indirect but refined way.

今宵喜值中秋節 Today was the mid-autumn festival.
玉兔團圞分外明 The bright moon indicated the moment of family union.
姑嫂花間同把袂 In the flowers, in-law sisters walked hand-in-hand.
一同玩月瑞麟廳 At the Ruilin Hall, they admired the beautiful moon.
(40. 353)

This description of a quiet, romantic, and intimate night scene is inserted right after the description of a grand feast in the family. Images and allusions such as the moon or the flowers form an externalization of a subtle sisterhood through lyrical subtlety.

In chapter 57 when Yue Fei is away from home leading the battle, his family members are having complicated feelings. At another family banquet, Lady Li tells Yue Yun that when his second son was born, the family failed to send him the good news because of the war. She was worried about her husband; they have been apart for three years. Yue Fei deliberately refused to send any word to his family so that they would not be distracted. While the general achieved many victories in defending the Southern Song Empire, his family members were living in constant anxiety. But the worries were temporarily replaced by the lovely scene of the three children in the family competing with each other to win the favor of Lady Li.

五爺見姪親君側 When Yue Ting saw his cousin playing by the lady,
也到親前爭愛心 He toddled to her to win her favor.
乳娘抱去小公子 The nanny carried away Ting's cousin,
恐惹霆爺淚涕零 So that Ting would not break into tears.
三人叔姪同爭愛 The three children fought over her attention.
登時引笑國夫人 She was pleasantly amused. (57. 532)

This banquet scene is actually a warm family picture. The seemingly unrelated details of children serve to provide delightful distractions from the heavy clouds of

anxiety. They help establish private feelings and mundane experiences as a major theme in the *tanci*, making the domestic inner attentions of everyday life equally as important as public imperial affairs of politics and patriotism.

Banquets are often associated with weddings, another favorite topic in *Jing zhong zhuan*. In addition to Yue Fei's wedding in earlier chapters, five more grand wedding ceremonies are elaborated in beautiful lyrics and great detail.[221] Typical wedding descriptions are particularly focused on preparation for family gatherings and rituals, such as the wedding parade, gifts, music, and customs. The elaboration of details also corresponds to a woman's status in the family. The detailed display of domestic life in *Jing zhong zhuan* almost embraces a type of exhibitionism and conveys a strong sense of orderly management for gentry women as household managers. *Jing zhong zhuan*'s gorgeous wedding scenes indeed brighten the depressing war story, since the details are often inserted between the intense war narrations. For example, when Yue Fei's army encircles the pirates at Lake Dongting, the woman author takes the narration out of the military framework and turns to a description of the wedding of the pirate general Wu Shangzhi 伍尚志.

須臾殿上懸燈彩 Soon lights were on in the palace.
霓裳曲奏五云飄 Auspicious clouds were floating, and beautiful music was playing.
宮娥對對提香鼎 In pairs, court ladies were carrying incense burners.
內侍雙雙品玉簫 In couples, attendants were playing jade flutes.
樂聲悠揚鈞天奏 The lovely melody went rising and falling, like in Heaven.
擁出金枝玉葉嬌 The beauty from the royal family appeared, surrounded by her maids.
三請殿前新駙馬 Three times, the emperor's new son-in-law was invited to come up.
參天拜地鳳鸞交 The deeply-in-love couple worshiped Heaven and Earth.
雙牽紅綠同心僚 Holding the two ends of a colorful cloth, their hearts join

[221] The six grand weddings in *Jing zhong zhuan* are for Yue Fei and Lady Li (chapter 4), Yue Yun and Lady Gong (chapter 38), Niu Gao and Miss Qi 戚氏 (chapter 26), Tang Huai 汤懷, Meng Bangjie 孟邦杰 and the Fan sisters 范家姐妹 (chapter 28), Wu Shangzhi 伍尚志 and Miss Yao 姚氏 (chapter 46), and the continual wedding celebration for Yue Fei's three sons (chapter 72 and 73).

into one.
洞房深處鵲成橋 Inside the bridal chamber, the magpie bridge was ready now.
坐床撤帳通行禮 the couple sat on bed and performed the rites.
瑣碎煩文莫細描 I will not further describe the trivial matters in my writing. (46. 422)

Here the arbitrary manner of the dramatized display, as well as the descriptive detail, blocks the narrative flow of the war. It is intriguing to notice that in the last verse Zhou actually recognizes the routine conventions and digressive irrelevance of her wedding scenes and thus disapproves of prolixity in her writing. But meanwhile she somehow appreciates the finery and indulges herself in such visual details. She takes every chance to show her skills in managing gorgeous scenes in poetic language with indulgent enthusiasm. At the end of the *tanci*, the Yue household gains all its honors back and receives more rewards from the new emperor. Zhou's writing shifts dramatically from historical facts on Yue Fei to her exclusively imagined domestic sphere: Lady Li arranges another three weddings for her sons Lei, Lin, and Zhen, who are all betrothed to daughters from noble families.[222] Chapter 72 is once again crowded with repeated descriptions of the wedding parades, showers of gifts from family friends and subordinates, wedding parties, or customs in the bridal chamber, where the details override narration.[223]

Weddings in *Jing zhong zhuan* challenge patriarchal authority as described in male-authored texts. Brides in *Jing zhong zhuan* take great control of their lives. Take

[222] In fact, like previous Yue Fei stories, Zhou Yingfang follows *Shuoyue* to rewrite the history in her fiction that Yue Fei's son Yue Lei finally beats the Jurchens and brings the coffins of Emperor Huizong and Emperor Qinzong back to the Song. See chapter 71 "Tang Huai defeated the Jurchen troops by shooting fire arrows; the son of Yue Fei realized his ambition to win the final victory" 湯御帶巧施火箭破番營，岳世子直搗黃龍酬先志.

[223] It deserves further notice that the *tanci* actually elaborates on the intermarriage between Yue Fei's son Yue Lin 霖 and the princess from an ethnic minority tribe in Yunnan. With her life experience in the borderlands in Guizhou, the woman author seems to embrace the Qing imperial rhetoric and casts herself as an advocate for the Manchu civilizing project for minorities.

the joint wedding party of Tang Huai 湯懷 and Meng Bangjie 孟邦杰 with the Fan sisters for an example. Their marriage in *Shuoyue* is condensed into one simple phrase: the conventional couplet of "The twelve Wu Mountains meet in the rains and clouds; tonight Prince Xiang will step on top of the pleasure on the sunrise platform"十二巫山云雨會，襄王今夜上陽臺.[224] Then after "drinking from the nuptial cups"合巹已畢, the two grooms go out and entertain their guests.[225] Women, even brides, are ignored; and the narration is completely male-centered.

The same plot is much more complex and cheerful in the *tanci* version. Dowry gifts from the Fan family are carefully recorded,[226] and preparation details are listed: official approval from the general arrives before the wedding; the Fan family is busy with arranging the party, etc. Meanwhile, the brides' mother is occupied helping her daughters get ready for the wedding. Zhou also imagines the brides' thoughts about the previous conflict: they feel regret about fighting with their husbands, while the two grooms could not help feeling truly blessed to meet their beautiful wives during the battle. After the wedding night, rather than playing a dominant role as we read in *Shuoyue*, the two heroes accompany their wives to serve the in-laws:

> 樊公夫婦多歡喜 The Fan family was in great joy.
> 內外開宴骨肉親 They held two banquets to please everyone.
> 內堂兩美陪慈母 The two daughters stayed with their mother in her chamber.
> 外廳翁婿共三人 Outside, Lord Fan and his two sons-in-law enjoyed the time.
> 珍饈羅列時新果 Fresh fruits were served with the sumptuous feast.

[224] Qian Cai and Jin Feng, *Shuoyue quanzhuan*, 208.

[225] The Chinese phrase *hejin* 合巹 (drinking from nuptial cups) refers to the ritual that the new couple exchange their cups and drink. See Qian Cai and Jin Feng, *Shuoyue quan zhuan*, 208.

[226] Scholars have pointed out that the dowry reflects the economic independence of women in late imperial China. A dowry, as crucial financial support, helps increase the bride's standing in her husband's family and maintain a bond with her natal family. See Patricia B. Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Susan Mann, "Dowry Wealth and Wifely Virtue in Mid-Qing Gentry Households," *Late Imperial China*, 29 (2008): 64-76.

美酒葡萄翠玉樽 Good wine was poured into jade cups.
金壺左右頻頻進 Gold wine pots encouraged their drinks.
筵前笑語共陶情 Relaxed laughter filled the banquet. (29. 251)

The detailed descriptive table displays and manners continue to indicate that these seemingly trivial affairs bore special significance for women, as opportunities to prove their capabilities in the domestic realm. In addition, Zhou emphasizes the intimate moments spent in the bedchambers and the respect paid particularly to the bride's parents. These details at a family banquet subvert the patriarchal family structure in the vernacular fiction. The woman author is not bound by household routine but creates the space to enjoy a sense of family union.

Together with themes of marriage, Zhou Yingfang portrays the celebrations of childbirth rituals with almost the same indulgent enthusiasm. As discussed above, Zhou did not start working on *Jing zhong zhuan* until she was in her late thirties, when she had already had four children. Pregnancy and childbirth becomes an equally constant topic in the *tanci* fiction. The character of Yue Fei's wife Lady Li most likely reflects Zhou's own experience living in a big upper-class family.

In opposition to the conventional belief, pregnancy does not conflict with conjugal love or romance after the wedding in the *tanci*. The young couple, expecting their new baby, is able to enjoy each other's presence for personal and family memory. When Lady Li comes back from visiting her father, the gentry couple has an intimate moment, with a stereotyped elegance and highly allusive vocabulary:

夫人恰好將妝卸 The lady just removed her makeup.
雅淡風姿畫不成 Her natural beauty was too graceful to be portrayed.
靜坐無言情默默 She was seated in silence, full of affection and joy.
滿堂燈燭十分明 The candles brightened the room.
見公行近殷勤接 Seeing her husband, she rose to greet him.
聯步同歸臥室門 The couple walked together back to their bed chamber.
元帥低言休若此 The general said to her in a low voice: Please do not do this again.
勞卿玉體怎安心 I feel guilty to bring you all the trouble.

卿身有娠宜珍衛 You should take care of yourself while you are pregnant.
豈可寒天坐夜深 Stay up late in the cold night no more.
言罷夫人微一笑 Hearing this, the lady smiled at him.
一同歸坐飲香茗 They sat down and enjoyed some fragrant tea.
水仙花好香頻送 The narcissus was blossoming and smelled sweet.
寶鼎香添火尚溫 The incense was just added into the burner and the room was kept warm.
良夜迢迢更漏水 The beautiful night was long, with the sounds from the dripping clepsydra.
花枝映月上窗櫺 The flowering branches in the moonlight were reflected on the window frame. (41. 365)

This domestic scene employs subjective observation to portray the affection between the couple in imagery. The subtle sensations and perceptions encapsulated in the lines visualize a quiet and intimate night scene. The details, such as idle talk, tea drinking, incense burning or the flowers all help create significant effects of a romantic isolation from the daily demands of an orthodox family. The last two lines even suggest a degree of physical intimacy in literary conventions.

When Lady Li gives birth to her first son, Yue Yun, she is still a very young woman and quite inexperienced. When she has her third son, Yue Lei, the character starts to pay attention to her own feelings and emotions as a mother:

偶翻詞譜填紅豆 The Lady was reading a poetry collection and composing a love poem.
遙寄新愁憶遠人 The message was to be sent to her husband who was living afar.
一時玉體難安坐 Suddenly she felt she could not sit in peace.
移蓮回進臥房門 She moved back to her bedroom.
值班侍女皆隨進 Maidens on duty followed her,
伏侍夫人入錦衾 And helped her settle into bed.
當時太郡夫人曉 Lady Yao immediately received the news.
親身來看國夫人 She came in person to help her daughter-in-law. (33. 289)

By the time she has her fourth son, Yue Zhen, she is attentive enough to develop sentiments towards her bodily changes. She is pleased to "feel her body get lighter" 喜身輕 (41.370), with inner understanding and the experience of motherhood. In other words, while childbirth is considered polluting and sinful in many late

imperial texts,[227] *Jing zhong zhuan*, although not radically, overall expresses a positive and pleasant attitude towards childbirth. When Yue Yun's wife Lady Gong has her first child, Lady Li has grown into the actual person in power in the family. She demonstrates outstanding coordinating and managing skills in the Yue household. When she first learns that her daughter-in-law is pregnant, she immediately waives all Lady Gong's daily duties including paying respect to the elders, so that she can rest in her own chamber. Since the young daughter-in-law has little knowledge about pregnancy, Lady Li helps her gain confidence and comfort during the delivery process.

少夫人坐紅綾帳 The young lady is seated in the red curtains,
獨自慵妝擁錦衾 completely laid back, and feeling upset.
堂上夫人知此事 When Lady Li heard the news,
忙忙移步瑞麟廳 She hurried to the Ruilin Hall.
產麟在即殊深幸 She told the young lady that the family was blessed to have this child,
囑咐姣兒要自珍 and asked her to take care.
傳示房中諸仆婢 She gave orders to the servant maids in the room,
小心服役莫粗心 that they should be very careful and keep their eyes open.
須臾又至慈親舍 She then walked to Madam Yao's chamber,
孫媳臨盆事稟明 reporting the good news of her granddaughter-in-law's lying-in. (41. 364)

The seemingly insignificant details add the dynamics of action and emotions in the family. Lady Li gradually grows up from a young bride to a capable woman managing a big household. These domestic moments are presented with pride as a woman's way to enjoy power within the daily rhythms of the household. The detailed description helps represent Zhou's vision of reality and build an emotional backdrop.

[227] See Gary Seaman, "The Sexual Politics of Karmic Retribution" in *The Anthropolgy of Taiwanese Society* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1981), 381-96. One of the more extreme examples might be the Blood Basin Sutra 血盆經, in which the Venerable Maudgalyayana, or Mu Lian in his Chinese name, travels to the underground to rescue his mother. He witnesses a hell specifically for women because their blood during the period of menstruation and birth delivery is considered offensive (產下血露污觸地神). See Robin R. Wang's translation of Blood Basin Sutra in her *Images of Women in Chinese Thought and Culture*, 291-3. Also see Alan Cole, *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism* (Stanford, Calif. : Stanford University Press, 1998), 159-225; Patricia F. Shih, *Female Pollution-in Chinese Society* (Thesis., McMaster University, 1978); Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2005); and Emily Ahern, "The Power and Pollution of Chinese Women," in Margery Wolf, Witke Roxane, and Martin Emily. Ed., *Women in Chinese Society* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1975), 193-242.

Despite the fact that childbirth could be a great danger for women in the nineteenth century, *Jing zhong zhuan* presents a lively picture of the joy and busyness that childbirth means to a gentry family. Instead of depicting the pain and fear surrounding childbirth, the *tanci* shows the sense of blessing and careful nurturing received from family members that soothe the new mother's worries. Meanwhile, rather than emphasizing the significance of the patriarchal family lineage, Zhou regards childbirth primarily as a joy and another reason to celebrate. When Yue Pu 岳甫 is born, knowing that she now has a lovely great-grandson, Yue Fei's mother Lady Yao is ecstatic, along with the rest of the family. She tells Yue Yun to be a good father and asks with great joy whether the baby looks more like mom or dad. From the perspective of the author, a woman's life in a gentry family is seen as an expansive vision with many detailed fragments. In these everyday domestic scenes, women in the Yue family are scarcely on the margin of history. In Zhou's rewriting of the Yue Fei story, mothers and grandmothers play a decisive role in childrearing, not only as a result of the household division of labor, but as a crucial part in the family dynamics. As Margery Wolf has pointed out, from a Chinese woman's point of view, family is not the male line of descent but the uterine family created by herself and her mother. A woman's loyalties are thus not completely in alignment with the interests of the male-centered family unit.[228]

In addition, childbirth in the *tanci* text faithfully records many customs of women's culture in the Jiang'nan region, such as bathing the new baby within red curtains and then wrapping him with silk clothing. The new mother is required to stay indoors for recovery. The image of a woman sitting among the curtains and holding a baby boy is often portrayed as the Children-sending Goddess (送子觀音), as Zhou

[228] Margery Wolf, "Women and the family in Rural Taiwan" in Ai-li S Chin and Maurice Freedman ed., *Family and Kinship in Chinese Society* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1970), 37-62.

with an appreciating tone describes Lady Gong after she gives birth. In *Jing zhong zhuan*, the women who experienced these private moments of childbirth and the accompanying feelings give that process its own meaning and challenge the themes of female pollution and impurity suggested in religious narratives.

These detailed practices, including household management and the operation of family rituals and customs, are usually considered as serving the Confucian hierarchy – for example, proper wedding rituals regulate expressions and emotions and childbirth customs provide a continuous link between the present and the past, especially to the patriarchal ancestors. Yet in *Jing zhong zhuan*'s domestic scenes, women seek and realize for themselves the possibilities for articulating their experiences in everyday rituals and customs. In another scene, Madam Zhang, Yue Lei's grandmother-in-law, expresses the following feelings: "It is a commonplace for our children to build their families, yet I just cannot wait to see their marriage take place" 男婚女嫁雖常事，奈我心中急十分 (73. 608). In Zhou's time and even today, these verses certainly bring smiles to female readers – women who have experienced similar situations or sentiments when they manage a family. The description here is of a small matter, but is based on details from a mature woman's experience of life and almost conveys a sense of humor and duty at the same time. It is not simply that Zhou indulges her writing in trivial subjects and descriptions, but that such detailed moments, rooted in a fully feminized knowledge, carry great social and emotional significance in women's lives.

In short, instead of defamiliarization, Zhou Yingfang embraces the domestic familiar in women's everyday practice. Thus she brings the *tanci* text closer to acceptance by the female audience. This aesthetics of domesticity challenges a

mainstream literary critique, prevalent since the late Ming that readers are supposed to encounter only the unfamiliar in fiction.[229]

But even for unfamiliar topics such as wars and battles, *Jing zhong zhuan* also provides amazing visual details in the descriptions of martial women and battlefields, however with alternative attention. As we have seen earlier, Zhou redefines the image of martial woman though Liang Hongyu who embraces both military talents and feminine identity. Commentators generally believe that women writers were unable to handle battle scenes because they were bound within their boudoirs and lacked public experience. As Wilt Idema and Beata Grant suggest, "Warfare is a subject that only rarely makes its appearance in the poetry of women poets of the eighteenth century."[230] However, this is not true, especially considering the constant social turbulence and military crises since the nineteenth century in China. Women poets frequently turned their attention to images of and reactions to war.[231] In women-authored *tanci* texts, war depictions are not rare either, but as Siao-chen Hu comments, in *Zai sheng yuan*, Chen Duansheng only resorts to magical powers and refrains from describing actual action on the battlefields. [232] The magic Chen could imagine turns

[229] For example, the early Qing playwrighter Li Yu argues that "Only novelty lasts" (*fei qi bu chuan* 非奇不傳). In the first chapter of *Honglou meng*, Cao Xueqin highlights the rareness and uniquess (*xin qi bie zhi* 新奇別致) of the story. Lu Xun also values *Honglou meng* as "getting rid of the old customs" (*baituo jiutao* 擺脫舊套). See Lu Xun, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilue* 中國小說史略 (Taipei: Fengyunshidai chubanshe, 1980), 291.

[230] Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, *The Red Brush*, 652.

[231] About women's witness of social turbulence, See Susan Mann's recent essay: "The Lady and the State: Women's Writings in Times of Trouble during the Nineteenth Centry," in Ellen Widmer and Grace S. Fong, ed., *The Inner Quarters and Beyond*, 283-314.

[232] See Hu, "War, Violence, and the Metaphor of Blood in *Tanci* Narratives by Women Authors," in Ellen Widmer and Grace S. Fong, ed., *The Inner Quarters and Beyond*, 249-80. In fact, war scenes in another woman-authored *tanci* fiction *Zhou jin tang jing* 晝錦堂記 (Records of the Midday Embroidery Hall, c. 1826) are as vivid as those in vernacular novels.

out to be quite dry and uninventive so, overall it is not as striking as the description of military action.

However, the woman author Zhou Yingfang's personal experiences as a victim of wars and the wife of an imperial military leader play a decisive role in *Jing zhong zhuan*'s depictions of war. Once the author herself has lived through war and violence, martial matters and believable embattling become prominent in her writing. For instance, in one of the most popular battle stories of Yue Fei, the battle against the Dongting Lake pirates led by Yang Yao, she first reminds the audience that the narrative will highlight the war scenes in the ensuing chapter:

> 欲知下卷開兵事 In order to know what happened during the war,
> 免毫慢展寫長篇 Please allow me to wield my brush pen slowly and write a long passage. (47. 439)

Then chapter 48 is devoted to a scene of military array displayed in poetic language. Rather than a vague, conventional description written out of ungrounded imagination, the volume first introduces Yue's strategy to fight the bandit: the maze of Five Formations (五方陣) based on five elements. Then it continues in detail to portray how the five elements are embattled, with elaborative lyrics of the five colors:

> 紅旗紅甲紅纓艷 The red flags, red armor and red tassels were flamboyant.
> 紅光一片賽紅云 The red color was even brighter than the sunset clouds.
> 三千軍校隨旗轉 Three thousand officers followed the flag signals.
> 左右將軍奉令行 His captains of left and right wings obeyed their orders.
> 正西門內從容入 They entered the main west gate with deliberate steps.
> 搖旗吶喊助軍威 Flag waving and battle cry boosted their morale.
> 化龍領袖三軍勇 Hualong was the leader of this brave army.
> 進了嶙峋陣軍門 He entered the gate through the craggy display.
> 黑旗黑甲何元慶 Black flag and black armor was He Yuanqing,
> 帶領三千鐵甲兵 Who led his three thousand soldiers in iron armor.
> 黑光一片烏雲色 The black color was like black clouds,
> 遮了長空日影明 Which covered the bright sun in the sky.
> 正南門內搖旗進 They entered the main gate from the south waving their flags.
> 二將相隨兩翼分 His two captains went to the left and right sides respectively.
> 當時進陣團團轉 The troop made a circle in the display.

喊聲震動鬼神驚 Their cheers would even startle the gods and ghosts.
金光一片乾坤亮 A golden light was shining and brightened the world.
長爺率眾陣前臨 Yue Yun and his soldiers appeared in from the army.
黃旗搖動連天色 The golden color reached the sky when they waved their flags.
金盔金甲放光明 Golden helmets and armor reflected extraordinary luminescence in the sky.
輔翼將軍同入陣 His captains in the side wings entered the army with him.
黃甲三千遍地金 The three thousand soldiers in golden armor spread the space with golden bright.
北方陣隊飄然入 With serenity they entered from the north.
舞動軍符萬點金 Their waving banners looked like bits of shining gold.
銀盔銀甲張公子 Zhang Xian was wearing silver for his helmet and armor.
銀光皎皎月同明 The glistening white is as clear as the bright moon.
白旗招展東方色 The orient color shone when their white flags were flying in the wind.
二將同征一片銀 His two captains led an army of silver color.
三千白甲梨花舞 Three thousand soldiers wearing white armor looked like dancing pear flowers.
搖旗進了正東門 Waving their flags, they entered the main east gate.
柳堤春景連天綠 On the riverbank, the spring willows extended green to the sky.
閃出將軍楊再興 General Yang Zaixing lightened everyone's eyes.
青旗青甲三千卒 His three thousand soldiers were wearing green armor and carrying green flags.
並駒青甲兩將軍 His two captains were juxtaposed on their horses, wearing green armor.
青旗轉處春山笑 Where the green banners divided into two groups, a smiling young face arose.
飄搖督隊陣前臨 He reviewed his army with grace.
旌旗五色遮紅日 The flags of five colors even surpassed the sun.
躍馬揚鞭破陣軍 Flourishing the whips and leading their horses, soldiers of the Yue were ready to fight. (48. 440-41)

The detail shifts the reader's attention from the political tension to a grand view and explanation of the battle array, a regular feature in storytelling. In *Shuoyue*, this feature also serves to address the magical warfare afterwards. But in the *tanci* verses when one army poses against another, Zhou both displays her erudite images about war and presents a somehow mysterious yet realistic scene based on old Chinese philosophy. The indulged details of colors, directions, and dynamics help

women readers to visualize the military formation.[233] In addition, as her mother Zheng Danruo takes pride in presenting her knowledge about painting, calligraphy, chess play, and even astrology in *Meng ying huan,* Zhou also enjoys the deliberate slowness of pace, elegance, and fine details in her revised Yue Fei story. She naturally integrates military information, including names of generals, battle array, troop arrangement and morale, with literary images such as the bright moon, pear flowers or the swaying green willows in spring. The correspondence between war scenes and literary illusions blends a dose of poetic charm into the brutal war narration.The overflow of verses dense with colors and familiar allusions intensifies the aesthetics to the heroic scene. With detailed erudition and eloquence, Zhou's version of a battlefield demonstrates her ability to not only portray everyday life in the gentry family but to deal with the most imaginative vision of a military action, a topic far beyond the inner chamber.

Womanhood, Power, and Authority

Compared with other Yue Fei narratives, *Jing zhong zhuan* has a clear emphasis on domestic subject matters. Zhou sets her eyes on domesticity and extends her imagination beyond war scenes in the frontline. Thus she challenges conventional narration of the historical figure and enriches the theme of women-authored *tanci* fiction. Interestingly, unlike most female *tanci* authors who challenge the convention that women have no social roles outside their homes, Zhou is not quite committed to this debate. On the contrary, as a woman from a high social rank, she focuses on strengthening women's domestic status. In my previous discussion, the hard work of

[233] The visualization aroused from the lines also brings a dramatic effect, which suggests an influence from performance on stage.

Lady Li and Lady Yao in family affairs shows how women gain indirect power. Another significant character in the *tanci*, Yue Fei's mother, provides growing hope for the lives of women: a retreat from household responsibilities, spiritual renewal, and increased power and authority.

Hsiung Ping-chen suggests that the mother figure in traditional Chinese literature was mostly constructed to build a social and cultural identity. In particular, widow mothers were always portrayed as symbols of virtue and suffering; the biography of an exemplary widow mother was usually written by her son or other male relative. Through a virtuous and suffering life was how they wished others to remember her.[234] But what kind of image does Zhou want the readers to remember of Yue Fei's mother in her *tanci*?

In folklore and in *Shuoyue*, on the third day of Yue Fei's birth, a great flood wipes out his hometown. Lady Yao holds her son and hides in a flowered vat to escape. Later they are rescued by Wang Gui's father. Zhou changes the story so that the mother and her son are not separated from the rest of the family until he reaches the age of three.[235] Being more practical as a gentry woman who most likely once managed a household, Zhou also refuses to let Lady Yao and her son completely rely on the Wang family as written in *Shuoyue*, but makes her financially self-sufficient via her brother's support from Shandong (2. 9).

The Confucian moral code of filial piety enabled, and in fact required, sons in late imperial China to remember their mother's dedication and misfortune in both emotional and practical ways. Meanwhile, in so many aspects the mother is influential

[234] See Ping-chen Hsiung, "Constructed Emotions: The Bond between Mothers and Sons in Late Imperial China," *Late Imperial China*, 15:1 (1994): 87-117.

[235] The change is much more reasonable because it is based on women's experience in reality. Neither a new-born baby nor a woman who had just delivered a child could have survived the torrents.

and sometimes completely powerful. Growing up in a modest home, Yue Fei is first educated by his mother. Rather than pushing her boy to succeed, however, Lady Yao emphasizes moral teaching. Unlike Mencius's mother, who taught her son in accordance with the ritual principles and upheld her role to the Thrice Followings (*sancong* 三從),[236] Lady Yao teaches Yue Fei about state affairs (*guoshi* 國事) rather than the pursuit of scholarly honor or official rank. She has less concern for fame and considers loyalty as an extension of filial piety rather than a goal of its own.[237] Besides her hard work and self-sacrifice, *Jing zhong zhuan* carves out a space to allow other possible experiences and emotions for Lady Yao. She is not reduced to merely a voiceless widow and mother in late imperial China. First, Lady Yao is not just a mother with entitled feelings but with an independent personality. She is praised as "a woman of heroic nature" 閨中巾幗英雄性 (16. 134), because she does not allow herself to be too attached to or live through her son. People admire her because she "educates a good son, who truly brings fame to the family" 教子成名人共仰 (33. 189). Meanwhile, Zhou by no means requires that Yue Fei remember the debt he personally owes to his mother. His mother does not expect, nor demand, a full return. In fact, Zhou repeats her opinion that authentic filial acts should be derived from human nature (*chunxiao tianran* 純孝天然, 2.9).

Moreover, the lady enjoys her age with no anxiety. Although the basic storyline of Yue Fei's mother is still derived from earlier accounts that she survives

[236] Liu Xiang, *Lie nü zhuan* 1:10b.

[237] Conventional discourse requires that devoted mothers use their maternal influence not only to raise good sons, but to enrich Chinese civilization with grand terms such as loyalty and patriotism. Perhaps this is the reason why *Jing zhong zhuan* shows no interest in further elaborating on one of the most famous plots about how Yue Fei is tattooed with the characters of "serving the nation with the utmost loyalty" 精忠報國 on his back. *Shuoyue* spends half a chapter on the tattoo inscription. In contrast, Zhou Yingfang simply copies the narration and keeps a distance from such excessive passion demanding loyalty.

the family disaster and endures suffering and hardship, in *Jing zhong zhuan* Lady Yao still fits well in the noble lifestyle. She now "lives a healthy and cheerful life from morning till night" 金萱無恙樂晨昏 (14. 112); and she is "devoted to Chan Buddhism, playing with her grandchildren and having a wonderful relationship with her daughter-in-law" 參禪余興將孫課, 奉親子職國夫人 (33. 189), as well as other women in the household. This is a truly pleasant retirement, as Zhou describes it, "she lived an easy and comfortable life at her senior age" 十分安逸暮年身 (33. 189), or "Life was well-content and delightful" 事皆遂意喜欣欣 (33. 189). Most of the time she is "overjoyed" 無限喜 (38. 330), "extremely happy" 喜不勝 (41. 364), or "talking and laughing with great joy" 說笑是開心 (41. 364). She even makes jokes with her grandson Yue Yun in front of the family when Yun gets betrothed to Lady Gong without asking for his father's permission, saying: "My grandson's literary talent is not as good as his father, but he is more tactful [in marriage]"孫兒文才雖不及他父親，作事倒比他父親老練些 (37, 328). Everything is quite smooth and satisfactory and she asks for no more, living a leisurely life in old age and finding peace in nature.

Such an image of a joyful widow enjoying her golden years forms a particularly sharp contrast in comparison with a detail in *Shuoyue*, where she is a pathetic victim of the family tragedy. In *Shuoyue*, even at a young age, Yue Fei demonstrates a ridiculously rigid Confucian morality. When the seven-year-old boy leaves home to collect firewood, he says "Mother! When I am away from home, please keep the doors closed." The narrator then makes a moral comment to promote patriarchal rules: "What a worthy and virtuous lady she was! Indeed she followed the maxim: Obey your son after your husband's death."[238] With a poem the narrator

[238] Qian Cai and Jin Feng, *Shuoyue quan zhuan*, 10.

reinforces the virtuous and suffering image of a widow, who "provides food by weaving day and night, educates her son, and sheds tears for her husband" 終宵紡績供家食，教子思夫淚暗拋.[239] Such an emotionally helpless and vulnerable woman character is deprived of any satisfaction or joy. Her own voice is denied in the conventional narration, and her identity is subsumed into the roles of widow and mother in the patriarchal family.

As a further break from the *Shuoyue*'s portrait of Lady Yao, a submissive mother, Zhou describes Yue Fei's filial action from a mother's perspective. In *Jing zhong zhuan*, Zhou completely deletes *Shuoyue*'s didactic plot and inserts her expectation of filial acts from the child. Chapter 3 starts with Yue's mentor, Master Zhou Tong's request to visit the lady. Yue Fei replies in a protective way, telling his mentor that it is inappropriate to invite his widowed mother, and it is the master's turn to feel embarrassed. Meanwhile, Yue's virtue is once again proved by such a filial and intelligent answer. To better fit her respected status, another woman accompanies Lady Yao to meet the mentor in a school. This visit also subverts our conventional view that married women, especially gentry widows, were strictly bound to the home. Again the male author's assumption of women as submissive objects in Confucian teachings is challenged by Zhou's own experience as a gentry woman. The fictional text proves what Ko observes of women in late imperial China: "The Confucian rituals in practice might have deprived women's legal and formal social identity, but not their individual personality or life."[240]

[239] Qian Cai and Jin Feng, *Shuoyue quan zhuan*, 10.

[240] For the complex relations between Confucian norms and women's agency in practice, see Ko, Dorothy. *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 1-25. Also see Susan Mann and Yu-yin Cheng ed., *Under Confucian Eyes*, 1-8.

On the other side, *Jing zhong zhuan* does not encourage women to abuse their powers within the family space. Lady Yao also represents a new expectation for in-laws in the gentry family. Starting from the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. – 220 A.D.), wives were expected to be humble and to please their in-laws. The chapter "Obeying Selflessly" 曲從 in Ban Zhao's *Lessons for Women* (女誡) requires women's absolute submission:

> [In serving parents-in-law] there is nothing as important as denying yourself and following them. If your mother-in-law says "no," and if she is right, you of course should follow her. If your mother-in-law says "yes," and if she is wrong, you should still follow her. You should not distinguish between right and wrong; you should not argue with your mother-in-law about right and wrong. This is what is called obeying parents-in-law selflessly.[241]

After Ban Zhao, such internalized self-oppression almost became a cultural phenomenon, in which women not only participated in their own oppression but also in the oppression of other women. Unconditional obedience became unquestioned for women in the household.[242] But in *Jing zhong zhuan*'s interpretation of a harmonious family, the mother-in-law should first be reasonable, not abusing her power, before she is entitled to any respect or obedience. Zhou employs subtle lines to describe such an ideal mother-in-law, "The strict parents are noble-minded and enjoy living in their hometown" 嚴親高尚樂榆枌 (16. 131). Rather than being a picky and hard-to-please old woman, Lady Yao is considerate and amazingly humorous, especially with young couples, even telling the newlyweds about her son's hesitation before the marriage or

[241] Translated by Robin Wang, in her *Images of women in Chinese thought and culture*, 186-87. Full citation see attached bibliography.

[242] Unconditional obedience in a woman's marital family was often valued as significant as chastity in women's readings, authored by both genders. To name a few such textbooks for women in imperial China: *Cuishi furen xun nü wen* 崔氏夫人訓女文 (Madam Cui's lectures to her daughters, Tang Dynasty) by an anonym; *Nü xiaojing* 女孝經 (Books of filial piety for women, Tang Dynasty) by a Madam Zheng, *Nei xun* 內訓 (Teachings of the inner chambers) by Empress Xu 徐 (1362-1407), *Jiao nü yi gui* 教女遺規 (Bequeathed lessons for the education of daughters) by Chen Hongmou 陳宏謀 (1696-1771); *Xin fu pu* 新婦譜 (Guidelines for new wives) by Lu Qi 陸圻 (b. 1614), etc.

joking with her grandson Yun about his future wife and the wedding night. Meanwhile, she is worried when there is no news of her son and grandson from the front line. The tyrannical power of in-laws often described in other late imperial fiction is replaced by maternal love and genuine engagement in family affairs. While approving of the gendered authority of old age, the woman author makes an effort to build an equal relationship between children and parents.[243]

Cross-boundary and Martyred Women

Women writers in Ming and Qing often allowed themselves to indulge in the fantasy of passing the examination and serving in court or having exciting adventures on the battlefield. Female protagonists in many *tanci* texts are cross-dressed heroines or warriors. Such romantic visions provide an imaginary space for female readers to travel and go on quests. Zhou Yingfang, however, is not completely comfortable with the gender disorder even in the fictional world. As a gentry woman who indeed survived wars and violence, she sees the unrealistic part of the fantasy and keeps her fiction firmly grounded within women's domestic realm. Her idealized heroines fully embrace their roles in the inner chambers, achieving great success in the realms of romance, family or virtue, not necessarily in adventure or warfare like men. Even for the heroine Liang Hongyu, Zhou highlights her female identity in the narration.[244]

[243] The image of a malicious mother-in-law starts from the first long narrative poem in China, titled *Kongque dongnan fei* 孔雀東南飛 (Southeast the peacock flies, Eastern Han Dynasty). However, characters of demanding and cruel in-laws in Ming and Qing vernacular fiction were not as common as those of evil daughters-in-law. For a study about the representation of the roles that mothers play in their sons' marriages in Ming Qing fiction, see Chu Aihua 楚愛華, *Mingqing zhi xiandai xiazu xiaoshuo liubian yanjiu* 明清至現代家族小說流變研究 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2008), chapter 2. Meanwhile, the fictional character of Yue Fei's mother Lady Yao also reminds us of another two famous widowed mothers in late imperial Chinese literature: Granny Jia in *Honglou meng* and Madam Shui 水 in Xia Jingqu, *Yesou puyan* 野叟曝言 (Humble Words from an Old Rustic, 1779).

[244] See my dissertation below, 133-40.

While gender-crossing does not appear as a major motif in *Jing zhong zhuan*, Zhou "plays" with the cross-dressing and actually debunks this myth via the experience of Yue Fei's daughter Yue Wen.[245]

In the early chapters of the *tanci*, Wen is an adorable little girl cherished by the family, especially her father. The general even delays his march because his daughter would not let him go. When she grows up, she is a virtuous woman with astonishing beauty and her intelligence goes beyond domestic boundaries. She senses a crisis when her brother hides certain political facts to make the family less worried. She sees her father's tolerance of treacherous ministers as not only destroying his achievements, but bringing danger to himself and the empire. In Lin'an, after hearing the news that her father has been put into prison, she attempts to help with the situation by following the examples of ancient heroines – the martial warrior Mu Lan 木蘭 and the eloquent Ti Ying 緹瑩.[246]

木蘭曾有從軍志 Mu Lan had her wish to join the army.
百戰歸來慰白頭 She served her parents when she returned after a hundred battles.
兒女英雄真壯氣 Heroic sons and daughters are inspiring me.
愧儂不及侍親游 But I feel guilty now I did neither.
……
回思昔日緹瑩女 I recall the famous daughter Ti'ying,
上書救父姓名留 Who left her name in history by rescuing her father from death.
儂為大將名門女 I am also a daughter from a glorious family of the general.
不效馨名事合謀 Why not follow their good examples? (60. 563)

[245] Also compared to later women-authored texts where women have to "redeem" themselves and abandon their cultural heritage, *Jing zhong zhuan* comfortably stays inside the domestic realm and embraces the family values. Representative works include Wang Miaoru's *Nü yu hua* 女狱花 (A Flower in Jail, 1904) and Ding Ling's early novel *Yi jiu san ling nian chuan Shanghai* 一九三零年春上海 (Shanghai Spring 1930, 1930).

[246] Ti Ying was the youngest daughter of the Qi official Duke Chunyu Yi, during the reign of Xiaowen. He was condemned to corporal punishment and had no son to come to his aid. Ti Ying followed him to the court and asked to become a palace servant to redeem her father's fault. Her clarity of expression and reasoning persuaded the king to mitigate his laws and reject corporal punishment.

Both Mu Lan and Ti'ying inspire many female characters in *tanci* fiction to rescue their families or start their careers. However in *Jing zhong zhuan*, Zhou provides the truth that the inspiration is not always successful. Wen pierces her finger and writes a letter with blood to plead for her father. She plans to beg for mercy from Emperor Gaozong and replace her father in any punishment. Dressed in men's clothing, Wen and her maid Ying'er 穎兒 leave the household at midnight. But their cross-dressing adventure fails. The treacherous minister Qin Hui has controlled the access to the imperial palace. After much scorn and humiliations the two girls have to go back. Rather than writing like a youthful idealist, Zhou is more practical in face of family crisis. The harsh gendered divisions and ruthless politics in reality clearly make it impossible for Wen to fulfill her wish to use her talents to rescue her father. She is torn apart between the fantasy inspired by ancient exemplary women and her awareness of reality, realizing that she is not able to follow the previous heroines, and feels guilty for surviving. Disillusioned by the failure of her chivalrous wish to rescue her father, she commits suicide.

Here Zhou expresses her suspicion about the reality of the tradition of exemplary women, which was established primarily in male-authored discourses. When other women writers internalize such male-created myths and encourage their fictional heroines to embrace their newly acquired gender identities as men, they also invite readers in a subtle way to cross boundaries as well. However, the character of Yue Wen cruelly alarms the female audience who might still be indulging themselves in the fanciful imagination of cross-boundary adventures. Although adventure is not necessarily a harmful or dangerous taboo, it is simply not realistic.

Meanwhile, Zhou holds the same ambivalent attitude towards martyrdom. Authors of other Yue Fei stories admire Wen's death since the suicide upholds her

father's reputation.[247] For example, *Shuoyue* uses her suicide to suggest vulnerability and weakness of a woman: "Blossoming flowers are damaged by the rain in March; hanging willows are killed by the frost in September" 斷送落花三月雨, 摧殘楊柳九月霜.[248] In contrast, Zhou regards Wen's death as an exemplary filial action but one that is pointless. "The filial daughter made a rash decision to follow the death of her father; her delicate soul returned to Heaven like disappearing fragrance and broken jade pieces" 孝女殉親輕決死, 香消玉碎返柔魂 (61. 566). Although in the end the author explains that Wen became the "Fairy Lady of Chastity" (*zhenlie xiangu* 貞烈仙姑) in the immortal land, the lines here imply Zhou's disapproval of women's blind martyrdom.[249] She does not identify herself with self-sacrificing heroines, who are thought to represent the loftiest form of loyalty within the patriarchal hierarchy. Especially considering the fact that Zhou herself lived as a chaste widow after her husband's death rather than commit suicide, it is not unreasonable to suspect that she regards nothing admirable or canonical about women unnecessarily sacrificing their lives to follow their male relatives to the grave.

[247] A similar case is the heroic suicide of Li Shun'er 李順兒 in 1355. She was born into a scholarly family at Xuzhou. When the Mongols were attacking Xuzhou, her father said to her mother that "Ours is a cultured family strict in rituals, but this girl will bring bad reputation to us 我家詩禮相傳，此女必會牽累我家." When Li overheard the words, in tears she answered: "Father and mother, please escape without worrying about me 父母可自逃難毋以我為憂." She then hanged herself in the back garden. See section of "Biographies of Women 列女傳" in vol. 246, *Yuan shi* 元史.

[248] Qian Cai and Jin Feng, *Shuoyue quan zhuan*, 384.

[249] This could also be read as Zhou's alternative interpretation of "loyalty." In the text, hearing the news that Yue Fei has been executed, two of his sworn brothers immediately commit suicide rather than live on in shame. But Niu Gao does not die. He lives on to attempt revenge for the general and guide the younger generation of heroes against the Jurchens and ultimately helps with the full restoration of honor to the Yue family. More discussion on women martyrs, see Paul S. Ropp, Paola Zamperini, and Harriet T. Zurndorfer, ed., *Passionate Women: Female Suicide in Late Imperial China* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

Women in the Public Sphere

1. The Sword and the Needle: Liang Hongyu and Miss Yao

Another flamboyant woman in the *tanci* text is the female general Liang Hongyu. Like General Yue Fei, the character of Liang is based on a true historical figure. Liang Hongyu (1102-1135) was the wife of General Han Shizhong 韓世忠 (1089-1151). She helped her husband prevent the invading Jurchens from crossing the Yangzi River. As a woman who was able to contribute her efforts to defend the empire, Liang is often paired with Mu Lan as a female patriot. However, canonical writings either exclude women from the tales of male heroism, or turn them into voyeuristic objects. *Shuoyue* and other accounts overall speak highly of Liang, but the authors also take every opportunity to highlight her background as a courtesan. *Shuoyue* reminds readers of Liang's humble origins: "She was once a woman from the Pingkang Lane, and now belongs to the Lord of Dingyuan – General Han" 舊是平康女，新從定遠侯.[250] When she beats the drums to inspire the Song soldiers in battle, the narrator shifts from the war scene to a focus on Liang's physical attractiveness: "Sweating fragrance, [she worked so hard that] she almost broke her slender waist and elegant jade-like arms; and her delicate heart is filled with spring joy" 險不使壞了細腰玉軟風流臂，喜透了香汗春融窈窕心.[251] These erotic descriptions about her sweet breath, fair hands, and other features of her body invite male readers to enjoy a voyeuristic pleasure. The woman warrior is read as a sexualized object. In contrast, female-authored texts often celebrate women warriors and woman scholars as equals to men. But in these narratives, the heroines are

[250] Pingkang Lane was the neighborhood where famous courtesans lived during the Tang dynasty (618-907). Qian Cai and Jin Feng, *Shuoyue quan zhuan*, 261.

[251] *Ibid*.

deprived of, or have to compromise, their feminine characteristics in order to stand out as a hero and embrace male honors. Even Meng Lijun never endeavors to have herself accepted specifically as a woman.[252] On the surface, here women authors are expressing their discontent at gender inequity. But by portraying the heroine with the same standards as a successful man, they actually epitomize the masculine and reinforce the notion of patriarchal hierarchy.

However, in *Jing zhong zhuan*, rather than immediately appearing as a heroic woman knight on horseback, Liang never loses her femininity. Her debut in the *tanci* takes place in the inner chamber, discussing war situations with her husband and other officers in a pleasant and gentle voice (鶯聲燕語, literally a voice like the singing of nightingales or swallows). Unlike other authors who turn Liang into an object of the male gaze, Zhou emphasizes her intelligence. Although Liang might previously have been a courtesan, Zhou portrays her as equal to other upper-class women and men. In addition to stressing the equal status between the couple, she adds more domestic and literati-style sentiments. In *Jing zhong zhuan*, the military camp appears in a way of family settings: "[General Han and General Liang] were seated together in the Lotus Curtains, tasting tea and discussing the battle in low voices" 雙雙同坐蓮花帳， 品茗輕商軍國情 (36. 316). Details such as tasting tea or talking in low voices distinguish these scenes from conventional war novels and add a scholarly taste to the descriptions of war.

[252] Both Liang Desheng and Hou Zhi made Meng Lijun return to her original role as a woman in their sequels. In *Bi sheng hua*, the female protagonist Jiang Dehua 姜德華 is cross-dressed and reaches the position of the imperial Prime Minister. But instead of resisting patriarchal rules, the character eagerly defends women's chastity and supports concubinage. The heroine Qian Shurong 錢淑容 in *Jinyu yuan* 金魚緣 (The Goldfish Affinity, 1865) never returns to female dress and spends her life in a male identity. All three of these fictional characters express a wish to improve women's social status on the surface, but essentially they still maintain patriarchal standards.

When Liang enters the battle, Zhou describes her dazzling glory with a strengthened female identity:

巧梳云髻珠冠罩 A pearl coronet covered her delicate hair.
星眼蛾眉一點唇 She had eyes shining like stars, long eyebrows, and crimson lips.
桃花粉面如秋月 Her beautiful face was like the autumn moon, the color of peach blossom.
柳腰一稔掌中輕 Her waist was as slender as if she could dance on a palm.
戎衣蜀錦春花色 Her war robe was made of *Shu* silk, with the color of spring flowers.
繡鎧魚鱗綠錦裙 Her armor was a green silk gown with embroidered fishes.
龍泉三尺橫腰下 Under her waist hung the sword from the Dragon Fountain.
狐革袋內皂雕翎 A bag made of fox fur held her arrows.
坐鞍上色黃驃馬 She rode a yellow horse, with a decorated saddle.
尖尖十指大刀掄 A broadsword danced in her beautiful fingers.
番王不覺渾呆了 The Jurchen prince was amazed by what he saw.
此女莫是漢昭君 Was this lady Wang Zhaojun, returning from the Han dynasty? (11. 89)

The above lyrics lavish attention upon the portrayal of Liang's beauty and devote even more time to her armor, costumes, and weapons. Although adopting the perspective from the Jurchen prince, the *tanci* means to appreciate Liang's beauty as well as to celebrate her dashing spirit. On the other hand, it is also of critical importance to the text that it refers to Liang as Wang Zhaojun 王昭君, the famous Han beauty who was married to the Hun leader in order to make peace between the Chinese and the Huns. The juxtaposition of the two women here conveys a sense of irony and even critique towards China's diplomacy. As a general, Liang, like Yue Fei, fights the Jurchen army to defend the Chinese. But Wang's marriage over a thousand years before strengthened the ties between Han China and the northern minorities. Zhou's concerns boldly move into the world of politics through the image of the woman warrior. Both Yue Fei and Liang were particularly complicated characters in the late Qing discourse, because they fought against the invading Jurchens, the forebears of the ruling Manchus. Thus, as discussed in the previous chapter, in her

rewriting Zhou might not significantly alter the narrative, but does accentuate this patriotic element. Another dynamic and feminine moment in the *tanci* narration takes place after the description of Liang's exhaustion in the battlefield; she takes out her mirror and checks her appearance after beating the drums 下桅臨鏡整精神 (36. 317). Patriotism, talent, and remarkable beauty are jointly celebrated in the rewriting of history.

Jing zhong zhuan also highlights Liang's identity as a mother. When her son is captured by the Jurchens, Liang bursts into tears. Her logic is completely practical in a domestic way: "[Your father and I serve the emperor and should do our best.] My son has not received any official post; he sacrifices his life for no reason" 姣兒未受皇家祿, 戰死沙場為甚因 (11. 88). Such a layer of maternal concern is never highlighted elsewhere, even in legends of cross-dressed women warriors. In other words, the renovated image of the military heroine stands out from conventional narratives, but without signaling a revolution in gender roles. This way of thinking will certainly not receive approval from grand narrative in the name of loyalty or patriotism, but it reflects Zhou's family-oriented perspective as a gentry writer.

But the best description of Liang Hongyu takes place after Yue Fei's death. Not surprisingly to readers who are familiar with Chinese knight-errant novels, as a powerful general with a chivalrous spirit, Liang dismisses the imperial guards that surround the Yue household. She goes to the treacherous official's residence to question the injustices done to Yue Fei. She even plans to bring her army to the imperial palace and confront the ungrateful emperor. While these actions present Liang's character as a female knight-errant, the emotional support she provides Yue's wife is also highlighted in the *tanci* narration. After venting her anger in the capital, Liang stays with Lady Li who is now in great distress, keeping Lady Li's family safe

and helping arrange a proper funeral for Yue Fei and Yue Yun. As a response to the *haohan* brotherhood ideology including honor, duty, and comradeship depicted in *Shuoyue* and other vernacular historical fiction, the character of Liang demonstrates a feminine counterpart of the Confucian concept of *yi* 義 or sisterly loyalty within the women's community. *Jing zhong zhuan* uses warm, soothing language to describe the sisterly friendship between the two women: "[Liang] spent time quietly [with Lady Li] and forgot her return date 淡然相對竟忘歸 (62. 577). "Big" political issues recede into the background at such a moment of refined sentiment, which stands in opposition to a history mostly associated with masculinity. Here the woman author crafts another dynamic space allowing modern readers to have a glimpse of women's dignity and their complex friendships. Finally Liang sends ten women warriors to protect the Yue household on their way to exile.

At the same time, women who are outside the gentry family use their beauty and intelligence as a weapon to defend their reputations. *Jing zhong zhuan* shows great admiration towards them. A Miss Yao 姚, Yue Fei's cousin, is captured by the bandit Yang Yao 楊幺 when she is still a toddler. Later she is married to Yang's officer Wu Shangzhi 伍尚志. Miss Yao takes her marriage as an opportunity to persuade Wu to avenge her family. Though Wu respects his bride's will that the marriage not be consummated until her wish is realized, he still attempts several times to seduce her with his romantic tricks. In her verses, the woman author ridicules this male shallowness. While the husband is confident of his masculine charisma and skill in romance, Miss Yao is "a woman with better talents than a man"巾幗奇才勝似男 (47. 439). She insists on her wish and eventually convinces her husband to join the Yue army. Miss Yao fearlessly denies the requirement of women's obedience in marriage. In addition, Zhou does not even frown at how the bride takes advantage of

her wifely role to fulfill her will. Readers might still feel ambivalent towards Miss Yao because she simply uses her physical attractiveness to achieve her desire for revenge. But *Jing zhong zhuan* highly values her virtues, including intelligence and wisdom, and her wifely authority. The *tanci* narrative blesses their marriage with conventional language laden with tropes from the literary tradition:

> 紅鸞天喜雙仙會 The propitious star governing marriages was descending from Heaven.
> 美景良宵無限情 The beautiful night was full of passion and affection.
> 秦臺今夕來蕭史 Scholar Xiao arrived at the Qin Terrace today.
> 同心靜好鳳鸞鳴 The happy couple stayed in harmony with their hearts joined together. (48. 455)

Unlike most male-authored narratives, *Jing zhong zhuan* shows great sympathy towards femme fatale characters, women who are conventionally defined as sexual vampires and a threat to justice. Emperor Gaozong's concubine, Lotus 荷香, is one of those deadly women who appear in Yue Fei's narratives. In *Shuoyue*, she is originally a maiden of the treacherous Prime Minister Zhang Bangchang. Zhang offers her as a gift to the emperor, in the hope that she will distract the emperor from his business. Lotus becomes an empire-toppling beauty like another famous woman in Chinese history Diao Chan 貂蟬.[253] Lotus traps Yue Fei and attempts to persuade the emperor to execute Yue. Later she is executed by the Jurchen Prince Wushu, because he regards her as a disloyal person and condemns her as being a "shameless and ungrateful woman" 寡廉鮮恥, 全無一點恩義之人.[254]

In the *tanci* adaptation, Zhou rewrites this misogynist discourse and refuses to make the low-status woman a scapegoat. *Jing zhong zhuan* takes the view that the

[253] Diao Chan is known as one of the four ancient beauties in many Chinese legends. In the historical novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, she assisted the official Wang Yun 王允 in a plot to persuade General Lü Bu 呂布 to kill his foster father, the tyrannical warlord Dong Zhuo 董卓. Diao Chan herself later became a victim of the political struggles.

[254] Qian Cai and Jin Feng, *Shuoyue quan zhuan*, 215.

emperor is the one to be blamed: “[The emperor] would not take harsh advice and abandoned his ancestors’ legacy; he indulged himself in foolish behaviors and lacked seriousness” 忠言逆耳抛先業, 一味庸愚少正經 (29. 262). She even completely deletes the episode in which Lotus speaks evil of Yue. As for the fate of this imperial concubine, Zhou makes the following comment expressing her deep sympathy for a woman who enjoys temporary wealth and glory, but cannot control her own fate:

楊花一陣狂風散　A wind blew away poplar blossoms**.**
暮樂朝歡空媚君　She charmed the emperor with great pleasure from morning till night.
今朝金斧加身死　Killed by the gold ax today, at this moment,
應悔身承內院恩　She must be regretting of all the favors received from the emperor. (30. 263)

Jing zhong zhuan’s narrative tone is full of compassion for the concubine’s fate. From the male perspective, it is not uncommon to create a woman who seduces and destroys powerful men with her dangerous beauty, charm, and sexual allure. But Zhou Yingfang rejects this conventional characteristic that beautiful women threaten the social order. Even if she does not plan to change the established storyline, she highlights the vulnerability and helplessness of women in the court. In this sense, Zhou refuses to attach a larger importance bearing to the topic of female sexual purity. As a form of resistance, she alters the femme fatale narrative in her text and subverts the misogynist discourse against women.

2. Lady Wang: The Opposite of a Virtuous Woman

Ironically, *Jing zhong zhuan* depicts unusual moral superiority towards Qin Hui’s wife, Lady Wang. Zhou uses the conventional qualities of a shrew to depict her. Wang is cruel to her mother-in-law and does not allow her husband to have any maid servants. Regardless of how malicious Qin Hui is at the court, he acts like a henpecked husband and is even called a “turtle” at home.

Jing zhou zhuan frequently refers to Wang as either "the slut bearing three surnames" (三姓淫婦) or "the witch" (妖嬈). What make Wang evil is her lustful desire. In sharp contrast to other elite women in the *tanci*, from the beginning Wang is introduced as a cheap woman. She has had two husbands before being married to Qin. During her previous marriages, she flirts with other men and pursues material benefits. In addition, an unusually detailed prose paragraph depicting the scene of Wang's adultery with Jurchen soldiers takes place in chapter 40. In traditional polygamous discourse, adultery is overwhelmingly a sin of women. It is rare for educated *guixiu*, even senior members in the family, to bring this topic up, let alone to produce such obscene lines. [255]

In her recent discussion of *Jinzhong qi* 精忠旗 (The banner of loyalty, seventeeth century), another *chuanqi* drama about Yue Fei, Tina Lu argues that the reason many versions treat Wang as being more notorious than her husband is that she embodies both adultery and treason.[256] *Jing zhong zhuan*, however, expresses a certain degree of ambiguity about Wang's sinful conduct. Zhou deletes the details of Wang's horrible death and her suffering in the underworld as they are told in previous karmic narratives.[257] She still harshly condemns her betrayal and adultery. But unlike

[255] Even male writers of vernacular fiction would be careful with erotic plots. Most late imperial pornographic novels borrow the karmic discourse to justify their writing. For more discussion see Keith McMahon, "Eroticism in Late Ming, Early Qing Fiction: the Beauteous Realm and the Sexual Battlefield," *T'oung Pao*, 73 (1987): 217-64; as well as Richard G Wang, *Ming Erotic Novellas: Genre, Consumption and Religiosity in Cultural Practice* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2011).

[256] Tina Lu, *Accidental Incest, Filial Cannibalism, & Other Peculiar Encounters in Late Imperial Chinese Literature* (Cambridge, Mass: Published by the Harvard University Asia Center, 2008), 12-13.

[257] Feng Menglong's short story "Humu Di Intones Poems and Visits the Netherworld"游酆都胡毋迪吟詩 portrays Wang being locked in a cage with all her clothing ripped off. See Feng Menglong, Shuhui Yang, and Yunqin Yang, *Stories Old and New* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 557-71. In *Shuoyue*, like her husband, Wang is excruciatingly tortured in the underworld. She is additionally punished by being reincarnated as a breeding sow; see Qian Cai and Jin Feng, *Shuoyue quan zhuan*, 439-44. Both texts single out the wife for more severe retribution and use her female body as a tool for punishment.

male authors, Zhou refuses to incorporate sins associated with a polluted female body, nor does she use the female body as a tool for punishment.

In short, Zhou Yingfang demonstrates a strong sense of the moral superiority of upper-class women. *Jing zhong zhuan* intentionally portrays Qin Hui's wife as a degraded and corrupted woman from the lower class. The last chapter elaborates how women from the Yue household receive great honors in heaven, while Wang is executed by the maid of Yue Fei's daughter. Such a harsh moral lesson serves to reinforce the gap between Wang and the elite women of virtue. The contrast represented in *Jing zhong zhuan* spreads across the author's moral instruction on virtue to the audience, and the authoritative tone in *Jing zhong zhuan* also implies the actual status of elite wives and mothers in the Qing family. As Mann argues, these women are part of a family system that constitutes a seamless social order in the empire, and their husbands and sons rely on feminine virtues to succeed outside.[258] Just as the gentry writer Yun Zhu 惲珠 (1771-1833) believes that women's poetry gives the truest and fullest expression of their moral authority, Zhou Yingfang uses *tanci* lyrics to suggest that her gentry heroines are talented, filial, capable, and loyal and should be established as perfect models for all women.

Conclusion

This chapter explores Zhou Yingfang's construction of a woman's space in *Jing zhong zhuan*. She creates a female utopian sphere that is distinct from yet parallels the heroic Yue Fei legend.[259] For the most part, Zhou takes a conservative

[258] Susan Mann, *Precious Records*, 15.

[259] I use the term utopia based on Libby Jones's statement that "Utopia is traditionally a genre associated with gaps: between what we have and what we would like to have; between what we would like to have and what someone else would prefer; between our apprehension of possibilities and the

view of Confucian morals and does not directly challenge most aspects of the gender order. Although the *tanci* seems to accept the Confucian traditions and tolerate the constraints, it presents a meaningful and colorful world of women in everyday life. Virtuous women in *Jing zhong zhuan*, within the Confucian family or beyond, together highlight the possibilities for women to cultivate their own culture, even when confined by Confucian gender hierarchy in late imperial China. Zhou's vision is not as radical as modern readers might expect. She neither disavows orthodox values nor inspires women to resist patriarchy and she embraces the traditional definitions of virtue. Moreover, virtuous women are not those who submit to the demands of husband, father, and the cult of chastity. They assume the responsibilities for themselves without the interference of men. Within the household, there is a lot of fluidity for individual women to (re)define their roles in everyday practice. They are housewife, mother, educator of children, and powerful household manager. They have a variety of ways to influence the family. In sum, Zhou breaks the silence of women's self-representation in which classic Chinese writing has long muted, particularly in representations of war and political turmoil. *Jing zhong zhuan* provides another example how the culture of *wen* 文 empowers intellectual women in late imperial China. Through classical language, Zhou Yingfang fulfills her identity as a writer and elite woman with moral authority. As we will see in the next chapter, a new position of upper-class women is being defined, both by the women themselves and by the men in their lives.

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words we find to construct them." For details of women's utopia, see Libby Jones and Sarah Webster Goodwin, *Feminism, Utopia, and Narrative* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 1.

CHAPTER IV

THE RE-ORIENTING OF MASCULINE HEROES: CONVENTION AND RENOVATION

From our contemporary perspective, although the act of writing could be considered transgressive for women in late imperial China, their *tanci* texts sometimes still echoed the dominant culture and emphasized traditional values such as a blind loyalty, absolute filial piety, rigid female chastity, and harmony in a polygamous family.[260] Potential subversive stories also exist, but the stated subversion is often intertwined with anxiety and uneasiness, or eventually returned to orthodox ideologies. For example, even at the end of *Zai sheng yuan*, a *tanci* usually considered as a proto-feminist text, the cross-dressed female protagonist Meng Lijun is facing the dilemma of either being punished or being forced to return to her feminine role and marry her fiancé. The author Chen Duansheng was not able to finish the *tanci* and the narrative ends at the suspenseful moment when Lijun's female identity is about to be exposed. In *Zai zao tian*, a sequel of *Zai sheng yuan*, Lijun completely abandons her previous cross-boundary actions and returns from the imperial court to the inner chamber sphere. Meanwhile, except for Lijun, the other female characters in *Zai sheng yuan* still live according to late imperial gender rules. Zhou Yingfang's *Jing zhong zhuan* upholds orthodox ideologies while granting women more agency within the orthodox values. The complex message conveyed in her *tanci* adaptation of Yue Fei cannot be simply categorized as either conservative or radical, but different enough to anticipate a new generation of women writers. *Jing zhong zhuan* provides assumptions about

[260] For example, the *tanci* narratives of *Bi sheng hua* written by Qiu Xinru and *Jin gui jie* 金閨杰 (Heroine from the gold chamber, c. 1826) by Hou Zhi are both regarded as extremely conservative because of the orthodox gender values advocated in the texts.

Confucian virtues that the woman author shares with men in nineteenth-century China; but the way in which she narrates the story challenges the conventions of historical fiction. Zhou was not only skilled in writing topics favored by men, but was also creative in rewriting the traditional masculine heroic images into less aggressive but more gender-neutral ones by adding sentiments and emotions to the depictions of her heroes. This chapter reviews the conventions in previous Yue Fei legends in the description of the general himself and other accompanying male characters, as well as discussing how Zhou Yingfang renovates these writing conventions, reducing male chauvinism, inserting romance, and deleting the violence in her rendition, in order to cater to a female readership. In *Jing zhong zhuan*, masculine themes are softened by a taste of feminine touches. The creation of melodramatic scenes in the rewritten Yue Fei legend undermines the patriarchal values in other accounts. The new images of Yue Fei and his friends in the *tanci* also construct a unique aesthetics with soft and delicate sentiments. *Jing zhong zhuan*'s revision further reflects the artistic awakening of the woman author in terms of her manipulation of literary conventions. With the flourishing of print culture beginning in the late sixteenth century, publication and circulation of texts reached a new height. This process helped Zhong Yingfang grow more conscious of herself as an authoritative reader and writer with critical views and responses in her literary creation.

The New Yue Fei: A Hero Both in the Court and in the Family

In addition to the dedicated women's sphere we have seen in the earlier chapter, to a large extent *Jing zhong zhuan* rescues the character of Yue Fei from

being reduced to the predictable dimensions established in other accounts.[261] Zhou grants the historical figure Yue Fei more agency and refuses to make him the stereotyped "self-appointed" victim of tragic injustice while serving the throne. She constantly parallels familiar battle stories with invented family scenes of the Yue household in her narration and actually gives priority to domestic themes other than the hero's stereotyped military actions.

1. The Martial Hero with Scholarly Charm

Today the statue of Yue Fei in the Hangzhou impresses visitors with the image of a mighty martial hero. But most Yue Fei stories leave no clue about the general's appearance. Especially in *Shuoyue*, the narrative is so devoted to plot development and seems to indicate that since Yue Fei was as glorious as the sun and the moon (*ri yue tong ming* 日月同明),[262] or perfect in morality and integrity, his appearance was beyond portrait. The fast narrative pace in *Shuoyue* also excludes the possibility of spending long paragraphs on descriptive language.

In fact, before Zhou Yingfang's elaboration of Yue Fei's appearance in her *tanci*, Xiong Damu wrote a short description in his *Yanyi*: "Prince Kang glances at Yue and sees a robust young man about seven-feet tall, with pink complexion, lips painted red. He has a straight nose and sharp eyes as bright as stars. Surely he is a

[261] As one the most celebrated generals in Chinese history, Yue Fei is widely known not only for his military success but also for high ethical standards. In fact, the image of the historical figure Yue Fei has also been reduced from a military hero with complex personality to a flattened character. The grand discourse/collective memory about him being loyal, patriotic and heroic indeed covers his faults (i.e. unforgiving, alcoholic, beating officers). According to the historical records *Sanchao beimeng huibian* 三朝北盟會編 (Collective records of three emperors after 1120, completed in 1194) by Xu Mengxin 徐夢莘, Yue Fei killed his uncle in an extremely violent way; Yue's first wife née Liu was separated from him during the war, and had to remarry for survival. When General Han Shizhong found her, he sent Yue a message so that he could take her back. However Yue refused to respond and brought only his mother back.

[262] Qian Cai and Jin Feng, *Shuoyue quan zhuan*, 494.

hero of both intelligence and courage, civil and military skills" 身長七尺，腰大數圍，面如傅粉，唇若抹朱，鼻似懸膽，眼相刀裁，端的智能并兼，武文皆會.[263] A prominent image constructed by conventional vocabulary without specific characteristics such as this one in *Yanyi* was quite popular in Chinese fiction. Overall the masculinity of the general is measured by his physical prowess and martial accomplishments. However, probably influenced by opera performance or *tanci* singing in her time, Zhou devotes amazing attention to Yue Fei's appearance and provides a hybrid model of heroism. The renovated image of Yue Fei de-emphasizes his macho prowess but highlights his gentle manners and scholarly charm. His appearance and personality are like those of a talented scholar in most romantic novels since the seventeenth century. At the beginning of the *tanci*, the unusual circumstances attending Yue's birth and infancy in conventional Yue Fei stories do not get much attention from the woman author;[264] rather, she is passionate to show how outstanding the general is even as a toddler:

姿容如玉神秋水	His look was as refined as jade, as peaceful as the autumn water.
額角方方貌不群	The square forehead suggested his prestige.
天庭飽滿藏威秀	The full face indicated his superior and majesty.
唇若涂脂出字形	His ruby lips were shining and in good shape,
鼻如懸膽丹鳳眼	His nose was tall and straight, and his eyes as beautiful as phoenix.
異香遍體有精神	He was an energitic baby, with a pleasing fragrance around his body. (1. 2)

Zhou continues to tell her audience what a graceful and delicate child he is, as she summarizes, "[The baby was] decorated with rouge and carved out of jade, with a

[263] Xiong Damu, *Wumu jingzhong zhuan* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990), 103.

[264] In the karmic narrative frame Yue Fei is the Garuda, a celestial attribution as suggested by his courtesy name Pengju 鵬舉. In *Shuoyue*, the Immortal Chen Chuan 陳摶 visits the Yue family before Yue Fei is born, predicts the flood and instructs that the infant Yue Fei should be placed in a vase to survive. See Qian Cai and Jin Feng, *Shuoyue quan zhuan*, 7.

natural dignity" 粉妝玉琢天然秀 (1. 3). Filled with maternal love and adoration, the lyrics portray the toddler obviously from a mother's perspective. When he grows up, Yue Fei becomes an ideal model of a scholarly and noble-minded person with broad talents. The general's appearance subverts the conventional image of a military hero. *Jing zhong zhuan* leaves Yue's martial bearing unchallenged, but gives him more scholarly charm. With his delicate looks and elegant manners, the text negotiates the conventional martial masculinity associated with the general.[265] Even when he is leading a battle at the frontline, the military general "possesses the charm of a Confucian scholar; He outstandingly embraces both civil and martial skills" 一種風流儒將度，才兼文武更超群 (40. 352). In the eyes of his son Yue Yun, his father surprises everyone with his gentle appearance: "people assume that my father is a general with great strength and power. In fact, he is even more graceful than a civil official" (料親怎樣威嚴重，豈知儒雅勝文臣 47. 371). Even from the viewpoint of his adversary Yang Zaixing 楊再興, the head of the water margin bandits, "[Yue Fei was] as radiant as when they first met [during the martial arts contest], and now he has a beard like Su Shi" 英姿如昨春風好，微髯三綹似髯蘇 (43. 388).[266] Considering the great literary reputation of Su Shi, here Zhou deliberately presents Yue as a military general with an elegant air of sophistication and virtue.

In addition to his refined appearance, *Jing zhong zhuan* highlights Yue Fei's prominent literary talents and scholarly tastes. In chapter 43, the great military victory

[265] Martin W. Huang also discusses the fluidity of masculinity in Ming Qing fiction. See his *Negotiating Masculinities in Late Imperial China*.

[266] Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101), courtesy name Dongpo 東坡, was a leading cultural and political figure in the Northern Song Dynasty and one of the major poets of the Song era.

against the pirates on the Taihu Lake is followed by a secluded scene where the general visits his hermit friend Zhang Wan 張完:

訪戴尋梅兩意投 Like visiting a friend or looking for plum blossoms, it was most important to understand each other in friendship.
綠樹濃陰長夏日 In a long summer day, under the shade of a green tree,
炎風酷暑進程郵 He (Yue Fei) entered Chengyou in the hot wind,
雜徑柴叢行曲曲 Riding on the zigzag path in the woods,
迴環溪碧進幽幽 Along the winding and quiet creek.
……
修竹當門君子宅 Tall bamboos stood at the gate of the gentleman.
籬無犬吠白雲留 His dog did not bark, clouds lying in sky.
停駒元帥將鞍下 The Commander-in-chief stopped his horse and dismounted,
柴扉輕扣意偏優 Leisurely, he knocked on the wicker gate. (43, 392)

The scene here shifts from the earlier bloody battlefield to a utopian-like space of a recluse, where mundane affairs are excluded. The first four lines sketch a picture of the journey, with references to classical verses from the Tang poems.[267] The natural setting here is not necessarily meant to increase the drama, but inspires appreciative feelings of the aesthetically pleasing surroundings. The zigzag path and the winding creek further visualize the slow narrative pace. The second four lines employ several literary allusions including bamboo, clouds, and wicker gate to construct the ideal land within the Confucian scholarly imagination, where landscape, reclusive lifestyle, and suggested virtue are integrated into one picture. The details of this natural scene provide a peaceful distraction from the fighting and help to establish the dual image of the general as both a military hero and a graceful gentleman.

Other stories about Yue Fei rarely mention his literary writing, but the *tanci* incorporates a small collection of Yue Fei's poetry. The integration of Yue Fei's

[267] The line of "in a long summer day, under the shade of a green tree" 綠樹濃陰長夏日 borrows from the Tang military general and poet Gao Pian 高駢 (?-887)'s poem, titled "Shanting xiari" (山亭夏日 A summer day in the mountain pavilion). Zhou only adjusted the order of the last two characters.

actual poems in the *tanci* enriches his character. For example, during his visit to Zhang Wan, Yue Fei composes a *jueju* 絕句 quatrain:

> 無心買酒謁青春 I do not intend to buy wine and cast away my youth.
> 對鏡空嗟白發新 I lament the newly grown white hair in the mirror.
> 花下少年應笑我 Young people lingering in the flowers will laugh at me.
> 垂垂羸馬訪高人 I visit a noble hermit on my thin and slow horse. [268]
> (43, 392)

Via this hermit friend's observation *Jing zhong zhuan* highlights Yue Fei's sublime demeanor and virtue:

> 難怪朝臣皆減色 No wonder he was the best among all the subjects.
> 如公風雅世罕儔 His elegance and refinement were incomparable in the world.
> 文才奪得江山秀 His literary pursuits would win the highest prize across the country.
> 緯武英奇保帝州 His extraordinary military skills guarded this empire.
> (43. 393)

In fact, the scholarly accented image of the general in *Jing zhong zhuan* is not completely fictional. In history Yue Fei did enjoy a scholarly reputation. According to the biography of Yue Fei in *Songshi* 宋史, the general was "gracious and humble to scholars, knowledgeable in the classics and history, and skilled at poetry singing and drinking games; he looked as gentle as a scholar"好賢禮士，覽經史，雅歌投壺，恂恂如書生. Since the Song, scholars have been devoted to collecting Yue Fei's writings.[269] *Jing zhong zhuan* records another two poems by Yue Fei, titled "Ji futu

[268] The poem is titled "Guo zhang xi zeng Zhang Wan"過張溪贈張完 (To Zhang Wan when crossing the Zhang creek) (d. 1130).

[269] Yue Fei's poems are primarily collected in the following works: Yue Ke 岳珂 ed., *Jin tuo cui bia*n 金佗稡編 (Collection of Jin tuo, 1218); Xu Jie 徐階 ed., *Yue ji* 岳集 (Records of Yue Fei, 1536); Shan Xun 單恂 ed., *Yue zhong wu wang ji* 岳忠武王集 (Records of the King Yue Zhong wu, 1638); Anonymous *Jing zhong lu* 精忠錄 (Records of Dedication and Loyalty, Ming Dynasty); Huang Bangning 黃邦寧 ed.,*Yue zhong wu wang wenji* 岳忠武王文集 (Collection of the King Yue zhong wu, 1769); Li E 厲鶚 ed., *Song shi jishi* 宋詩紀事 (The chronicle of Song Poetry, eighteenth century); Qian Rulin 錢汝霖 ed., *Song Yue E wang wenji* 宋岳鄂王文集 (Collection of Yue Fei: the King of E in the Song, 1924); Wang Ruilai 王瑞來, *Yue Fei shici jikao* 岳飛詩詞輯考(Compilation of Yue Fei's poetry) in *Yue Fei yanjiu* 岳飛研究 (1988) . For Full citations see bibliography attached.

Huihai" (寄浮圖慧海 To the monk Huihai, d. 1110) and "Cangzhou Cuiwei ting" (滄州翠微亭 The Cuiwei Pavilion in Cangzhou, d. 1136) .

> 湓浦廬山幾度秋 How many years has the Lu Mountain stood in Penpu?
> 長江萬折向東流 The Yangtze River flows to the east after thousands of turns.
> 男兒立志扶王室 I am determined to serve the royal family,
> 圣主專師滅虜酋 And lead the imperial army to fight the barbarian enemies.
> 功業要刊燕石上 My accomplishments will be inscribed in stone.
> 歸休終伴赤松游 But when I retire I will travel with Chi Song.
> 丁寧寄語東林老 I am telling the person in the Donglin Temple,
> 蓮社從今著力修 To practice the Buddhist teaching diligently. [270] (58, 543)
>
> 經年塵土滿征衣 My war robe has been covered with dust for years.
> 特特尋芳上翠微 I go to the Green Mountain Pavilion particularly to enjoy the view. [271]
> 好山好水看不足 I will never see enough of the beautiful mountains and rivers;
> 馬蹄催趁月明歸 But the horse clops urge me to return while the moon is shining. (43, 392)

Zhou not only records masterpieces attributed to Yue, but also creates more lines to reconstruct the moments of muse. Historically, when Yue Fei wrote his most celebrated lyric *ci* poem *Man jiang hong* 滿江紅 (Entire river red) in 1133, he was upset about Emperor Gaozong's order that his troops remain stationed in Zhuxian 朱仙 rather than follow up the victory and beat the Jurchens completely. [272] In the *tanci*, the falling leaves remind the general of his unaccomplished ambition. However, cheered by the chrysanthemum flowers blossoming out of the frost, he composes the lyrics. Zhou also describes how his reader responds to the poem:

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[270] Chi Song 赤松 refers to Chi Song zi 赤松子, an immortal in the Daoist legend. The allusion of travelling with Chi Song refers to a reclusive life. Donglin Temple is located in the Lu Mountains. *Lianshe* 蓮社, or Lotus Community, here refers to Jingtu 淨土 Buddhism. The term comes from Huiyuan 慧遠 (334-416), who first organized the community in the Lu Mountains.

[271] The Chinese term *cuiwei* 翠微 describes the green color of mountains seen from afar.

[272] It is widely accepted that the poem is attributed to Yue Fei. But several modern historians, including James T.C. Liu, believe certain phrasing in the poem dates its creation to the early sixteenth century. See James T. C. Liu, "Yueh Fei (1103-41) and China's Heritage of Loyalty," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 31, No. 2 (1972): 291-97.

張君玉手持斑管 Officer Zhang held the brush pen in his delicate hand.
落筆書成翰墨香 The ink smelt sweet where the characters were newly written.
好句詞翻金玉調 [Yue Fei's] beautiful poem matched the brilliant melody.
錄成低誦齒芬芳 Chanting the lines, the officer felt great joy and inspiration. (57. 528)

At the same time, while Yue Fei is portrayed as a hero with both martial bearing and scholarly charm, the *tanci* never hesitates to present readers with his vulnerability. In spite of being a legendary general of great strength, in the rewriting he often physically falls ill. The readers almost have the impression that he suffers from some chronic illness. Yue Fei is sick for months after his resignation from the capital Lin'an (14. 112). After learning the news that his sworn brother, General Tang Huai, has committed suicide to avoid humiliation at the hands of the Jurchen soldiers, he falls into a depression, without any appetite; even his eye sight is damaged by over crying (49. 456). When the emperor decides to make peace with the Jurchens and rejects Yue Fei, the hero becomes severely ill in bed. The *tanci* highlights the convention that illness and suffering are catalysts for poetic inspiration. During this period he struggles to compose another famous lyric *ci* poem, *To the Tone of Little Multi-Hills* (調寄小重山) in the camp. *Jing zhong zhuan* recreates the writing moment with compassion and admiration:

(帳外是)月映清光霜皎潔 (Outside of the camp) the moon was bright and the frost was shining.
無聊正觸故園思 The general felt homesick while he had no battle to lead.
巡簷細領蟾光色 Walking under the eaves, he appreciated the beautiful moon.
小重山調寄新詞 He wrote new lyrics to the tone of *Little Multi-Hills*.
信口吟成庸握管 Without holding a pen, he composed the poem on the spot.
迎風嘯月影依稀 His shadow was indistinct in the moon and the breeze.
一闋詞章書雅興 Through the poem he showed his aesthetic mood.
情文流露兩兼之 The verses expressed both the literary pursuits and

his emotional struggle. (58. 538)

In this highly sentimentalized setting, poetry writing is connected with illness. The general's frustration and weariness seem to offer a better opportunity to articulate his emotions and sensations. In other versions, Yue Fei is primarily known for his accomplishments on the battlefield and his ultimate loyalty, which caters to common audiences, either in written texts or on-stage performances. *Jing zhong zhuan*, however, enriches the image of the general, who now embraces both literary talents and military abilities as the backbone of the empire. The elegant elaboration of Yue Fei's scholarly cultivation helps attract more *guixiu* readers in gentry families. The sophisticated literati culture reflected through textual reconstruction of Yue Fei's poetic talents also serves to justify Zhou Yingfang engaging in traditionally masculine themes with war, betrayal, and violence. The scholarly taste she adds in her version of the story blurs the gendered boundaries in heroic narration and shortens the distance between her text dealing with a masculine hero and the perceptions of *guixiu* readers, who were likely more familiar with scholar-beauty (*caizi jiaren* 才子佳人) stories. As we will see in a later discussion, the character of Yue Fei in this *tanci* rewriting fits into the category of the scholar-beauty narrative, and the descriptions of his gentle appearance and literary talents pave the way for an image of a general with sublime virtues who dedicatedly serves the emperor as well as his family.

2. The Sentimental Hero

The character of Yue Fei in *Jing zhong zhuan* challenges the previous simplifed image of a masculine hero. With the erasure of a karmic narrative framework and a highlight on the private feelings and emotions of Yue Fei and his

family members, the *tanci* adaptation is deeply rooted in cult of *qing* values.[273] As the dramatist Li Yu 李漁 (1611-1680) believes, "Stories about human feelings circulate forever"凡說人情物理者千古相傳. [274] The woman author Zhou Yingfang does not aim for an image of a military hero, but a story of human sentiments and relationships.

Rather than a rigid martial hero, the image of Yue Fei in *Jing zhong zhuan* is associated with not only the orthodox values of *yi* (義 duty-bound friendship), but also *qing* (情 feelings and emotions). The *tanci* adaptation profusely celebrates *qing* in the narrative. The general is described as *duoqing* 多情 (full of emotions, 21. 179) or *zhongqing* 鐘情 (with deep feelings, 58. 542). When he ascends to the immortal land, he is assigned to "take charge of the territory of *qing*" 合領情關第一津 (66. 623). The general expresses sincere feelings towards everyone around him, including his friends, family, and the emperor.

Early in the text, before Yue Fei receives any imperial position, although he wins the first prize in the military competition, he is trapped by the treacherous minister Zhang Bangchang and forced to leave the capital. Zhou fills in this narrative gap with domestic subject matter. Yue spends time with his family and sworn brothers, as the lyrics describe their friendship (*youqing* 友情): "The man with superior talents was born to be affectionate; he highly valued friendship and righteousness"無雙國士鐘情生，友義情懷十二分 (14. 112). Later when Yue Fei leaves his colleague,

[273] The cult of *qing* refers to the centrality of sentiment, affection, or feelings in philosophy, literature, and theater plays during Ming and Qing. For discussions on the cult of *qing*, see Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses*; Martin W. Huang, "Sentiments of Desire: Thoughts on the Cult of Qing in Ming-Qing Literature," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews*. 20 (1998): 153-184; Paolo Satangelo and Donatella Guida, ed., *Love, Hatred, and Other Passions: Questions and Themes on Emotions in Chinese Civilization* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); and Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2007).

[274] Li Yu, *Xianqing ou ji* 閑情偶寄 (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe), 32.

Marshal Zhang Jun 張俊, the narrative borrows literary allusions from the Tang poet Wang Wei 王維 (701-761) to create a slightly sentimental but inspiring scene:

當時并馬出西郊 Together their horses walked to the western suburb.
渭城朝雨浥征袍 The morning drizzling of the *wei* city washed their warring robes.
青青柳色催行腳 The green willows seemed to urge his journey.
拂拂旆旗走錦驃 His robust saddle horse jogged under the flying flags.
須臾相近離亭驛 Soon they got close to the departing pavilion.
話別一觴意氣豪 Their farewell spoke inspiring words.
三分懷意行軍帥 The marshal on leave felt slightly attached.
一往情深蓋世豪 [The general was] an unrivalled hero with deep affections. (20. 169)

Private feelings are often delivered at the moment of departures. The term *liqing* 離情 (sentiments at parting) appears frequently in the *tanci*, as the general has to leave his family and friends. However, when the separation is between life and death, the emotions become intensified. In chapter 49, Yue Fei deeply laments the death of his sworn brother Tang Huai, who commits suicide when escorting the southern Song Imperial Emissary into the Jin territory:

(兄與你)同窗曾結關張義 (You and I) have been classmates and sworn brothers.
兒時相聚到如今 We spent our time together since childhood.
雖然異姓為兄弟 Although we are sworn brothers with different surnames,
同氣連枝似嫡親 We feel as close as biological brothers.
未常違我三秋別 You and I have never been apart for over three autumns.
友愛深情弟最真 The friendship between you and me is most sincere.
（難得你）慨然應令隨星使 (It is commendable) that you accept the order and escort the imperial emissary.
（恨愚兄）護衛無能死負君 (I am disappointed with myself that) I failed your expectation to guard your safety.
（可惜你）功名未上凌煙閣 (It is so regrettable) that you have not established any memorable achievement.
棟樑材幹不逢辰 The times are not favorable.
（兄累你）長途鞍馬隨軍征 (I made you) exhausted in the long march.
久拋鄉井歷風塵 Leaving your home behind, and experiencing difficulties.
（只落得）馬革裹尸名姓美 (Now you) died on the battlefield and left a

	reputation of being a martyr.
凄風苦雨滯英魂	Your heroic spirit is lost in the bitter winds and rain.
（只望）迎鑾共展平生志	(I only hope to) fulfill my lifetime wish to bring the two emperors back.
（豈料你）先期拋我九泉行	(I did not expect that) you first left me for another world.
戰績猶堪刊燕石	Your great military achievements should be inscribed.
太平安享竟無辰	You did not enjoy a peaceful time.
(你）乾坤正氣歸天上	(You) now return to Heaven with uprightness and integrity.
悔盡愚兄交義心	How I regret inviting you to the war when we became sworn brothers. (49. 455)

Jing zhong zhuan even employs the techniques of opera to reveal the rich feelings of the originally very masculine character, which have been oppressed in all previous male-authored narratives. The two pronouns "you" and "I" here change back and forth and form an eloquent dialogue between the event and the emotional expression within the frame of Yue Fei's monologue, where narration, conversation, and lyrical descriptions are naturally integrated into an organic whole. The direct speech here creates an intimacy and power in a way that simple narrative cannot equal.

In *Jing zhong zhuan* such fullness of feelings (*duoqing* 多情) is sometimes represented by the overflowing of tears and blood. Yue Fei sheds tears or even spits up blood whenever he is wracked by anxiety and almost dies of anxiety or grief. From time to time, lyrics describe Yue feeling homesick and longing for a return to his family. As early as chapter 18, seeing his sworn brothers receive leaves to visit their families, he "weeps secretly for being homesick" 暗暗掉下淚來 (18. 150). When his mother dies, the general spits blood and passes out. In fact, with a broken heart as a filial son, he is so grieved that "his only wish at the time is to follow her in death" 世事全拋唯乞死 (41. 371-72). When he sees the coffin, his sorrow reaches the peak:

刀刺丹心痛不禁 The pain felt like his heart being stabbed with a knife.

大叫一聲昏絕去 He fainted with a desperate cry.
魂靈飄渺體如冰 His body was icy-cold, his spirit flying outside of the body. (41. 372)

The woman author adopts literary conventions to portray Yue Fei as a hero with sensitive feelings. Later when Emperor Gaozong gradually deprives him of his military power and redistributes his officers, the saddened general "wipe[s] his tears when witnessing his comrades being disarmed one by one" 慘淡英姿拭淚痕 (58. 539). These alternative and sentimental descriptions challenge typical models of masculine heroes. The emotional weakness and struggles in *Jing zhong zhuan* helps create a more convincing and respectful heroic image, rather than a flat military hero.

After Lady Yao's death, Yue Fei is very reluctant to lead the army. Only when the water margin bandits are threatening the Song dynasty does Yue feel obliged to take on the role of commander. Zhou starts the departure scene with an unusually low mood: "the general looked pale and quiet; the lady lowered her head with tears" 元帥容顏殊慘澹，夫人低首淚珠傾 (42. 383). Readers who are familiar with history or the legend know that in spite of the great military accomplishments the general would soon make, this is the last time the family see each other. This moment of departure is the most heart-breaking scene in the *tanci*. The whole family is immersed in a tragic atmosphere, especially Yue Wen 岳雯, his only daughter. The dramatic interactions between the father and the daughter reinforce a tender image of the hero.

仙姿小姐悲難忍 The beautiful daughter could not hide her grief.
春尖挽住紅袍袖 Her delicate hand held back the general's wardrobe,
問親何日是歸程 Asking when her father would come back home?
公爺深識嬌兒意 Lord Yue completely understood his daughter,
一聽其言難出聲 But could not utter one word.
沉吟良久長吁嘆 After long silence, he let out a sigh.
呼兒珍重體親心 "My daughter, take care and understand your father.
此去南征兼北戰 I will have to fight across the country this time.
怎能屈指返家庭 I cannot return to you any time soon."
仙娥忽聽如斯語 The angel daughter did not expect such an answer.

哭倒親懷不放行 Crying in his arms, she refused to let him go.
此時難壞英雄帥 The heroic general was awkward at this moment.
怎禁英雄淚滿襟 He could not hold back his tears.
內堂人眾皆垂淚 Everyone in the hall was weeping.
陽關一曲最難吟 The melody of *Yangguan* was the most difficult to sing. [275]
奈何金鼓增行色 But the beating drums did not allow him to stay longer.
外廂催請不停金 His officers kept sending in plaques to urge him.
岳爺只得重離座 Lord Yue had to rise from his seat again.
小姐牽衣不放行 But she held his robe to prevent her father from leaving.
宛轉嬌啼聲不住 The daughter could not stop crying in helplessness.
情關父女兩難分 Father and daughter could not bear to part from each other.
幾巡家將頻頻請 The family guards had to remind him repeatedly.
岳爺三次別夫人 Lord Yue bid farewell to his wife three times.
相偕齊把瑤階下 Together they walked down the stairs.
行行將近正儀門 Together they approached the main gate.
夫人牽眾含悲送 In great sorrow, the lady led the family to see him off.
要看岳爺上馬行 They watched him mount the horse.
元帥其時揮蟒袖 The general waved his sleeve.
將兒灑脫出前廳 Following him, the officers and soldiers moved out of the front yard.
未將滴水簷前下 Before he even reached the dripping eave,
花枝招展倒塵埃 His beautiful little girl fainted in the dust.
當時哭暈天仙子 She was sobbing at the time.
嚇壞堂前上下人 This terrified everyone there.
公爺頓退英雄色 The general was no more a fearless hero facing his little girl.
回身看視掌中珍 He immediately returned to examine his dear daughter.
撫摹良久無聲息 She was breathless in his arms for a long time.
丹心如刺更如焚 Anxiety pierced at the general's heart.
一聲長嘆神思亂 He let out a long sigh and lost his mind.
退跌金交椅上存 He retreated, falling into his chair. (42. 384)

Zhou cannot help expressing her sorrow, knowing the general will never reunite with his family. Soon afterwards they are in two different worlds. The slow pacing and rhythm reinforce his vulnerability and sensitivity. Maram Epstein argues that the motif of sickness enhances the affective power of *qing*, and the emotional authenticity

[275] The Yangguan Pass was established as a frontier defense post in northwest China by Emperor Wu of the Han. Travelers who went beyond Yangguan were considered leaving China and had a small chance to return due to the poor living conditions in the northwestern desert. *Yangguan Sandie* (Thrice partings at *Yangguan* 陽關三疊) is the subject of one of China's most beloved ancient musical pieces, which depicts friends about to part. The music is based on a poem by the Tang Dynasty poet and musician Wang Wei 王維.

is associated with vulnerability.[276] The aestheticized representations of intensified pain with tears and physical collapse in the *tanci* do not belie weakness itself, but are a means of signifying other possibilities and dimensions of Yue Fei's heroic image. The woman author constructs an alternative space in which conventional masculinity is being negotiated from her perspective. The characteristic of Yue Fei as an emotional military general also suggests Zhou's wide range of reading, especially the romantic novels circulating at her time.[277]

3. The Family-Bond Hero

With its private nature, *qing* is best expressed in domestic settings. *Jing zhong zhuan*'s re-defined heroism is not only embodied in the public sphere, but is closely associated with family issues. Instead of a hero on the battlefield keeping a distance from women, manliness also requires responsibility within the family as an exemplary son, husband, and father. In the *tanci*, the textual focus on Yue Fei shifts frequently between public space and the domestic sphere. Zhou presents the general with a brand-new image embodying his perfect personality in a utopian family context: elegant, graceful, capable, caring, gentle, and loyal, as she writes:

公爺堂上依慈母 Lord Yue obeyed his mother in the family.
曲譜南陔樂事真 Being a filial son brought true happiness for him.
公懷曠達兼仁厚 He was broad-minded and benevolent.
下愛諸兒一體恩 He loved his children equally.
家庭不動嚴聲色 He did not show his anger in the family.

[276] Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses*, 99, 106. Also see Charlotte Furth, "Blood, Body and Gender: Medical Images of the Female Condition in China, 1680-1850," *Chinese Science* 7 (1986): 53-65; Judith T. Zeitlin, "Shared Dreams: The Story of the Three Wives' Commentary on The Peony Pavilion," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 54, no. 1 (1994): 127-79.

[277] With so many war novels published and circulated in the nineteenth century, we can assume that audiences were interested in the text primarily for its staging of battles or war strategies. But it remains to further study the readership of the female audiences: Were they interested in politics or more in domestic scenes? Zhou Yingfang seems to make an effort to integrate both romantic and historical narratives in her text.

靄靄春風和氣生 Always kind and affable, he bathed his family with spring breeze. (41. 369)

This family scene reveals the ideal domestic relationship hoped for by late Qing gentry woman. Compared to his character in other late imperial fiction, Yue Fei rarely displays patriarchal authority in the *tanci*, such as that of a tyrannical parent or a malicious man. In the following discussion I will examine Yue Fei's domestic roles in *Jing zhong zhuan*.

3.1. Yue as a Kind Father

The conventional parental mode in the Confucian family could be summarized as a stern father and a compassionate mother (*yanfu cimu* 嚴父慈母), but Yue Fei is no doubt a loving father in *Jing zhong zhuan*. Compared with, for example, the rigid father Du Bao 杜寶 in *The Peony Pavilion*,[278] such a flexible and intimate father figure represents the ideal family dynamic for elite woman in late imperial China. When Yue Fei has to lecture his son Yue Ting 岳霆, it is not about virtue, morality, or Confucianism. Because Ting, a four-year old, is boating alone in the pond, Yue worries about his safety, and, with an affectionate tone, the general tells him not to do this again (39. 349). The relation between Yue Fei and his only daughter Wen 雯 reflects an intimate and intellectual father-daughter relation in late imperial upper-class families.[279] Zhou expresses her expectation of an ideal fatherly mode: the father is first and foremost a loving and intelligent person, caring about his children. Second, the father intellectually nurtures his children. They enjoy discussing news and history

[278] Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖, *The Peony Pavilion* 牡丹亭 (d.1598).

[279] Many women-authored tanci in late imperial China address the father-daughter relationship, including *Tian yu hua*. Detailed discussion see "Patrimonial Bonds: Daughters, Fathers, and Power in Tianyuhua," *Late Imperial China* 32, no. 2 (2011): 1-33. *Zai sheng yuan* and *Bi sheng hua* also shed light on the dynamics between fathers and daughters in late imperial families.

and exchanging poetry writings. Third, the children serve their father carefully, with respect and consideration (40. 352-53).

Another lively dimension is between the general and his eldest son, Yun. When Yun wants to please his wife by inviting her family to stay, he acts like any spoiled child. He first pleads to his grandmother and asks for her permission, in the hope that once Lady Yao nods, the general would not dare to say no. After Yun learns that everyone else in the family supports his decision, he runs to his father. Zhou portrays the scene with a tone of family intimacy and sense of humor:

> 偷看生身嚴父面 Yun took a glimpse at his father.
> 春風藹藹笑容生 The general was amiable, with a warm smile.
> 此時心下歡無限 Yun was released and feeling great joy.
> 忙報佳人好放心 He hurried back to his wife and reported the good news.
> (41. 367)

Yun acknowledges the authority of his father, yet there is still a subtle tension between them. But the neutralized vocabulary such as "spring breeze" and "warm smiles" in the *tanci* text helps dissolve the patriarchal power of the father figure. The relations between Yue Fei and his children are equal and mutually supportive, unlike in other narratives, in which the father figure is often taken as the absolute authority in the gentry family.[280] By creating her ideal father-child relationship in the Yue Fei legend, Zhou Yingfang challenges the standard discourse on patriarchal hierarchy in the Confucian family.

In another scene, the strategy that the general employs to beat the head of the water margin bandits, Yang Zaixing, is to win him over by virtue. When they are fighting, Yue Yun happens to pass by. He is urged by Niu Gao to help his father. This gives Yang an opportunity to laugh at Yue's lack of discipline. Red in the face, the general has no alternative but to go back to camp. In great anger, he gives his son

[280] A typical example is Jia Baoyu's father Jia Zheng in *Honglou meng*.

forty lashes then has him sent to Yang to apologize and to let him examine his injuries. In *Shuoyue*, when Yue Fei sees Yun's face covered in tears, he says, "I have had you beaten these few strokes, do you thus harbor a grievance against your father and cry even now?"[281] However, the *tanci* rewrites this moment into a scene taking place in private. The general hides his emotions in public, but when he is alone in the camp, he experiences emotional struggles:

此宵杖責親生子 Tonight he stroked his own son.
慈懷輾轉意沉沉 He could not fall asleep and felt upset.
……
無言退坐花梨榻 Without a word, the general retreated to the sandalwood couch.
鳳目難抬涕泗傾 He wept and could not raise his eyes.
欷歔滴盡思親淚 He missed his family desperately,
丹心飲恨意如焚 And his heart was filled with guilt and pain. (43. 489)

The lines depict the general's conflict of duties between a military leader for the empire and his private roles of father, son, and husband in the context of family. To a certain extent he withdraws from the battlefield into a world of memories and interior emotional life, which is unthinkable in other Yue Fei stories.

3. 2. Yue as a Loyal Husband

As Anne Doody argues, romances are a way of "interpreting and allegorizing a woman's life."[282] Zhou Yingfang creates romantic stories in which romance and love in marriage are still possible. The ideal mode between man and woman in a utopian marriage marks one of its most radical departures from other mainstream vernacular *xiaoshuo* fiction, where gender relations are always in conflict and

[281] Qian Cai and Jin Feng, *Shuoyue quan zhuan*, 280.

[282] Margaret Anne Doody, *The Female Quixote* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989), xxvii.

competition, and encourage masculine heroes to stay away or remain a proper distance from women.[283]

Although the legend of Yue was transmitted primarily as heroic stories, Zhou Yingfang makes great effort to insert a touch of scholar-beauty romance and further enriches the image of Yue Fei from a gentry woman's perspective. As stated in my previous chapter, rather than a biased belief that the most polluting women are those who are married as we have seen in *Jin ping mei* and *Honglou meng*, married women in *Jing zhong zhuan* are powerful because of their abilities to establish and manage a family. Their characters thus potentially undermine the patriarchal concept of family. Meanwhile, as Siao-chen Hu indicates, women-authored *tanci* texts often continue to explore life after the wedding, rather than concluding the romance before real marital life begins. [284] For example, Chen Duansheng refuses to make Meng Lijun return to her female identity in *Zai sheng yuan*, since she regards marriage as a source of unhappiness. On the other hand, *Bi sheng hua* provides an example that the married woman author Qiu Xinru made compromises within the patriarchal family order. But, the romance does not end after the wedding in *Jing zhong zhuan*. Yue's perfect marriage could be a reflection of Zhou's own satisfying marriage before her husband died in the Miao riot. It also shows her expectations of how companionate marriages are compatible with the hierarchical and multigenerational structure of elite households. In the *tanci* fiction, marriage is not a battlefield between men and women about power and control, but a harmonious union.

As Martin Huang states, in prevalent male-authored vernacular fiction, a man's attitude toward his wife (or wives) is often regarded as an index to his

[283] For example, see Martin Huang, *Negotiating Mansuclinity in Late Imperial China* (University of Hawaii Press, 2006), Chapter 2 and Chapter 5.

[284] Hu, "Literary *Tanci*", 217.

masculinity. Husbands in *San'guo Yanyi* and *Shuihu zhuan* have the right to act as they wish. McMahon also indicates that in these stories men consider it their moral duty to execute their wives, no matter if they are adulterous or innocent. Extreme violence towards women is legitimized and even celebrated as part of masculinity. Meanwhile, if a husband is obedient to his wife, he is labeled "henpecked" and considered emasculated. [285] In contrast, the ideal marriages of two couples in the *tanci*, Yue Fei and his wife Lady Li, as well as Yue Yun and his wife Lady Gong, represent women's fantasy of marital intimacy. Yue Fei demonstrates what a perfect husband should be: handsome, successful, considerate, responsible, loyal, and having a good influence on family members and friends. From the early chapters, the *tanci* begins to portray the newlyweds as models of an ideal couple with a dash of scholar-beauty romance:

> 月映倚窗明似鏡 From the window, the moon was as bright as the mirror.
> 香飄羅帳夢俱清 Within the fragrant silk curtains, their dreams were pure.
> 日上杏花仙子起 The beautiful lady rose with the sun.
> 澹妝風雅畫難成 Her subtle elegance was difficult to portray.
> 岳爺並坐梁鴻案 Lord Yue sat with her, side by side.
> 玉鏡臺開翰墨林 Brush and ink spread on the jade dressing table.
> 書生風度英雄態 He had scholarly grace and heroic charisma.
> 相對無窮雅意深 Looking at each other in deep kindness, they enjoyed the speechless moments.[286] (6. 37)

[285] In addition to the notorious episodes in *Shuihu zhuan* where Shi Xiu 石秀 and Lu Junyi conduct "honor murders," there is another plot in the early chapters of *San'guo Yanyi* in which a hunter kills his wife merely to serve her flesh to the starving Liu Bei 劉備. Martin Huang also comments, "The readiness to desert or even sacrifice one's wife for the sake of friends or sworn brothers is often considered a measure of a hero's true manhood." See Huang, *Negotiating Masculinities in Late Imperial China*, 131. McMahon, *Misers, shrews, and polygamists*, 3. Also see Bret Hinsch, "The Emotional Underpinnings of Male Fidelity in Imperial China," *Journal of Family History*, 32.4 (2007): 392-412.

[286] Even before Zhou Yingfang's *tanci*, the Ming playwright Yao Maoliang 姚茂良(ci. 1475)'s drama *Jing zhong ji chuanqi* 精忠記傳奇(The legend of dedication and loyalty, 15th century) opens with a harmonious family scene during Yue Fei's temporary retirement. See Yao Maoliang, *Jing zhong ji* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe), Act 2. But the domestic theme appears only briefly at the beginning of the *chuanqi*. In the *tanci* version, Zhou not only continues but also develops this domestic theme. In contrast, Chen Duansheng defines marriage as a shackle to their happiness: when a woman marries, utopia, adventure, and personal narrative all end. Her heroine avoids marriage and refuses to change back to female dresses. Qiu Xinru, on the other hand, portrays her deteriorating life quality after

Zhou presents a moment and space for the couple to be together by themselves, away from the demands of the larger household or filial conduct and responsibility to parents and elders. The lines describe a pairing of love with talent which is quite popular in the genre of scholar-beauty romances. The couple cultivates their good training of the gentry class, and matches each other in accordance with their shared hobbies and tastes. It is not surprising that such moments are re-inscribed repeatedly in the *tanci* text. Unlike *Zai sheng yuan,* in which marriage deprives women of freedom and oppresses their nature, *Jing zhong zhuan* believes in conjugal love in a family. Romantic sentiments are compatible within the companionate marriage.

In addition, Zhou Yingfang rewrites the expectations of marriage. By the end of the nineteenth century, some educated couples had begun to pay more attention to emotional compatibility, in addition to producing a son to carry on the family lineage as demanded by the Confucian family system. The above lines reflect that companionate marriage is first and foremost a union between an intellectually compatible couple who treat each other with mutual respect. Although Yue Fei at this moment has not started his military career, this does not yet prevent Zhou from presenting his life in a gentry family. An equal and intellectual relationship between husband and wife in the domestic setting is highlighted, valuing the leisure of the calligraphy practiced by both and the cult of private pleasures. From this point, *Jing zhong zhuan*'s very concern for affection and compatibility in marriage challenges the Confucian family hierarchy, in which such emotional needs are discouraged. Yue Fei's marriage is based on intimacy, not on duty, control, and obedience. Meanwhile, though their relationship is based on romantic love, the gentry couple still behaves

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marriage. However, Zhou believes that a colorful and meaningful life is still able to continue after the wedding with correct passions and affections.

rationally and tempers their lust. As McMahon puts it, the chaste Qing couple in the elite household "replaces sex with words, poems, letters, and polite conversation."[287]

The *tanci* also suggests that in addition to romance and loyalty, the ideal couple also demonstrates the quality of being each other's soul mate, which is crucial in the cult of *qing* in late imperial China. When Lady Li departs to visit her natal family, the couple whispers to each other: "Do not forget our appointment to spend the winter together when the plum blooms" 尋梅令節，賢卿勿負消寒之約 (40. 352). The text turns a tough military general into an affectionate young husband with scholarly charm. In chapter 57, three years have passed since Yue Fei's expedition. He is stuck in the town of Zhuxian but sends his son Yun back to accompany the family. From her side, Yue Fei's wife thinks that Yun should stay with his father so that the general will not be alone in the army. Ideally, love in a companionate marriage combines mutual encouragement and support for the family members, as Zhou comments: "The lady understood his thoughts from afar; their love and affection were as deep as the ocean" 夫人會意公遙念, 相思一樣海波深 (57. 531). The affection here in the nineteenth-century text could be read as a late Ming legacy of the cult of *qing* about passion and love.

Most significantly, the ideal marriage portrayed as "the harmony between the lute and psaltery with deep affections" 琴瑟調和，恩情美滿 (39. 349) in *Jing zhong zhuan* lays stress on a loyal commitment to each other. Marriage in China before the twentieth century has often been described as a rigid example of patrilineality, patrilocality, and patriarchy. Scholars have studied how reading romantic fiction

[287] McMahon, *Causality and Containment*, 229.

helped shape women's self-perceptions and concepts of family.[288] While male-authored scholar-beauty stories usually promote polygamy as the ideal family pattern,[289] women writers in late imperial China, however, show ambivalence towards the polygamous family. Chen Duansheng, for example, in *Zai sheng yuan* describes women's state of mind in the polygamous family system as being oppressed, where Lijun is more talented than most men but can only fulfill her ambition by cross-dressing. Chen attempts to resist against the women's way of life in the polygamous family.[290] Similarly, the author of *Tian yu hua* insists on monogamy as a Confucian norm. As we see from the male protagonist Zuo Weiming, he never takes a concubine and remains faithful to his wife, though other male characters may indulge their desires. But other women-authored *tanci* fiction, *Yuchuan yuan*, *Bi sheng hua* and *Liuhua meng*, all have their heroines live in polygamous families and reinforce the teaching that primary wives must accept concubines.[291] In contrast, *Jing zhong zhuan* ridicules polygamy. Though Zhou Yingfang does not explicitly challenge the orthodox concept of womanhood, she expresses subtle critiques of polygamous marriage. In the *tanci* no hero marries more than one wife. When asked by his best friend why he does not remarry, Yue Fei's father-in-law Magistrate Li answers that

[288] On women's perceptions on family, see, for example, Ellen Widmer, "Xiaoqing's Literary Legacy and the Place of the Woman Writer in Late Imperial China," *Late Imperial China* 13.1 (1992): 111-55; *The Beauty and the Book*; and Judith Zeitlin, "Shared Dreams."

[289] For studies on details on polygamy in Chinese fiction, see Duan Jiangli 段江麗, *Lifa yu renqing* 禮法與人情 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006); Keith McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists:* and *Polygamy and Sublime Passion*.

[290] In *Zai sheng yuan*, after Meng Lijun 孟麗君 achieves her ambition and becomes the prime minister, the whole story shifts to how she manages to cover her female identity and avoid her engagement to Huangpu Shaohua 皇甫少華, especially when she learns that he has taken a concubine.

[291] Li Guiyu 李桂玉, *Liu hua meng* 榴花夢 (Dreams of pomegranate flowers, 1861). Among the three mentioned women-authored *tanci* fiction, Qiu Xinru's *Bi sheng hua* most completely submits to polygamy. In *Bi sheng hua*, supporting polygamy is regarded as a primary feminine virtue and wives help their husbands to find concubines and produce sons.

his only life goal now is to reach enlightenment 一塵不染是心苗 (4. 23). When Emperor Gaozong takes a maid from his official, Zhou criticizes his lack of control over his desire, which signifies the emperor's personality flaws and moral inferiority (20. 163).[292]

In other words, authentic *qing* passion is closely associated with loyalty in marriage. To further support her belief in conjugal love, Zhou even creates a dramatic story that Yue Fei rejects an offer of two concubines from Prince Ning. The general illustrates great self-discipline. He declines the prince's agents, not allowing the sedans to enter his household. He explains to the prince that he only has the emperor and his mother in mind, "no room for other feelings" 一切閑情豈在心 (39. 346). We can also get a sense of the dynamics and subtle lines within the intergenerational family in late imperial China. When Yue Fei meets his wife, she walks forward to congratulate him on the concubines. The general tells her that there is nothing to be celebrated and shows her his letter declining the gift.[293] However, after the couple retreats to their own chamber they have a very intimate conversation. Thinking that his wife has changed her mind and is encouraging him to take the concubines, Yue Fei feels slightly disappointed that she "fails to live up to the promise" 如何近日負同心 (39. 348). To him, his affection for her is strong and exclusive:

惟有君親常在念 All I am thinking is to serve Emperor and Mother.

[292] In this sense Zhou Yingfang challenges the orthodox narration about "good" and authoritative emperors in most Ming Qing fiction. Even in *Zai sheng yuan*, for example, the criticism of the young emperor is rather vague compared to the many sharp comments in *Jing zhong zhuan*. At most, Chen Duansheng portrays the young emperor as a morally ambiguous character, instead of using direct satire. For further discussion on *Jing zhong zhuan*'s critical comments on the emperor, see my chapter V, 194-201.

[293] This plot also reflects the author's hierarchical consciousness. She concludes that the two maids were only second-class beauties when compared with women of the Yue family. As a result, Yue Fei finally arranged for the two maids to be married to his officers. Meanwhile, Zhou demonstrates her understanding that the exchange of concubines had a meaningful value in creating homosocial relations between men.

余情專注在卿卿 If there is any feeling left, they are all about you.
曾經滄海難為水 One who has seen the ocean thinks no more of rivers**.**
除卻巫山不是雲 After Wushan, all other clouds are mere puffballs above.
夫婦百年永期好 The harmonious union will last one hundred years.
卿休再作此言論 Please never talk like this in the future.
閑情早付東流水 I have no more passion for other people,
骨肉相關至性深 But our children are like my own flesh and blood.
內政頻繁多少事 I am occupied with politics in the imperial government.
事親教子賴賢卿 I rely on you to serve my mother and teach our children.
余因鞍馬親王事 Serving the emperor on the battlefield,
離別時多久負情 I know I let down your deep affections when I am away. (39. 348)

The lines read like an after-wedding version of a confession of love and an expression of gratitude from the husband to his dedicated wife. Marital loyalty brings mutual understanding and appreciation. The woman author further defines an ideal companionate marriage. She explicitly rectifies women's domestic contributions. On the other hand, the approval and appreciation of the wifely contributions to the family also forms a resistance to the disciplines of the Confucian patriarchy. During the visit to her natal family, Lady Li hesitates whether she should stay longer with her father or go back to her husband on time. Zhou reinforces the concept of loyalty in marriage via Magistrate Li's teaching:

他今年少居高爵 Your husband is young and in a prominent position.
紅錦帳中無二人 There is no other woman in his embroidered curtains.
德配無雙情義重 His virtue is peerless, with strong affections towards you.
英雄蓋世實超群 He is truly an unparalleled hero of the age.
兒當得福須知福 My daughter, you should realize how lucky you are.
凡事還須順彼行 Following his will is what you ought to do (41. 362).

Magistrate Li tells his daughter that a wife should prioritize her husband's needs and not her own, *under the condition* of her husband's loyalty in the marriage. In Confucian ideology the role of a husband is an extension of the father figure, representing paternal authority. By prioritizing mutual love and respect for women's obedience, *Jing zhong zhuan* challenges the hierarchical husband-wife relationship or

at least provides an alternative family model. While orthodox Confucian family rules require chastity and loyalty to one man as the most crucial virtue of a woman, the *tanci* repeatedly states that a husband's loyalty is a parallel counterpart of the Confucian ideals of womanhood.[294] Yue Fei's loyalty to his wife is not only about economic or ritual concerns of the family, but a genuine expression of emotional primacy.

3.3. Yue as a Filial Son (-in-Law)

At the core of the cult of *qing* in the *tanci* narrative *Jing zhong zhuan*, I argue, is filial piety. As an icon of dedication and loyalty in Chinese culture, the character of Yue Fei is primarily described as a frugal man who keeps strict discipline among his soldiers, attaches little value to wealth, and is concerned about the well being of the common people. His image has always been associated with abstract moral virtues including loyalty, steadfastness and patriotic spirit in the public realm. However, more than one third of *Jing zhong zhuan* is devoted to describing his family and domestic virtues, in which filial piety in particular becomes the most crucial value and a distinguished marker demonstrating his moral superiority in serving both the empire and the family. Zhou Yingfang restores family-oriented filial piety as a defining virtue for the ideal social order. It is also the sublime principle in both the mundane world and Heaven. Beyond the family, "a virtuous emperor should rule his country with filial piety" 聖王以孝治天下 (39. 350). Even "[t]he Jade Emperor rules with the virtue of filial piety. This is the emotion shared both in heaven and on earth" 玉皇以

[294] In fact, Zhou Yingfang did not "create" the corresponding duty for husbands, but "restored" the full meaning of chastity. As Lu Xun reveals, chastity used to be a virtue for men as well as women, but later only women were required to remain chaste while "men have no part in it." See Lu Xun, *My Views on Chastity* 我之節烈觀 (1918). Also see Janet M. Theiss, *Disgraceful Matters: The Politics of Chastity in Eighteenth-century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

孝治天下, 人間天上共斯情 (73. 701). There is no way to displace the lofty virtue of filial piety in *Jing zhong zhuan*. Zhou Yingfang exaggerates filial piety from the beginning: she names Yue Fei's hometown "Village of Peace in the town of Filial Piety" 孝悌里永寧鄉 (1. 1). The name illustrates her faith that filial piety will lead to the ultimate peace and prosperity of the empire. Yue Fei's talents in both military and literary grace are in perfect balance, which is a result of his inborn filial piety 純孝天然 (2. 9). In fact, he shows an interest in moral teachings even before his military gifts begin to shine. He was born a diligent student, often reading alone late at night. His favorite texts are history and works by ancient sages. But his utmost virtue is filial thoughts and actions, replacing the Confucian discourse of political loyalty as the social foundation.

Shuoyue deals with the death of Yue Fei's mother Lady Yao in a few short sentences: "Medicines cannot rescue the aged lady's worsening health. She died unexpectedly. After arranging an appropriate funeral with great sorrow, the Commander-in-Chief was absorbed in grief and became weak" 不意太太老病日增，服藥無效，忽然歸天。岳元帥悲傷哭泣，盡心葬祭，廢寢忘餐，弄得骨瘦如柴.[295] However *Jing zhong zhuan* uses almost half a chapter to elaborate her grand funeral as a way to express the general's deeply emotional connection and filial action.[296]

開喪卜葬皆依禮 Every detail at the funeral strictly followed the customs.

[295] Qian Cai and Jin Feng, *Shuoyue quan zhuan*, 272.

[296] In fact, Yue Fei's image as an extremely filial son is not completely a fictional imagination. He also enjoys the reputation for being extremely filial in history. According to the modern historian Li An, his mother passed away in 1136. Even before the imperial decree arrived, Yue Fei and Yue Yun carried the coffin back to their hometown on bare feet. Yue performed the ritual of living in a mourning hut for three years (*lumu* 盧墓). Meanwhile, the country of Qi was invading. Emperor Gaozong issued the edict to re-assign him as the general, and Yue Fei declined three times. Only after Emperor Gaozong wrote a personal letter to him did he reluctantly accept the order. See Li An, *Yue Fei shiji kao*.

事死如生孝子心 It was the hope of the filial son that he could serve the dead as if she was still alive.

……

岳爺盧墓依親側 Lord Yue lived by her tomb in a hut.

不改生前孺慕深 He did not change the filial respect he had shown when she was living.[297] (42. 376)

As in *Shuoyue*, or any other versions of the Yue Fei stories, the general worries most about the fate of the empire. But in the *tanci* rewriting, he suffers primarily from the loss of his mother. Having deleted the karmic frame, the overall narrative frame of *Jing zhong zhuan* targets the ultimate reunion of the Yue family in Heaven. Although his health deteriorates, the general still mourns for three years, obeying the Confucian requirement of filial piety, with every day spent in deep sorrow. While orthodox ritual requires mourning to touch deep emotions, it might also interfere with bureaucratic efficiency and raise critiques.[298] The *tanci* attempts to reconcile the competing demands between parents and emperor, or between filial piety and loyalty with an alternative interpretation: filial piety as the foundation of all virtues, particularly political loyalty. Genuine loyalty is a form of filial piety and is derived from filial piety. In her rewriting, the woman author impresses on the readers that filial piety is the essential virtue of the hero. Yue Fei's genuine filial thoughts (純孝心 41.374) reach Heaven; in a dream (in fact, he has fallen unconscious) his parents reveal the instruction that serving the emperor with dedication and loyalty ultimately would lead to a family reunion in heaven. The teaching from his parents in the dream also makes him abandon any thoughts of suicide (41. 372-6).

[297] The details presented in the funeral rituals draw attention to appropriate political and cultural sanctity in the Qing. By the time Zhou wrote this *tanci* fiction, filial piety, as well as other safe ways to express grief over the loss of family, had taken on new overlays. Han mourning practices were not regarded as a potential ethnic resistance to the Manchu rule, but promoted as part of the Qing civilizing mission (*jiaohua* 教化) to invest a foundation of virtue in the empire.

[298] Qing policy ruled that personal mourning had to be put aside for the needs of government. For further discussion on Qing mourning rituals, see Norman Kutcher, *Mourning in Late Imperial China: Filial Piety and the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 120-52.

In addition, filial duties in *Jing zhong zhuan* are not merely limited to the patrilineal family. Women's natal families receive equal attention for filial responsibilities. The *tanci* elaborates Yue Fei's uxorilocal marriage. Magistrate Li Chun 李春 has only a daughter, so he has been looking for a reliable son-in-law. He selects the talented Yue Fei during the military examination, arranging for his marriage into the Li household in order to continue the family lineage and provide security for his old age (衰年相托免飄飄 4. 23). According to historical records Yue Fei was indeed married uxorilocally, but most stories about him gloss over this detail. *Shuoyue* faithfully records that Yue Fei originally married into his wife's family, but the narration immediately shifts to his military adventures. Many versions portray in detail how the general is taught and adopted as a son by the great master Zhou Tong 周侗. To a large extent, the character of the master compensates for the absence for Yue's father and counters the negative impression conveyed by his uxorilocal marriage.

Weijing Lu's study shows that uxorilocal marriage was often regarded as a way for declining or commoner families to move up the social ladder and was associated in imperial China with reduced masculinity. She suggests that in the Qing dynasty, uxorilocal marriage was no longer confined to those from the low end of the social hierarchy, but was practiced by elite families as well, apparently without much stigma. Particularly in southern Jiangsu and northern Zhejiang, there seemed to be few negative connotations attached to uxorilocal marriage among literati. For example, the renowned scholar and *ci* lyrics poet Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 (1629-1709) was an uxorilocal son-in-law; Fang Bao 方苞 (1668-1749), the founder of the Tongcheng School, had an uxorilocally married father. One of Fang's sisters, a niece, a second

cousin, and a granddaughter of his brother all married uxorilocally. [299] Similarly, Yue Fei's uxorilocal marriage is not presented as a stigma in the *tanci*, but celebrated positively as a lovely story. Zhou's bold alternative writing about the general also includes exaggerating his wedding as an uxorilocal groom, a grand event she describes as "the flute melody in the golden room sings the phoenix's good choice; the fancy candles in the bridal chamber gladden to meet the dragon"金屋笙歌偕卜鳳, 洞房花燭喜承龍 (4. 27). Traditionally, a woman marries into her husband's family and pays her respects to her in-laws the next day. Zhou describes with great interest how Yue Fei pays his respects to his new father-in-law after the wedding night.

酒過數巡方散席	The feast was finally over after the wine had been around quite a few times.
一宵美景慶良辰	The beautiful night scene joined to celebrate the auspicious time.
次日李公窗下坐	Next morning, Magistrate Li was seated under the window.
岳爺來做問安人	Lord Yue greeted him with care and respect. (4. 28)

The verses subvert the conventional marital status. From the woman author's perspective, the conjugal bond of the uxorilocal son-in-law and his wife is marked by harmony and affection without the burden of hierarchy. However, as we have seen earlier in Magistrate Li's teaching, the *tanci* does not radically challenge the orthodox gender norms in uxorilocal marriage. The sense that a wife should belong and be loyalty to her husband's family remains unchanged.[300] Lady Li keeps feeling guilty about her lack of opportunity to serve her mother-in-law. After a period of uxorilocal residence, the couple moves back to Yue Fei's family when his mother falls ill. The traditional concepts that a woman belonged to her husband's family and that her

[299] Weijing Lu, "Uxorilocal Marriage among Qing Literati," *Late Imperial China* 19, no. 2 (1998): 64-110.

[300] *Ibid*. In contrast, another *tanci* fiction *Tian yu hua* goes even further with the relationship between a married daughter and her parents. In *Tian yu hua*, the father Zuo Weiming insists that his married daughter Zuo Yizhen should always belong to her natal family. See *Tian yu hua*, chapter 25.

obligation was to serve her in-laws still encouraged an uxorilocally married woman to give priority to her husband's interests over those of her natal family. The expectation that she, as a daughter, would and could switch her loyalty and affections to her marital family is still a crucial part of an ideal marriage in the *tanci*. Rather than weakening the heroic image of Yue Fei, the elaboration of his uxorilocal marriage helps further portray his gentleness within the family context while reinforcing the orthodox values. The hero is truly perfect in both public and private spheres.

Yue Fei in *Jing zhong zhuan* is open-minded in the domestic scenes and demonstrates equal attentions to his in-laws. Some late imperial texts suggest married women should not continue their financial and emotional connections with their natal families.[301] However, *Jing zhong zhuan* makes an effort to stress the equality and mutual respect between marital and natal families.[302] Women's concerns about their natal family are legitimized by the notion of filial piety as well. Zhou promotes the bold concept that a woman's loyalty to her husband should be balanced with *his* filial support to *her* parents. The *tanci* celebrates Lady Li's every visit to her natal family

[301] Visiting the natal family is often regarded as the source of family trouble. For example, in Ling Mengchu's collections of short stories, Yao Dizhu 姚滴珠 is kidnapped and sold on her way to her parents' house. See Ling Mengchu (1580-1644), *Chuke pai'an jingqi* 初刻拍案驚奇.Even the powerful Jia family would think a married daughter should no longer have any relationship with them. After Jia Yingchun's wedding, her mother Madam Xing makes the following comment: "For girls, sooner or later they will step out of the gate. When they get married, how can their natal families continue to take care of them? It is up to her fate. Meeting a good person, she is lucky; nothing can be done if her luck is bad"大凡做了女孩兒，終久是要出門子的，嫁到人家去，娘家哪裡顧得，也只好看她自己的命運，碰得好就好，碰得不好也就沒法兒 (*Honglou meng*, Chapter 81). Maram Epstein's study on late imperial law documents suggests a frequent source of domestic violence in legal cases was the argument on whether the wife could visit her natal family, particularly among poor families. See her "Making a case : characterizing the filial son," collected in Robert E. Hegel and Katherine Carlitz ed., *Writing and Law in Late Imperial China : Crime, Conflict, and Judgment* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), chapter 1. Also see Wang Yuesheng 王躍生, *Qingdai zhongqi hunyin chongtu touxi* 清代中期婚姻衝突透析 (Beijing: shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2003).

[302] The *tanci* text elaborates on the gift exchange before the marriage between two families and the mutual support of parents of both sides. The Ming scholar Gui Youguang 歸有光 (1507-1571) first challenged the Confucian notion of a woman's absolute loyalty to her marital family and argued that her first obligations before marriage were to her parents, and she became bound by her obligations to her husband only after the marriage. In that scene, Zhou Yingfang goes even further to suggest the couple should take responsibility for parents on both sides.

(*guining* 歸寧); but more importantly, her husband strongly supports her visits. Although the general feels reluctant to be separated from his wife, he is touched by her filial intention because "Filial piety dominates the five relations" 今古人倫唯孝重 (39. 350), with equal expectations from both genders. The couple understands their responsibility to take care of the parents on both sides, and the ultimate solution, the *tanci* suggests, is to "live as one family" 迎歸一室(5. 29). When his wife moves into the Yue family, she is naturally worried about her own father living alone, especially after the Jurchen invasion. Yue Fei immediately sends his sworn brother Tang Huai to check on his father-in-law. In addition, although the general no longer lives in the Li family as the son-in-law, he keeps his eyes open to help Magistrate Li adopt a son, in order to take care of him as he ages. This search for an appropriate adoptive son becomes another subtle thread when the narrative alternates from war scenes to domestic issues. Chapter 20 spends several pages shifting from the crisis of the Song Empire to Yue Fei's effort to arrange the adoption for his father-in-law. The adoption is finalized in the middle of the *tanci*, when Lady Li visits her father with her two sons, Yue Lei and Yue Ting. Zhou repeatedly elaborates scenes of celebration in *Jing zhong zhuan*. She switches from the worsening political situation in the capital Lin'an back to Nan'yang where Yue Fei's in-law resides and presents another cheerful picture of a family reunion, during which people are appreciating chrysanthemums at the Double Ninth Festival (*chongyang* 重陽).[303] Magistrate Li is glad to see his two grandsons. He also chooses an auspicious day to adopt Li Yun 李雲, who has been recommended by the general, and marries him to a daughter of the Yan 嚴 family.

[303] The Double Ninth Festival is also celebrated as the date to pay respect to old people and demonstrate filial thoughts and actions.

Yue Fei's fifth son, Yue Ting 岳霆, is adopted by Li Yun as well and stays with them. Thus the general makes good arrangements for his father-in-law, and the family is complete within the ideal Confucian code, or in Zhou's words, "Jade trees, irises and orchids present auspicious signs at the stairs" 玉樹蘭芝, 庭呈祥瑞 (41. 362). The *tanci* presents what an ideal family looks like from a daughter's perspective:

> 且喜嚴親尤矍鑠 Lady Li was glad to see her father healthy and energetic.
> 年雖高邁有精神 He was old but hale and hearty.
> 更欣弟婦稱賢淑 Her sister-in-law was kind and virtuous.
> 夫婦承歡善孝親 Together the couple received love from the magistrate and served him carefully. (41. 363)

3.4. Filial Piety and Loyalty: The Management of Moral Competition

As the most celebrated general in China, Yue Fei has been considered an enduring symbol of loyalty. Martin Huang suggests that the notion of loyalty in imperial China is primarily defined by a hierarchical relationship "in which the subordinate is supposed to be completely subservient and faithful to his supervisor."[304] Fiction in late imperial China often attempts to portray the dilemma between the two major virtues: *zhong* loyalty to the empire and *xiao* filial piety to the parents, or as it is expressed in Chinese, "loyalty and filial piety cannot complement each other"忠孝不能兩全.[305] Earlier Yue Fei stories seldom describe his bond with

[304] Huang, *Negotiating Masculinities in Late Imperial China*, 99.

[305] For example, in *Sanguo Yanyi* 三國演義 (d. fourteenth century), Xu Shu 徐庶 (who recommends Zhuge Liang to Liu Bei's mother) condemns her son who is serving Liu but goes back to see her in the territory of Cao Cao 曹操. She says to Xu: "You are a learned person, so you must know loyalty and filial piety cannot go together"汝既讀書，須知忠孝不能兩全 (*Sanguo Yanyi*, chapter 37). Ming *chuanqi* drama *Baojian ji* 寶劍記 (Legend of the sword, 1547) adds the character of Lin Chong 林沖's mother out of the original *Shui hu* narrative and presents the *Shui hu* hero's ethical conflicts between taking care of his mother and pursuing justice. See Li Kaixian 李開先, *Linchong baojian ji* 林沖寶劍記 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1954). A less known mid-Qing scholar Yang Chaoguan 楊潮觀 (1712-1791) composed a collection of short *zaju* plays, in which *Xinling jun yizang jinchai* 信陵君義葬金釵 (Prince Xinling buried a heroine by integrity) further discusses the dilemma. The woman Ruji 如姬 steals the seal from Prince Xinlin to avenge her father, but is murdered by Lord Wei. Neither

the family, including his elderly mother. For example, the late Ming *chuanqi* drama *Jing zhong qi* completely deletes the role of Yue Fei's mother. *Shuoyue*, however, highlights Yue Fei's loyalty and integrity (*zhongyi* 忠義), while it mentions little about filial piety. Inheriting the idealized discourse of *quanzhong quanxiao* 全忠全孝 (utter loyalty and sheer filial piety) in Chinese drama, Zhou Yingfang rewrites this dilemma into a new story of harmony.

Before *Jing zhong zhuan*, a few late imperial texts had begun to pursue the ideal coexistence of loyalty and filiality. The late Yuan *nanxi* 南戲 play *Pipa ji* 琵琶記 (Legend of the lute) portrays Scholar Cai as a successful model of serving both his parents and the emperor, as its author Gao Ming 高明(ca.1305-1370) preaches that "Zhao Wuniang embraces lofty chastity and virtuousness; Cai Bohai fulfills his fidelity and filial piety"有貞有烈趙五娘, 全忠全孝蔡伯喈.[306] However, the play solves the conflict only by completely erasing the wife's independent personality. While Cai serves in the capital, his wife Zhao Wuniang fulfills all filial duties to his parents. Another Ming playwright Meng Chenshun 孟稱舜 (1599-1684) manifests the same *quanzhong quanxiao* ideal in his *chuanqi* drama *Er xu ji* 二胥記 (Stories about Shen Baoxu and Wu Zixu, 1643), in which he applies the Confucian notion of *zhong xiao yi ti* 忠孝一體 (unified loyalty and filial piety are integrative) by contributing to the family and the empire in a sequential order.[307]

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heaven nor the underworld would accept her soul, since her filial act violates her loyalty to the prince. See Yang Chaoguan, *Yin feng ge zaju* 吟風閣雜劇 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chuabanshe, 1982). Even contemporary novels still occasionally borrow this concept to promote patriotism; see Li Cunbao 李存葆, *Gaoshan xia de huahuan* 高山下的花環 (Jinnan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 1982).

[306] Qian Nanyang, ed., *Yue ben pipa ji jiaozhu* 元本琵琶記校注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980).

[307] Meng Chenshun, *Er xu ji* 二胥記 (Beijing: Wenxue guji kanxingshe, 1957). The term *zhong xiao yi ti* is first seen in *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (d. 239BC). Later the *Xiaojing* 孝經 (Classic of filial piety)

Jing zhong zhuan further develops the idea that loyalty and filial piety are essentially integrated as an organic whole. As shown in the narrative frame, Yue Fei and his family die as loyal subjects, leading to the family reunion in the heavenly world. According to Zhou, filial piety is fundamental and always assumes a commitment to political loyalty. She is so fond of the idea of filial piety that she defines the virtue as having the utmost value to help defend and strengthen the empire. In the *tanci*, Lady Yao refers to mothers of Tao Kan 陶侃 and Wang Ling 王陵 to educate her son Yue Fei so he could concentrate on serving the empire, as she says: "It is a filial action when you are devoted to the country" 致身于國方為孝 (26. 227). [308] The emphasis on filial piety over loyalty reflects an expected social value from the woman writer's perspective. Loyalty to the emperor was once regarded as the ultimate standard for evaluating supreme excellence (*zhi shan* 至善) in morality, but *Jing zhong zhuan* reverses this standard to filial acts towards parents. Zhou places filial piety, not loyalty or romantic sentiments, at the center of both public and domestic relations. When Yue Fei is imprisoned in Lin'an, he explains to the jailer why he does not take the advice from the Zen Buddhist monk to retreat:

> At that time I was carrying on a royal duty, and I will not be able to enjoy retirement while my country suffers from the Jurchen invasion. If I did that, I could not face the emperor; in addition, I could not face my dead mother.
> [我其時有皇命何可脫身，況國家多故、為臣者何可規避以享林壑之福？不但無以對君，且無以對吾母于地下。] (60. 558)

Essentially it is the fear that he might fail his mother's expectations that motivates Yue Fei. In the *tanci* filial piety and loyalty are not in conflict with each other. Filial

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further illustrates the multiple layers of the integration as "Filial piety begins with serving parents, continues with serving the emperor, and is completed in establishing one's own character" 始于事親，中于事君，終于立身.

[308] Tao Kan's mother is known for her strict moral teaching on self-discipline. Wang Ling's mother sacrificed her life to enable her son to establish the Han Dynasty.

feelings are the most basic and natural bond, and political loyalty should not repress them. The hero no longer has the dilemma of having to choose between serving his aged mother and serving the empire. Both loyalty and filial piety are now family virtues, and the originally external virtuous requirement becomes an internal domestic one. In that sense, the *tanci* also blurs the boundary between the outside public domain and inner private space.

Jing zhong zhuan makes political loyalty subtly subordinate to filial piety. In many earlier versions of Yue Fei's legend, when his son Yun is called to the capital by an imperial decree, the general realizes that a trap is being set by Qin Hui and the emperor. They are both in great danger. However he still encourages, almost orders, his son to follow the imperial commissioner. This has long been criticized as evidence of Yue Fei's blind loyalty.[309] Without challenging the notion of loyalty, Zhou shifts the attention here from the concern of the emperor to the commitment to being filial by obeying the parent. Holding back his sadness, the general urges his son to go and asks him to "switch from filiality to loyalty to comfort me" 移孝為忠慰我心 (57. 535), since "loyalty and filial piety are both our family values" 傳家忠孝是良箴 (57. 536).

Occasionally, the *tanci* directly parallels the relationship between the emperor and the general with a relationship of father and son (父子情).[310] Before Qin Hui appears in court, when Yue Fei asks for a battle assignment to bring back the empress dowager, Emperor Gaozong is convinced by the general's filial actions: "[Yue Fei]

[309] The debate on whether Yue Fei's loyalty was blind or not increased even in contemporary China. See Huang Junping 黃君萍, "Yue Fei yuzhong sixiang de weihai 岳飛愚忠思想的危害," *Jinyang xuekan* 晉陽學刊, 2 (1985): 50-52.

[310] In earlier stories, Yue Fei loses his father in the flood on the third day of his birth. To a certain degree the Southern Song emperor becomes a father figure for him.

serves me with loyalty and filial duty; now I know loyalty and filial piety are indeed natural genuineness" 忠君尚有思親孝, 始知忠孝本天真 (20. 171). But when the emperor changes his mind, he "immediately destroys the father-and-son relation with the general" 頓滅君臣父子情 (51. 474). Zhou further argues that political loyal and filial piety both stem from inborn nature (天性真 43. 388). The statement predicts that justice will be done only when a filial son takes charge of the court. The *tanci* thus anticipates Emperor Xiaozong 孝宗 (r. 1162-1189) who reversed the verdict in 1153: "We look forward to a filial son who will rule the empire" (待看孝子佐朝綱 68. 644). In the text, the significance of filial piety is proved after the new emperor Xiaozong ascends the throne. When Yue Fei's third son Lin 霖 presents the emperor with his petition to redress the injustice done to his father, so that Lin could fulfill his filial heart, everyone is moved by his sincere filial piety (孝行誠 68. 644).

To a certain degree, the fundamental value of filial piety in *Jing zhong zhuan* reflects the peaceful relationship between Qing rulers and Jiang'nan intellectuals in the nineteenth century. Being an alien conqueror confronted with fierce resistance from the Southern Chinese, the Manchu regime tried from the very beginning to adopt and propagate traditional Confucian ethical norms. In 1670 Emperor Kangxi 康熙 (r.1661-1722) issued the Sacred Edict including sixteen maxims. The very first one is about filial piety: "Esteem most highly filial piety and brotherly submission, in order to give due importance to the social relations" 敦孝弟以重人倫.[311] However, prioritizing filial piety also undermines the ethic of loyalty. Zhou even believes that

[311] Translated by Victor H. Mair, see his "Language and Ideology in the Written Popularizations of the *Sacred Edict*," collected in David G Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan, Evelyn S. Rawski, and Judith A. Berling, *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 325.

"dedication and loyalty are the roots of [Yue Fei's] tragedy" 精忠是禍根 (59. 549).[312] As expressed in Magistrate Li's remarks, "[h]e who is so great in his achievements will make his superior feel insecure; had my son-in-law resigned earlier, he might not have been met with such misfortunes" 功高震主易啟猜忌, 怪女婿苟能及早引退, 或不致遭此橫逆 (76. 692). Originally this is a common theme in historical fiction, but *Jing zhong zhuan* often juxtaposes brutal politics with domestic scenes of tender sentiments. The *qing*-feelings of filiality in the *tanci* thus override the loyal requirements of orthodox Confucian codes.

Other Military Heroes with Tender Hearts

Jing zhong zhuan is meant to set up models of self-improvement for the audience. While Yue Fei represents the best example, other martial heroes in the *tanci* are also characters rewritten with delicate feelings and family virtues.

1. Yue Yun

Yue Fei's eldest son Yue Yun is a legendary character with his military success and his wrongful death. But *Jing zhong zhuan* creates an affecting love story between him and his wife Lady Gong. *Shuoyue* uses only several lines to narrate how Yue Yun is betrothed to Lady Gong.On his way to visit his father in Shandong, he kills bandits that are attacking the Gong family; to express their gratitude, the family

[312] In fact, even before Yue Fei's time, Confucian scholars had differentiated loyalty to the individual emperor and to the empire. The Northern Song Prime Minister Wang Anshi (1021-86) develops Mencius's idea and argues that when ancient kings such as Jie and Zhou displayed evil behaviors, Tang and Wu killed them and replaced their thrones, but the world did not consider Tang and Wu as being disloyal 桀、紂為不善，而湯、武放弒之，而天下不以為不義. See Wang Anshi, *Wang Wengong wenji*, vol. 28 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1974).

"[decides] to present their daughter to him in marriage" 送與公子成親.[313] In *Jing zhong zhuan*, this gift-like engagement in *Shuoyue* turns into a grand celebration of commitment and free will in love. Although Yun replies to the Gong family, "Marriage is a serious affair. I cannot promise until I make a report to my parents"婚姻大事, 必須稟告父母, 方敢應允 (34. 299), he is actually deeply committed to his verbal agreement. Afterwards, during the war Shandong is occupied by the Jurchens and Yun loses touch with the Gong family. Other officials take the opportunity to do match-making for Yun, in the hope of being attached to Yue Fei's power. But Yun rejects their proposals and remains loyal to his engagement.

姻緣天定無更改 Marriage is predestined and cannot be changed.
安知鞏女已不存 How do we know the daughter of Gong has died?
何須意外生枝節 It is not necessary to complicate my marriage.
說甚椒房帝室親 Why talking about me marrying someone from the royal family.
縱他落雁沉魚貌 Even if she is an amazing beauty,
孫兒豈是愛花人 Your grandson is not someone who collects flowers.
憑他織錦回文女 Even if she is extremely talented,
難奪孫兒太義盟 She cannot make me break my promise.
才貌雖優非所願 She might be better-looking but not my willingness.
惟知情義重千金 I only know a promise is as valuable as thousands of gold.
鞏姣已作孫原配 The daughter of Gong has been engaged to me.
才貌平常也稱心 I will be happy even if she is just ordinary.
若然難訪真消息 If we cannot hear anything back from them,
孫向山東自覓尋 I will travel to Shandong by myself to look for her. (38. 332)

To him, it is most important to keep his promise, as he tells his grandmother: "If she dies in the war I will abandon all my feelings" 佳人果死孫絕情 (38. 332). Yun's words remind us of the scholar-beauty type of love stories. The *tanci* promotes righteousness via Yun's self-determination and loyalty in marriage.

After the wedding, Yun and his wife demonstrate how an emotionally understanding and supporting couple should appear. In addition to being an excellent

[313] Qian Cai and Jin Feng, *Shuoyue quan zhuan*, 244.

military officer and filial son, Yun is a considerate husband as well. When he visits home on vacation, the couple expresses their yearning for each other. Rather than lovesickness merely being a wife's monologue, Zhou makes the husband confess his affection and empathy.

侍兒左右將茶獻 Two maids came and served tea,
互相低語訴離情 When the couple were talking about their sorrows of parting.
幾度陌頭春色好 "The spring view at the roadside turned anew several times.
芳心未免怨征人 You must be complaining about the one on the expedition."
佳人低首無言慰 Lowing her head, the wife could not find better words to console him.
笑展星眸視岳君 She looked at her husband with her bright eyes and a smile.
被夫說著芳心意 Her husband expressed his feelings for her.
同心一樣感離情 Their hearts felt the same when they were parting. (57. 532)

These lines not only reproduce the intimate moment and passion between the couple in the boudoir, but also show the ambiguous usage of literary conventions. Based on the model of representation which Maureen Robertson in her study on women poets' textual positions refers to as the "literati-feminine,"[314] the allusion of the spring scene at the roadside (陌頭春色) is a typical male-performed feminine voice referring to women's lovesickness, in which women in love are emotionally vulnerable. But the *tanci* uses it from a different perspective. It is not how the wife expresses her feelings. Zhou reveals that it is the husband's assumptions of the wife's sensual vnlnerability. The narrator manipulates the poetic convention by deliberately switching the positions. It is the young military hero Yue Yun who fully expresses his affection and appreciation, acting like a romantic scholar in the domestic space. In this late nineteenth-century *tanci*, the scholar and the beauty are still within the "old"

[314] The vocabulary derives from the Jade Terrace boudoir-erotic style. This is a female persona constructed by the male gaze and desire, typified by the love poems in the sixth-century anthology *yutai xinyong* 玉臺新詠 (New Songs from a Jade Terrace) in which the female image is eroticized and objectified in a voyeuristic presentation.

discourse while holding onto traditional merits. But they are on the path to the representatives of modern romance.

Having lived for years in the Yue family, Yun's wife begins to worry about her mother living alone in Shandong. When she expresses her filial anxiety to her husband, Yun immediately suggests they invite her mother to stay with them, so that she could have her family reunited. For Yun, this is his duty as a "half son" (*ban zi* 半子) to his wife's family. In addition, taking care of his in-laws proves his love and loyalty to his wife 始信愚夫不負卿 (41. 366). This decision also receives support from the entire Yue family. Lady Yao indicates that "Filial piety is most treasured in the family"吾家最重人倫孝 (41. 367). Yue Fei replies that "Even plants would adore their parents" 草木猶存孺慕心 (41. 367) and makes detailed arrangements to collect Yun's mother-in-law. When she arrives, her life in the Yue family could not be more satisfying, not only because of the reunion with her daughter, but also because her son-in-law is so attentive: "Lord Yun was a very considerate son-in-law; the couple served her carefully from morning to night with affection"更有雲爺能體貼,夫妻好合侍晨昏 (41. 369). Compared to Yue Fei's efforts to find an adopted son for his father-in-law, this solution of inviting both families into one big household is the more ideal, brimming with idealized family order and joy.

2. Niu Gao

Yue Fei's sworn brothers and officers, who are primarily very masculine and gruff in the legend, also have a sense of romance in the *tanci* version. As a sequel to *Shuihu*, *Shuoyue* inherits the brutish attitude towards women. Male heroes in *Shuoyue* either show no respect for women or remain at a distance from them. Niu Gao's son

Niu Tong 牛通, for example, behaves like a bandit in the vernacular fiction, regardless of his identity as an anti-Jurchen officer. After capturing the Pass of Southern End, he kidnaps Luanying 鸞英, the daughter of the local Officer-in-Charge, and forces her to be his wife. *Shuoyue* narrates the "wedding night" in an extremely disrespectful way, or, to put it more bluntly, as a violent rape.

> Niu Tong ran into the private apartments and saw Luangying. He carried her up and jumped onto his horse. They returned to his own camp. Without talking to her, he ripped off her clothing and forced her in bed. Luanying pushed him away but could not compete with his strength. The shame is unavoidable now as the poem describes:
>
> The delicate flower on the tender branch was still budding.
> A lascivious butterfly had first landed on tip of the flower.
> While the phoenix was groaning softly,
> The troopial was instructed to make her new acquaintance.
>
> Afterwards, Niu raised his body. Shi Luangying was full of shame. She lowered her head and wept.
>
> [且說牛通將鸞英抱進營中，不由分說，按倒在床。鸞英左推右避，終是力怯，這一場可羞之事，怎能免得？詩曰：
> 柔枝嫩蕊尚含苞，浪蝶初棲豆蔻梢。
> 正是鸞聲嗚嘒嘒，復教黃鳥試初交。
> 歡畢起身，石鸞英羞慚滿面，低頭垂淚。][315]

Like other male-authored fiction, *Shuoyue* employs literary conventions to portray women in vulnerable positions in the face of male violence. The depiction also conveys a sense of voyeuristic pleasure. Niu Tong's violence is not much different from *Shuihu*'s misogynist characters Song Jiang or Wu Song. Rather than being merely the daughter of the military leader, Luanying is a woman warrior as well. When Niu Tong first sees her, he is enchanted by her beauty and regards her as a sexual object. But he is beaten by Luanying in battle. In this scene of imposed marriage, Niu Tong redeems his honor from his previous humiliation. His masculinity is secured. The gender order in *Shuoyue* is restored, but the violence and abusive treatment towards women are left unchecked, even celebrated.

[315] Qian Cai and Jin Feng, *Shuoyue quan zhuan*, 413.

In sharp contrast, *Jing zhong zhuan* views the mainstream gender practices in male-authored texts with strong suspicion and resentment. In the *tanci* version, Niu Tong's father, General Niu Gao, the best friend of Yue Fei, marries a daughter from the Qi 戚 family. The original writing in *Shuoyue* is somehow supernatural: in her dream Miss Qi is chased by a tiger to her bed, implying male power and violence against women. Zhou Yingfang adopts the plot in a much less threatening way for her female audience. In her rewriting, the aggressive sexual implication turns into an intimate moment of mutual emotional sharing and support between the two Qi sisters. The bride-to-be runs into her sister's bedroom telling the scary dream and realizes this is a prediction of her future husband Niu Gao, the stellar god of black tiger (黑虎星), a character known for being imprudent. After explaining the astrological relation, the narrative turns to portray the affectionate sisterhood:

> 一雙姐妹回香閣 The two sisters returned to the bedchamber.
> 當時入帳同銷金 They spent the night in the curtains.
> 荊樹連枝花本好 Flowers were blossoming from the twinned branches.
> 繡衾同臥語陰陰 Whispering to each other, they lay inside the embroidered quilt. (26. 223)

In order to provide further relief from the uncomfortable reading experience about Niu Gao's aggressive sexuality, Zhou even reconstructs his personality and clarifies that "Commander Niu was usually careless, yet even he cherished his wife with conjugal affection" 粗中有細牛統帥, 也解夫妻恩愛情 (26. 227). Then the woman author confirms to the female audience that "[t]he beauty and the hero now tie their knot, and this is truly Heaven's will" 美人豪士成連理, 天定良緣各稱心 (26. 227). *Jing zhong zhuan* purifies the disturbing wedding scenes with potential

voyeurism in *Shuoyue* into sensual but affectionate moments.[316] Returning from the battlefield, Niu Gao is quite a considerate husband.

牛皋燕爾樂新婚	Niu Gao just got married and enjoyed his life as a newlywed.
倚紅偎翠情親密	He and his bride spent sweet time together.
相愛相憐十二分	The couple developed lots of affection and intimacy.
久疏元帥諸盟好	He almost distanced the Commander-in-Chief and other friends.
且在金衙伴美人	Every day he accompanied his beautiful wife in his residence. (27, 228)

Rather than suggesting her heroes remain as distant as possible from women, Zhou Yingfang completely rejects the misogynist notion in her rendition. These verses deliver the sentiments of Niu Gao's love drama, evoking feelings of softness, warmth, and gentleness. By elaborating their excessive and private emotions, Zhou attempts to humanize and cultivate the military heroes with whom the readers have been familiar only through their physical prowess. *Jing zhong zhuan* indeed enriches the image of masculine heroes in Chinese literature in a subtle and refined way. They are no longer merely burly figures as in other Yue Fei stories, but her full of feelings and emotions.

Renqing and Domesticity

In her rewriting, Zhou Yingfang attempts to remedy the deficiencies of stereotyped heroes and gender bias among male authors. In the places in *Shuoyue,* the parent text, where the narration might not be friendly to female readers, *Jing zhong zhuan* deletes or changes the story. Zhou fully embraces her intellectual sources with self-conscious creativity. During the pauses between wars and romances, the *tanci* does not forget to present a glimpse of broader social relations (*renqing* 人情) from a woman's perspective.

[316] For other forced marriages in *Shuoyue*, see chapters 67 and 79.

In *Shuoyue*, Landlord Wang Ming rescues Yue Fei and his mother from the flood. His wife Lady He 何 is judged not a virtuous woman because she is so controlling. Qian Cai explicitly links her jealousy with her infertility as a way of punishment. Even though Zhou incorporates the same jealous description of the wife, she turns her into evidence of good moral influence: half a year after Lady Yao and Yue Fei stay with the Wang family, Lady Yao's grace and virtues win great respect. Even the previously grumpy wife becomes a virtuous woman and allows her husband to take a concubine.

But this does not mean Zhou accepts the male-oriented family expectations. As discussed in the previous chapter, women-authored *tanci* illustrate two oppositional attitudes towards polygamy, one of the most common themes in Ming-Qing fiction. Zhou values loyalty in marriage, so couples in *Jing zhong zhuan* are faithful and devoted. But when she follows *Shuoyue*'s storyline that Wang takes a concubine to produce a son, she adds more drama to explain why sometimes a concubine is acceptable from a gentry woman's perspective: Wang's lack of a son makes the family vulnerable to financial exploitation by other relatives. Although Zhou still borrows from the Confucian discourse, for example, saying "among the three unfilial acts, lack of the son is the worst"不孝有三無後為大 [2. 8], ultimately her concern is the financial future of the family's estate, as she writes:

> 望他生下兒和女 We hope that she will give birth to sons and daughters.
> 免得宗業屬他家 Otherwise the property will fall into hands of others. (2. 8)

Landlord Wang Ming does not belong to the group of military heroes in *Jing zhong zhuan*, but he protects his family finances from being sabotaged. Within the gentry family, women negotiate with the patriarchal rules for their own benefit. Meanwhile, there is a subtle tone satirizing men's eagerness for concubines. Receiving permission

from his wife, Wang is ecstatic. He bows to his wife: “Your decision is made too late, otherwise I would already have several children”可惜為時嫌過晚, 不然蘭玉早芬芳 (2. 8). He immediately arranges the wedding the next day. Zhou writes in quite a scornful manner:

何氏暗思真性急	The wife told herself: he simply cannot wait!
但既經允許納偏房	But since she had allowed him to take a concubine,
時間遲早無關係	It did not matter when to have the wedding.
落得個悉聽夫君自主張	She was more than happy to let her husband take all the trouble. (2. 8)

With women as the main readers, the lines become a parody of men in polygamous discourse, entertaining both the writer and the readers.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the rewritings of the masculine heroes in *Jing zhong zhuan*. In contrast to the tough characters of martial arts, the woman author Zhou Yingfang employs a dramatization of *qing*, or feelings, to provide a unique and intense sensibility in her *tanci*. The passions and sentiments are primarily presented as love and private feelings (*ernü siqing* 兒女私情). But essentially, filial piety is the determining virtue in the hierarchy of feelings. The characteristic reconstructions of her heroes in *Jing zhong zhuan* also demonstrate a distinctive woman’s voice speaking to the public in this late imperial text. Her rhetoric about chastity, loyalty, and filial piety not only serves heroic canonization and patriotism, but also personalizes the grand discourse at the individual level.

Meanwhile, the insertion of private feelings and passions into the Yue Fei story highlights Zhou’s skilled narrative techniques. Long before Zhou Yingfang, the early Qing commentator Mao Zonggang 毛宗岡(1632-1709) summaries the following writing tips:

> The highest mastery of prose writing lies in introducing a cold figure into the narration at the hottest point of action or a scene of calm idleness right in the midst of the most intense activity. [文章之妙，妙在極熱時寫一冷人，極忙中寫一閑影。][317]

As we have seen earlier, in *Jing zhong zhuan*, Zhou always manages an alternation between war scenes and domestic events to create a dynamic variety in her narration. Such a balanced structure mixes relaxation and tension and forms a rhythm between action and repose, urgency and ease, or, as Mao Zonggang 毛宗岡 puts it, "the technique of interrupting drums with woodwinds and interspersing strings among the bells"笙簫夾鼓，琴瑟間鐘之妙.[318] These so-called *mang zhong qian bi* 忙中閑筆 (casual insertions) in the midst of feverish political struggles and bloody battles play a central role in the (re)composition of *Jing zhong zhuan*'s characteristics. The repeated elaborations on Yue Fei's masculine prowess and military achievements in previous versions reduce him to a predictable character, especially since his legend has been circulated for hundreds of years. Zhou's insertions of domestic themes and *qing*-feelings are exactly where she manifests her creative energy and refreshes the image of the hero. Both the woman writer and her audience are anticipating new ways to tell this already well-known story.

[317] Luo Guanzhong, Mao Zongguan, *Sanguo Yanyi* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1989), 1149.

[318] *Ibid*., 11.

CHAPTER V

NATIONAL READINGS OF *JING ZHONG ZHUAN* IN SHIFTING HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

This chapter shifts from *Jing zhong zhuan*'s textual details to the larger context of its varied reading responses. When literary texts leave the author's desk and are in the process of circulation, they become open for interpretation. The late Ming scholar Wu Yingji 吳應箕 pointed out, "If the real spirit of the ancients is lost, it is the fault of the commentator-editors"大抵古人精神之不見於世者，皆評選者之過也.[319]

Conventional views often require that good writings serve the political orthodoxy. The emergence of Chinese nationalism that began during the late nineteenth century is crucial in fully understanding the circulation and interpretation of Zhou Yingfang's *tanci* ficiton *Jing zhong zhuan*. In a broad sense, Chinese nationalism is regarded as a complex phenomenon of political movements, cultural thoughts, as well as person beliefs, emotions, or motivations. Prasenjit Duara suggests that in imperial China, culturalist dominance promoted only the Han Chinese culture, though other ethnic groups also participated. The time period between the late nineteenth century and the May Fourth era witnessed the transition from the self-legitimized culturalism to nationalism. As he indicates, in the early discourse, nationalist sentiment in China was an expression of elite anxiety produced after the Qing's disastrous defeat in the first Sino-Japanese war in 1895. It soon developed into the Boxer's anti-foreign boycotts against the expanding imperialist powers in urban

[319] The line comes from a letter by Wu Yingji (1594-1645) to his friend. Quoted from Guo Shaoyu 郭紹虞 ed., *Zhonguo lidai wenlun xuan* 中國歷代文論選, vol.3 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1979), 83.

cities during the last decade of the Qing. Chinese nationalism in a narrower but more populist sense can be synonymous with a long struggle for autonomy and survival vis-à-vis Japanese aggression.[320] During the period of nationalist sentiment, people in different social positions were pursuing their own agendas. For example, many scholars have noticed how female intellectuals in the 1920s employed discourses on the national crisis and salvation in order to promote modern education and the independence of women.[321] Overall, Chinese nationalism as a political ideology, involves a progression that Anthony Giddens describes as "the articulation of historicity in relation to planned or actual trends of social change."[322]

Because of their overtly political agenda, Republican readers seldom treated *Jing zhong zhuan* as an entertaining text as they did with most women-authored *tanci* narratives, but made great efforts to search for the potential "nationalist voice." Influenced by the pervasive revolutionary trend and the emerging anti-Japanese sentiment, they tended to read the *tanci* as a political allegory conveying nationalist significance. However, such speculations run the risk of reading into this woman-authored text their own male-oriented cultural assumptions. Before delving into the varied modern interpretations and examining how each interpretation responds to diverse political and/or cultural agendas, I will first investigate Zhou's own comments on history in the *tanci* text.

[320] Prasenjit Duara, "De-constructing the Chinese Nation" in Jonathan Unger and Geremie Barmé, ed., *Chinese Nationalism* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), 31-55.

[321] See Theodore Huters, Roy Bin Wong, and Pauline Yu, *Culture & State in Chinese History : Conventions, Accommodations, and Critiques* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1997), 1-26, 236-58.

[322] Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State Violence*, vol. 2 of *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (Cambridge: Polity Press; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 212.

Historical Comments and Critiques in *Jing zhong zhuan*

After 1840, China's elite paid increasing attention to political struggles, military rebellions, social problems, and even statecraft policies in their writings. By far most research focuses on the poetry, essays or vernacular fiction written by men during this period, since interest in state affairs conventionally belonged to the domain of men and "beyond the women's quarters." As Susan Mann observes, women's writing is still an untapped and ignored resource for understanding the impact of nineteenth-century crises on the consciousness of China's elite.[323] Recent scholarship has started to uncover the names of some gentry women who actively participated in historical research and poetic criticism. However, women's equivalent of *xiaoshuo* fiction, *tanci*, presents another way of narrating history, often as a metaphor for contemporary politics. While the two most developed texts about Yue Fei, *Shuoyue* and *Jing zhong zhuan* both refer to political corruption. *Shuoyue* provides only limited and mild criticism of the Southern Song Dynasty. The vernacular fiction regards the fall of the dynasty as Heaven's mandate and primarily blames treacherous officials for misleading the emperor.

In *Jing zhong zhuan*, however, Zhou Yingfang seems to enjoy more freedom and intellectual independence than her male predecessors. Her historical criticism boldly challenges the assumed gendered boundaries and places harsh judgments on Southern Song history. Her historical criticism first includes a negative perception of Emperor Gaozong's imperial office, where treacherous officials control the power while honest people are marginalized and persecuted. Zhou employs four examples of

[323] See Mann, "The Lady and the State: Women's Writings in Times of Trouble during the Nineteenth Century," in Fong, and Widmer, ed., *The Inner Quarters and Beyond: Women Writers from Ming through Qing*, 283-314.

parataxis, repeating the phrase "to his surprise…(*juran* 居然)" to express her anger at Qin Hui's receiving a second rank official position:

> 居然頭頂烏紗帽 To his surprise, he could wear a black gauze cap on the head.[324]
> 居然衣蟒并腰金 To his surprise, he could wear an embroidered robe and gold belt.
> 居然竟向朝班立 To his surprise, he now served the imperial court.
> 居然顯職自獨尊 To his surprise, he could enjoy his power from this noble position (40. 358).

Zhou thinks that the chaos of the Southern Song essentially come from the emperor's refusal to consider virtue in making political appointments: "The current officials were not working for the empire or the people, but merely following and flattering each other" 朝中是無非執笏隨朝輩, 為國為民少大臣 (40. 358). Borrowing voices from loyal subjects such as Li Gang 李綱 and Zong Ze 宗澤, Zhou expresses her idea that the only way to rule the empire is to rely on virtuous officials, or in Yue Fei's words, "Civilian officials do not love money; military officers are not afraid of death" 文官不愛財，武官不惜死.[325]

Zhou's criticism is conveyed mostly by characters based on true historical figures including Qin Hui, Zhang Bangchang, and Emperor Gaozong. In addition, she creates four Jurchen generals who have names that suggest notorious ministers in Chinese history: Sun Ruquan 孫汝權, Cao Rucao 曹汝操, Zhang Rusong 張如嵩 and Wei Ruxian 魏汝賢 (51. 471). These names refer to Sun Quan 孫權 (182-252), Cao Cao 曹操 (155-220), Yan Song 嚴嵩 (1480-1567) and Wei Zhongxian 魏忠賢 (1568-1627), respectively. These politically ambitious men divided China, controlled the emperor, or abused power for their own personal benefits. Moving from the level of

[324] "Wearing a black gauze cap" refers to receiving an official post in Chinese. The term is still widely used in China today.

[325] The saying is attributed to Yue Fei in many stories.

word play to the sources of Zhou's historical knowledge, a broad range of texts is presented: official historiography, *xiaoshuo* fiction, and folk tales, as well as other miscellanea. More importantly, the invented names reflect the moral criteria of a gentry woman's political consciousness in late Qing. Officials are condemned for failure to consult the emperor and for their own ambition and corruption.

Criticisms of Emperor Gaozong for being unappreciated and hypercritical are not completely new, but *Jing zhong zhuan*'s explicit criticism of the emperor is in sharp contrast to those earlier texts that blame Yue Fei's "blind loyalty" without challenging the highest ruling power.[326] Zhou's criticism of the ruler is unusually blunt. As introduced in my chapter II, she deletes the karmic explanation of Song's dynastic declination and denies the cosmological interpretation of the injustice done to Yue. In addition to condemning the betrayal of treacherous officials, Zhou directly criticizes Emperor Gaozong for his character flaws and his lack of virtue (*shi de* 失德) that cause all the tragedies. She even makes scornful remarks about the three emperors during the transition from the Northern to the Southern Song:

> 徽宗失德江山亂 Emperor Huizong lacked virtue and undermined his reign.
> 重任群奸社稷傾 He promoted treacherous officials and the empire was falling.
> ……
> 欽宗懦弱無能輩 Emperor Qinzong was weak and useless.
> 高宗昏憒不堪論 Not to mention Emperor Gaozong, who was foolish.
> 偏安一隅為長局 He was content to exercise the sovereignty in a small portion of China.
> 大志全無豈是君 Without any ambition, how can he be an emperor? (43. 388)

Such severe critique of the emperors marks *Jing zhong zhuan*'s active, even aggressive engagement in historical and political writing. Compared with *Shuoyue*,

[326] For example, in *Shuoyue* chapter 59, Yue Fei clearly knows that "treacherous officials are in power and my return will be dangerous," but dares not have any hesitation or delay. As Emperor Qianlong comments, "He knows only the emperor but not himself; only the imperial edict but does not treasure his own life." In this case *Shuoyue* neglects the conflict between loyalty and patriotism and portrays Yue as a dedicated servant.

which carefully avoids mentioning the emperor, the *tanci* text voices bold discontent about Gaozong's rule. In *Jing zhong zhuan*, even the lesser educated Niu Gao is very aware of the cowardliness of the emperor and calls him a "gullible emperor" (*hun jun* 昏君) or "dead man" (*si ren* 死人) (58. 537).

Zhou also sharply criticizes Emperor Gaozong's selfishness. After so many victories, the emperor begins to feel uneasy about Yue Fei's achievements and his military power. Taking Qin Hui's advice on diplomacy, he changes his mind and decides to make peace with the Jurchens. He then orders Yue Fei to station his troops in Xiangyang 襄陽 and loses his best opportunity to destroy the Jurchen army. Realizing the deceit of the treacherous ministers and disappointed by Emperor Gaozong's lack of foresight, Yue Fei in *Jing zhong zhuan* repeatedly resigns in order to unite with his family. But the suspicious emperor rejects his requests in fear that once Yue is free he would rebel.[327] Gaozong is so fatuous and easily manipulated that even Qin Hui, the worst of the treacherous ministers, admits that he has no principles (*wudao* 無道) (40. 360).

Zhou's criticism of the emperor eventually culminates in a focus on his ignorance of filial piety. After the Empress Dowager's death, the emperor neglects filial piety and indulges himself with court ladies. He refuses to adopt the good (but bitter) suggestions and loses interest in ruling the empire. *Jing zhong zhuan* claims that his selfish thoughts derive from being unfilial 為君不孝 (60. 554). He cannot make correct judgments as a leader. Zhou also points out that rather than acting after being persuaded by his treacherous ministers, the emperor hesitates, due to his deepest

[327] Historians have long argued that the Song writers avoided mentioning the weakness of Emperor Gaozong and blamed everything on Qin Hui. The Yuan-composed *Songshi* points out that "Gaozong determined to abandon Middle China, so he determined to kill Yue Fei" (高宗忍自棄中原，故忍殺飛).

fear that once the other two emperors come back, his legitimacy to rule will be threatened.[328] As a Han Chinese emperor, Gaozong's foolishness and brutality provide an ironic contrast with the Jurchen prince Wushu's diligence, intelligence, and personnel strategy.[329]

As we have seen in chapter IV, *Jing zhong zhuan* presents the image of the perfect hero Yue Fei in the hope of restoring China's prestige, which ultimately depends on moral restoration. By criticizing the Han Chinese emperor and allowing one of her heroes to be the non-Chinese prince, Zhou shows an ambivalent attitude towards the Manchu rulers in her time. Similar to the political turbulence reflected in the Song, anxieties concerning foreign threats and blurred racial boundaries peaked around the late nineteenth century. Although on the surface *Jing zhong zhuan* is highly literate and family-centered compared to other Yue Fei stories, the moral ambiguity between the Han Chinese and the Jurchens in the *tanci* conveys a sense of concern about China's place in the unsettled world of her time.

The fictionalized historical narrative also demonstrates the interplay between history and the real political incompetence which lay before Zhou's eyes. She draws parallels between the fall of the Southern Song due to the absence of virtuous officials and her contemporary age, as she expresses in a rhetorical way: "The civil ministers and the military generals did not have the same mission in the Song" 宋軍文武未同心 (52. 477). The political situation of the Southern Song supplies the woman writer with concerns about the dynastic future and clear symbols of good and evil and serves

[328] "[Gaozong] worries that he will have no share of the throne once the general successfully brings back the two retired emperors" 深慮元帥功成，二聖還朝，這個皇位他就沒有分了(58.537).

[329] As discussed in chapter 2 of this dissertation, in *Shuoyue*, the Jurchens are demonized as wolves. However in the *tanci* version, the character of the Jurchen Prince Wushu demonstrates virtues that many Song officials lack. He shows sympathy towards citizens living in Song's northern border whose emperor abandons them. He feels ecstatic on learning the news that Yue Fei was executed, but he also laments the great general and laughs at Emperor Gaozong's foolishness.

as an analogy between the past and her present. In a rhetorical way, she writes in an urgent tone in response to Southern Song's situation after Yue's death: "Treaties have been made to divide [China's] territory and redraw the borders; the foreign king and the emperor are seated shoulder by shoulder in the divine land" 割土封疆和有約，神州領坐并肩王 (63.596). Late Qing intellectuals often employed the term "to divide China's territory and redraw the borders" to refer to the imperialist invasion of China.[330] While not necessarily targeting the contemporary Manchu rulers, *Jing zhong zhuan*, at the convergence of the temporary political situation and Zhou's personal experiences, does share the general anxiety about China's future in the late nineteenth century. Born in 1829, Zhou experienced only the last few years of the prosperous High Qing.[331] However the *tanci* text never seems to reflect any awareness of the dynastic zenith, even in a nostalgic way. The narrative immediately begins with natural disasters and continues with portrayals of political turmoil, involving wars, foreign invasions, and social chaos. She connects history with her reality, when she experienced the turbulent times of the Qing. Married into a high-ranked official family and travelling extensively with them, she might have heard and witness corrupt Qing officials flattering foreigners; she might have felt indignant witnessing the deterioration of the Qing under domestic and foreign threats. Thus her admiration of the military hero Yue Fei from centuries before goes beyond romantic nostalgia; or as the preface writer Li Shu suggests, she rewrote the story in the hope of rectifying

[330] The phrase *ge tu feng jiang* 割土封疆 originally as *lie tu feng jiang* 列土封疆, first appears in the *Hanshu* 漢書 (The history of Han) authored by Ban Gu (32-92), referring to the emperor drawing borders to allow his relatives or trusted subjects to rule under his power. Zhou seems to be among the earliest to use the phrase in a rhetorical way in the late Qing political chaos. Despite the setting of the Southern Song, the words clearly suggest the urgent fact that China was being divided by European countries and Japan from the second half of the 19th century. After *Jing zhong zhuan*, in 1903 the revolutionist Chen Tianhua 陳天華 (1875-95) similarly employs the phrase in his anti-Manchu pamphlet *Meng hui tou* 猛回頭 (Turning around).

[331] According to Mann, the High Qing era was from 1683-1839. See Mann, *Precious Records*, 20.

social ills. As a gentry *cainü* type of woman, Zhou Yingfang raises her own voice at the dawn of the political and educational reforms during the late Qing period – not merely as a follower of men, but as an independent writer with her own thoughts. Read synchronically with women-authored poems concerning the crisis in the nineteenth-century China, *Jing zhong zhuan* joins a group that not only mourns the past but also anticipates the call to change.[332]

Accentuated Anti-Manchu Ethnic Interpretations

Zhou Yingfang completed *Jing zhong zhuan* in 1895 and died the same year. Her family carefully preserved the manuscript. It was first circulated among families and friends.[333] As Susan Mann indicates, making a woman's voice heard was often a corporate project conducted with duty, affection, and pride by relatives and/or patrons.[334] The title page of *Jing zhong zhuan* published by Shanghai Commercial Press in the 1930s still exemplifies the joint service of Zhou's children to publish her work (FIGURE 1). Her son, daughters, and daughters-in-law all helped proofread and edit the *tanci*. The appearance of their names also decorates the publication with honor, sentiment, and ambition.

Jing zhong zhuan was published with two prefaces, one dated 1905, the other 1911. Li Shu 李樞 (1878-1971), the author of the 1911 preface, once served as an education inspector (*tixue* 提學) in Guizhou during the last decade of Qing.

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[332] Susan Mann, "The Lady and the State: Women's Writings in Times of Trouble during the Nineteenth Century," in *The Inner Quarters and Beyond: Women Writers from Ming through Qing*, 281-314.

[333] According to the two prefaces, Zhou's son Yan Kaidi carried the manuscript with him during his post in Canton, where he showed the text to other scholarly friends and asked some of them to endorse the *tanci*.

[334] Mann, *The Talented Women of the Zhang Family*, 165.

Figure 1. Inside front cover of *Jing zhong zhuan*, published by Shanghai Shanwu Press, 1932. Property of UC Berkerly library.

Despite his position as a Qing official, Li Shu passionately advocated the 1911 anti-Manchu revolution, as demonstrated in the preface he wrote for the *tanci*:

> [Madam Zhou] pursued the spirit of Yue Fei. The trees on his tomb were inspired and grow no north-facing branches. The eternal regrets of the hero are hard to pacify. Yet the inheritance of Chinese culture calls on a change of dynasty. Please look, who rules China today? Republic of China is a unified country; wars will never happen again. Had General Yue known this news in Heaven, he would have no more regrets.
> [即追溯精忠心跡，墓木有灵，枝無北向，英雄遺恨，終古難平。然而神器傳家，豈無鼎革？請看今日之域中，竟是誰家之天下？共和一統，永息戰爭。岳忠武在天有知，當亦可以釋然無憾噫。][335]

[335] See Li Shu's preface.

The preface responds to the call for opposing the Manchu rule and views the *tanci* as a forerunner that anticipates the 1911 revolution. By 1911, it was fashionable for Han Chinese to accuse the "foreign" ruling Manchus of being the chief obstacle to China's national salvation and renewal. James Townsend indicates that Chinese nationalism initially displayed a strong ethnic, even xenophobic, tendency. The newly established Republican government demanded that China shake off backward traditions: opium, foot binding, and Manchus. [336] A 1903 essay titled "The Legend of Yue Fei: The Earliest Nationalist in China" 中國民族主義第一人—岳飛傳 portrays Yue Fei as the first national hero (*minzu yingxiong* 民族英雄) in Chinese history.[337] The article highlights his ethnic identity as Han Chinese against his Jurchen enemy, who is considered the ancestor of the Manchus. In 1905, Sun Yat-san 孫逸仙 borrowed words from the Ming Emperor Hongwu (r. 1368-1398) and expressed his political manifesto of the Chinese United League (*Zhongguo tongmenghui* 中國同盟會) as aiming "to expel the northern barbarians and to revive China"驅除韃虜，恢復中國 The "northern barbarians" here refer to none other than the ruling Manchus. Local anti-Manchu secret societies wrote Yue Fei's resistance against the Jurchens into their anti-Manchu genealogy. The Dragon China Society (*Longhua hui* 龍華會), a revolutionary association aimed at overthrowing the Qing empire, raised General Yue to the top of the anti-Manchu nationalist hierarchy.[338] The guidelines suggest that, ideally, membership in the Dragon China Society should be issued in a Yue Fei Temple (*Yue miao* 岳廟), where people smear blood as a sign of oath (*shaxue*

[336] James Townsend, "Chinese Nationalism," in Unger and Barmé, ed., *Chinese nationalism*, 1-30.

[337] The article was published on *Hubei xuesheng jie* 湖北學生界 (The circle of students from Hubei), a radical revolutionary magazine aiming to overthrow the Manchu Qing government.

[338] The Dragon China Society was closely connected with another influential anti-Manchu association, the Restoration Society (*Guangfu hui* 光復會), before the 1911 Revolution.

weimeng 歃血為盟) that "we will fight together to kill the northern barbarians and avenge our ancestor."[339] Through the ceremony, late Qing revolutionaries separated the Manchus from Han Chinese and constructed a confrontational tension between the two. More importantly, under the name of the historical hero Yue Fei, their rebellious actions were legitimized within the discourse of Chinese traditions. The image of the general symbolized spiritual strength and a political rallying point.

Meanwhile, intellectual readers at the turn of the twentieth century appreciated more "practical" literature that reflected serious national problems. Liang Qichao was the most influential among them. In 1902 Liang published "On the Relation between the Novel and the Rule of the Masses"論小說與群治之關係, in which he prioritized "new novels" (*xin xiaoshuo* 新小說) as the agents for serious political and social change, while denying the value of literary aesthetics. His politicized criticism made particularly harsh judgements on traditional women's writing. Liang labeled many women-authored texts as lacking knowledge beyond the inner chambers and remaining passive when confronting the national crisis.[340] In the service of the anti-Manchu political discourse, literature about Yue Fei tended to be circulated to inspire nationalist sentiments. *Jing zhong zhuan* stood out among women-authored texts by being embraced by enthusiastic readers, as we can tell from Li Shu's preface. He explicitly places *Jing zhong zhuan* into the radical racial conflict between Manchu and Han at the time. His primary concern is to make the victory of Han Chinese stand out

[339] See Sun Jiang 孫江 and Huang Donglan 黃東蘭, "Yue Fei xushu: gonggong jiyi yu guozu rentong 岳飛敘述：公共記憶與國族認同 (Narratives of Yue Fei, Public Memory and National Identity)," in Gong Yanming and Zu Hui, ed., *Yue Fei yanjiu* 岳飛研究 vol. 5 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 15-41.

[340] Liang criticized the entertaining nature of traditional literature and advocated "new novels." To him, the best novels are those which expose the miserable state of the empire. He edited and published the journal *Xin xiaoshuo* 新小說 (New novels) beginning in 1902. Representative works of such new novels include *Xin zhongguo weilai ji* 新中國未來記 (1902) by Liang Qichao, *Tong shi* 痛史 (1906) and *Ershi nian mudu zhi guai xianzhuang* 二十年目睹之怪現狀 (1909) by Wu Jianren 吳趼人, etc.

against other ethnic minorities. Although his understanding of Chinese history was still framed within a fluctuating *tianxia* dynastic cycle, he proudly dated the preface with the new dynastic title: the eighth month in the "first reign year of the Republic of China" (*Zhonghua minguo yuannian* 中華民國元年). Li portrays Zhou Yingfang as a writer who used the image of Yue Fei with an intention to "praise great virtues and inspire the people" (*biaoyang dajie, jili renxin* 表揚大節，激勵人心). In the guise of an appreciation of the *tanci*, Li simply classifies Zhou within the group of anti-Manchu writers without considering the alternative image of Yue Fei in the *tanci* fiction.

It is not unusual for contemporary scholars to read *Jing zhong zhuan* as an anti-Manchu text within the 1911 context.[341] However, during the period when Zhou was writing *Jing zhong zhuan*, the Manchus had long won the support of the Chinese elite. Although *Jing zhong zhuan*'s parent novel, the vernacular fiction *Shuoyue*, was still a banned novel in early Qing because of its potential hostile attitudes toward non-Han ethnicity, by the Taiping Rebellion most Han Chinese felt close to the Manchus than to the heterodox Christians.[342] The Taiping Rebellion drove Han Chinese and the Manchus even closer. Only after the failure of the 1898 *wuxu* 戊戌 reforms did real resentment against the Manchus begin to circulate. As Mary C. Wright argues, most of the last restrictions separating the Manchus from the Chinese were removed in 1865. By the time of the Tongzhi Restoration (1862-74), China was governed by a unified Manchu-Chinese upper class whose great common aim was to preserve the

[341] For example, Siao-chen Hu suggests that Zhou's retelling of the Yue Fei story carried some subversive meaning and had to do with the anti-Manchu sentiment rising in the late Qing. See her "War, Violence, and the Metaphor of Blood" in *The Inner Quarters and Beyond*, 261.

[342] The Taiping Rebellion swept across half of China and caused millions of deaths and devastation in China's wealthiest region. Mary Wright argues that Qing's war against the Taipings as well as the following Tongzhi Restoration, were essentially a defense of a harmonious Confucian order. See Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism*, 3.

Chinese cultural heritage against the depredations of domestic rebellion and the threat of Western domination.[343]

However tempting it is to read *Jing zhong zhuan* as having a proto-nationalist theme, it is problematic to label the work as being anti-Manchu. As discussed in previous chapters, the ethnic boundary between Han and Manchu had been softened by Zhou's time, particularly in the Jiang'nan region where she lived. Susan Mann suggests that anti-Manchu sentiment seems to have been less salient than a general frustration with the inefficacy of the court's military leadership in the Jiang'nan area.[344] Mary Rankin's more detailed study of the shifting political consciousness in Zhejiang locates the rise of anti-Manchu sentiment there relatively late, to the period of the Boxer Uprising of 1900.[345] On a personal level, it is also unconvincing to claim that Zhou would have had hostile feelings toward the Manchus. Although her natal family probably suffered when her grandfather Zheng Zuchen was put into prison,[346] essentially Zhou Yingfang benefited greatly from the Qing government. Her husband's death brought the family imperial honors and rewards from Emperor Tongzhi (r. 1862-74), and her son Yan Kaidi received a hereditary official rank.[347] Although Zhou herself was likely detached from the royal honors, the new titles and

[343] Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism*, 51-52. Prasenjit Duara also studies the ambivalent attitude the ruling Manchu elite held towards the dominant Han culture. He has found that in the early stage of the Qing, the Manchu community actively sought to maintain their ethnic distinctiveness through a variety of means, including a ban on intermarriage and on Han migration to Manchuria. But they soon recognized cultural politics and rapidly became the patrons of Han Chinese culture. See his *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), as well as *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

[344] Mann, *Talented Women of the Zhang's Family*, 192-95.

[345] Mary Backus Rankins, *Elite Activism and Political Transformation in China: Zhejiang Province, 1865-1911* (Calif: Stanford University Press, 1986), 194.

[346] See my chapter II, 29. Zheng Zuchen was deprived of his position in 1850 and put into prison because he ignored the Taiping outbreak and released Hong Xiuquan when he was first arrested.

[347] See *Guangxu Tongxiang xianzhi*, vol.14, 488, 505.

ranks provided her family with material security and local privileges. In addition, she even seems to advocate the Qing ethnic policy, *gai tu gui liu* 改土歸流 (turning the aboriginal chiefdom into appointed officialdom), in her rewriting. It aimed at transforming local tribal chiefs in Southwest China, especially Guangxi, Guizhou and Yunnan, into Qing officials, and sharing their power with assigned Han or Manchu officials. This political practice frequently caused radical conflicts among Manchus, Han, and minorities during the Qing. Zhou's husband Yan Jin also died in one of the riots in Guizhou. In the end of *Jing zhong zhuan*, Yue Fei's third son Yue Lin is married to the sister of the Chief of Southern Barbarian in Yunnan (雲南南蠻王). Zhou Yingfang as usual elaborates their grand cross-ethnic wedding. In particular, she makes the chief beg the Yue family to teach his sister proper behaviors (72. 696). Symbolically, the Yue family represents orthodox values for both Han Chinese elites and the Manchu rulers.

Despite the preface writer Li Shu's self-appointed cultural mission for national rejuvenation against Manchus, later interpretations of *Jing zhong zhuan* shifted from the ethnic boundaries to a national identity within the modern nationalism discourse. Since the 1920s, the image of Yue Fei has shifted slightly from an ethnic Han Chinese hero to the embodiment of the national spirit (民族精神） of all Chinese people regardless of ethnic diversity. In 1922, Yue Fei became the most significant hero in Chinese history and his biography ranked first among The Youth Series (*Shaonian congshu* 少年叢書) published by Shanghai Commercial Press. The editor, Sun Yuxiu 孙毓修, followed the format of *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Grand Historian) and added his own commentaries. It is most noticeable that he placed Yue Fei's legend in the context of the threats that Chinese people were experiencing in the twentieth century.

After praising Yue Fei as a model for Chinese youth, he explained the situation in the Southern Song in a pan-Asian way:

> Many other ethnic people have been living around the Han nationality in East Asia. They often brought disasters to Han people in all ages. During the period of Northern Song, three nations Liao 遼, Jin 金 and Xia 夏 confronted each other from China's west, north and east respectively. Their people were Tungus and Turkic. Their languages and customs obviously differed from China. They were different ethnic groups of the yellow race, with a relatively late civilization. Therefore they had a brutal nature and liked killing, with little sense of propriety and justice. Our ancestors rebuked them as a race of dogs and goats, and Han people especially disliked them. Nonetheless, the only goal of the three nations was that they all planned to invade the Song.[348]
>
> Thanks to Yue Fei's military resistance, our Chinese civilization did not end after the Northern Song. Scholars in South China remained unthreatened; scholars from North China went across the Yellow River to relocate in the South and kept themselves safe. The Han nationality thus had been preserved and became the head of East Asian civilization today. This is all from Yue Fei's effort.
>
> Seven hundred or eight hundred years ago the Mongolian, Manchurian, and Tibetan people were much less civilized, while Han people were gentle and weak. Because they suffered much, they debased Mongolians, Manchurians, and Tibetans as dogs and goats, or *hu yi* 胡夷 barbarians. Now things are different. We are the Republic of five nationalities and as intimate as brothers. We should work jointly at this difficult time. Manchurians, Mongolians, and Tibetans are like young brothers and everyday they are progressing in civilization. The five nations are mutually equal. It is time to work hard together and fight against foreign aggression.[349]

Rather than depicting the Jurchens as the ancestors of the Manchus, Sun related them to the real "foreign" Tungus or Turkic, who are closer to modern Europeans. Thus the focus transfers from ethnic conflicts within China to a discourse that calls on anti-foreign invasions. The 1922 comment was quite optimistic about the future of a modern multi-ethnic China nation-state after the 1911 revolution, though readers can still detect a sense of Han chauvinism in the words. Foreign aggression now became a real problem for all "five nations" of China. Sun confirmed the achievement of Yue

[348] Sun Yuxiu 孫毓修, *Shaonian congshu: Yue Fei* (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1922), 2.

[349] *Ibid*., 4

Fei and exaggerated his role in Chinese history by crediting him with the continuation of Chinese civilization after the Northern Song. He re-narrated Chinese history into a new centralized nationalist discourse: a patriotic passion replaces the previous ethnic boundary in the Yue Fei legend. His narration also upgrades the general from a loyal military official of the Southern Song to a national hero of the whole of China. Compared with Li Shu's anti-Manchu victory claim to Sun's call for an intimate brotherhood, the shifting reflects a conscious change in the circulation of Yue Fei's story motivated by intellectuals of the twentieth century.

In 1928 the Nationalist government praised Yue Fei as "serving his country with dedication and loyalty, rich in national spirit" 精忠報國，富於民族精神. Especially since the 1930s, the image of Yue Fei helped foster the anti-Japanese discourse and inspire all Chinese, including Han, Manchu, Hui, Mongolians and other ethnic minorities, to defend their nation facing the invasion of Japanese imperialism. In 1930 an anonymous writer under the pseudonym of Qing Liu 清流 (clear current) published a new biography of Yue Fei in an educational journal, introducing his heroic exploits.[350] After the Japanese occupied northeast China in 1931, further works, including drama, textbook chapters, articles, etc., about Yue Fei emerged in large numbers to facilitate the anti-Japanese war on the front line.[351] In particular the tattoo

[350] The article was published in *Chun Sun* 春筍, 1 (1930): 6-7.

[351] For example, a *chu* 楚 opera troupe performed their historical drama *Yue Fei* for the army stationed in Chongqing in 1939. Gu Yiqiao 顧一樵 (1902-2002) directed a four-act play *Yue Fei* that ran eight encore performances in Chongqing in 1940. Ambassadors of the United States, United Kingdom, France and Soviet Russia were invited. After the performances, the Nationalist government presented them with banners embroidered with *Huan wo he shan* 還我河山. The play script was also published by Shanghai Commercial Press in 1940. In the same year Tian Han 田漢 (1898-1968) also premièred his 36-act grand historical play *Yue Fei*. Although of varying aesthetic quality, dramas about Yue Fei during wartime were never short of patriotic appeal. Other works about Yue Fei in Republican China include: Li Hanhun 李漢魂, *Yue Wumu nianpu* 岳武穆年譜 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1947). In addition, Mao Zedong also quoted Yue Fei's military strategy " 運用之妙存乎一心" in his *On Protracted War* 論持久戰 (1938).

"return my rivers and mountains" (*huan wo he shan* 還我河山) on Yue Fei's back became propaganda for the Nationalist Party during the war period and inspired Chinese soldiers to fight back for lost territory. A popular wartime slogan summarizes: "Men must learn from Yue Wumu, and women from Hua Mulan" (男學岳武穆，女學花木蘭).[352] Yue Fei made China's past come alive in the 1940s in a vividly inspiring way.

Consuming *Tanci* in Jiang'nan: 1920-1930

In 1932, *Jing zhong zhuan* was published by the most influential publishing house in China, Shanghai Commercial Press. It was soon reprinted in 1935. This section will explore the circulation of *tanci* narratives before the 1940s.

The city of Shanghai played a leading role in Chinese literary production and publication during the first half of the twentieth century. Radical intellectuals of the late Qing first used Shanghai international concessions as shelters to produce and publish anti-Manchu literature. Soon the extension of modern printing technology and commercial publishing helped make Shanghai the cultural center of China. Statistics show that by 1911, 83.3% of literary periodicals were published in Shanghai. Fictional magazines in Shanghai had a minimum circulation target of 3,000 readers.[353]

As Jin Jiang has noticed, by far most Western-language monographs on Shanghai's popular culture in Republican China have focused on the petty intellectuals closely involved in the production and consumption of popular fiction

[352] See comments by Chen Yifan in Shen Qiyu, "Zhongguo manhuajia cong Sulian dailai de liwu," 中國漫畫家從蘇聯帶來的禮物 *GM* 1.9 (10 October 1936): 572. Quote from Chang-tai Huang, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). Accessed on April 20, 2013, http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft829008m5/, Chapter 1, note 105.

[353] Chen Bohai and Yuan Jin, *Shanghai jindai wenxueshi* 上海近代文學史 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1993), 1.

and film based on standard Chinese, while overlooking local-opera and storytelling genres and their native-place supporters, who formed a large urban population characterized by low literacy and/or low status.[354] In fact, the performative form of *tanci* reached its heyday in Shanghai and Suzhou on air in the 1920s. The flourishing of *tanci* performance in Shanghai cannot be separated from the full flowering of capitalism in the 1920s. The reading public in Shanghai was not only built through the circulation and consumption of written texts, but formed in theaters, tea houses, and radio programs within an emerging dynamic bourgeoisie.[355] *Tanci* singing in particular became popular with the spreading of commercialized audio and visual media.[356] New mass media also created a much broader storytelling audience than had existed in the past. Carlton Benson in his dissertation studies how *tanci* performance recreated the traditional storytelling experience among the male community in teahouses and then dominated radio entertainment in the early 1930s.[357] The broadcasting and the recording industries further helped to popularize the circulation of the *tanci* stories.

With the help of the performance form and the flourishing printing industry, women-authored *tanci* narratives, which originally embraced China's cultural elite, became more available to a wider range of readers as popular texts. According to the

[354] Jiang Jin, *Women Playing Men: Yue Opera and Social Change in Twentieth-century Shanghai* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 9. For a discussion on popular culture in Shanghai during Republican China, see Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: A Flowering Urban Culture in China 1930-1945* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999).

[355] For a full account of the industrialization, commercialization and developing bourgeoisie urban life, see Marie-Claire Bergere, *The Golden Age of the Chinese Bourgeoisie, 1911-1937*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[356] The first radio station in Shanghai was established in 1922. By 1936, Shanghai had 42 radio stations and *tanci* performance became a crucial program on the air. See *Shanghai tanci daguan* 上海彈詞大觀 (Shanghai: tongyi chubanshe, 1941), and He Zhanchun 何占春, "Guangbo zhong de tanci jiemu" 廣播中的評彈節目, in *Xiqu jingyin* 戲曲菁英 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1989), 303-04.

[357] See Carlton Benson, "From Teahouse to Radio Storytelling and the Commercialization of Culture in 1930s Shanghai" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1996).

catalog of Shanghai Commercial Press, from 1924 to 1932 at least ten *tanci* narratives, including *Jing zhong zhuan*, were published.[358] *Jing zhong zhuan* itself was published twice within a mere three years, in 1932 and 1935, suggesting a broad circulation. Although not written in the common vernacular language, *tanci* texts were still accessible to men and women in various formats at different literacy and status levels. Benson suggests that apart from the literary reading community formed by talented women from gentry families in the past, *tanci* per se was no longer considered to be highbrow in Republican China. It had been transformed into an earthy mass entertainment, warm and personal.[359] Perry E. Link estimates that the audience of popular texts ranged from upper-class men and women, educated young people, merchants, lower-level governmental functionaries, and shopkeepers to anyone who was literate but not extensively trained in refined classical literature.[360]

On the other hand, despite the conventional thought that *tanci* texts only belonged to the "old" fiction[361] and modern readers showed only limited interest in

[358] For example,the 1931 catalog of Shanghai Commercial Press advertised the following *tanci* fiction: *Ai li ji tanci* 哀梨記彈詞(Cheng Zhanlu), *Xiaonü Caihui tanci* 孝女蔡蕙彈詞(Cheng Zhanlu), *Ming yue zhu tanci* 明月珠彈詞(Cheng Zhanlu), *Yu xuan cao tan ci* 娛萱草彈詞(Ju dao ren), *Ou si yuan tanci* 藕絲緣彈詞(Cheng Zhanlu), *Tian yu hua* 天雨花(Tao Zhenhuai), *Lai sheng fu tanci* 來生福彈詞 (Qin Songling), *Xiuxiang Zai sheng yuan quanzhuan* 繡像再生緣全傳(Chen Duansheng, Liang Desheng), and *Xiuxiang Bi sheng hua* 繡像筆生花(Qiu Xinru). See Liu Hongquan 劉洪權, ed., *Minguo shi qi chu ban shu mu hui bian* 民國時期出版社書目匯編 (Beijing Shi: Guo jia tu shu guan chubanshe, 2010), Vol. 1-4.

[359] About the transformation of *tanci* performance from teahouse storytelling to radio broadcasting, see Carlton Benson, "From Teahouse to Radio Storytelling and the Commercialization of Culture in 1930s Shanghai."

[360] See E. Perry Link, *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: Popular Fiction in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Cities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 189-95. For discussion on how the audience seems to overlap with vernacular fiction and operas, see Robert E. Hegel, "Distinguishing levels of audiences for Ming-Chíng vernacular literature," in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 112-43. However, my emphasis is on the urban setting in the Jiang'nan area, in particular metropolitan Shanghai.

[361] The founding of the Republic of China awakened the urban population, especially intellectuals, to a keen desire for modernization. With the downfall of the Manchu dynasty, the Chinese nation would now be revitalized. Citizens of the new Republican China believed that once practical science from the West was applied, Chinese wealth and power would be restored. As presented in Perry Link's book, avant-garde writers in Shanghai frequently indulged themselves in the comforts of the new life style,

the genre, the market for *tanci* actually overlapped that of popular fiction in the 1930s. As Perry Link argues, the change in cultural attitudes did not necessarily synchronize with the development of printing technologies or political slogans. To serve the common interests, writers were more willing to produce stories that reinforced traditional morality, with only a stylish decoration of the Western influence. Most readers, though, might adopt a few foreign words here and there from fiction written in the new style. According to Link, commercialized publishers and the mass audiences of fiction still felt more comfortable staying within the traditional literary styles. Although Shanghai had accumulated a reservoir of modern intellectuals by the early twentieth-century, there was also a large, less-educated population, who were the descendants of the Taiping refugees from the lower Yangtze region. Shanghai residents still had very close personal ties to the countryside, where their families were based. The female audience, in particular, was a culturally conservative group. Burgeoning fantasies with Western norms might occasionally satisfy their curiosity, but eventually old-fashioned narratives that had shared feelings and sympathy better served to provide access to an intimate and reliable world as well as an escape.[362] *Tanci* stories such *Jing zhong zhuan*, regardless of the genre, could also have gained popularity in 1930s Shanghai due to their perceived moral and emotional thrust for

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free romance, and (sometimes) opium, and portrayed the urban city with great passion. Their works presented readers with new knowledge that they needed to thrive in a rapidly "modernizing" environment, which sharply contrasted with the aesthetics of traditional Chinese fiction. Scenes depicting such modern conventions as household electricity, Western banks, cable cars, and lessons of foreign language were exhaustively detailed in popular fiction. The most famous line of Chinese modernization probably comes from Mao Dun's *Midnight* (*Ziye* 子夜, 1932): Light! Heat! Power!

[362] See Perry Link, 155-79, 196-235. In fact, the prevalence of *tanci* had such a big impact on popular literature that some modern writers also picked this genre. Before Mao Dun took over *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 小說月報 (Fiction Monthly) in 1920, this influential literary magazine once called upon a reform on *tanci* fiction and published many of them. In the 1930s, Lu Dan'an 陸澹庵 (1894-1980) adapted *Tixiao yinyuan* 啼笑因緣 (Fate in Tears and Laughter), the best known work of Mandarin-ducks-and butterflies fiction, into a *tanci* performance script and published the script. From a linguistic perspective, many Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies fiction writers also originated from Suzhou and were familiar with traditional *tanci* performance.

readers. The legendary General Yue Fei, together with his friends and family, embodied an idealized model of the traditional Chinese virtues of loyalty, devotion, and integrity. The identities of the storytellers and literati authors might have been repressed or forgotten, but the central motif of Yue Fei's moral righteousness and his heroic struggles endured as an integral part of the Chinese cultural repertoire. Despite varied natures among the readers, it was still a story with a shared, unchallengeable understanding in the Chinese collective memory.

Scholars of popular culture often ask the question: How was popular culture used by elite forces to control or mobilize the non-elite?[363] Within the context of rising nationalism in modern China, political activists and intellectuals also made attempts to mobilize the mass audience by manipulating popular culture. As the pressure of contemporary events intensified in the late 1930s, May Fourth generation intellectuals began to generate mythologized versions of the past. In contrast to late Qing intellectuals who viewed China's past as a barrier to modernization, May Fourth scholars shifted their mission from qimeng (啓蒙 enlightenment) to jiuguo (救國 rescuing China) by emphasizing China's "national self-awakening," particularly when facing the Japanese invasion. Under the banner of patriotic mobilization, any attack on tradition could be considered an assault on the collective Chinese spirit. Meng Yue suggests that as early as the turn of the century in Shanghai, modern dramatists often used the past to criticize the present.[364] The new print media brought forth an innovative form of shared understandings concerning Yue Fei's account. When *Jing zhong zhuan* left the small circle of family and friends and became available to the

[363] For details see Chandra Mukerjee and Michael Schudson, "Introduction: Rethinking Popular Culture," in Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson, ed., *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 1-61.

[364] Meng Yue, *Shanghai and the Edges of Empires* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 106-19.

public, people interpreted the text according to their own political agenda. With its heroic topic, the *tanci* likely eased anxieties, provided comfort to Chinese who were experiencing a similar crisis to that in the past and urged a restoration of order over the present. The old story of Yue Fei in the *tanci* narrative was given new significance to better support the national project of a Chinese people united to resist foreign aggression. In the views of most modern scholars, *Jing zhong zhuan* is the product of a highly nationalist-motivated text.

The rest of this chapter will study several representative scholarly comments on *Jing zhong zhuan* from the 1930s and 1940s. It is the stirring patriotism of the *tanci*, rather than the feminine aesthetics, that have drawn the attention of their crticis.

Jing zhong zhuan in the Nationalist Discourse: 1930-1945

In 1932 the first edition of *Jing zhong zhuan* was published by Shanghai Commercial Press (*Shangwu yinshuguan* 商務印書館), the most significant modern publishing house in China.[365] In addition to introducing new materials, the Press also made great contributions toward promoting traditional literature. By 1932, it was actively (re)printing, (re)advertising, and (re)publishing *tanci* narratives. However, this bourgeoning cultural prosperity in Shanghai was suddenly interrupted by the Shanghai Incident. On Jan 29, 1932, while Japanese troops proceeded to Zhabei, their air force bombed Shanghai. The city was thrown into chaos. Shanghai Commercial Press was among the targets. The printing workshops and all machines were entirely

[365] Established in 1897 and the first publishing house to use foreign capital, Shanghai Commercial Press soon set up a forward-looking attitude toward both Chinese and Western studies. At the height of the May Fourth Movement, the press was once again quick to update its intellectual profile by cultivating close ties to New Culture celebrities. However, its commitment to satisfying the maximum readership and supporting intellectuals remained unchanged. For a more detailed study on Shanghai Commercial Press, see Florence Chien, "The Commercial Press and Modern Chinese Publishing, 1897-1949" (MA thesis., University of Chicago, 1970).

destroyed. In the following days, the Oriental Library (*dongfang tushuguan* 東方圖書館) affiliated with the Press also caught fire. Almost all collections, including unique copies, rare editions, and foreign books in the library were burned. It was a devastating moment in the history of the press.

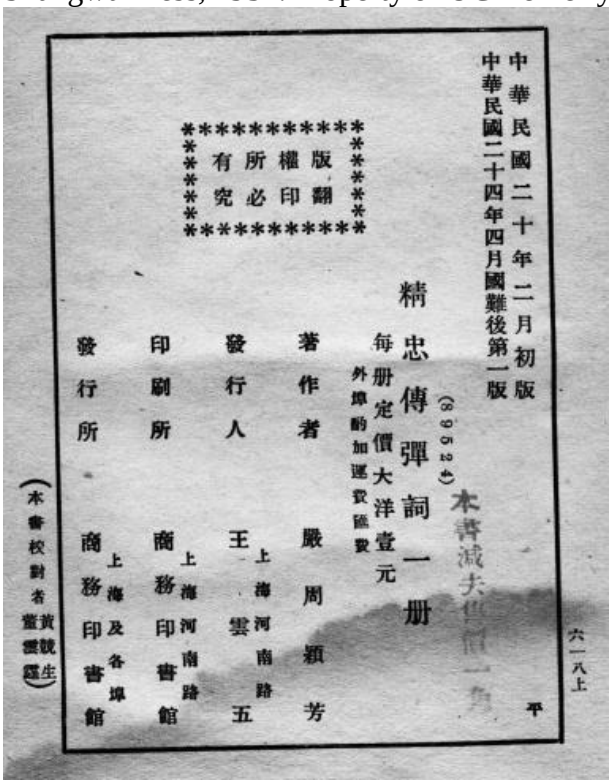
But the press rebuilt from the ashes and revived soon after the crisis. In fact, the five years from 1932 to 1937 witnessed the most productive period since the establishment of *Shangwu*. Driven by patriotism and an anxiety to preserve Chinese civilization under the threat of a Japanese invasion, the press published Chinese classics and rare collections and started a new project, *wanyou wenkou* 萬有文庫 (Universal Library). [366] Serial publications also became a specialty. As Dr. Ch'iu K'ai-ming lamented, "To most Westerners, the Commercial Press is just a printing plant and publishing house, but to the Chinese it is an agency for preserving and spreading old Chinese culture and an institution for the introduction of modern education into China."[367]

After the Shanghai Incident, Chinese intellectuals bitterly resented the Japanese aggression. The theme of nationalism and patriotism was accentuated in publishing. Commercial Press also actively participated in publishing books and magazines with anti-Japanese themes. Most publications by the Press were marked as "after the national calamity" (*guonan hou* 國難后) versions on the cover pages. The second edition of *Jing zhong zhuan* in 1935 was printed in such a format as well (FIGURE 2).

[366] For example, starting from 1919, Shanghai Commercial Press had printed in succession *the Chinese Classics in Four Divisions* (siku congkan) and *the Complete Library of the Four Divisions* (*siku quanshu* 四庫全書). Another of he company's major projects was the publication of *the Collection of Collections* (*Congshu jicheng* 叢書集成).

[367] Chien, "The commercial press and modern Chinese publishing, 1897-1949", 69.

Figure 2. Inside back cover of *Jing zhong zhuan* marked "after the national calamity", published by Shanghai Shangwu Press, 1932. Property of UC Berkerly library.



To many Republican intellectuals, the Chinese nation had always been conceived of as a territorially as well as culturally defined entity. When Japanese troops attacked Shanghai and invaded Manchuria and later North China, the entity of China was threatened by the imperialist design of the Greater Far East Co-prosperity Sphere (*Da dongya gongrongquan* 大東亞共榮圈). The defiant image of Yue Fei was thus used to inspire this intense nationalist sentiment among the Chinese population. *Shangwu* never classified *Jing zhong zhuan* as classical (*gudian* 古典) literature like other women-authored *tanci* narratives in their catalog. With the rallying cry of "after the national calamity" printed on the cover page, from the first page readers were reminded of the contemporary crisis and encouraged to consume *Jing zhong zhuan* as part of the fast-spreading anti-Japanese sentiment throughout the nation. Yue Fei's achievements served to mediate their anxiety over the current violence during

devastating moments and provoked an inspiration to preserve the national entity, through the process of circulation and through its commentaries.

Meanwhile, aiming to enlighten the Chinese people, May Fourth intellectuals during the 1920s and '30s promoted non-elite culture and performing arts and incorporated their political agenda. Simultaneously, scholars made great efforts to place *tanci* in the broad category of "appropriate" popular literature. They published articles in influential newspapers to promote *tanci* as a method of social education and/or mobilization.[368] *Jing zhong zhuan* stood out, with its theme of political struggles, and received great public attention.

Generally speaking, scholarly criticism of *Jing zhong zhuan* by May Fourth intellectuals dominated the reading process and attempted to mobilize the audience to step into a political arena, with calls for national resistance to Japan as part of the agenda that literature should serve the modern nation. They also attempted to erase Zhou's elite taste and mark the text within the category of literature produced since the late Qing that bears strong political themes of resistance and revolution. In the following study of four scholarly responses to *Jing zhong zhuan* and/or women's literature in the 1930s and 1940s, I aim not only to translate and report what was said, but to interpret their findings, literally and figuratively.

1. Tan Zhengbi

In 1934, Tan Zhengbi 譚正璧 (1901-1991) published the third edition of his *Zhongguo nüxing wenxue shihua* 中國女性文學史話 (The History of Women's Literature in China). Compared to the first version in 1930, Tan added a substantial

[368] The earliest article was "An Announcement to Storytellers in China" 告海內外說書家, published under the pseudonym of Sheng Jing 勝境 (wonderland) in *Shenbao* 申報 (April 28, 1921).

amount of information on female-authored *tanci*, some of which he had collected from antique bookstores at high prices in Shanghai. In his preface, Tan criticized previous comments about the history of women's literature in China, indicating that those writings were bound to the old standard that canonized poetry and discriminated against fiction or operas. Tan claimed that his criteria were based on "mainstream literature" (*shidai wenxue* 時代文學).

Tan incisively noticed the relation between women and fiction. He argued that Chinese popular literature was most prevalent in two forms: vernacular fiction and *tanci* [fiction]. Women readers of popular literature preferred *tanci* to vernacular fiction. Tan consciously placed women-authored *tanci* within the Chinese narrative tradition. The only difference between *tanci* and vernacular fiction was the format: *tanci* was written in verse and vernacular fiction in prose. He attributed women's association with *tanci* fiction to their strong sensibilities and musical talents. [369] Tan is the first scholar who discovered two vernacular *xiaoshuo* novels written by women: *Yuan Ming yishi* 元明遺事 (The Lost History of Yuan and Ming) by Wang Duan 汪端 and *Zh xian lou* 謫仙樓(The Tower of Exiled Immortals) by Chen Yichen 陳義臣.

The chapter "Popular fiction and *Tanci*" 通俗小說與彈詞 in his book is a collection of his *tanci* fiction critiques. Distinct from other May Fourth scholars, Tan's reviews reflected much less of the politico-historical standards, but represented more literary techniques. He spoke unusually highly of *Meng ying yuan*, which Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸 disliked because of its transcending theme and overly detailed portraits.[370] Tan, however, regarded *Meng ying yuan* as "a crane standing among

[369] Tan Zhengbi, *Zhongguo nüxing wenxue shihua* (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 1984), 368-72.

[370] Zheng, *Zhongguo su wenxue shi*, 540.

chickens (*he li ji qun* 鶴立雞群)," a great work outstanding among others.[371] Dissatisfied with the fact that *tanci* was no longer an elite art, he was critical of the shallow plots and low tastes that filled Chinese leisure literature and blocked modern readers from understanding the aesthetics of the detailed lyric narration in *tanci*.

No doubt based on the high regard for Zheng Danruo, Tan admired her daughter Zhou Yingfang's work *Jing zhong zhuan*. Tan even claimed that the mother Zheng Danruo somehow predicated her daughter's future writing on Yue Fei.[372] Without reservation he sang high praise of Zhou Yingfang's artistic skills. But more crucially, he highlighted that Zhou was the only woman *tanci* author who selected such a solemn and stirring topic, while most *tanci* fiction were primarily scholar-beauty stories. To Tan, this was the most significant value of *Jing zhong zhuan* and the one which would make this text an immortal piece. Yet Tan reiterated the interpretation of Zhou's motivation to write about Yue Fei found in the two prefaces by Xu Desheng and Li Shu -- that she was encouraged by the popular nationalist thought during late Qing.

Essentially, Tan's admiration for *Jing zhong zhuan* still fell into the conventional discourse that literature eventually was a vehicle for socio-historical reflection. He further interpreted Li Shu's preface and claimed explicitly that by writing the *tanci*, Zhou foretold the end of the Qing dynasty. Regrettably, Tan ignored the female identity of the author. He did notice Zhou's elaboration on Yue Fei's daughter and believed that the daughter represented the model of an ideal woman, the

[371] Tan Zhengbi, *Zhongguo nü xing wenxue shihua*, 443.

[372] In the beginning of chapter 30 of *Meng ying yuan*, Zheng expressed her strong interest in history and especially the account of Yue Fei. See my chapter II, 91-92.

only respectable woman character in the *tanci*.[373] He underestimated the role of this female character in the Yue family and merely regarded her as an exemplary person of old female virtues, who completed identified herself with her heroic father. In this respect, he completely misinterpreted the female author, and her effort to voice a representative theme of gentry women in late nineteenth-century China was submerged in the flood of mainstream May Fourth discourse.

Although Tan Zhengbi and his daughter Tan Xun 譚尋 continued working on women-authored texts in the post-revolutionary period, it remained unclear why the focus on women's literature was deliberately marginalized within their research frame after 1949.[374] Meanwhile, most contemporary research on *tanci* neglect *Jing zhong zhuan*. Tan Zhengbi's contribution to preserve and study women-authored *tanci* had been neglected until the genre raised scholarly interests again in the twenty-first century.

2. Zheng Zhenduo

As one of the most influential intellectuals in twentieth-century China, Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸 (1898-1958) was also one of the earliest *tanci* scholars. In his milestone work *Zhongguo su wenxue shi* 中國俗文學史 (The History of Popular Literature in China, 1938), Zheng contributed particularly to the study of women-authored *tanci* narratives. As a leading May Fourth scholar, he had strong preferences

[373] In contrast to Tan's interpretation, as discussed in my chapter I and III, Zhou Yingfang holds a rather ambivalent attitude toward women's suicide. See 24-39, 130-34.

[374] See Zhengbi Tan and Xun Tan, *Tanci xulu* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe : Xinhua shudian Shanghai faxingsuo faxing, 1981).; and their *Pingtan tongkao* (Beijing: Zhongguo qu yi chubanshe : Xin hua shu dian Beijing fa xing suo fa xing, 1985). With much sympathy, Nancy Hodes records that when she visited Professor Tan in 1985, in his tiny room in Shanghai, he was practically blind but talkative and cheerful. Tan Xun by then had been in and out of mental hospitals for some time. See Nancy Jane Hodes, "Strumming and singing the *Three smiles romance*: a study of the *tanci* text" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1990), 66.

for texts with the potential theme of patriotism or women's emancipation. Other types of women-authored *tanci* were hardly appreciated, or even harshly criticized. For example, in sharp contrast to Tan Zhengbi's great appreciation of literary aesthetics, Zheng commented that Zheng Danruo's *Ming ying yuan* had little value but was merely a showy display of the writer's talents. He also disapproved of *Feng shuang fei*, saying that " [it is] different from stories like *Zai sheng yuan*, which advocated women's rights. It is no more than a pastime for gentry women and deserves no attention."[375] He completely neglected the effort these women authors made to establish their literary reputation.

Jing zhong zhuan attracted Zheng Zhenduo for its patriotic topic. In his opinion, Zhou Yingfang did not limit herself to boudoir trivia but extended her vision to the imperial borders; the protagonist was not a gentry woman on a fanciful and explorative journey, but the famous General Yue from the cold and bloody historical battlefields. These aspects met approval with Zheng's May Fourth view of literary values. He agreed with some earlier commentaries that *Jing zhong zhuan* was detached from the flamboyance popular in other *tanci* fiction and exemplified a reform of *tanci* narration.[376] He even gave some quite unusually high praise for *Jing zhong zhuan*: "The author was scrupulous in her writing and wrote in a lively style. Compared with other ordinary *tanci* fiction, this piece of work plays a distinguished note (*tan chu bie diao* 彈出別調)."[377]

Zheng also wrote a brief biography of Zhou Yingfang based on the two prefaces by Li Shu and Xu Desheng. Although Xu had explained that the reason Zhou

[375] Zheng Zhenduo, *Zhongguo su wenxueshi*, 380.

[376] See the preface of *Yu xuancao tan ci* 娛萱草彈詞 by *Zuo yue chui sheng lou zhu ren* 坐月吹笙樓主人. Judaoren, *Yu xuan cao tan ci* (Shanghai: Shangwu, 1931).

[377] Zheng, *Zhongguo su wenxueshi*, 381.

chose the Yue Fei topic was to revise the karmic frame of conventional narrations, Zheng took notice of the integration between the fictional subject and Zhou's personal trauma. He recorded her earlier experiences and Xu's interpretation and encouraged further study of *Jing zhong zhuan*.

3. Zhao Jingshen

In the late 1930s, a selected chapter from *Jing zhong zhuan* was anthologized in *Tanci xuan* 彈詞選 (A selection of plucking rhythms) by Commercial Press for middle school education. The editor, Zhao Jingshen 趙景深 (1902-1985), was first known as the translator of Hans Christian Andersen. Influenced by his contemporary May Fourth writers, especially Lu Xun and Zheng Zhenduo, Zhao advocated for the new literature and joined the Literary Research Association (*wenxue yanjiu hui* 文學研究會). Later he enjoyed a distinguished reputation in the discipline of Chinese opera and folk literature studies. The anthology was first published in 1938 and reprinted in 1947.

In Zhao's account, *tanci* is supposed to serve more of a function to educate than to entertain the masses; *Tanci xuan* was published for nationalist education for middle school students. The book was the very first volume of a series called "A New Library for Middle School" (*Xin zhongxue wenku* 新中學文庫), in the section of "Supplementary Readings for Middle School Chinese" (*Zhongxue guowen buchong duben* 中學國文補充讀本). Driven by this educational motivation, Zhao chose *tanci* chapters with great care. This was a hard time in China, when hundreds of thousands of Chinese civilians were killed by Japanese troops and Chinese soldiers were shedding their blood on the frontline fighting against the Japanese invasion. Zhao aimed not only at literary education, but put out an urgent call for nationalist and

patriotic inspiration. He illustrated two reasons why Zhou Yingfang's *Jing zhong zhuan* was crucial: from the literary perspective, the *tanci* fiction was grouped with another storytelling script about Yue Fei, *Shi'er jinqian* 十二金錢 (Twelve gold coins). Through this comparison, students would be able to comprehend and appreciate the differences between literary *tanci* and performance art -- in other words, between elite writing and mass literature. More importantly, the juxtaposition would "inspire the nationalist spirit of middle school students" 激發中學生的愛國精神.[378] He made explicit in the preface that more study should be focused on performing *tanci*: "*Tanci* is an interdisciplinary art. Therefore we need to explore its origin and development. Meanwhile we also need to study the actual performance."[379]

Zhao's critique of *Jing zhong zhuan* did not aim to restore the original context of the late nineteenth century or to treat the text as a specific genre by women authors. In fact, his choice represented the universal May Fourth intellectual interest: literature for the masses and literature that reflected reality. He advocated performance *tanci* as being independent from other operas and being for the broad masses (*pingmin hua* 平民化).[380] For Zhao, most literary *tanci* texts were simply Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies fiction. He wrote:

> Their contents are no other than scholar-beauty romance, with very few exceptions. I will say no more about them. Such romantic stories are most unsuited for middle school students. Old values of loyalty, filial piety, chastity and righteousness are integrated. In addition, these are fabricated stories.[381]

[378] Zhao Jingchen, *Tan ci xuan* (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1947), 8.

[379] *Ibid.*

[380] *Ibid*., 7

[381] Zhao Jingsehn, *Tanci xuan*, 8

He then continued to further explain his principle when anthologizing the book: *Tian yu hua*, which in his perspective better reflected the politico-historical reality, was chosen to represent the regular type *tanci* that is purely fictional. However, *Jing zhong zhuan* and another *tanci* about the 1900 Boxer War, G*engzi guobian tanci* 庚子國變彈詞 (*Tanci* On the National Crisis in the Year of *Gengzi*, 1902), were viewed as based on true history. They were both properly instructive for student readers. *Gengzi guobian tanci* directly drew materials from a war some thirty years earlier and revealed China's weaknesses when confronting the Western powers at the turn of the twentieth century. *Jing zhong zhuan* worked similarly to evoke patriotism in the moment of national crisis among readers. The historical event of Han Chinese resisting Jurchens was once again employed to refer to the Sino-Japanese conflicts and to encourage youth to fight against the invaders.

Tanci xuan echoed the consistent political tone of other wartime Chinese intellectuals that urban popular culture forms, including spoken dramas, cartoons (*manhua* 漫畫), newspapers and other media should serve anti-Japanese propaganda. In a short article called "The War of Resistance and *Tanci*" (*Kangzhan yu tanci* 抗戰與彈詞) published in a Shanghai-based newspaper *National Salvation Daily* in 1938, Zhao addressed the effort to compose new *tanci* stories with resistance themes to serve anti-Japanese propaganda. He also criticized popular *tanci* performers in 1930s' Shanghai, who sang only traditional scholar-beauty scripts. Their performances were doing nothing to help China but only served to numb the audience. In the same article Zhao highlighted *Jing zhong zhuan*, and suggested the text should be adapted into performance, because it portrayed the historic patriotic hero Yue Fei, which delivered

a perfect model for those who called for resistance.[382] To the audiences accustomed to traditional performance, he granted *Jing zhong zhuan* a mission to inspire unity and devotion to the nation at a critical time. Or in Chang-tai Hung's words, the urban culture genre was refashioned into a political tool.[383]

4. Tao Qiuying's Promotion of Literary Aesthetics in *Tanci*

Tao Qiuying 陶秋英 (1909-1986) was a lesser known woman scholar in the May Fourth period.[384] She came from a gentry-merchant family and was an expert in classical Chinese poetry. In 1933 Tao published a monograph on Chinese women and literature, titled *Zhongguo funü yu wenxue* 中國婦女與文學 (Chinese Women and Literature).[385] The book aimed to reveal the multiple oppressions upon Chinese women and to discuss the limited amount of women-authored literature in Chinese history. Instead of arranging the selections in a chronological order, Tao's approach was to select a few representative women writers for each genre. Chapter 5 of her book classified traditional Chinese literature written by women into four categories: *fu* 賦 (Han Rhapsody), letters, poetry, and prose. Under the subtitle of "Prose," Tao listed two items, *tanci* fiction (*tanci xiaoshuo* 彈詞小說) written by women before the twentieth century and contemporary women's essays and novels.

This unique organization and categorization of her book suggests that her critical standards were somewhat detached from her contemporary male peers. First,

[382] Zhao Jingshen, *Quyi congtan* (Beijing: Zhongguo qu yi chubanshe, 1982), 124-26.

[383] Chang-tai Huang, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 12.

[384] Her husband, Jiang Liangfu 姜亮夫 (1902-1995), is a renowned scholar in the field of Chu *ci* 楚辭 (Elegies of Chu) studies.

[385] Tao Qiuying, *Zhongguo funü yu wenxue* (Beiping: Beixin shuju, 1933). The book was reprinted in Taiwain in 1975.

while a chronological history of literature was the most popular format among modern scholars, by composing a history arranged by literary genres, Tao strategically avoided any possible repetition of other works and established her own framework. Secondly, although Tao also adopted the prevalent May Fourth discourse that pre-modern women were mostly an oppressed and backward group bound by Confucianism, she admitted that a few of them had the opportunity to receive education. Further, influenced by the seventeenth-century *xingling* 性靈 (spiritual) chool poetry,[386] she believed that women writers were more associated with "the mysterious and natural power of literature (文學的神秘的自然的力)."[387] Therefore she focused more heavily on literary aesthetics and techniques in her comments. This alternative principle provided a contrast to May Fourth mainstream literary evaluation which emphasized the social-historical reflection. Third, while most scholars referred to women-authored *tanci* as a form of folk literature or a subgenre of Chinese opera, Tao deployed Ah Ying's concept of *tanci* fiction and clearly placed women-authored *tanci* into the category of fictional narratives. She challenged the conventional view that women did not participate in fictional narration in late imperial China. In addition, she reminded readers of the uniqueness of the genre, which developed from singing opera and written fiction (由曲由小說兩者之演化應用而生), shedding light on the status of the genre in the history of Chinese literature (于文學變遷有其歷史上的價值).[388]

[386] The late Ming *xingling* 性靈 school of poetry advocates authentic feelings and emotions. Early representative poets include the Yuan 袁 brothers and sisters. *Xingling* school was revived during High Qing. Yuan Mei (1716-1798) highlighted authenticity and creativity in poetry writing, emphasizing the interaction between nature and human emotions. Women poets were especially considered talented because of their natural style of writing and abundance of feelings.

[387] Tao, *Zhongguo funü yu wenxue*, 2

[388] Tao, *Zhongguo funü yu wenxue*, 277.

Tao particularly embraced *tanci* narratives with the explicit theme of women's emancipation. She actually did *not* choose *Jing zhong zhuan* as a representative work in her book. In the section she criticized the cliché of the *tanci*, in which "a poor scholar won the first place in the imperial examination, and a young couple secretly got married in the back garden" (落難公子中狀元, 私訂終身后花園).[389] Then she listed other women-authored *tanci* fiction, including *Tian yu hua*, *Bi sheng hua* and *Feng shuang fei*, as good examples. Unlike the May Fourth progressive discourse that encouraged people to break off from the old family and pursue a modern life, Tao appreciated traditional values such as filial piety. She praised Qiu Xinru as a filial daughter who wrote *Bi sheng hua* to amuse her mother. She also commented on *Feng shuang fei* as a unique piece, based on her criteria of women's special talents in literary aesthetics. However, her favorite was the *Zai sheng yuan* series. Although Zheng Zhenduo claimed that Hou Zhi's sequel, *Zai zao tian*, had little value in the sense of literature, Tao spoke highly of the re-evaluation of Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (624-705) in the *tanci*.

It deserves further discussion to explore why Tao did not select *Jing zhong zhuan* while other male intellectuals valued it. In the 1930s the image of Yue Fei had been very much intertwined with the difficult political situation. Therefore, Tao's disapproval could be read as resistance to the prevalent nationalist reading. In other words, based on her belief in the special talents in literary aesthetics associated with women, she refused to place their works within the male aesthetic context and created her own independent criteria.

[389] *Ibid*., 276-77.

Conclusion

During the Sino-Japanese war (1937-45), Chinese nationalist sentiment reached its peak. Nationalist narratives became the dominant discourse. In a 1941 article on teaching Chinese history to high school students, Minister of Education of the Nationalist government Chen Lifu 陳立夫 gave two principles of nationalist education: ethnic supremacy (*minzu zhishang* 民族至上) and state supremacy (*guojia zhishang* 國家至上). Yue Fei had always been a source of spiritual sustenance for the Chinese people when they faced outside aggressors and, once again, perfectly fit into a nationalist historiographic discourse. In the same article, Chen acclaimed Yue as a ational hero (*minzu yingxiong* 民族英雄) in contrast to Wang Jingwei 汪精衛 (1883-1944) who collaborated with the Japanese.[390]

However, the nationalist rhetoric that interprets *Jing zhong zhuan* as a literary inspiration of resistance demands a critical rethinking. To some extent, the nationalist reading is a sign of a lack of intellectual independence in modern China. Confronting Japanese aggression, some intellectuals felt it necessary to strengthen their relevance to their nation's destiny. As expressed in the writings of Zhao Jingchen and Zheng Zhenduo, the single focus on a patriotic theme in *Jing zhong zhuan*, in fact, reflects a typical elitist political agenda, a defining feature of the male-oriented nationalism in the first half of twentieth-century China. From a literary perspective, these dominant intellectuals focused only on political allegory in classical Chinese literature to evaluate this woman-authored *tanci* and ignored any sign of alternative aesthetics. Meanwhile, they deployed the image of the heroic Yue Fei from the text to reorganize the relation between past and present in the new historical discourse. Through their

[390] Qian Mu 錢穆, *Kangzhan shiqi zhi lishi jiaoyu* 抗戰時期之歷史教育 (Hongkong: Longmen shudian, 1966), 2.

new nationalist interpretation of *Jing zhong zhuan*, a new identity of the woman writer Zhou Yingfang was invented in order to cultivate the national spirit among every reader in this age of rising patriotism. By merging their nationalist agenda into their readings of classical literature, their leadership role in the public arena was secured. In this sense, the intelligentsia of modern China did not change much from their predecessors in the imperial period. Still perceiving themselves within the category of traditional literati (*wenren* 文人), these scholars strived to express their loyalty to an ultimate authority, which had changed from the "emperor" to the "nation." In all previous critiques of women-authored *tanci* narratives, only Tao Qiuying's deliberate neglect of *Jing zhong zhuan* might be read as a relationship renegotiating the dominant discourse of China's nationalism and intellectual independence.

CHAPTER VI

A FINAL NOTE: WOMEN AND HISTORIOGRAPHY IN *JING ZHONG ZHUAN*

This dissertation has examined the late nineteenth-century woman writer Zhou Yingfang and her *tanci* fiction *Jing zhong zhuan*. In this unique genre, Zhou Yingfang negotiates writing conventions in the long-circulated legend of Yue Fei in order to voice her view of history. The *tanci* enriches the characteristics of the heroic Yue Fei and his masculine friends by adding more *qing*-oriented family episodes, especially in the domestic settings. The woman author balances the general's heroic achievements in public with his family life in private. In addition, she attaches great importance to women's roles in her narrative. *Jing zhong zhuan* redefines important values in late imperial China, such as filial piety and political loyalty and the significance of family, stressing women's virtues, determination, self-control, and endurance instead of their vulnerability to wars. In this concluding chapter, I will continue the discussion on the historical background of Zhou's *tanci* work and investigate how she perceives history and the political reality of her own time.

Nüshi: The Woman Historian

The Chinese term *nüshi* 女史 (women historians) was originally an official title in *Zhouli* 周禮 (The rites of the Zhou), referring to women from noble families who served the empress and facilitated her in ruling the royal household. During the Ming, women in the imperial court were able to receive the title of *nüshi* if they had completed a certain degree of education.[391] By early Qing, *nüshi* had become an

[391] See Shen Defu 沈德符 (1578-1642), *Wanli ye huo bian* 萬歷野獲編, in the session of "Imperial Household and Female *xiucai*" 宮幃女秀才.

honorific towards educated women and women writers and a very popular title. For example, in *Suiyuan shihua* 隨園詩話 (Poetry critique from the Sui Garden), Yuan Mei mentioned a Yuting *nüshi* 玉亭女史.[392] *Nüshi* in late imperial China could be considered an emerging group of intellectual women. As the name suggests, *nüshi* women writers often demonstrated strong interests in history. Despite a conservative attitude, women continued their writing practices, particularly during the second half of the nineteenth century. For example, Paola Zamperini studies how late Qing courtesans represented themselves as "both the personification of a world being lost and the embodiment of new worlds and objects."[393] *Guixiu* gentry women were still active in poetry writing and publishing; in addition, some of them attempted to challenge the male-dominated genre of novels and fictions.[394]

Like women poets, many women *tanci* writers used the titile of *nüshi*, women historians. According to Tan Zhengbi, Zhou Yingfang's mother Zheng Danruo was referred to as Danruo *nüshi*.[395] Although Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu argues that the flourishing vernacular fiction in late imperial China brought a trend of "dehistoricization" to the Chinese narrative tradition,[396] women *tanci* writers were clearly conscious of the dynamics between historiography and their narratives. Since

[392] See Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua*, Vol. 2.

[393] Paola Zamperini, "But I Never Learned to Waltz: The Real and Imagined Education of a Courtesan in the Late Qing," *Nan Nü: Men, Women and Gender in Early and Imperial China* (1999): 107-44.

[394] Widmer, *The Beauty and the Book*, 273-77. Scholars also suggest that the revival of studies of classical texts in the Qing drew attention to learned women in history. See Mann's discussion about Zhang Xuecheng in *Precious Records*, Chapters 1 and 4.

[395] Other women *tanci* writers who used the title of *nüshi* include Qiu Xinru, alias Xinru *nüshi* 心如女史; Wenyuan *nüshi* 文垣女史 who authored *Ru shi guan tan ci* 如是觀彈詞; Wang Oushang 汪藕裳 (1832-1892), alias Duliang *nüshi* 都梁女史 who authored *Zi xu ji* 子虛記, and Yonglan *nüshi* 詠蘭女史 who authored *Xianü qunying shi* 俠女群英史(1905).

[396] Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, *From Historicity to Fictionality: the Chinese Poetics of Narrative* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 129.

historical writing was the privileged and dominant genre of narrative in imperial China, they described *tanci* as a subgenre of historical texts, which helped justify their writings. In her preface to *Zai sheng yuan*, the woman *tanci* writer and editor Hou Zhi wrote: "Poetry expresses feelings; historiography narrates events. Unofficial history and *tanci* either make up for what previous generations regretted, or discover neglected anecdotes" 詩以言情，史以記事。至野史彈詞，或代前人補恨，或恐往事無傳. Hou Zhi explicitly categorizes *tanci* into a subgenre of unofficial Chinese historiography.

As discussed in chapter II of this dissertation, in *Meng ying yuan*, Zhou Yingfang's mother Zheng Danruo demonstrates her particular interests in writing about Yue Fei and the Song Empire. When Zhou Yingfang picks up her brush pen, she has an even clearer agenda for historical writing – a hope of raising her fellow women's interests in history and political reality. She claims her motivation of rewriting the Yue Fei story at the beginning of the *tanci*: "I dare renovate the old tone to a new one and make the name of the loyal hero known even to women and children" 敢將古調翻新調，要使那婦孺皆知忠烈名 (1.1). Like Xiong Damu, Zhou Yingfang hopes to edify the less-educated public, especially women. Distinct from other women *tanci* writers who frequently justified their literary creation as a filial act to amuse senior family members, she explicitly expresses her writing motivation with a didactic function, to "discern right from wrong, while rewarding reputation and integrity" 辯是非而勵名節.[397] In other words, she neglects the domestic restraints of women's writing, but places herself in the same position as other historical fiction writers who held a sense of moral authority on orthodox values such as loyalty and righteousness. This serious didactic intent, together with the renewed definitions of

[397] See Xu Desheng's preface.

virtues in the *tanci*, forms another feature associated with Chinese historians before the twentieth century.

In *Jing zhong zhuan*, Zhou Yingfang aims to promote the essential Confucian idea of filial piety and to reform women's thinking in accordance with a sense of history. The beginning of the *tanci* borrows a fashion of storytellers to attract the attention of the audience.

歷朝帝業言難盡 Reigns of royal families are difficult to explain in a few words.
話到興亡總愴神 It is always sad to talk of the rise and fall of each dynasty.
不講唐虞與三代 I am not telling a story during the time of Yao and Shun, or Xia, Shang or Zhou.
不講李唐與朱明 I am not telling a story set in the Tang or Ming. (1.1)

Then the woman author quickly switches to her narrative and gives a brief plot summary of the rise and fall of the Southern Song and the biography of Yue Fei. In fact, as the story has been circulating for hundreds of years, the legend is quite familiar among the audience. Zhou therefore does not repeat the story but focuses on her commentaries on history, especially the injustice done to the general and his unfulfilled dreams. She laments in her lyrics:

只恨途中遭毒手 It is pitiful that Yue Fei was murdered in the midway of his career.
空懷壯志未能伸 His aspirations have not yet been realized.
莫須有冤屈無處訴 The groundless wrongs could not be redressed.
只落得一顆丹心照汗青 Only his loyalty remains to shine in history.
忠奸從來不并立 Loyal officials could not stand with treacherous ones.
算來此事最傷心 This is truly the saddest thing. (1.1)

Jing zhong zhuan, as a *tanci* fiction with many invented characters, is still meaningfully constructed in the expectation of historical narratives. Zhou identifies herself as a historian and is conscious of her writing as an engagement of grand historical narration. She keeps highlighting the notion of "history" (*shi* 史, or

zhengzhuan 正傳) in the text and differentiates historicity and fictional invention in her narrative. Using phrases such "I will tell stories of the unrecorded history" 且把那漏史遺文訴一回 (60. 561) or "I mix in my writing the official record and the miscellanies" 正傳閑文同一體 (62. 581), she recognizes the distinction between historical events and fabrication by blurring the two styles. Zhou also presents herself as a reader of history by saying that "Reading history makes me weep; while Prince Kang (Gaozong) was ecstatic when ascending the throne" 讀史使人垂痛淚，當年面北笑康王 (63. 598). On Yue Fei's death, she writes, "It is difficult to describe the injustice done to him; read the history and you will know it"受屈言詞難盡述，但觀信史便分明 (59. 546). By inserting both orthodox and personal comments, she engages herself in the historical writing and sets up a model to encourage women to embrace history, rich in both intellectual and emotional significance. Considering that the injustice done to Yue Fei was the worst one in Chinese history, she confidently endorses her own historical writing by claiming to be unprejudiced (直笔).

Zhou Yingfang adopts a dynamic gesture when engaging in writing history. Compared to other women *tanci* writers, she deliberately distances herself from the popular themes such as scholar-beauty romances, female adventures, and others. In contrast, her choice to rewrite a conventionally male-dominated topic regarding Yue Fei's loyalty to the emperor seems very conservative on the surface. However, this choice reveals a woman's larger concerns beyond the conventional writings commonly associated with *guixiu* 闺秀 gentry women. Hsiao-chen Hu comments on *Jing zhong zhuan*'s adaption of the Yue Fei story as a parody of a grand narrative tradition, when, in chapter 69, Yue Zhen's fiancée, Miss Zhang composes poems in Yue Fei's mausoleum and discusses his greatness with her mother and grandmother in

their chambers. The grand historical issues of war and dynastic crisis become the topic of women's daily conversation in the private sphere.[398] In other words, in this completely fabricated story Zhou Yingfang suggests that the talented daughter not only puts her learning to use beyond family duties but extends it within a historical consciousness. Fictionality is affirmed in her narration of history.

In addition, *Jing zhong zhuan* presents a new historical view: the de-emphasis and deconstruction of the Han/barbarian ethnic conflict. As discussed previously in chapters II and IV of this dissertation, the narrative frame about the *tianxia* boundary between the Han Chinese-centered government and the ethnic minorities is refocused into an immortal request based on family values. In contrast to an often enclosed imperial boundary, the woman author breaks through the boundaries and provides a few possibilities to re-define the relations between Han Chinese and minorities.[399]

Speaking in a Borrowed Voice:
An Exploration of Zhou Yingfang's Writing Motivations

In the introductory chapter I reconstructed Zhou Yingfang's biography and her elite family background. The multi-cultural and multi-ethnic Qing Empire was once a highpoint of Chinese culture. However, after the late eighteenth century, the empire and traditional Chinese order seemed to be on the verge of collapse. By 1860 when Zhou Yingfang and her family were living in southwest Guizhou, the imperial government appeared demoralized and hopeless in the face of domestic mass uprisings and foreign invasions. In addition to the major threat from the Taiping rebels, other local riots in North China as well as along the southwest frontier also

[398] See Hu, "War, Violence, and the Metaphor of Blood in *Tanci* Narratives by Women Authors," in *The Inner Quarters and Beyond*, 249-82.

[399] Details see my chapter II and chapter IV, 65-79, 194-209.

deeply troubled the Qing. Simultaneously, internal turbulence left the Qing Empire in a weak position to resist Western expansion. During the decade of the Taping uprising and other social turbulence, war disrupted daily life in the Jiang'nan region, once known for its wealth and intellectual brilliance. Historians have observed that the Taiping rebels particularly aimed at the cultural traditions of the elite in the Jiang'nan region.[400] After the Taiping Rebellion, the surviving literati elite made a great effort to rebuild local communities and restore their cultural glory. For instance, Zhou's brother-in-law, Yan Chen, was devoted to compiling a local gazetteer and establishing the Academy of Aspirations 立志書院 in Tongxiang. Like many other Jiang'nan literati families, Zhou's family also suffered grief, death and horrific property damage. Hence, in addition to her family learning and her interests in history, it is against this background of recent personal loss and suffering, amid the attempts of Jiang'nan literati to revive the cultural heritage, and within the larger context of China's decline, that we should understand Zhou's motivations to write *Jing zhong zhuan*. In other words, her writing was motivated by the convergence of her contemporary political situation and her personal life experiences.

As discussed in chapter IV, the new image of Yue Fei in the *tanci* is more than that of a typical masculine hero with brilliant military achievements. Zhou Yingfang intentionally tones down Yue's absolute loyalty to the emperor, but highlights his gentle appearance, moral integrity, and literary gifts, as well as his extraordinary administrative abilities. I argue that the subtle shift of focus on Yue's endowments could partially be read as a response to the call for "human talents" (*rencai* 人才)

[400] Chester J. Cheng, *Chinese sources for the Taiping Rebellion, 1850-1864*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1963), 3.

during the Tongzhi Restoration 同治中興 (1862-1874).[401] Zhou portrays Yue Fei as an all-powerful talent in order to modify and rescue the dynasty from crisis. Since she deletes the karmic narrative frame in her version, human talents become the single determinant of the fate of Southern Song. In her version, the young general comes from a declining gentry family, but receives genuine support from other gentry families. He performs well in the imperial military exams and is recommended by influential people such as his master Zhou Tong 周桐 and the great General Zong Ze 宗澤. The way in which Zhou tells her story also juxtaposes examinations and recommendations as complementary forms in the selection of talent.[402]

In the verses narrating Yue's death in *Jing zhong zhuan*, Zhou expresses deep sorrow and regret. Doubtlessly this reminds her of the family tragedy in 1865 in Guizhou , where her husband Yan Jin lost his life in the battle against the Miao rebels. After 1864, although Taiping troops had been suppressed, some jointed the Nian 捻 rebels and made alliances with the northwestern Moslems. Meanwhile, disturbances in Guizhou were severely aggravated. According to Mary Wright's research, in most previously rebellious regions, new leaders from the Restoration gradually took charge and brought back peace. But in Guizhou such leadership was absent, and this contributed to the frequent revolts in this area.[403] The results were devastating: by 1872 when the Miao rebellion was finally put down, five million had died in Guizhou,

[401] Beginning in 1861, the Qing imperial family and officials made an attempt to launch a series of "self-strengthening" reforms, such as the transformation and Westernization of regional armies, construction of railroads, factories and arsenals, better negotiations in foreign affairs, etc. For a detailed study on the Tongzhi Restoration, see Mary C. Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism: The T'ung-chih Restoration, 1862-1874* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957).

[402] It is worth noticing that Zhou severely condemned the corrupt practice of rank-purchasing in her text, though her husband had originally bought his official rank in Guizhou. My understanding is that Zhou regarded her husband's promotion as a result of military talents and recommendations.

[403] Mary Wright, *The Last Stand of ChineseCconservatism : the T`ung-chih restoration, 1862-1874*, 96-99.

with especially heavy loss of scholars and civil officials like Yan Jin. Within this context, I read Zhou's blended image of Yue Fei in *Jing zhong zhuan* not merely as nostalgic, but as an active call for talent and domestic order in her time. By converting Yue Fei's account from a preaching of karma in *Shuoyue* into a celebration of heroism and virtue, Zhou aims to bring about "public justice" and to restore the elite's traditional role of cultural leadership.

Talented Women Writers: The Neglected Group

Concepts such as heroism, morality, and emotion continued to be given new meanings. After *Jing zhong zhuan* was completed, Zhou invited her family members to endorse the *tanci* by composing response poems. As mentioned in chapter V, the poetry compilation was published along with the *tanci* fiction by Shanghai Commercial Press (see Appendix C).When Zhou Yingfang and her family responded to the fin-de-siècle anxiety by writing *daogu* 悼古 mourning the past lyrics, one of them had a fresh voice. Yan Yeqiu 嚴也秋,[404] a cousin from the Yan family, in her response lays out a connection between the past and the present.

> 英雄功業至今存 [Yue Fei's] outstanding contributions have lasted untill today.
> 讀史何須作憤論 We do not need to make comments with rage when reading history.
> 獨振臣綱千古事 It is a continuing requirement to rectify the principles for officials.
> 要多后起繼忠魂 This is calling on more successors to inherit his loyal spirit.

Within the family context, the talented woman Yan Yeqiu even challenges Zhou Yingfang and explicitly demands that history serve reality. The circulation of *Jing zhong zhuan* and its commentaries provides a glimpse into the issue of intellectual

[404] A cousin of Zhou Yingfang's husband Yan Jin. Zhou and her family lived with Yan Yeqiu in Haining for a short period after they returned from Guizhou.

women and their patriotic anxiety during the late Qing. Reading and writing the Yue Fei story in *Jing zhong zhuan* helped raise historical and political awareness among women.

The Qing defeat in the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) brought complex traumatic and humiliating results to the Chinese people. Zhou Yingfang did not live to see the profound impact of the defeat on the last few years of late Imperial China. She died in 1895, the year she completed her *tanci* fiction *Jing zhong zhuan*. She did not live to be among those who were swept up by a hegemonic "nationalist discourse" and did not witness the later male intellectual-oriented discourse blaming women as the source for China's weakness. Before being published and circulated freely only decades later, the voices of Zhou Yingfang and other talented women were still confined within their inner chambers and could not reach a wide range of audiences. This provided an opportunity for contemporary male intellectuals to construct a misleading narrative about talented women. Soon after Zhou's death, the "traditional" talented women of her generation became a symbol of an outdated and stigmatized China. Late Qing male reformers, as well as May Fourth male intellectuals alike, portrayed Chinese women as an unproductive and disgraceful group symbolizing China's backwardness.

In 1897, two years after Zhou Yingfang's death, Liang Qichao published his reformist essay "Lun nüxue" 論女學 (On Women's Education) to discuss the value of women's education. Unlike the sympathetic male literati such as Yuan Mei or Chen Wenshu 陳文述 (1771--1843), late Qing reformists did not position themselves to further nurture female talents but were rharsh in their judgments regarding talented women. Liang described elite women as knowing only how to tease the wind and fondle the moon (*pifeng moyue* 批風抹月), pluck flowers and caress the grass

(*nianhua nongcao* 拈花弄草), and then compose some lyric *ci*- or *shi*-style poems to mourn the spring and lament parting (*shangchun xibie* 傷春惜別).[405] By completely rejecting the value and contributions of traditional talented women, Liang and his fellow male reformers shaped a new desirable womanhood within a larger nationalist discourse. In the name of modern nationalism, they deliberately ignored talented women's literary skills, as being a contribution far from practical education, on the grounds of both genre and gender.[406] Within the notion calling for radical and violent revolutionary action, only Qiu Jin (1875-1907) is remembered, two other late nineteenth-century talented women, Wu Zhiying 吳文英 (1868-1934) and Lü Bicheng 呂璧城 (1883-1943), are either condemned as ignorant or completely forgotten.

As Hu Ying argues, the denial of talented women served the political agenda in late Qing when intellectuals hoped to separate China's past from the present and to create a modern (masculine) nation by disavowing women's achievements in classical learning and the power of their writings.[407] But the existence of talented women in the late imperial China indeed paved the way for the rise of women's education in the modern period. By restoring Zhou Yingfang to a position that reflects the contemporary status of gentry women, we will have a deeper understanding of the lives of this group of women, who challenge the late Qing and May Fourth discourses about Chinese women being merely a silent and oppressed group with bound feet.

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[405] See Liang Qichao, "Lun nüxue"論女學 (On Women's Education), *Shiwu bao* 23 (12 April 1897): 1a-2a.

[406] Zurndorfer illustrates an example of how Liang Qichao dismissed the Qing woman scholar Wang Zhaoyuan 王照圓 in the essay "Wang Zhaoyuan (1763-1851) and the Erasure of Talented Women by Liang Qichao," in Nanxiu Qian, Grace S. Fong, and Richard J. Smith, ed., *Different Worlds of Discourse: Transformations of Gender and Genre in Late Qing and Early Republican China* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 29-56.

[407] Hu Ying, "Naming the First New Woman," in Rebecca E. Karl, and Peter Gue Zarrow, ed., *Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period: Political and cultural change in late Qing China* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002), 185-86.

Jing zhong zhuan joins the group of women-authored texts that resist the reductive picture of traditional talented women portrayed by late Qing male reformists. The new version of the Yue Fei story foreshadows a sense of anxiety and crisis in the following years: the abortive hundred-day political change in 1898, the Boxer's war in 1900, the fall of Qing in 1911 and beyond. In the larger context of historiography of Chinese women at the turn of the twentieth century, Zhou Yingfang and her *tanci* fiction *Jing zhong zhuan* provide the lens through which to access an alternative interpretation of the interrelated meanings of gender, historiography, tradition, and modernity.

Conclusion

The study of the late nineteenth-century woman writer Zhou Yingfang and her *tanci* fiction *Jing zhong zhuan* suggests an alternative historical writing from a submerged voice of an elite woman. In raising the level of the oral performance and vernacular text of Yue Fei in her *tanci* adaption,[408] Zhou actively placed herself in the intellectual lineage of those in the cultural elite who were patronizing the vernacular arts and she created a new narrative from the female perspective to nurture that legacy. The literary creations of a blended image of Yue Fei and a women's utopia deemphasize the conceptual separation of the inner quarters and public space. I argue that by choosing the historic and heroic topic of Yue Fei, Zhou Yingfang emerged into public space and repositioned herself in the literary hierarchy.

In addition, I read Zhou's rewriting of the patriotic story as a conscious engagement in the state-centered historiographical tradition, but from a woman's perspective. Her admiration for the military hero Yue Fei was more than romantic nostalgia. By using the unique genre of the *tanci* narrative, she hoped to appeal to a

[408] See chapters II, III and IV of this dissertation.

wider readership, especially women, to raise their interests in history and to help them face the political realities in a time of social chaos. She allied herself with orthodox historical narrations, but challenged the dominant discourse by inserting details of domestic subject matter.

The genre that she chose to use, the seemingly traditional and marginal *tanci*, appropriated the emerging "new" and "modern." Different from the independent "new woman" two decades later who truly stepped into the national public arena, as a talented woman from the gentry class in late nineteenth-century China, Zhou Yingfang might not have been politically active, but was intellectually engaged, even in a rhetorical form, in state affairs from a woman's perspective. Her *tanci* narrative *Jing zhong zhuan* also predicted a new female subjectivity that began to emerge in the following decade as more women authors articulated a variety of themes in Chinese literature. We hear her voice in the historical rewritings at the dawn of an unfolding modern China.

APPENDIX A

LIST OF MAIN CHARACTERS IN *JING ZHONG ZHUAN*

Yue Fei: commander-in-chief of the Southern Song, marries Li Xiao'e.

Lady Li: wife of Yue Fei, daughter of Magistrate Li.

Lady Yao: mother of Yue Fei, marries Yue He from Tangyin, Henan Province.

Yue Yun: eldest son of Yue Fei, marries the daughter of the Gong family from Shandong Province.

Lady Gong: wife of Yue Yun

Yue Lei: second son of Yue Fei, marries Princess Zhao from the royal family.

Yue Wen: daughter of Yue Fei, commits suicide after her mission to rescue her father and brother fails.

Yue Lin: third son of Yue Fei, marries Princess Li from the Yunnan Miao tribe.

Yue Zheng: fourth son of Yue Fei, marries Lady Zhang from a literati family in Hangzhou.

Yue Ting: fifth son of Yue Fei, lives with his grandfather Magistrate Li.

APPENDIX B

JING ZHONG ZHUAN PLOT SUMMARY

Chapter 1: Historical background of Southern Song. In Tangyin County, He'nan Province, Lady Yao dreams of a hawk hovering over the roof and gives birth to Yue Fei the next day. When Yue Fei is three, he drags his mother into a huge flower pot. As soon as they sit down, a huge flood washes them away to Neihuang, HuBei Province. Landlord Wang Ming and his wife rescue them and invite them to stay with the family. Lady Yao has a virtuous influence on Wang's wife who used to be jealous, and later they become sworn sisters.

Chapter 2: Wang's wife allows her husband to take a concubine. The concubine gives birth to a son named Wang Gui. When Master Zhou Tong arrives in the town, he receives Wang Gui as well as two other wealthy children, Zhang Xian and Tang Huai, as his disciples, teaching them both literary and martial arts. One day when Master Zhou visits a friend, the three naughty children ask Yue Fei to help with their homework. Master Zhou finds out about the trick but is amazed by Yue's talents.

Chapter 3: Master Zhou visits Yue Fei and his mother and takes Yue Fei on as both his student and adopted son. When Yue Fei is thirteen, a snake monster presents him with a silver spear for his weapon.

Chapter 4: Yue Fei wins the first prize in the preliminary military examination in Huang County. Magistrate Li Chun, an old friend of Master Zhou, is impressed with Yue and marries his daughter Li Xiao'e to him. After a grand wedding, Yue becomes an uxorilocal son-in-law in Li's family.

Chapter 5: Yue's wife Lady Li also wins her mother-in-law's favor. The couple discusses the possibility of inviting both parents to live with them. But Master Zhou falls ill and Yue Fei serves him like a real son. When Master Zhou dies, Yue practices the *rumu* ritual for him. One day Yue and his friend meet Niu Gao, who is on his way to look for Master Zhou. Knowing that Yue is the master's adopted son and admiring his personality, Niu Gao repents making his living as a bandit and

follows Yue and his friends. Niu Gao's mother is also invited to stay with the Yue family.

Chapter 6: Yue Fei and his sworn brothers go to Xiangzhou city to take the examination, where he beats a corrupt official Hong Xian on the martial field and also wins the literary test. The Imperial Examiner Liu is so amazed by Yue's talents that he orders the local official Xu Ren to rebuild a house for the Yue family in Tangyin. His sworn brothers' families decide to relocate together with the Yues. On their way Hong Xian organizes a group of bandits to assassinate them, Yue and his sworn brothers successfully protect their families.

Chapter 7: Yue Fei and his sworn brothers bid farewell to their families and participate in the imperial examination at the capital Bianjing, where Yue Fei demonstrates knowledge about martial arts weapons to Master Zhou's friend and receives the Dragon Spring sword as a gift. General Zong Ze also visits Yue Fei and is impressed by his credentials.

Chapter 8: Niu Gao gets involved in a conflict with two knight warriors Yang Zaixing and Luo Yanqing. Yue Fei makes peace between them. During the competition for the imperial military degree, Yue kills the young Prince of Liang. Treacherous officials Zhang Bangchang, Wang Duo and Zhang Jun take this opportunity to remove Yue from the winner's list.

Chapter 9: Wang Gui suddenly falls ill on their way home. Yue and other brothers take good care of him. A warrior named Wang Shan feels disillusioned about the emperor by the news that Yue Fei has been driven away from the capital. Wang Shan organizes a rebel army and captures General Zong Ze. Yue and his sworn brothers rescue Zong Ze and kill Wang Shan. Later another hero Shi Quan joins their brotherhood.

Chapter 10: Jurchen troops invade the Song. The Jurchen Prince Wushu takes the border city of Lu'an. General Lu Deng and his family commit suicide to show their loyalty to the Song, but Prince Wushu adopts Lu's son Wenlong to carry on the Lu family lineage.

Chapter 11: The Song General Han Shizhong and his wife Madam Liang Hongyu lead their army to fight the Jurchens, but due to the unexpected explosion of the cannons, Madam Liang loses the Two Wolves Pass. When the Jurchen troops arrive in the city of Hejian, General Zhang Shuye surrenders to protect his people.

Chapter 12: Yue Fei is sick in bed when General Zong Ze asks for his help to fight against the Jurchens. Zong Ze and Li Gang lose the battles and are removed from their posts. Emperor Qinzong is weak in character and indulges the treacherous officials. Zhang Bangchang sends Qin Hui to make peace with the Jurchens by providing treasure and women. But Wushu wants Emperor Qinzong's son Prince Kang as a hostage.

Chapter 13: Yue Fei peacefully stays at home. Zhang Bangchang traps Emperor Qinzong and his father, the retired Emperor Huizong, and gives the two emperors to the Jurchens. The loyal minister Li Ruoshui loses his life in rebuking the Jurchen king.

Chapter 14: Prince Kang escapes from the Jurchen encampment following a divine bird. He also crosses the Jia River riding on an earthen horse and arrives safely in Song. At the same time, Yue Fei lives a peaceful life with his family and friends in Tangyin. He slowly recovers from his previous sickness and has his first son, Yue Yun.

Chapter 15: Prince Kang ascends the throne in Jingling and becomes Emperor Gaozong. Meanwhile, Yue Yun is five. The couple thinks about inviting Magistrate Li to live with them or helping him adopt a son to take care of him in his retired life.

Chapter 16: Yue Fei rejects Wang Zuo's persuasion to serve Yang Yao, a bandit leader in the Dongting Lake who entitled himself the Great King of Pervasive Saintliness. Learning what has happened, Lady Yao tattoos Yue's back with characters of *jingzhong baoguo* (serving the country with dedication and loyalty), in order to make him remember his duty. Later Yue Fei is called by Emperor Gaozong to serve the new court and fight the Jurchens. Yue leaves his family with enormous appreciation for his mother and his wife.

Chapter 17: Yue Fei is appointed as a military general in charge of troops at the border. He works with another general, Zhang Suo, who admires Yue Fei's talents. Zhang Suo also makes Yue Fei the nominal father of his son, Zhang Xian.

Chapter 18: With the help of his sworn brothers, Yue Fei wins his first victory against bandit Sun Hao's army in Gusu. Tang Huai leaves to go to his parent's funeral, and Shi Quan gets married in his hometown. Yue Fei feels extremely lonely and homesick, but he is soon appointed to be the First Officer fighting the Jurchens. The Yue army defeated Jurchen general Nianhan's soldiers.

Chapter 19: The Song officer Liu Yu wants to claim Yue's achievements but his trick is detected by Zhang Suo. To avenge himself, Liu surrenders to the Jurchens.

Chapter 20: In order to win the favor of Emperor Gaozong, the treacherous Prime Minister Zhang Bangchang presents his servant maid Lotus to the emperor. He also suggests that the emperor recall Yue Fei back to the capital from the border. Yue Fei bids farewell to Zhang Suo and leaves him a poem. On his way to the capital, he encounters Magistrate Li's relative and asks him to keep an eye out for an adopted son for the magistrate. Arriving in the capital, Yue Fei asks for a leave to visit his family that he has not seen for three years. Deeply moved by Yue's filial heart, Emperor Gaozong approves his request and orders Yue Fei to bring the Empress Dowager from the old capital Bianjing to Jingling.

Chapter 21: That winter Yue Fei leads the soldiers to drive the Jurchens away from Bianjing and accompany the Empress Dowager to Jingling to reunite with her son Emperor Gaozong. As a reward, she orders Yue Fei to immediately visit his family in Tangyin until the following spring. When Yue Fei goes back to Jingling, he persuades Niu Gao again to join the Song imperial army. During the battle at the Aihua Mountain, Wushu is almost captured by Yue's official Ruan Liang.

Chapter 22: The Jurchen Prince Wushu escapes with Heaven's help. Later the emperor promotes Yue Fei as commander-in-chief in charge of five provinces and orders him to suppress the pirates at Dongting Lake. Drinking too much before the battle, Brigadier Niu Gao is captured on the lake by the pirate leader.

Chapter 23: Yue Fei acts as a spy in Yang's territory. The Geng brothers surrender to Yue Fei. They bring the Yue army strategies to win battles on the water.

Chapter 24: Yue Fei claims to be ill but secretly arranges for the Geng brothers to build special warshipsYue defeats Yang Hu's pirates but takes good care of Yang's family. Yang Hu is persuaded to surrender to the imperial army.

Chapter 25: Yue Fei and his army are sent to suppress the pirates on Boyang Lake. He first recruits the tiger-like warrior Yu Hualong from the pirates, then Yang Hu sacrifices himself to help Yue Fei capture the Hill of Kanglang.

Chapter 26: Niu Gao destroys the attacking Jurchen soldiers when he was drunk. When he visits the family of Jin Jie, the Office-in-Charge at the Pass of Lotus Pond, he happily gets married to Jin's sister-in-law Lady Qi.

Chapter 27: A Shandong hero Meng Bangjie joins Yue's army. Niu Gao asks for more leave to spend time with his newly wedded wife. Zhang Shuye's son Zhang Li saves Yue's Officer Ji Qing several times and joins the Yue army. Zhang Li meets his brother Zhang Yong who is serving the bandits and persuades Yong to surrender to Yue Fei.

Chapter 28: Zhang Suo's son helps Shi Quan defeat the bandit Dong Xian and joins the Yue army. Tang Huai and Meng Bangjie encounter the Fan daughters on their way to duty. The four of them first have a fight while deer hunting then fall in love. Arranged by the Fan family, the two couples happily get married and enjoy their honeymoons.

Chapter 29: Yue Fei twice captures the bandit He Yuanqing and finally persuades him to join the imperial army. The Jurchen Prince Wushu and his troops attack the Song from the north. After so many battles and worried about the invasion, Yue Fei falls ill.

Chapter 30: The Jurchen troops move fast and cross the Yangtze River. The capital of Jingling is threatened. Emperor Gaozong flees before the Jurchens arrive,

but his favorite concubine Lotus is killed by Prince Wushu. Five gods offer protection to the emperor on a dangerous voyage during his escape. Yue Fei saves the emperor from the Jurchen troops at Oxhead Hill.

Chapter 31: On behalf of Yue Fei, Niu Gao delivers the declaration of war to Prince Wushu.

Chapter 32: The treacherous Prime Minister Zhang Bangchang is executed by Wushu. Yue's officer Gao Chong is killed by Jurchen's fire carts.

Chapter 33: While Yue Fei is serving the emperor, his wife gives birth to their third son, Yue Ting. Their first son, Yue Yun, is twelve years old and has demonstrated his talents in both literature and martial arts. Leading a hundred warriors, he defeats the three thousand Jurchen soldiers and saves his family. Later he leaves alone to visit his father leading a battle at Oxhead Hill.

Chapter 34: On his way to Oxhead Hill, Yue Yun helps save the Gong Family Village from an attack by local bandits. He is betrothed to the squire's daughter Lady Gong. Niu Gao meets Yue Yun during a battle to rescue the emperor and brings him back to his father.

Chapter 35: In contravention to military law, Yue Yun breaks the truce boards, but he soon wins victories against the Jurchen troops. He and Han Shizhong's son Han Yanzhi swear brotherhood.

Chapter 36: The Jurchen troops are diminishing, and Yue Fei helps Emperor Gaozong with social restoration. Before the battle against the Jurchens, Madam Liang and her husband General Han Shizhong spend the night drinking and enchanting poems. Then she leads the battle at Golden Hill and defeats Wushu at Yellow Skies Bay.

Chapter 37: Wushu manages to escape with his life by dredging the Old Stork River. Yue Fei and his army return to Jingling after their victories. On his way he arranges for the current Prime Minister Li Gang's relative Li Yun to be his father-in-

law's adopted son. Yue Fei is disappointed with Emperor Gaozong's decision that the capital should move from Jingling to Lin'an and resigns to rejoin with his family in Tangyin. The family celebrates the reunion with grand feasts. Lady Yao and Lady Li are also pleased with Yue Yun's betrothal, even though Yun has acted without their permission.

Chapter 38: Yue Fei grants long leave time to his soldiers and officers and enjoys his family reunion. He is devoted to serving his mother and educating his children. Prince Ning hopes to betroth his daughter to Yue Yun but receives only refusals, because Yun would like to keep his promise to Lady Gong. Yue Fei then sends Tang Huai and Zhang Bangjie to find the Gong family on their way home. Yue Yun's worries about his fiancée get relieved when a letter from Shandong arrives. After the New Year and the Lantern's Festival celebrations, Yue Yun and Lady Gong hold their grand wedding party.

Chapter 39: The Yue family is extremely satisfied with Yun's wife. At his thirtieth birthday celebration, Yue Fei also declines Prince Ning's gift of two maids as his concubines. Instead, he arranges for them to be married to his officers. The two talented maids make friends with Yue Fei's daughter, Yue Wen. Lady Li wants to visit her father but Yue is reluctant to let her go after so many years of separation. Finally, Lady Li decides to go after the summer to her natal family and help with the adoption ceremony.

Chapter 40: Yue Fei misses his wife terribly during her absence. While the general serves his mother carefully, his children are filial and considerate as well. Meanwhile, the Jurchen Prince Wushu sends Qin Hui and his wife back to bewilder the Song emperor.

Chapter 41: Lady Li comes back from her natal family to help her daughter-in-law give birth. The arrival of Yue Fei's first grandson, Yue Pu, brings the family great joy. But Lady Gong worries about her mother who is alone in Shandong. Yun's suggestion to invite her mother to live with them is welcomed in the Yue family because this is a filial action. After Lady Gong's mother arrives, the family is even more cheerful. The following year, Yue Fei has his fifth son, Yue Zhen. Yue Fei's

mother Lady Yao dies. The general falls severely ill. While in a coma he meets an immortal, Chen Chuan, who explains that their filial piety and loyalty will make the Yue family members immortals after they ascend to heaven.

Chapter 42: After experiencing a short reunion with his parents while he was in a coma, Yue Fei practices a full funeral ritual and stays by his mother's tomb for another year. Emperor Gaozong's throne is under the threat of two rebellious generals. Yue Fei has Niu Gao escort the emperor. The emperor commands Yue Fei to serve in the new capital Lin'an. With extreme reluctance, Yue Fei bids farewell to his family, never to return.

Chapter 43: Yue Fei is ordered to suppress bandits in the Nine-Dragon Mountain, at Taihu Lake and Dongting Lake. On the way he also visits his hermit friend, Zhang Wan, and writes poetry.

Chapter 44: The bandit Wang Zuo sets a murderous banquet for Yue Fei but fails in his assassination plan. Another bandit, Yang Qing, surrenders to Yue and offers him a military map. With the help of Han Shizhong, Yue Fei wins great victories.

Chapter 45: By chance, Niu Gao detects Qin Hui's conspiracy to poison Yue Fei and his soldiers. Yue Fei encounters danger while he explores the Hill of Mao but he remains safe.

Chapter 46: The bandit officer Wu Shangzhi listens to his wife and secretly surrenders to Yue Fei. Master Baofang presents Niu Gao with treasures to defeat Yang Yao, the bandit, at the Dongting Lake.

Chapter 47: Brigadier Qi, who was punished by Yue Fei for disobeying the law, takes revenge on the general and shoots him with an arrow. Niu Gao saves the life of the general with a treasure given by Master Bao.

Chapter 48: Yue Fei breaks up Yang Yao's battle array at Five Formations. Wu Shanghai consummates his marriage. When fighting invading Jurchens, Yue's officer Yang Zaixing is killed at the Little Shang River.

Chapter 49: In the capital, Qin Hui manipulates his power and demotes the loyal official Zhang Jiucheng. Zhang is ordered on a suicide mission as the imperial emissary to visit the entrapped Huizong and Qinzong in the Jurchen's territory. Yue's sworn brother, Tang Huai, volunteers to escort Zhang but is killed by the Jurchens. Yue Fei is deeply grieved by the loss of Tang Huai and loses consciousness.

Chapter 50: Yue Fei falls ill after the death of Tang Huai, while the treacherous minister Zhang Jun in Huaixi surrenders to the Jurchens. The capital Lin'an is in great danger now.

Chapter 51: Yue Fei struggles to guard Emperor Gaozong's throne from the Jurchens several times. But the emperor listens only to Qin Hui and begins to feel suspicious of and threatened by Yue Fei's power.

Chapter 52: While Emperor Gaozong and Qin Hui secretly develop a plan to make peace with the Jurchens, Yue Fei and his army are ordered to march towards the border town Zhuxian. Officer Wang Zuo decides to sacrifice his own life to help Yue Fei.

Chapter 53: Wang Zuo cuts off his right arm and becomes a clown around Lu Wenlong, Wushu's adopted son. Wang finds a chance to tell Lu his family story and raises Lu's filial consciousness towards his own parents.

Chapter 54: Using hooked spears, Yue Fei's army breaks the chains of the Jurchen's armored horses. Later Lu Wenlong destroys the Jurchen cannons and returns to Yue Fei's camp.

Chapter 55: Brigadier Qi again tries to assassinate Yue Fei but this time he is killed by Niu Gao. A little hero, Guan Ling, displays his ability by destroying the Jurchen's Golden Dragons Formation.

Chapter 56: Yue Fei and his army recover three important places: Hejian Prefecture, Two Wolves Pass and the sub-prefecture of Lu'an. Wushu almost commits suicide, but a hermit tells him Yue's victory won't last long.

Chapter 57: Emperor Gaozong only wants to make peace and rejects Yue's request to march forward following the victory. Yue Fei is disillusioned and worried about the country. He writes more poems while stationed at the town of Zhuxian, including the most well-known lyrics *To the Tune of the River Runs Red*. Yue Yun is sent back to visit the family and serve his mother. At the same time, Qin Hui and the emperor set a trap for Yue Fei and his family.

Chapter 58: The emperor worries that once Yue Fei brings Huizong and Qinzong back from the Jurchens, he will lose his throne. Thus he gradually removes the general from military power, then issues twelve edicts one after another to recall Yue Fei back to Lin'an. On his way, the general encounters a Zen master who warns him of the danger ahead.

Chapter 59: Under the acquiescence of Emperor Gaozong, Qin Hui puts Yue Fei in prison. Yue Fei's wife Lady Li dreams of the separation with her husband and receives Qin's false imperial edict that Yue's family has been recalled to Lin'an.

Chapter 60: The emperor completely discards the virtues of filial piety and loyalty. Yue Fei, Yue Yun, and Zhang Xian are executed on false charges. Yue Fei's wife Lady Li leads the family on their way to Lin'an. Learning the news that her father and brother have been put into prison, Yue's daughter Wen decides to rescue them with her talents.

Chapter 61: Disguised as men, Yue Wen and her maid attempt to meet the emperor but they do not succeed. Wen commits suicide to fulfill her filial mission. In great sorrow, Lady Li sends a secret letter to Lady Gong and asks her to be prepared. She also suppresses a riot from soldiers who want revenge for the general. Madam Liang and her women warriors come to see Lady Li and offer protection from the imperial guards.

Chapter 62: According her mother-in-law's instruction, Lady Gong has Yue Lei hidden and her own mother and brother sent back to their hometown, and then she compiles an inventory of the family property and waits in peace for the imperial guards.

Chapter 63: Seeing how the emperor treated loyal officials, General Han Shizong resigns from his post. On his way to escape, Yue Lei meets other young heroes. Gaozong makes the treaty with the Jurchens and Wushu leads his troops to enter the central plains of China (*zhongyuan*).

Chapter 64: When the Yue family arrives in Yun'nan, the tribal officer Zhu Zhi has an evil intention towards Lady Gong but is stopped by Prince Cai and his mother. The prince offers protection and aid to the Yue family.

Chapter 65: Yue Fei's third son Lin sets out on a trip to look for his mother and the rest of the family. In a dream, a scholar Hu Di witnesses Qin Hui and his wife receiving punishment in the underworld.

Chapter 66: Yue's sworn brother Shi Quan is executed after failing to assassinate Qin Hui. But he and Yue Fei reunite in heaven. Yun Lin meets his mother in Yun'nan and makes friends with the king of the Miao tribe, Li Shupu, and his nephew, Black Wild Dragon. Wushu is now invading the capital, and Emperor Gaozong feels deep regret.

Chapter 67: Surrounding Lin'an, the leader Black Wild Dragon defeats the Jurchen troops with his Miao soldiers and delivers a letter from Lady Li to Emperor Gaozong. The emperor repents and decides to correct the injustice done to Yue Fei.

Chapter 68: Qin Hui's body is destroyed by the earth. Qin's death terrifies Emperor Gaozong and he dies soon afterwards. The new emperor Xiaozong redresses Yue's case and confers official titles on Yue family members and friends. He also orders a Temple for Yue Fei to be built in Lin'an and pays the imperial respects to the general. Worrying about her father after so much suffering, Lady Li goes to visit the magistrate in Nanyang. Yue Lei is appointed as the Commander-in-Chief of Sweeping

the North. With the help of his friends, Song soon wins great victories against the Jurchens.

Chapter 69: Zhang Jiucheng's brother Jiusi has military talent. After the new emperor ascends the throne he joins the army of Yue Lei. Women in the Zhang family in Lin'an enjoy a great reputation of literary pursuits. Zhang Jiucheng's wife and daughter visit Yue Fei's temple one day. When they come back, Zhang's mother tells them the story of Yue Fei.

Chapter 70: With the help of Little Sister Xiyun, the Song army destroys the Jurchen's magic weapons. Wushu is killed by Niu Gao and Niu Gao himself dies in delight.

Chapter 71: Yue Lei leads the Song army to win the final victory against the Jurchens. Coffins of Huizong and Qinzong are brought back. Zhang Jiucheng returns to the Song.

Chapter 72: Yue Lei receives imperial rewards and returns home. The family reunites in Tangyin, where Lady Li with great joy arranges grand weddings for each of her sons.

Chapter 73: Lady Li and the rest of the family all receive honors and rewards from the emperor. After Lady Li and Lady Gong die, they reunite with their families in heaven, where they are entitled as immortals.

APPENDIX C

ON *JING ZHONG ZHUAN*

Initial Poem

敢將聖績細凝眸	I dare to read closely [Yue Fei's] great achievements
憶到歸神痛莫籌	And feel sorrow-stricken when I recall his death.
汗馬功傾終古恨	His war exploits only led to eternal regrets.
奇忠豈獨享千秋	His legendary loyalty will be honored for endless ages.
天地英雄萎草萊	The hero of the world was buried in the moor.
瓊枝玉樹盡良材	He exhausted his jade-like talents and virtues.
岳候純孝張候義	Lord Yue represents the utmost filial piety, and Lord Zhang supreme righteousness.
慘日愁雲一例哀	The grey sun and the gloomy clouds are lamenting.
孝娥仙去井猶存	Xiao'e ascended to heaven, but the well [into which Yue Wen jumped] still exists.
留向人間作勝論	They embodied what could be called excellence in the mundane world.
冰雪襟懷光日月	They are as noble as the crystal ice and as glamorous as the sun and the moon.
那容艷筆悼芳魂	How can a gaudy pen appropriately write the epitaphs?
英名千古並關王	[Yue Fei's] illustrious reputation is known as that of Guan Yu in history.
稚子猶知爇瓣香	Even children know they should burn incense and pay respects to him.
二帝不回傷社稷	The empire was wounded when the two emperors could not return.
權奸底事助豺狼	For what reason would the court officials, who were powerful and treacherous, help the wolfish?

(Quantang, Zhou Yingfang, Huifeng)

Response 1

幾回展卷豁雙眸	So many times the scrolls have opened my eyes.
緯武經文第一籌	[Yue Fei] ranked first with his literary talents and martial skills.
私淑聖門高弟子	He was a brilliant student of Confucius,
胸中左氏有春秋	Who was fond of history and knew *Zuoshi Chunqiu* by heart.[409]
荒田莫治任蕪萊	Uncultivated fields became wilderness.
忍把良材作棄材	Fine materials were abandoned and wasted.
可惜蒼生望時雨	Although the common people were expecting the hero who was like a timely rain,

[409] Referring to *Zuo zhuan* 左傳, or *Chunqiu Zuozhuan* 春秋左傳, attributed to Zuo Qiuming 左丘明(fl. fifth century BC), one of the earliest historical narratives in China. *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan* is a commentary on the Confucian classic *Spring and Autumn Annals* 春秋.

攀轅難換不勝哀　It is sorrowful that they pulled his cart and still could not make him stay.
英雄勳業至今存　His outstanding contributions have lasted untill today.
讀史何須作憤論　We do not need to make comments full of rage when reading history.
獨振臣綱千古事　It is a continuing requirement to discipline officials.
要多后起繼忠魂　This is calling on more successors to inherit the loyal spirit [of Yue Fei].
志在蒙塵返二王　His goal was to bring back two emperors who were carried into the dust.
豈圖千載姓名香　He did not pursue his own reputation in history.
天心似合東窗計　[But] Heaven seems to prefer the scheme made by the east window.
縛虎功成實縱狼　Tying up the tiger leads to letting loose the wolves.
(Tongxi, Yan Dian, Yeqiu)

Response 2

后人悼古淚盈眸　The later generations shed tears when lamenting the history.
帷幄空教費運籌　The plans and tactics turned out to be fruitless.
未遂丹心安宋室　Although [Yue Fei] did not fulfill his loyal dream to secure the Song imperial court,
獨懷壯志到千秋　His aspirations have been soaring for thousands of years.
英靈一自返蓬萊　Since his heroic spirit returned to the *Penglai* immortal land,
重振江山竟乏材　No one after him could revive the rivers and mountains of the empire.
想見黃龍余戰壘　I can imagine the ruins of the old battlefield at Huanglong.
荒煙蔓草不勝哀　It is a deserted land and infested with weeds.
痛恨東窗詭計存　Even I have a deep hatred for the scheme made by the east window,
蒙塵二帝尚何論　Let alone the two emperors carried into the dust.
可憐奉詔班師后　It is sorrowful that after he ordered the retreat to obey the imperial decrees,
惟許軍門待返魂　The soldiers could only wait for the return of his soul.
神歸心尚向君王　With his spirit returning to heaven, his heart was still leaning towards the emperor.
枝盡朝南樹亦香　Trees [on his tomb] all have their branches facing the south.
只見西泠遺冢在　Now we only witness the grave by the West Lake.
更何人再縛豺狼　Who can help capture the wolves?
(Haining, Ma Zheng, Chanxi)

Response 3

書中英氣射雙眸	The heroic spirits from the book brightened my eyes.
試較群忠勝幾籌	[Yue Fei] is even superior to other loyal subjects.
馬策刀環勞半世	He spent half of his life wearing swords on horseback.
那知空望太平秋	Who will know that his wish to make peace only became disillusionment?
十載奇功付草萊	The decade of meritorious service was paid back as a grave in the wasteland.
緣何生此棟梁材	Why was such a courteous person born to the world?
借他一管淩雲筆	I am borrowing a pen of talents,
表出精忠萬古哀	To express my eternal sorrow for his dedication and loyalty.
武穆英名自古存	Yue Fei's grand reputation has been circulated since the ancient times.
後人尚作不平論	Later readers are still feeling frustrated about the injustice.
雄心未了身先歿	The hero died before he fulfilled his ambition.
二帝空歸異域魂	The souls of the two emperors wandered in the alien's territory.
墓畔枝還向帝王	Branches of the trees by his tomb are still leaning towards the throne.
更思五桂亦生香	His family embraced the reputation of being virtuous and admirable.
一輪空照沙場月	The moon is illuminating the deserted battlefield.
從此無人逐虎狼	Thereafter, no one could drive away tigers and wolves.

(Tongxiang,Yan Wenzao, Fuxiang)

Final Response

乾坤大節耀人眸	His matters of honor in the universe illuminated our eyes.
忠孝兼全最上籌	He is superior in both loyalty and filial piety.
辛苦偏安全社稷	He exhausted himself to guard the empire.
論功更不止千秋	His achievement will be everlasting in history.
天星何事謫蓬萊	For what reason was the heavenly star dismissed into *Penglai*?
儒雅多文屈將材	With his scholarly charm and literary talents outweighing his military post,
未許黃龍謀痛飲	He was not given a chance to toast the final victory in Huanglong.
功成中廢有余哀	The regret lasted untill today that his contribution was accomplished half way.
帷幄英奇聖績存	Sites that testify to his talents still exist today.
神機妙算更無論	His genius strategies are unparalleled.
補天莫補丹心恨	The sky can be mended, but not the regret from his loyal heart.
望斷胡塵二帝魂	He desperately longed for the two emperors in the barbarian dust.
當年父老挽賢王	On that day, when the people asked the lord to stay,
爭祝長春萬柱香	They burnt incense for him and wished him good health.

留得蒼生遺像在　His portrait was handed down generation to generation.
英姿猶望攝豺狼　His heroic posture awes the tigers and wolves.
(Zhou Yingfang)

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