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The Politics of Fashion:
Perceptions of Power in Female
Clothing and Ornamentation
as Reflected in the
Sixteenth-century Chinese Novel
Jin Ping Mei 金瓶梅

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PhD Thesis

1999



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ABSTRACT

**The Politics of Fashion:
Perceptions of Power in Female Dress and Ornamentation
as Reflected in the Sixteenth-Century Chinese Novel
Jin Ping Mei 金瓶梅**

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This thesis examines issues of female power and influence in sixteenth-century China focusing on how women and their roles were perceived in the changing social environment of the mid-late Ming dynasty. Using aspects of a New Historicist approach, information from contemporary literary and historical sources are analysed alongside each other. With its emphasis on the lives of women and preoccupation with the description of material objects, the late Ming novel *Jin Ping Mei* forms an important element in the thesis. China in the sixteenth century saw expanding urbanisation, the emergence of a new wealthy merchant class, increasing visibility of women and a questioning of traditional morality. Fashion consciousness, as one of the most conspicuous aspects of the new material culture, is a possible indicator of these trends. Traditional Western theories contend that fashion began in the particular context of Renaissance Europe. However, this study argues that a similar fashion awareness existed in China too, and was manifested in a competitive striving for social status, in this case specifically among women. In contrast to previous studies which downplayed the impact women had on defining traditional Chinese culture, this thesis demonstrates how women and their sartorial choices began to redefine the boundaries of material culture, influencing literati discourse which, in turn, re-influenced female behaviour.

DECLARATION

I confirm that no part of the material offered has previously been submitted by me for a degree in this or any other university.

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	i
Romanisation/Translation/Bibliographic References	ii
Abbreviations	iii
Ming Dynasty Reign Periods	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
<i>Approaches to Social History and Women's History</i>	6
<i>Dress, Fashion and Power</i>	10
<i>Theoretical Approaches</i>	12
<i>Power and Power Symbolism</i>	15
<i>Did China have a Fashion System?</i>	18
<i>Sources</i>	22
<i>Material Sources</i>	22
<i>Textual Sources</i>	23
<i>Literature as Historical Material</i>	25
<i>The Novel Jin Ping Mei</i>	31
a. Structure and Themes	32
b. Authorship and Dating	39
c. Editions	47
d. Discourse on the Novel	48
ONE: CHINA IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY	52
<i>Economic Expansion</i>	53
<i>Developments in the Chinese Textile Industry</i>	58
<i>Changing Patterns of Culture</i>	66
<i>Merchant, Scholar, Official</i>	74
<i>Summary</i>	80
TWO: FEMALE SPHERES OF INFLUENCE	81
<i>Images of Women in the Classics and Legal Thought</i>	82
<i>Female Authority in the Home</i>	87
<i>Female Hierarchies</i>	87
<i>Motherhood</i>	92
<i>Rivalries and Jealousy</i>	97
<i>Female Influence in the Wider World</i>	100
<i>Women's Work</i>	100
<i>Education and Cultural Fields</i>	106
<i>Alternatives to Traditional Marriage</i>	112
<i>Increasing Visibility of Women</i>	116
<i>Summary</i>	119
THREE: IMAGES OF RANK AND OFFICIAL STATUS	122
<i>Badges of Rank and the Tongxiu Gown</i>	127
<i>Ornamented Belts</i>	134
<i>The Phoenix Head-dress and Xiapei</i>	142

<i>Veneration of Ancestral Status</i>	155
<i>Palace Goods and Exotic Commodities</i>	162
<i>Emulation of the Lower Classes</i>	170
<i>Summary</i>	172
FOUR: THE POWER OF MOURNING RITUAL	175
<i>Social Hierarchies and Ritual</i>	176
<i>Ming Changes in Mourning Practice</i>	180
<i>The Power of Display and Unity</i>	192
<i>Transition and the Assertion of Status</i>	196
<i>Morality</i>	199
<i>Fidelity</i>	204
<i>Summary</i>	216
FIVE: GIFT-GIVING AND POWER RELATIONS	219
<i>Female Property in Traditional China</i>	222
<i>Intimate Friendship and Social Connections</i>	229
<i>Demonstration of Status</i>	240
<i>Bribery</i>	246
<i>Summary</i>	260
SIX: ADORNMENT AND SEXUALITY	262
<i>Female Sexual Power in China</i>	265
<i>Erotic Ideals</i>	269
<i>Clothing</i>	269
<i>Bound Feet</i>	280
<i>Fashionable Norms</i>	288
<i>The Relationship between Sex and Money</i>	293
<i>Male-Female Gifts</i>	293
<i>Prostitutes</i>	301
<i>Lack of Adornment</i>	309
<i>Rejection of Sexuality</i>	310
<i>Usurpation of Male Roles</i>	314
<i>Summary</i>	317
CONCLUSIONS	319
LIST OF WORKS CITED	326
<i>Primary Sources</i>	326
<i>Secondary Sources</i>	335
APPENDICES	370
<i>Badges of Rank</i>	370
<i>Belt Decoration</i>	371
<i>Xiapei Decoration</i>	372

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ROMANISATION

With the exception of certain published source titles and names of authors, the spelling of Chinese words follows the *pinyin* system of romanisation.

TRANSLATION

Unless cited from a non-Chinese language source, all translations are the work of the author.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

For Chinese primary sources, a full-stop separates a *juan* 卷 (section) or *hui* 回 (chapter) number and a page number. For other sources, a full-stop separates a volume number and a page number.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>CLEAR</i>	<i>Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles and Reviews</i>
<i>DMB</i>	<i>Dictionary of Ming Biography</i>
<i>DMHD</i>	<i>Da Ming huidian</i>
<i>DYQS</i>	<i>Gao Hetang piping diyi qishu</i>
<i>ECCP</i>	<i>Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period</i>
<i>HJAS</i>	<i>Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies</i>
<i>JALRMB</i>	<i>Jie'an laoren manbi</i>
<i>JPMCH</i>	<i>Jin Ping Mei cihua</i>
<i>KZZY</i>	<i>Kezuo zhuiyu</i>
<i>PPJPM</i>	<i>Xinke xiuxiang piping Jin Ping Mei</i>
<i>SCMY</i>	<i>Songchuang mengyu</i>
<i>TAMY</i>	<i>Tao'an mengyi</i>
<i>TWXP</i>	<i>Taowu xianping</i>
<i>TXJG</i>	<i>Tianxia junguo libing shu</i>
<i>WLYHB</i>	<i>Wanli yehuo bian</i>
<i>WZZ</i>	<i>Wuzazu</i>
<i>XYCS</i>	<i>Xiangyan congshu</i>

MING DYNASTY REIGN PERIODS

<u>Dynastic title</u>		<u>Reign title</u>		<u>Reign period</u>
Taizu	太祖	Hongwu	洪武	1368-1398
Huidi	惠帝	Jianwen	建文	1399-1402
Chengzu	成祖	Yongle	永樂	1403-1424
Renzong	仁宗	Hongxi	洪熙	1425
Xuanzong	宣宗	Xuande	宣德	1426-1435
Yingzong	英宗	Zhengtong	正統	1436-1449
Daizong/Jingdi	代宗/景帝	Jingtai	景泰	1450-1456
Yingzong (resumed government)	英宗	Tianshun	天順	1457-1464
Xianzong	憲宗	Chenghua	成化	1465-1487
Xiaozong	孝宗	Hongzhi	弘治	1488-1505
Wuzong	武宗	Zhengde	正德	1506-1521
Shizong	世宗	Jiajing	嘉靖	1522-1566
Muzong	穆宗	Longqing	隆慶	1567-1572
Shenzong	神宗	Wanli	萬曆	1573-1620
Guangzong	光宗	Taichang	泰昌	1620
Xizong	熹宗	Tianqi	天啓	1621-1627
Huaizong/ Zhuangliedi	懷宗/莊烈帝	Chongzhen	崇禎	1628-1644

INTRODUCTION

The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries saw the beginnings of phenomena which were to grow and spread across the whole of the Chinese empire, the effects of which were to rock the very foundations of the Ming 明 dynasty (1368-1644). In the small town of Qinghe 清河, Shandong 山東, the female protagonists of the late sixteenth-century novel *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 emerge from their merchant household to enjoy an evening's entertainment:

Wu Yueniang and the others were invited to go up to the second floor to watch the display of lanterns and enjoy themselves. Hanging blinds of speckled bamboo were suspended from the eaves, as were brightly coloured lanterns. Wu Yueniang was wearing a wide-sleeved robe of figured scarlet material, an attractive green satin skirt and a sable cloak. Li Jiao'er, Meng Yulou and Pan Jinlian all wore white damask robes and blue satin skirts, over which Li Jiao'er also wore a brocaded aloewood-coloured sleeveless overdress, Meng Yulou a brocaded green sleeveless overdress. On their heads pearls and kingfisher feathers rose in piles, phoenix hairpins were half askew, while, from just behind the hair over their temples, there dangled numerous pendant earrings in the shape of miniature lanterns of every description. Leaning out of the windows of the second-floor room, they looked down on the Lantern Market where crowds of people had congregated. It was tremendously lively.¹

The appearance of these exquisitely made-up women causes quite a stir in the street below as groups of young men vie to take a closer look at these beauties from the inner chambers [See Illustration 1]. From the records of contemporary observer Zhang Dai 張岱 (1597-ca. 1684)² it appears as though this was a typical scene of the time. He describes how women from the town of Shaoxing 紹興, Zhejiang 浙江, would walk to the liveliest spots of the town to view the lanterns, watched by all those they passed by in the street.³

¹ *Jin Ping Mei cihua* 金瓶梅詞話, by Lanling Xiaoxiaosheng 蘭陵笑笑生, repr. 6 vols., Hong Kong: Taiping, 1986, 15.2a (hereafter abbreviated to *JPMCH*).

² A.W. Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*, Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1943, 53-54 (hereafter abbreviated to *ECCP*).

³ "Shaoxing dengjing 紹興燈景," in *Tao'an mengyi* 陶庵夢憶, by Zhang Dai 張岱, repr. in *Tao'an mengyi, Xihu mengxun* 陶庵夢憶, 西湖夢尋, Shanghai: Guji, 1982, 6.54.

Illustration 1: Woodcut from Chapter 15 of the *Jin Ping Mei*



Historian Gu Qiyuan 顧起元 (1565-1628)⁴ noted that, from the Zhengde 正德 period (1506-1521), the local customs of his native Nanjing 南京 were becoming more extravagant by the day. Stranger still, this was particularly the case with women.⁵ He cites the assertion of a certain Mr Zhang 張 that before this time

⁴ L. Carrington Goodrich and Chao-ying Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1976, 734-36 (hereafter abbreviated to *DMB*).

⁵ "Minli 民利," in *Kezuo zhuiyu* 客座贅語, by Gu Qiyuan 顧起元, repr. in *Gengsibian*, *Kezuo zhuiyu* 庚巳編, 客座贅語, Beijing: Zhonghua, 1987, 2.67 (hereafter abbreviated to *KZZY*).

the customs of the women of Nanjing were quite prim and proper:

As a rule, women did not show their faces outside of the inner quarters, they devoted themselves to culinary affairs and spent their time spinning and weaving. Few bothered themselves with pearls, kingfisher feathers, silks and gauzes, and those ornamented prostitutes, matchmaking old women, those who go in and out acting no differently from men, would not have counted for one or two in every hundred.⁶

By the Jiajing 嘉靖 (1522-1566) and Wanli 萬曆 (1567-1620) periods, however, according to the much aggrieved scholars who commented on the customs of the time, the situation had spiralled out of control. Scholar-official Lü Kun 呂坤 (1536-1618)⁷ blamed the new urban culture in which such things as erotic novels and sexual handbooks were available, for the degeneration of female morals.⁸ He comments:

Those born in villages are accustomed to hearing vulgar expressions. Those living in wealthy homes have licentious, arrogant and extravagant natures. Their heads are covered with gold and pearls, their bodies are clothed from head to toe in fine silk gauzes. Although clever enough to study, they are flippant and practised in artful speech. They neither speak good words nor perform good deeds.⁹

Even women in poor villages were reported to prefer gathering to discuss ornaments and clothing instead of attending to their household duties.¹⁰

⁶ "Zheng Jia yiqian chunhou 正嘉以前醇厚," in KZZY, 1.25-6.

⁷ DMB, 1006-1010.

⁸ For pornography in the Ming see R.H. Van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society from ca. 1500 B.C. till 1644 A.D.*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1961; *idem*, *Erotic Colour Prints of the Ming Period: With an Essay on Chinese Sex Life from the Han to the Ch'ing Dynasty, B.C. 206-A.D. 1644*, Tokyo: Privately published, 1951; Liu Dalin 劉達臨, *Zhongguo gudai xing wenhua* 中國古代性文化, Yinchuan: Ningxia, 1993, 792-834. For *chunhua* 春畫 "spring pictures," see *Bizhouzhai yutan jielu* 敝帚齋餘談節錄, by Shen Defu 沈德符, edn. *Xiangyan congshu* 香艷叢書 (hereafter abbreviated to XYCS), repr. 5 vols., Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 1994, 1.1b-2a; "Chunhua 春畫," in *Wanli yehuo bian* 萬曆野獲編 (1610), by Shen Defu 沈德符, repr. 5 vols., Taipei: Weiwen, 1976, 26.1741-1742 (hereafter abbreviated to WLYHB); Yang Xin 楊新, "Mingdai nühuajia yu chungonghua zhouti 明代女畫家與春宮畫譚議," *Gugong bowuguan yuankan* 故宮博物館院刊 1995.3, 4.

⁹ *Guifan* 閨範 (1590), by Lü Kun 呂坤, repr. in *Zhongguo gudai banhua congkan erbian* 中國古代版畫叢刊二編 5, Shanghai: Guji, 1994, pref.1a-b.

¹⁰ *Shizheng lu* 實政錄 (1598), by Lü Kun 呂坤, edn. *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書, repr. Shanghai: Guji, 1995, 2.14a. Late Ming scholar-officials such as Lü Kun felt it necessary to engage in public service to remedy such perceived problems in society. See Joanna F. Handlin, *Action in Late Ming Thought: The Reorientation of Lü Kun and Other Scholar-Officials*, Berkeley and London: University of California, 1983.

The number of reports of women venturing outside the home, particularly due to the increase in the popularity of women visiting temples to worship female goddesses, is reflected in the concern of Confucian moralists.¹¹ These places were often depicted in literature as preferred sites for the consummation of adulterous affairs,¹² or where women might be seduced by heterodox societies such as the White Lotus Sect (白蓮教 *Bailian jiao*).¹³ By the seventeenth century, magistrate Huang Liuhong 黃六鴻 (b.ca.1633) was so concerned that he advocated women should be banned from these places to prevent such occurrences.¹⁴

The Neo-Confucian world appeared to be in turmoil. Contemporary reports and anecdotes suggest that women were emerging from sequestration and neglecting household duties, that they were becoming more and more preoccupied with extravagances and competition, particularly in the realms of clothing and ornamentation.¹⁵ The emphasis placed on the disintegration of female clothing systems by contemporary observers suggests the importance attached to this area of material culture. An investigation into perceptions of the role female sartorial habits

¹¹ Yu Songqing 喻松青, "Ming Qing shiqi minjian zongjiaopai zhong de nüxing 明清時期民間宗教派中的女性," in *Nankai xuebao* 南開學報 5 (1982), 29-33.

¹² Angela K.C. Leung, "L'amour en Chine: Relations et Pratiques Sociales aux XIIIe et XIVe siècles," *Archives des Sciences Sociales des Religions* 56.1 (1983), 64. For a contemporary literary example, see "He Daqing yihen yuanyang tao 赫大卿遺恨鴛鴦繚," in *Xingshi hengyan* 醒世恒言, by Feng Menglong 馮夢龍, repr. 2 vols., Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 1994, 15.289-317.

¹³ "Fengsu zhi 風俗志," in *Hangzhoufu zhi* 杭州府志 (1579), repr. Taipei: Xuesheng, 1965, 19.9a-b; *Ming Shenzong shilu* 明神宗實錄, repr. 27 vols., Beijing: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1966, 390.15.

¹⁴ Huang Liuhong 黃六鴻, *Fuhui quanshu* 福惠全書, *A Complete Book of Happiness and Benevolence: A Manual for Local Magistrates in Seventeenth-Century China*, Djang Chu 章楚, tr., Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1984, 431, 551, 608-609.

¹⁵ This is not to say that these phenomena were peculiar to the Ming. Prior to the rise of Neo-Confucianism in the Song, but particularly in the Tang, women are described as being relatively free from restrictions. They did not bind their feet, were seen outside the inner quarters, played games, wore male clothing, wrote erotic poetry and were able to borrow money in their own name. See Howard S. Levy, *Chinese Footbinding: The History of a Curious Erotic Custom*, New York: Walton Rawls, 1966, 38 and 41; Kenneth Rexroth and Ling Chung, tr. and eds., *The Orchid Boat: Women Poets of China*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972, 14-30; Yang Lien-sheng, *Money and Credit in China: A Short History*, Camb. Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1952, 93.

played in sixteenth-century life may, in fact, further reveal the intricacies of social interaction not only between women themselves, but also between women and men, society at large, and even the state.

The following introductory sections examine the methodological approaches and sources applied in the thesis. They include an analysis of recent developments in “Gold Studies” (金學 *Jinxue*).¹⁶ A large percentage of the novel *Jin Ping Mei* deals with the interaction of women in a merchant household and descriptions of their clothing and ornamentation and, therefore, suggests itself as a source for this study. Chapter One of the thesis explores the sixteenth-century economic, social and cultural environment, all of which provided a framework for the concepts and values of the people, particularly the newly emerging merchant class. Chapter Two acknowledges that, while dress and ornamentation may be manifestations of female hierarchical relationships, there were many other ways in which women in traditional China could attain power and influence both in the family and in society at large. Comprehension of these varying positions is essential as a basis for understanding how dress and ornamentation were employed to establish, develop and maintain female power relationships. In addition, this section also provides insights into how women and their roles in society were perceived by contemporary writers.

Chapter Three commences investigation into perceptions of how women obtained and managed emblems of official rank and economic power. This is an area in which one would expect to find explicit displays of status, particularly in a society which theoretically had a strict hierarchical sartorial system. Chapter Four continues the theme of prescriptive dress defining power, here in the highly regulated area of

¹⁶ As a major work of Ming literature, *Jin Ping Mei* has a research field devoted to it in the same way that “Red Studies” (紅學 *Hongxue*) is the study of the Qing novel *Honglouloumeng* 紅樓夢.

mourning ritual, an area rich in symbolism. The final two chapters look at more discretionary uses of dress and ornamentation. Chapter Five analyses the concept of the gift and how power relations were displayed and/or developed through gift exchange among women, shedding further light on the complex circulation of goods in traditional China. The final chapter examines perceptions of sexuality and beauty and demonstrates the importance of fashionable norms in this use of clothing.

Craig Clunas makes the distinction that one can investigate a material culture *for* women in traditional China but not a material culture *of* women, due to the absence of a substantial body of writings by women on the subject. He emphasises the passivity of women.¹⁷ However, what we see here is women taking a more active role in defining their own aesthetic criteria. In contrast to previous studies which have downplayed and minimised the impact of women on the defining of material culture in China, this thesis reveals how female consumerism and social behaviour affected not only the economy, but also contemporary mores and values. Perceptions of power in female clothing and ornamentation played a critical role in sixteenth-century Chinese relationships and this role was further accentuated by a burgeoning fashion consciousness. This study throws some light on how inequalities among women were materially experienced and rejects the previously held notion that élite men were the sole architects of traditional Chinese material culture.

Approaches to Social History and Women's History

The exploration of women's culture and the role of women in the development of culture as a whole has been a prominent aspect of women's history in

¹⁷ Craig Clunas, *Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early-Modern China*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991a, 56.

recent years. Therefore, with women and culture in sixteenth-century China as focal point of this study it is appropriate to consult contemporary theories on women's history. "Women's studies" has become an recognised subfield of Chinese studies. Despite initially being very much influenced by Western political and religious interests in China and the May Fourth movement during the early twentieth century, which emphasised the patriarchal oppression of Chinese women and/or painted romanticised portraits of female exemplars, more recent studies have attempted to avoid being criticised for 'colonial discourse' or 'orientalist legacy.'¹⁸

Definition of aspects such as historical period, geographical area, ethnicity and class are seen as essential, and contemporary theories now aim to connect the meaning or meanings of gender and sexuality at specific places and points in time to the power-holding structures of kinship, community, class and state.¹⁹ According to women's historian Joan Kelly:

The activity, power, and cultural evaluation of women simply cannot be assessed except in relational terms: by comparison and contrast with the activity, power, and cultural evaluation of men, and in relation to the institutions and social developments that shape the sexual order.²⁰

Successful sinological studies have revealed fresh views of Chinese society and gender relations, some of which demonstrate how women could wield power in

¹⁸ Jinhua Emma Teng, "The Construction of the 'Traditional Chinese Woman' in the Western Academy," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 22.1 (1996), 115-151; Li Xiaojiang and Zhang Xiaodan, "Creating a Space for Women: Women's Studies in China in the 1980's," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 20.1 (1994), 137-151.

¹⁹ Ellen Ross and Rayna Rapp, "Sex and Society: A Research Note from Social History and Anthropology," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23.1 (1981), 51-72. For the application of such criteria in a non-Chinese field, see Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1986, esp. 118-167; Martin King Whyte, *The Status of Women in Preindustrial Societies*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978.

²⁰ Joan Kelly, "The Social Relation of the Sexes: Methodological Implications of Women's History," in *idem, Women, History, and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986, 4-9.

various ways, socially, culturally and politically.²¹ These various areas are covered in more detail in Chapter Two.

Although the women's history movement has been very much related to the changing positions of the feminist movement,²² the history of women is not necessarily the same as feminist history, as an understanding of the impact of women, family, and the relationships between the sexes upon society does not have to serve a polemic end, an end which can give rise to limitations.²³ However, as sinologist Susan Mann explains, contemporary feminist analysis *is* useful in some respects in that it dislodges familiar texts from conventional frameworks giving them new historical meaning, in effect, "defamiliarising the familiar."²⁴

Approaches to scholarship on social history in the West have undergone radical change and development in the last century and this, therefore, has affected the analysis and presentation of the history of women in China. Until recently, mainstream history focused on major political and economic events and institutions such as warfare, rulership and religion, and influential figures. Because of this, aspects such as domestic life, material culture, heterodox groups, and the underprivileged classes received scant attention. However, this began to change in the 1970s as history was expanded to include personal, family and community relationships and practices.²⁵ The role of women in the creation of Chinese culture,

²¹ See, for example, Margery Wolf, *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972; Richard Guisso and Stanley Johannesen, eds., *Women in China: Current Directions in Historical Scholarship*, New York: Philo Press, 1981; Rubie Watson and Patricia Ebrey, *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991; Christina Gilmartin, Gail Herschatter, Lisa Rofel and Tyrene White, eds., *Engendering China: Women, Culture and the State*, Camb. Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994.

²² Joan Scott, "Women's History," in Peter Burke, ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991, 42-66.

²³ Kelly, 1986, 15.

²⁴ Susan Mann, "What Can Feminist Theory do for the Study of Chinese History," *Jindai Zhongguo funü shi yanjiu* 近代中國婦女史研究 1 (June 1996), 241-244.

²⁵ Joan Wallach Scott, "The Problem of Invisibility," in S. Jay Kleinberg, ed., *Retrieving Women's*

material culture in particular, has been opened up as a viable field of exploration.

One of the primary concerns of historians of women's history in the West is the invisibility of women in the retelling of the past, due to omission from or biased reporting in generally male-authored works.²⁶ Many of these sources can in fact provide information on women's history once it is recognised that contemporary testimonies and representations need not be taken at face value. An understanding of the complementary and intertwined nature of the texts that discuss women is essential.²⁷

To a certain extent, the same could be said for China where all but a minority of women remained illiterate and the main body of historical writings was compiled by male Confucian scholar-officials. However, writings on women compose a major part of many official and unofficial historical texts in the forms of biographies (列傳 *liezhuan*), perhaps the most important form of historiography in China since its inception in the *Shiji* 史記 by Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145-90BC).²⁸ In addition, as Susan Mann and Dorothy Ko, in particular, have shown, the not insubstantial number of extant writings by women in traditional China can also provide insights into female worlds and perceptions of those worlds.²⁹

Rediscovering neglected sources such as those works by women themselves or works about other aspects of women's lives, for example, fashion and hairstyles,

History: Changing Perceptions of the Role of Women in Politics and Society, Providence and Oxford: Berg/Unesco, 1992, 10-11. Clothing and fashion, for example, has only recently been demarginalised within mainstream academia. See Anne Brydon and Sandra Niessen, *Consuming Fashion: Adorning the Transnational Body*, Oxford and New York: Berg, 1998, ix.

²⁶ Kelly, 1986, 1-18; S. Jay Kleinberg "Introduction," in *idem*, ed., 1992, ix.

²⁷ Natalie Zemon Davies and Arlette Farge, eds., *A History of Women in the West. Vol. III. Renaissance and Enlightenment Paradoxes*, Camb. Mass. and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1993, 2.

²⁸ *Shiji* 史記, by Sima Qian 司馬遷, repr. 10 vols., Hong Kong: Zhonghua, 1969.

²⁹ Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994; Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.

areas previously regarded as trivial, is a new trend in women's history.³⁰ Dress and ornamentation as hitherto under-explored aspects of the lives of Chinese women form the basis of this research into perceptions of female power in sixteenth-century China and the extent to which women influenced the fashioning of material culture as a whole.

Dress, Fashion and Power

Recently, Chinese historians have been very active in the documentation of traditional material culture. Over the past ten years there has been a proliferation of works documenting Chinese dress and ornamentation. Most prominent in the field are Zhou Xun 周汛 and Gao Chunming 高春明 whose works include comprehensive studies on male and female apparel from earliest times to the present day.³¹ Other equally extensive historical surveys have been compiled by Shen Congwen 沈從文, Huang Nengfu 黃能馥 and Chen Juanjuan 陳娟娟,³² and further smaller studies complement the research on this area.³³ These scholars often utilise Chinese classic novels as a source for information about Chinese dress; however, they simply use these sources as an inventory and do little to investigate further into the reasons behind the use of particular objects at particular times. One notable exception is

³⁰ Mann, 1996, 244-245; Teng, 1996, 142.

³¹ Zhou Xun 周汛 and Gao Chunming 高春明, *Zhongguo lidai funü zhuangshi* 中國歷代婦女裝飾, Hong Kong: Sanlian, 1988a; *idem*, *Zhongguo gudai fushi fengsu* 中國古代服飾風俗, Xi'an: Shaanxi, 1988b; *idem*, *Zhongguo gudai fushi daguan* 中國古代服飾大觀, Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1996a; *idem*, eds., *Zhongguo yiguan fushi dacidian* 中國衣冠服飾大辭典, Shanghai: Shanghai cishu, 1996b; Gao Chunming 高春明, *Zhongguo gudai de pingmin fuzhuang* 中國古代的平民服裝, Beijing: Shangwu, 1997.

³² Shen Congwen 沈從文, *Zhongguo gudai fushi yanjiu* 中國古代服飾研究, Taipei: Longtian, 1981; Huang Nengfu 黃能馥 and Chen Juanjuan 陳娟娟, eds., *Zhongguo fuzhuang shi* 中國服裝史, Beijing: Zhongguo lüyou, 1995.

³³ Wang Weiling 汪維玲 and Wang Dingxiang 王定祥, *Zhongguo gudai funü huazhuang* 中國古代婦女化妝, Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin, 1991; Zhao Chao 趙超, *Huaxia yiguan wuqiannian* 華夏衣冠五千年, Taipei: Zhonghua, 1993; Gugong bowuyuan 故宮博物院, ed., *Qingdai houfei shoushi* 清代后妃首飾, Beijing: Gugong bowuyuan zijincheng, 1992.

Wang Weidi 王維堤 who has linked concepts of dress and adornment to philosophical concepts.³⁴

Early Western works, too, have tended to be descriptive rather than analytical, and focus on Qing dynasty imperial or official clothing, often artefacts available in museums.³⁵ More recent studies have gone some way towards remedying the underdeveloped nature of the analysis of clothing as a marker of status and subethnicity identified by Evelyn Rawski in 1991.³⁶ Schuyler Cammann has concentrated on imperial insignia, in particular, mandarin squares.³⁷ Julia M. White and Emma C. Bunker have examined some further issues of status and rank as displayed in Chinese ornament.³⁸ Beverley Jackson and Dorothy Ko have followed in the footsteps of Howard S. Levy in discussing the social and cultural significance of the bound foot.³⁹ In *China Chic: East Meets West*, Valerie Steele and John S. Major focus on various areas in different time periods to demonstrate the relationship between China's fashion system and Western influences.⁴⁰ The present thesis covers the previously relatively unexplored period of the sixteenth-century, complementing

³⁴ Wang Weidi 王維堤, *Yiguan guguo 衣冠古國*, Shanghai: Guji, 1991.

³⁵ Helen E. Fernald, *Chinese Court Costumes*, Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology, 1946; Alan Priest, *Costumes from the Forbidden City*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1945; Bernard Vuilleumier, *Symbolism of Chinese Imperial Ritual Robes*, London: The China Institute, n.d.

³⁶ Evelyn Rawski, "Research Themes in Ming-Qing Socioeconomic History - The State of the Field," *Journal of Asian Studies* 50.1 (1991), 84-111. General studies include Verity Wilson, *Chinese Dress*, London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996; Valerie M. Garrett, *Chinese Clothing: An Illustrated Guide*, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1994. More specific studies include Jenny F. So, "The Ornamented Belt in China," *Orientations* 28.3 (1997), 70-78; Tsao Hsingyuan, "From Hair to Ear: Head Ornaments Represented in Chinese Art as Signs of Cultural Identity," *Orientations* 28.3 (1997), 79-87.

³⁷ Schuyler Cammann, "The Development of the Mandarin Square," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* (hereafter abbreviated to *HJAS*) 8 (1944-45), 71-130; *idem.*, *China's Dragon Robes*, New York: The Ronald Press, 1952.

³⁸ Julia M. White and Emma C. Bunker with contributions from Chen Peifen, *Adornment for Eternity: Status and Rank in Chinese Ornament*, Denver: Denver Art Museum, 1994.

³⁹ Levy, 1966; Beverley Jackson, *Splendid Slippers - A Thousand Years of an Erotic Tradition*, Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 1997; Dorothy Ko, "The Body as Attire - The Shifting Meanings of Footbinding in Seventeenth-Century China," *Journal of Women's History* 8.4 (1997a), 8-27.

⁴⁰ Valerie Steele and John S. Major, eds., *China Chic: East Meets West*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999.

the recent advances in the analysis of clothing and ornamentation by examining the motivations behind sartorial taste and value-judgements. Moreover, attention is also paid to less élite styles of dress.

Theoretical Approaches

The importance of clothing and ornamentation in social life has long been recognised by Western scholars.⁴¹ In many societies, protection, warmth, modesty, beautification, competition, status display and the construction of gender, all underpin modes of clothing and ornamentation.⁴² Clothing and ornamentation can, therefore, be considered a form of language or communication. Indeed, clothing can identify those with whom one is likely to share other systems of communication.⁴³ When people encounter each other they generally inspect the other person's conduct and appearance in order to discover information about them such as their social status, economic standing and their temperament, or to bring into play information about them which they already possess.⁴⁴ Clothing can play an important role here as it presents a large surface for inspection and can be clearly distinguished at a greater distance.⁴⁵ Modern Western experiments show that clothing is most influential when

⁴¹ One psychologist comments that clothes have "entered into the very core of our existence as social beings." See J.C. Flügel, *The Psychology of Clothes*, London: Hogarth Press, 1950, 16. See also Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the 'Ancien Régime'*, Jean Birrell, tr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 5.

⁴² See, for example Hilda Kuper, "Costume and Identity," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 15.3 (1973), 348-367; Petr Bogatyrev, *The Functions of Folk Costume in Moravian Slovakia*, The Hague: Mouton, 1971.

⁴³ Stella Mary Newton, "Fashions in Fashion History," *Times Literary Supplement*, 21 March 1975, 305; Lawrence B. Rosenfeld and Timothy G. Plax, "Clothing as Communication," *Journal of Communication* 27 (1977), 24-31; Albert E. Schefflen, *How Behavior Means*, New York: Gordon and Breach, 1973, 43; Annette B. Weiner and Jane Schneider, "Introduction," in *idem*, eds., *Cloth and Human Experience*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989, 1; Grant McCracken, "Clothing as Language: An Object Lesson in the Study of the Expressive Properties of Material Culture," in Barrie Reynolds and Margaret A. Stott, eds., *Material Anthropology: Contemporary Approaches to Material Culture*, London: University Press of America, 1987, 121.

⁴⁴ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959, 13.

⁴⁵ Flügel, 1950, 15.

strangers meet and not so highly influential factor between acquaintances, thus indicating that our perception of others is influenced partly by clothes and partly by other factors.⁴⁶

This advantage of clothing was pointed out by the seventeenth-century Chinese scholar Ye Mengzhu 葉夢珠: "You could tell at a glance whether someone was noble or base."⁴⁷ For even the earliest Confucians, clothing and ornamentation played a crucial role in the conception of dignity, propriety and civility.⁴⁸ *Wen* 文 "cultured/civilised" equalled well-dressed, and thus great importance was attached to proper dress:

When meeting people one must be properly adorned; to be unadorned is to be lacking in manners; to be lacking in manners is to be disrespectful, to be disrespectful is to be without propriety, if one is without propriety one is not a member of society.⁴⁹

Later works continued to emphasise the appropriateness of certain types of clothing for certain occasions.⁵⁰ Ming officials were concerned when the civilising effect of clothing was ignored in the more distant areas of the empire. Official and geographer Wang Shixing 王士性 (1547-1598)⁵¹ reports that men and women of remote parts of Yue 粵 province (roughly equivalent to modern Guangdong 廣東 and Guangxi 廣西) demonstrated features picked up from their proximity to aboriginal tribes:

The robes of the men trail on the ground whilst the skirts and trousers of the women go no further down than the knees, thus revealing their ankles; they walk barefoot and do not mind the dirt. Those who sport straw sandals are the superior among them. Their heads are ornamented with tall chignons, large hooped earrings hang from their ears, and flower ornaments cast from tin adorn

⁴⁶ Mark L. Knapp, *Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972, 81.

⁴⁷ "Guanfu 冠服," in *Yueshi bian* 閩世編, by Ye Mengzhu 葉夢珠, repr. Shanghai: Guji, 1981, 8.175.

⁴⁸ Mark Elvin, "Tales of *Shen* and *Xin*: Body-Person and Heart-Mind in China during the last 150 years," in Michel Felcher, ed., *Fragments for a History of the Human Body, Part Two*, New York: Zone Books, 1989, 266; Lü Simian 呂思勉, *Xian Qin shi* 先秦史, Shanghai: Guji, 1982, 331-364.

⁴⁹ *Kongzi jiyu* 孔子集語, repr. in *Baizi quanshu* 百子全書, 8 vols., Shanghai: Renmin, 1984, xia 下.1b.

⁵⁰ "Jiaoji 交際," in *Yueshi bian*, 8.186-192.

⁵¹ *DMB*, 1405-1406.

their hair. Everywhere, male jobs, such as runners, bearers and grooms, are carried out by women. Men and women even mix together in entertainments. The officials are unable to prevent this.⁵²

The alternative dress of hermits and Daoists, in particular, came under attack, as the sixteenth-century ritualist Zhang Cong 張聰 (1476-1539) memorialised in 1528:

There have yet to be clear regulations of the dress of ranked officials living out of office, and disciples of the outlandish and strange compete in their odd dress, thereby upsetting the dynastic canons.⁵³

However, these views were not held by all and certain types of clothing were praised, despite being quite unorthodox. In his work *Yefu kao* 野服考, the late Ming art critic Zhang Chou 張丑 (1577-1643?)⁵⁴ enumerated sixteen of the most genteel types of rustic clothing as worn by cultivated persons living in retirement.⁵⁵ Ming scholar Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 (1558-1639)⁵⁶ referred, not irreverently, to those who went off into the mountains to chant poetry, wearing neither shirts nor shoes.⁵⁷ Philosophical views were reflected in clothing choices and were thereby used to reflect an individual's integration or exclusion from the norms of society.

This accords with the view of anthropologist Victoria Ebin who suggests that the body:

is the medium through which we most directly project ourselves in social life; our use and presentation of it say precise things about the society in which we live, the degree of our integration within that society, and the controls which society exerts over the inner man.⁵⁸

Clothing is the external aspect of a person which can be most easily manipulated and

⁵² "Jiangnan zhusheng 江南諸省," in *Guang zhi yi* 廣志繹 (1597), by Wang Shixing 王士性, repr. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1981, 4.93.

⁵³ *Ming shi* 明史, by Zhang Tingyu 張廷玉, repr. 20 vols., Beijing: Zhonghua, 1974, 67.1639.

⁵⁴ *DMB*, 51-53.

⁵⁵ *Yefu kao* 野服考, by Zhang Chou 張丑, repr. in *Meishu congshu* 美術叢書, 160 vols., Shanghai: Shen Zhou guo Guang she, 1928-1936, vol. 79.

⁵⁶ *ECCP*, 83-84.

⁵⁷ "Shanju zayong qi shou 山居雜咏七首," *Wanxiangtang xiaopin* 晚香堂小品, by Chen Meigong 陳眉公 (Chen Jiru 陳繼儒), repr. 2 vols., Shanghai: Beiye shanfang, 1936, 8.160.

⁵⁸ Victoria Ebin, *The Body Decorated*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1979, 5.

controlled. Such an individual use of clothing opens up the possibility of examining the enacting of culture by individuals in daily life.⁵⁹ Throughout this study the clothing strategies of both female individuals and groups from varying social strata in sixteenth-century China are analysed to reveal hitherto unexplored areas of material culture. Female uses of dress and ornamentation are compared and contrasted with ideals set down in Confucian discourse which attempted to exert control over individual and group behaviour.

Power and Power Symbolism

One of the aims of this thesis is to examine differing perceptions of power in female dress and ornamentation in China. However, is there an established link between dress and power? Max Weber's definition of 'Macht' has become a frequently adopted sociological definition of power:

Power (*Macht*) is the probability that one actor in a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests.⁶⁰

Subsequent refinements of the above concept include the inclusion of the group as well as the individual, and the use of sanctions and rewards to produce intended effects.⁶¹ Others argue, however, that these definitions make the assumption of conflict and antagonism and suggest that power relations may also be relations of mutual interest.⁶² The above concepts are useful for understanding the working of power relationships as seen in action.

⁵⁹ Gustav Ichheiser, *Misunderstandings in Human Relations: A Study in False Social Perception*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1949, 14; Rebecca H. Holman, "A Transcription and Analysis System for the Study of Women's Clothing Behavior," *Semiotica* 32.1-2 (1980), 15; Jennifer Craik, *The Face of Fashion*, London and New York: Routledge, 1994, 46; McCracken, 1987, 108.

⁶⁰ Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, A.R. Henderson and Talcott Parsons, tr., London, Edinburgh and Glasgow: William Hodge and Co., 1947, 139.

⁶¹ P.M. Blau, *Exchange and Power in Social Life*, New York: John Wiley, 1967, 117.

⁶² R. Martin, *The Sociology of Power*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977, 37-8.

Many forms of power have been identified, such as political, military, economic, social and ideological.⁶³ A variety of methods are employed to perpetuate power but perhaps one of the most significant of these is symbolism. It is widely acknowledged that the use of symbols is universal,⁶⁴ with many anthropologists, sociologists and psychologists even conceiving culture as a system of symbols.⁶⁵ Symbols can be thought of as instruments of expression, communication, knowledge and control. They *express* values and can evoke powerful emotions of identification with a group. Symbols *communicate* ideas with minimal or no verbalisation. The process of symbolic representation appears to abstract some quality common to both referent and symbol and allows one to *know* or perceive more clearly a particular type of relationship. Symbols may be used for reference or support to *control* the behaviour of others.⁶⁶ Symbols, therefore, have long been employed, consciously or unconsciously, as instruments of power and social control. All societies, it has been said, "manipulate people through the symbols that engage them."⁶⁷ China was no exception. As Howard Wechsler has shown, the Tang 唐 dynasty (618-906) legitimised their rule through the use of symbols of power.⁶⁸

⁶³ Barry Barnes, *The Nature of Power*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988, 1-2.

⁶⁴ Susanne Katherina Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*, Camb. Mass.: Harvard University, 1942, 27-8; Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism*, Philip Mairet, tr., London: Harvill Press, 1961, 27-56.

⁶⁵ Raymond Firth, *Symbols: Public and Private*, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1973, 60 and 111; Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz*, London: Hutchinson, 1975, 89; Abner Cohen, "Political Anthropology: The Analysis of the Symbolism of Power Relations," *Man: A Monthly Record of Anthropological Science* 4 (1969), 217.

⁶⁶ Firth, 1973, 77-84. Also see C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1959.

⁶⁷ Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964, 117. See also Cohen, 1969, 215-35; Thurman W. Arnold, *The Symbols of Government*, New York and Burlingame: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1962, 10; Harold D. Lasswell and Abraham Kaplan, *Power and Society: A Framework for Political Inquiry*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952, 117-119; Michael Walzer, "On the Role of Symbolism in Political Thought," *Political Science Quarterly* 82 (June 1967), 194-6; Victor Turner, "Symbolic Studies," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 4 (1975), 155-156.

⁶⁸ Howard J. Wechsler, *Offerings of Jade and Silk: Ritual and Symbol in the Legitimation of the Tang Dynasty*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985.

Access to a society's symbols of power is of fundamental importance in power relations. Powers or status groups tend to emerge where they are able to dominate the supply of an essential resource or skill, or where access to rights, privileges and opportunities may be controlled. Clothing and ornamentation often serve as symbols of power. Liu Lu 劉潞 suggests that, in the Chinese case, variations in colour, style and patterning of clothing and ornamentation were more to do with strengthening imperial power and social hierarchies than for aesthetic effect.⁶⁹ In societies where wealth is a way of gaining power and respect it is generally the case that the higher the rank the more elaborate and expensive is the ornamentation.⁷⁰ Appearance and investment are closely connected, as is most clearly demonstrated by the fact that expensive ornamentation such as jewellery can be easily carried and displayed. In other words, the material and aesthetic values of a society merge.⁷¹

Dress and ornamentation play an essential role in the acquisition and maintenance of power relations. In the first instance, if we take aspects of dress and ornamentation as symbols of power, then we can see how people desire to possess such symbols to acquire power or take on the appearance of power. Secondly, dress and ornamentation can be seen as objects of economic value to be used as rewards or sanctions with incentive to action or compliance. Through the employment of such symbols of power, the position of the individual in society, both in the family and in the world at large, is defined.⁷²

⁶⁹ Liu Lu 劉潞, "Fushi yu huangquan - wei Gugong bowuyuan fu Aodaliya 'Qinggong fushi zhan' er zuo 服飾與皇權 - 為故宮博物院赴澳大利亞 '清宮服飾展' 而作," *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 故宮博物院院刊 1989.2, 44.

⁷⁰ Flügel, 1950, 29-32. In his study of the leisure class, Thorstein Veblen asserts that members of the upper classes have to conspicuously display their wealth in such a way in order to show that they do not have to undertake degrading, productive work. See Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1925.

⁷¹ Ebin, 1979, 74.

⁷² G. Clark, *Precious Materials as Expressions of Status*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 82; Veblen, 1925, 130-131.

There are many indicators of social stratification, including political roles, military roles, economic roles, professional roles, wealth or property, birth or lineage, personal qualities, community activities, language and lifestyle; clothing and ornamentation are but two of them. However, it is important to note that different communities attach importance to different indicators. Wealth may be necessary for high position in one society, but frugality may be essential in another.⁷³ For this reason, clothing, like any aspect of social life, has to be analysed alongside other types of social relations.⁷⁴

Did China have a fashion system?

Some argue that, in many different societies, the fashion system goes hand-in-hand with the exercise of power.⁷⁵ According to the Oxford Encyclopedic English Dictionary, 'fashion' is defined as: "The current popular custom or style, especially in dress or social conduct."⁷⁶ Numerous scholars argue that fashion, as we know it today, began in the European courts of the late medieval period following the creation of bourgeois fortunes built on the back of commerce and banking. As the bourgeoisie began to emulate the styles of dress and ornamentation popular among the nobility and at court, those at the top had to develop new styles in an attempt to maintain the distinctions which separated them. Power was linked to more and more ostentatious display in dress and ornamentation, the inconstancy of which was lamented by contemporary observers.⁷⁷

⁷³ Bernard Barber, *Social Stratification: A Comparative Analysis of Structure and Process*, New York and Burlingame: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1957, 30-48.

⁷⁴ Kuper, 1973, 349.

⁷⁵ Craik, 1994, x.

⁷⁶ Joyce M. Hawkins and Robert Allen, eds., *Oxford Encyclopedic English Dictionary*, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1991, 513.

⁷⁷ Véronique Nahoum-Grappe, "The Beautiful Woman," in Davies and Farge, eds., 1993, 88; Gilles Lipovetsky, *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy*, Catherine Porter, tr., Princeton:

Many Western sociologists such as Elizabeth Wilson emphasise the ephemeral nature of fashion:

Fashion is dress in which the key feature is rapid and continual changing of styles. Fashion, in a sense *is* change, and in modern western societies no clothes are outside fashion.⁷⁸

For this reason, they assert that countries like China and Japan did not, and could not, have had a fashion system and instead exhibited stable costumes.⁷⁹ Sinologist Mark Elvin argues that the lack of a social environment in which both men and women were on display also limited the appearance of an extensive fashion system in China. However, he acknowledges that upper-class 'crazes' did exist.⁸⁰ According to Dorothy Ko, however, the concept that there never could have been a Chinese fashion system was *created* because the identification of European fashion with change required an Other to take on the mantle of 'costume.'⁸¹ Other fashion specialists, too, reject the Eurocentric notion that the term 'fashion' refers exclusively to capitalist societies where clothing behaviour is highly economic in nature and linked to issues of production, circulation and distribution.⁸²

An anecdote from the Legalist philosopher Han Feizi 韓非子 (d.233 BC) suggests that even as early as the Warring States period emulation of the upper classes existed:

Duke Huan of Qi loved to wear purple and everyone else in the state wore purple too. At that time five bolts of white silk could not get you one of purple. Duke Huan was troubled by this and put the question to Guan Zhong: "I love to

New French Thought, 1994, 22.

⁷⁸ Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, London: Virago, 1985, 3; Lipovetsky, 1994, 16. Original emphasis.

⁷⁹ Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism 15th-18th Century, Vol. 1: The Structure of Everyday Life, The Limits of the Possible*, Sian Reynolds, tr., London: William Collins Sons and Co. Ltd, 1981, 312-315; Veblen, 1925, 175-176.

⁸⁰ Elvin, 1989, 267-268. Stella Mary Newton, "Couture and Society," *Times Literary Supplement*, 12 November 1976, 1423.

⁸¹ Ko, Dorothy, "Bondage in Time: Footbinding and Fashion Theory," *Fashion Theory* 1.1 (1997b), 7.

⁸² Craik, 1994, 5-6; Steele and Major, eds., 1999, 3; Aubrey Cannon, "The Cultural and Historical Contexts of Fashion," in Brydon and Niessen, eds., 1998, 23.

wear purple but it is very expensive. All the people in my state really love to wear purple. What should I do?" Guan Zhong replied: "If you want to stop this, my lord, why not try not wearing purple and say to those around you, 'I absolutely detest the smell of purple.'" The Duke said: "I will." Thereupon, should a retainer who was wearing purple come forward, the Duke would say: "Withdraw a little, I hate the smell of purple." That day, none of his officials wore purple. The next day, no-one in the capital wore purple. On the third day, no-one within the borders wore purple.⁸³

Later examples also exist. A Tang princess tailored two skirts from the multi-coloured feathers of the 'hundred birds' and a saddlecloth from the furs of the 'hundred beasts' which were highly admired, so much so that "many of the noble ministers and rich households copied them to the extent that the furs and feathers of the curious birds and strange beasts from the Yangtze River and mountain ranges were gathered almost to the point of their extinction."⁸⁴ S.A.M. Adshead goes further and states that fashion began, not in Western antiquity, but in Tang China with Yang Guifei 楊貴妃, "the madame de Pompadour of China":

Her intelligence and taste for exotics turned fads and fancies into genuine fashions in a court which aimed to fascinate.⁸⁵

Despite these indications that the emulative side of fashion existed early in China, it is perhaps not until the commercial expansion and social change of the Ming dynasty that more conspicuous fashion could really take off. It is known that a degree of prosperity is required for innovation; social mobility and technical improvements lead to more rapid change.⁸⁶ Contemporary observer Gu Qiyuan noted that in his native city of Nanjing, alterations in fashion speeded up as the sixteenth

⁸³ "Wai chu shuo zuo shang 外儲說左上," in *Han Feizi jishi* 韓非子集釋, Chen Qiyuan 陳奇猷, ann., 2 vols., Shanghai: Renmin, 1974, 11.655.

⁸⁴ "Fu yao 服妖," in *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書, by Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修, repr. 20 vols., Beijing: Zhonghua, 1975, 34.878. See also *Yefu kao*, 3a for a belt decorated by beautiful and unusual flora which was invented by a rustic scholar and later copied by others who had seen a diagram of it.

⁸⁵ S.A.M. Adshead, *Material Culture in Europe and China, 1400-1800: The Rise of Consumerism*, Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1997, 28-29. See also Edward H. Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand: A Study of T'ang Exotics*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

⁸⁶ Braudel, 1981, 324.

century progressed. Women's fashions changed only once during ten years in the late sixteenth century, but in the early seventeenth century women's fashions changed every two or three years.⁸⁷ The increased interest in material life in the late sixteenth century was to a large part manifested in clothing customs. Fashion changed much more frequently and became influential in stimulating alterations in the market. It may also be argued that fashion underscored the rapid industrial and commercial growth in China at this time.⁸⁸ The changing economic climate which influenced changes in consumption and material culture in general is discussed further in the following chapter.

Clothing may, therefore, offer a way of understanding and a means of studying the social transformations which occur during times of social change and insecurity. Fernand Braudel contends that the history of material culture and the history of social behaviour are directly linked and this is clearly so in the case of dress:

The history of costume is less anecdotal than would appear. It touches on every issue - raw materials, production processes, manufacturing costs, cultural stability, fashion and social hierarchy.⁸⁹

The acquisition and ownership of objects such as dress and ornamentation can not only reveal changes in economic behaviour, but they can also reveal the changing religious, moral and political norms of society.⁹⁰ Grant McCracken notes:

In this and other forms, clothing is sometimes a confirmation of change and sometimes an initiation of change. It is sometimes a means of constituting the nature and terms of political conflict and sometimes a means of creating consensus. It is sometimes an instrument of attempted domination and

⁸⁷ "Fushi 服飾," in *KZZY*, 7.293.

⁸⁸ Chun-shu Chang and Shelley Hsueh-lun Chang, *Crisis and Transformation in Seventeenth Century China: Society, Culture, and Modernity in Li Yu's World*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1995, 149.

⁸⁹ Braudel, 1981, 311.

⁹⁰ Roche, 1994, 502-503.

sometimes an armoury of resistance and protest.⁹¹

Indeed, the importance of clothing both in the creation of material culture and the wider spheres of culture cannot be ignored. This thesis argues that in sixteenth-century China female sartorial habits played an important role not only in the development and maintenance of female social relationships and power structures but also in the shaping of new cultural practices and ideas for society as a whole.

Sources

In turning to primary sources to discover details and concepts of female dress and ornamentation in sixteenth-century China, a variety of materials present themselves. Two main sources are utilised in this study: material and textual.

Material sources

Despite the passing of over four hundred years, a not insubstantial collection of contemporary artefacts remains to this day.⁹² The majority of these are durable items such as head-dresses, hairpins and belts made from precious metals and stones. However, more fragile items such as clothing and material have also been preserved. Such collections have been unearthed from the tombs of the Ming aristocracy and thus we can deduce that most of the objects were intended for use by these classes.⁹³ Very little remains of the objects used by the less wealthy classes in society who would have been excluded from not only purchasing such fine objects, but also

⁹¹ McCracken, 1987, 109.

⁹² Notable collections can be found in Beijing Dingling Museum (北京定陵博物館), Imperial Palace Museum in Beijing (北京故宮博物館), Shanghai Museum (上海博物館), Shanghai Songjiang Museum (上海松江博物館), Shandong Jinan Museum (山東濟南博物館), Shaanxi Xi'an Museum (陝西西安博物館), Jiangsu Nanjing Museum (江蘇南京博物館), Hubei Museum (湖北博物館).

⁹³ See, for example, excavation notes from Ming tombs of the imperial household and aristocracy: Jiangsusheng Huai'anxian bowuguan 江蘇省淮安縣博物館, "Huai'anxian Mingdai Wang Zhen fufu hezangmu qingli jianbao 淮安縣明代王鎮夫婦合葬墓清理簡報," *Wenwu* 1987.3, 1-15; Jiangxisheng wenwu gongzuodui 江西省文物工作隊, "Jiangxi Nancheng Ming Yiding Wang Zhu Youmu mu fajue jianbao 江西南城明益定王朱由木墓發掘簡報," *Wenwu* 1982.2, 56-64.

preserving them in family tombs.

Pictorial sources from the Ming dynasty are numerous and can provide detailed depictions of women and their adornments. Not only was portraiture popular with the upper classes, but this was the period of the woodblock illustration. Advances in printing technology permitted the publication of high quality illustrations in encyclopaedias and similar works, such as the *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成 (1726), *Sancai tuhui* 三才圖會 (1585) by Wang Qi 王圻 and Wang Siyi 王思義 and the *Tiangong kaiwu* 天工開物 (1637) by Song Yingxing 宋應星, all of which include sections on textiles and clothing. Novels, short stories and even biographies of virtuous women were richly illustrated.⁹⁴ However, these are merely one part of the jigsaw and can only go so far as to indicate contemporary female styles and textiles. These types of sources reveal less about attitudes towards particular garments and their employment. Care must be taken to identify sources which portray idealistic or prescriptive dress or even fancies of imagination. Nonetheless, these too can give us insights into the concerns of those creating them.

Textual sources

Much descriptive information regarding Ming dress and ornamentation can be found in the Dynastic Histories and other official works. Regulations concerned with the stipulation of dress and ornamentation are contained in such works as the *Da Ming huidian* 大明會典 and the *Ming shi* 明史.⁹⁵ Other official documents provide detailed information on the material culture of the period. The *Tianshui bingshan lu*

⁹⁴ See for example, the Qiu Ying 仇英 illustrated Ming version of the *Lienü zhuan* 列女傳, by Liu Xiang 劉向, repr. Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 1991.

⁹⁵ "Yiguan 衣冠," in *Da Ming huidian* 大明會典 (1587), by Shen Shixing 申時行, edn. *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書, Shanghai: Guji, 1995, *juan* 60-61 (hereafter abbreviated to *DMHD*); "Yufu zhi 輿服志," in *Ming shi*, *juan* 65-68.

天水冰山錄, for example, itemises the confiscated estate of Grand Secretary Yan Song 嚴嵩 (1480-1565) and his son Yan Shifan 嚴世蕃 (1513-1565), notorious ministers of the mid-Ming, following their dismissal from office in 1562.⁹⁶

The late Ming saw the start of manuals of taste and style which included sections on clothing and ornamentation. However, many of the treatises such as the *Zhangwu zhi* 長物志 by Wen Zhenheng 文震亨 (1585-1645) refer only to male objects and preoccupations.⁹⁷ It is only when confusion may occur between male and female spheres, as in the misuse of objects, types of materials or decoration intended for women, that female objects are mentioned.⁹⁸ By contrast, reports from local gazetteers (地方志 *difang zhi*) and the *biji* 筆記 essays of scholars, on the other hand, offer useful sources for material on female dress and ornamentation. These supply comments on contemporary economic and social conditions with specific reference to regional customs and trends. The late Ming was a period when fastidious attention was paid to the sartorial choices of the populace, particularly women. However, as always, compilers had their own agendas in their selection of material. In some cases these were illustrations of good government, emphasising the exemplary behaviour of local citizens to ensure the compiler's own promotion.⁹⁹ In other cases, Confucian scholars focused on the less than savoury aspects of society, lamenting the degeneration of morals in an attempt to inspire self-reflection on the part of the ruling

⁹⁶ DMB, 1586-1591.

⁹⁷ *Zhangwu zhi* 長物志 (comp. 1615-20), by Wen Zhenheng 文震亨, repr. in Wang Wenru 王文濡, ed., *Shuoku* 說庫, Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji, 1986; *Qiju qifu jian* 起居器服箋, by Tu Long 屠隆, repr. in *Meishu congshu* 美術叢書, Shanghai: Shen Zhou guoguang, 1928, 2.9.3; *Kaopan yushi* 考槃餘事 (1606), by Tu Long 屠隆, repr. in Wang Wenru 王文濡, ed., *Shuoku* 說庫, Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji, 1986; *Zunsheng bajian* 遵生八箋 (1591), by Gao Lian 高濂, repr. Chengdu: Ba Shu, 1992; "Neichen peifu jilue 內臣佩服紀略," in *Zhuozhong zhi* 酌中志, by Liu Ruoyu 劉若愚, repr. 2 vols., Shanghai: Shangwu, 1935, 19.161-171.

⁹⁸ Clunas, 1991a, 54.

⁹⁹ Katherine Carlitz, "Shrines, Governing-Class Identity, and the Cult of Widow Fidelity in Mid-Ming Jiangnan," *Journal of Asian Studies* 56.3 (1997a), 624-630.

élite who, it was hoped, would then disseminate good behaviour to the populace. All representations of the social world, whether they claim to be fact or fiction, embody the interests of the group which produced them. These are usually the officials or literati.¹⁰⁰

Literature as historical material

Sixteenth-century China saw the proliferation of printed material, particularly novels, short stories and poetry collections, many of them filled with seemingly abundant information about female dress and ornamentation. Western critics have emphasised the importance of the French novelist of the 'ancien régime'¹⁰¹ as an invaluable source when investigating certain aspects of material culture, arguing that novels can provide information about ways of life because the novel places objects *in a context*. In other words, the novel can provide us with a picture of clothing and ornamentation in action.¹⁰² Daniel Roche shows how novels of the 'ancien régime' depict the changes in society which were going on at the time, in particular, the arrogation of dress and ornamentation:

The fictional imagination probably reflects the moral and social imperatives of habits which were sometimes contested. Whether to restore everyone to his costume or to accept the disguises which corresponded to new types of conduct was a dilemma which opposed two principles of society: that of the holistic and unequal world, of families, guilds and states; that of individuals regulating their conduct by personal rather than collective imperatives. In revealing this gulf, literary texts are invaluable, since they allow us to see the social and economic strategies which generate the new behaviour from the outside, if not the inside, of the works.¹⁰³

Indeed, novels can be more revealing than 'static' sources such as inventories or

¹⁰⁰ Roger Chartier, *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations*, Lydia G. Cochrane, tr., Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988, 5.

¹⁰¹ The 'ancien régime' refers to the political and social system in France before the Revolution of 1789.

¹⁰² Roche, 1994, 18.

¹⁰³ Roche, 1994, 20.

pictorial depictions in that perceptions of the motives behind sartorial choices at all levels are observable.

Recent literary critics have discussed the use of literature as a source of information for historical and sociological studies. In many works of literature we appear to be faced with much realistic historical and social detail. The narrative of the *Jin Ping Mei* is dense with descriptions of clothing and ornamentation worn by the characters in the novel presented through the medium of a 'formal realism.'¹⁰⁴ This rich narrative texture has attracted scholarly attention as an important source of information on Ming life.¹⁰⁵ Some modern Chinese scholars believe the novel to be of significant historical value, making up for what the official records or other contemporary accounts miss out, as customs of many different levels of society are highlighted.¹⁰⁶ Daria Berg, in her study of perceptions of Utopia in the seventeenth-century Chinese novel *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻緣傳, highlights this advantage in looking at the novel:

Official sources may leave us with a version of history that projects self-images in accordance with the current state ideology or tendentious bias. Fictional accounts, too, represent versions of perceived history. But they may speak out where other sources remain silent. They may focus on people, actions or situations that have not merited the attention of other records. They may provide insight into the realm of private thoughts and personal emotions. They may give access to both the bright and the dark aspects of life, the obverse and the reverse sides of historical events. They may deal with a sub-culture as

¹⁰⁴ Narrative method whereby the novel incorporates a circumstantial view of life. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957, 31-35.

¹⁰⁵ Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸, "Tan Jin Ping Mei cihua 談金瓶梅詞話," in Xu Shuofang 徐朔方 and Liu Hui 劉輝, eds., *Jin Ping Mei lunji* 金瓶梅論集, Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 1986, 2; Frederick W. Mote, "Yuan and Ming," in K.C. Chang, *Food in Chinese Culture: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives*, New Haven and London, 1977, 195-257; Zheng Qingshan 鄭慶山, *Jin Ping Mei lungao* 金瓶梅論稿, Shenyang: Liaoning renmin, 1987, 16-31; Zhu Xing 朱星, *Jin Ping Mei kaozheng* 金瓶梅考證, Tianjin: Baihua wenyi, 1980, 134-145; Craig Clunas, "The Novel *Jin Ping Mei* as a Source for the Study of Ming Furniture," *Orientations* 23.1 (1992), 60-68; Cai Guoliang 蔡國梁, *Jin Ping Mei kaozheng yu yanjiu* 金瓶梅考證與研究, Xian: Shaanxi renmin, 1984, 247-60.

¹⁰⁶ Chen Zhao 陳詔, "Minsu miaoxie tedian zhi mi 民俗描寫特點之謎," in Liu Hui 劉輝 and Yang Yang 楊揚, eds., *Jin Ping Mei zhi mi* 金瓶梅之謎, Beijing: Shumu wenxian, 1989, 257; Shao Wankuan 邵萬寬 and Zhang Guochao 章國超, *Jin Ping Mei yinshi daguan* 金瓶梅飲食大觀, Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin, 1992.

opposed to officially recognised culture, with vernacular history in contrast to the official version of history.¹⁰⁷

However, in analysing texts, there must be an awareness of the difficulties of relying on these sources for accurate information or 'facts,' due to the presence of with comic exaggeration or authorial irony.¹⁰⁸ How, then, do we deal with these distorting rhetorical devices? The descriptions found in such texts can be considered reflections of the author's relations with society and of human experience as perceived by the author.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, literary texts may reveal the concerns and preoccupations of the time rather than actual social events or situations. In turning to the past to gain an understanding of human existence, Stephen Greenblatt, advocate of "Cultural Poetics" or "New Historicism," suggests the historian's "desire to speak with the dead".¹¹⁰ Glen Dudbridge too has written of "a sequence of voices" when attempting to describe the role the historian plays in interpreting the testimonies left to us.¹¹¹ These include voices from within texts, the author of the text and later critics who have laid down their own interpretations. Each is influenced by their own cultural milieu and filters the information left to us through their own experiences and minds.

There is a tendency to make distinctions between different types of texts and

¹⁰⁷ Daria Berg, "The *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*: A Study of Utopia and the Perception of the World in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Discourse," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oxford, 1994, 12.

¹⁰⁸ G. Dudbridge, "A Pilgrimage in Seventeenth-century Fiction: T'ai-shan and the Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan," *T'oung Pao* 77.4-5 (1991), 229-230; Clunas, 1991a, 131.

¹⁰⁹ Robert E. Hegel, *The Novel in Seventeenth Century China*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1981, 232. He discusses how authors perhaps revealed more of their own minds through contemplation of known social experience despite attempts at objectivity.

¹¹⁰ S. Greenblatt, *Representing the English Renaissance*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1988, 1.

¹¹¹ G. Dudbridge, *Religious Experience and Lay Society in T'ang China. A Reading of Tai Fu's 'Kuang-i-chi'*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 15. Shuhui Yang suggests Feng Menglong voiced his concerns and anxieties through female characters in a form of ventriloquism. See *idem*, *Appropriation and Representation: Feng Menglong and the Chinese Vernacular Story*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1998, 99-152.

consequently, understanding is fundamentally conditioned by the perceived purpose of the text. A text that claims to be a depiction of actual events will be absorbed differently from a text that is assumed to be fiction. Some texts, although apparently reported as 'truth' may, in fact, turn out to be fiction and, vice versa, a supposedly fictional text may actually be portraying a perceived reality. We should therefore approach all sources from the past paying them the same attention as we would a literary text. It is important therefore to take into consideration who wrote the particular text, why it was written and at what type of audience the text was aimed; however, this may not always be possible.¹¹² This is certainly true of the pseudonymous *Jin Ping Mei*.

It was the seventeenth-century China, literary critic Zhang Zhupo 張竹坡 (1670-98) who pointed out: "The *Jin Ping Mei* is a kind of *Shiji*."¹¹³ This gives us some indication as to the traditional relationship between fiction and history in China. These had always been closely linked, as demonstrated by the clearly fictionalised accounts and dialogues of the earliest historical works such as the *Shu jing* 書經 and *Zuozhuan* 左傳. The landmark *Shiji*, in particular, demonstrates the fusion of historical and fictional writings. According to William Dolby, its drama-packed tales make its author more akin to a novelist than historian which suggests why his writings have had a profound effect on later literature.¹¹⁴

The expression *xiaoshuo* 小說 currently refers to 'fiction' or 'novels'.

¹¹² Stephen J. Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture*, London: Routledge, 1990, 11-15; Lee Patterson, *Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987, 44; David Aers, "Introduction," in *idem*, ed., *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology and History*, Brighton: Harvester Press, 1986, 1-10.

¹¹³ "Dufa 讀法 34," *Gaohetang piping diyi qishu Jin Ping Mei* 皋鶴堂批評第一奇書金瓶梅, by Zhang Zhupo 張竹坡, repr. 2 vols., Changchun: Jilin daxue, 1994, 39 (hereafter abbreviated to *DYQS*).

¹¹⁴ William Dolby, "Historical Introduction," in Sima Qian, *Warlords*, William Dolby and John Scott, tr., Edinburgh: Southside, 1974, 23.

However, the term first appeared in the works of Zhuangzi 莊子 and referred to 'little theories.'¹¹⁵ In the *Han shu* 漢書 compiled by Ban Gu 班固 (32-92AD), *xiaoshuojia* 小說家 referred to minor court officials who collected roadside gossip, anecdotes which were classed amongst philosophical writings.¹¹⁶ In later discussions, *xiaoshuo* ranged from gossip to heterodoxy, both beneath the dignity of scholars argues literary critic Sheldon Lu:

At best, *xiaoshuo* might serve as 'unofficial history,' 'deficient history,' or 'supplemental history,' whose sources, records and accounts were unreliable from the standpoint of the rationalistic, empirical, and historical mind.¹¹⁷

Therefore the line separating history and fiction can be seen to be between canonical and non-canonical texts, between official and non-official discourse, between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, rather than between truth and fiction.

Collections of anecdotes and stories from the Six Dynasties (222-589) based on the unexplained or supernatural, which later became known as *zhiguai* 志怪 'descriptions of anomalies,' were clearly associated with traditional historical writings due to their inclusion of many of the formal features and writing conventions of the classical works. These continued to be classified as types of history and philosophical discourse in later dynastic histories.¹¹⁸ Later *chuanqi* 傳奇 'tales of the marvellous' also retained aspects of historiography such as the biography form.¹¹⁹

Despite a nominal division of fiction and history in the Tang the relationship

¹¹⁵ "Waiwu 外物," in *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋, 4 vols., Beijing: Zhonghua, 1961, 26.925.

¹¹⁶ "Yiwenzhi 藝文志," in *Han shu* 漢書, Ban Gu 班固, ed., repr. 12 vols., Hong Kong: Zhonghua, 1970, 30.1745.

¹¹⁷ Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, *From Historicity to Fictionality: the Chinese Poetics of Narrative*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994, 4-5.

¹¹⁸ Kenneth J. Dewoskin, "The Six Dynasties Chih-kuai and the Birth of Fiction," in Andrew H. Plaks, ed., *Chinese Narrative: Critical and Theoretical Essays*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977, 26-29.

¹¹⁹ Dewoskin, 1977, 48-49.

between them has continued.¹²⁰ The historical basis for much later fiction such as the late Ming novels *Sanguozhi yanyi* 三國志演義 and *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 is an indication of this. Anthony Yu states:

The world implied in the bulk of classical Chinese fiction is one in which everything ‘means’ as long as it is related to a historical context. The problem of anachronism in language, costuming, manners and morals, and so forth, though frequently occurring in the narrative of Chinese fiction, is seldom taken seriously by the writer/storyteller and his reader, because more often than not historical data serve mainly as a reminder alerting readers to some *a-temporal* significance of moral mechanism, thereby highlighting a fundamental premise of Chinese historiography.¹²¹

It therefore became a narrative convention to use an historical framework for a contemporary novel. As the late Ming scholar Xie Zhaozhe 謝肇淛 (1567-1624)¹²² noted, it was necessary to combine real and fictive events in literary works.¹²³ Yu concludes “the implied status of art in this view is unmistakable: fiction is but repetition of history.”¹²⁴ It was perhaps not until this later period with the development of Chinese literary poetics as represented by commentators such as Zhang Zhupo who employed terms such as *bizhen* 逼真 ‘realistic,’ *xiaoxiang* 肖像 ‘lifelike,’ and *chuanshen* 傳神 ‘vivid’ to describe artistic quality, that there was the realisation of the more creative nature of fiction.¹²⁵ Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 (d.1763),¹²⁶ author of the Qing 清 (1644-1911) novel *Hongloumeng* 紅樓夢 sums up this interfusion of fact and fiction:

¹²⁰ Lu, 1994; Karl S.Y. Kao, *Classical Chinese Tales of the Supernatural and the Fantastic: Selections from the Third to the Tenth Century*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985, 21-22; Victor H. Mair, “The Narrative Revolution in Chinese Literature: Critological Presuppositions,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles and Reviews* (hereafter abbreviated to *CLEAR*) 5 (1983), 1-27.

¹²¹ Anthony Yu, “History, Fiction and Reading Chinese Narrative,” *CLEAR* 10.1-2 (1988), 14. See also *idem*, *Rereading the Stone: Desire and the Making of Fiction in the Dream of the Red Chamber*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, esp. 20-52.

¹²² *DMB*, 546-550.

¹²³ *Wuzazu* 五雜俎, by Xie Zhaozhe 謝肇淛, repr. 2 vols., Shanghai: Zhongyang, 1935, 15.307 (hereafter abbreviated to *WZZ*).

¹²⁴ Yu, 1988, 16.

¹²⁵ Lu, 1994, 134-142.

¹²⁶ *ECCP*, 737-739.

Truth becomes fiction when the fiction's real;
Real becomes not-real when the unreal's real.¹²⁷

Therefore, the traditional distinction between literary and historical discourses may not be wholly accurate, particularly in the Chinese case, as it is clear that both forms of discourse influenced each other. According to New Historicists, literary texts can be seen to be part of a network of active social forces, a symbolic economy through which culture and ideology are formed. Therefore, just as literary texts must be placed in their contexts, history can only be revealed through texts and narratives.¹²⁸ Aspects of this approach will be employed in the analysis of the various sources utilised in this thesis. By paying attention to both material sources and textual sources such as the *Jin Ping Mei*, dynamic and static perceptions of the female world of material culture may be revealed.

The Novel Jin Ping Mei

Although the *Jin Ping Mei* is ostensibly set in the last years of the Northern Song 宋 (960-1125), characters in the novel are depicted wearing clothes from the late Ming dynasty.¹²⁹ Unlike previous fiction where dress and ornamentation were merely devices intended to help the reader distinguish stereotypical characters, material objects such as food and clothing in the *Jin Ping Mei* appear as keys to the personalities and values of the individual characters and thereby reveal the norms and values of their society.¹³⁰ The detailed descriptions of material are not simply flagrant displays of authorial virtuosity, but deliberate designs to convey the physical and

¹²⁷ Cao Xueqin, *The Story of the Stone, also known as the The Dream of the Red Chamber. Volume 1: The Golden Days*, David Hawkes, tr., Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973, 55.

¹²⁸ Greenblatt, 1990, 157-158 and 170; Gabrielle M. Spiegel, "History, Historicism, and the Social Logic of the Text in the Middle Ages," *Speculum* 65.1 (1990), 70.

¹²⁹ Chen Zhao lays down evidence for the use of Ming fashions. Chen, 1989, 278-281.

¹³⁰ Sun Xun 孫遜 and Zhan Dan 詹丹, *Jin Ping Mei gaishuo* 金瓶梅概說, Shanghai: Guji, 1994, 78-79; Mote, 1977, 225.

psychological qualities of the characters through the garments they wear.¹³¹

At the relatively superficial level, clothes, ornamentation and material seem to symbolise the women themselves. Women are referred to throughout the novel by recurrent phrases such as *hua zuan jin cu* 花攢錦簇 ‘bouquets of flowers and clusters of brocade’ and *yi cui wei hong* 倚翠偎紅 ‘leaning against turquoise and cuddling red.’ Pan Jinlian is referred to as *ke yi qun chai* 可意裙釵 ‘the skirt and hairpin of one’s desire.’¹³² Elsewhere, prostitutes are referred to as *hong qun* 紅裙 ‘red skirts.’¹³³ These phrases are not unique to the *Jin Ping Mei*; however, there is clearly more to dress and ornamentation than simply mimetic description at work here.

In turning to *Jin Ping Mei* to discover perceptions of material culture for women of the Ming period, Craig Clunas emphasises the male authorship bias of many of the extant sources of information on material culture for women. Even though many scenes in the *Jin Ping Mei* depict women, commenting in detail on their environment, the author through which they are mediated is probably male, and he concludes that we are unable to know how women thought about the material goods surrounding them.¹³⁴ However, this may not necessarily be the case. As we have seen, the many layers of ‘voices’ within the text may, in fact, through careful analysis, reveal filtered perceptions of the concerns of both women and men.

a) Structure and themes

As one of the first Chinese vernacular novels to display a unilinear plot, the narrative structure of the *Jin Ping Mei* has been admired even by the earliest critics.

¹³¹ John Hay, ‘The Body Invisible in Chinese Art?’ in Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlow, eds., *Body, Subject and Power in China*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994, 61-2.

¹³² *JPMCH*, 4.4b.

¹³³ *JPMCH*, 15.1a.

¹³⁴ Clunas, 1991a, 76.

The Xinxin Zi 欣欣子 preface describes "a unified focus in its structural ramifications such that myriad threads face the wind without becoming entangled" and the Qing critic Zhang Zhupo's essay *Jin Ping Mei dufa* 金瓶梅讀法 "How to read the *Jin Ping Mei*" comprises 108 points elaborating the intricacy of the text.¹³⁵ More recently, C.T. Hsia's comment that the novel presents "structural anarchy" has been strongly refuted by David Tod Roy who describes a "finely wrought structure,"¹³⁶ and Andrew Plaks who has detailed the author's manipulation of the seasons, recurring annual events such as birthdays and festivals, to name but a few.¹³⁷ The fact that the novel exhibits some inconsistencies in point of view and improbabilities suggests, for some, that the manuscript may have left the author's hands before its completion.¹³⁸ Internal evidence indicates that the work is of a single creative imagination;¹³⁹ however, some scholars have suggested that chapters 53 to 57 may be of another hand,¹⁴⁰ and one suggests that the final 20 chapters are by a different author from the first 80.¹⁴¹

The novel demonstrates a wide range of sources, with the first ten chapters of the plot taken from the earlier novel *Shuihu zhuan*. Other materials originate from drama, colloquial and classical short stories and poetry.¹⁴² The opening twenty

¹³⁵ DYQS, 30-52.

¹³⁶ David Tod Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or Chin P'ing Mei. Vol. 1: The Gathering*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993, xviii. See also Peter Rushton, *The Jin Ping Mei and the Nonlinear Dimensions of the Traditional Chinese Novel*, Lewiston: Mellen University Press, 1994, 225 who applies chaos theory to the novel.

¹³⁷ Andrew H. Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987, 97-98 and 120-156. See also Katherine Carlitz, "Codes and Correspondences in the *Jin Ping Mei*," *CLEAR* 8 (1986), 7; Wei Ziyun 魏子雲, *Jin Ping Mei de wenshi yu yanbian* 金瓶梅的問世與演變, Taipei: Shibao, 1983, 89-91; Zhu Xing, 1980, 59.

¹³⁸ Roy, 1993, xx.

¹³⁹ Patrick D. Hanan, "A Landmark of the Chinese Novel," in Douglas Grant and Millar Maclure, eds., *The Far East: China and Japan*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961, 325.

¹⁴⁰ Hanan, 1961, 14-33. Lu Xun says they were initially missing and were added at the first printing. See Lu Xun 魯迅, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilue* 中國小說史略, Beijing: Beixin shuju, 1925, 199.

¹⁴¹ Liu Hui 劉輝, *Jin Ping Mei chengshu yu banben yanjiu* 金瓶梅成書與版本研究, Shenyang: Liaoning, 1986, 3-6.

¹⁴² Patrick D. Hanan, "Sources of the Chin P'ing Mei," in *Asia Major* 10.1 (1963), 39-49.

chapters of the novel depict the gathering of the principal characters in the main setting, the Ximen 西門 household. Beginning with the adultery of Pan Jinlian and Ximen Qing 西門慶 which leads to the murder of her husband Wu Da 武大, we see Ximen Qing's concubines entering the house. First is the wealthy widow Meng Yulou 孟玉樓, then Pan Jinlian and finally another wealthy widow Li Ping'er, to join Wu Yueniang 吳月娘, the principal wife and the existing concubines, former prostitute Li Jiao'er 李嬌兒 and promoted maid Sun Xue'e 孫雪娥. The narrative depicts Ximen Qing's increasing wealth, status and sexual conquests and the developing rivalries between his wives, Pan Jinlian and Li Ping'er in particular. A visit to the powerful minister Cai Jing 蔡京 in the capital and his obtaining an aphrodisiac from an itinerant monk (Chapters 49-50) form the climax to his life.

The death of Li Ping'er and her son Guan'ge 官哥 at the hands of Pan Jinlian following this indicate the start of decline and Ximen is ultimately overdosed by Jinlian, dying at the same moment Yueniang's son, Xiaoge 孝哥, is born (Chapter 79). The last twenty chapters see the disintegration of the household beginning with Li Jiao'er returns to the brothel. Wu Yueniang undertakes a hazardous pilgrimage before returning to assert her authority, ejecting Chunmei (Jinlian's maid), Chen Jingji 陳經濟 (Ximen's son-in-law) and Jinlian from the household following the discovery of their adultery. Jinlian goes to her death at the hands of Wu Song 武松. Shortly after, Sun Xue'e is sold and Meng Yulou remarries. The final ten chapters detail the demises of Chen Jingji and Chunmei, now the wife of Commander Zhou 周守備. In the final chapter Yueniang is forced to hand over Xiaoge to a strange Pujing as she flees the invading Jin 金 forces.

Analysis of the main themes of the novel may help us to comprehend the

framework for the voices which emerge from the text. There have been many misreadings of the novel, according to Roy:

In roughly chronological order, it has been interpreted as a roman à clef, a work of pornography, a Buddhist morality play, an exercise in naturalism, or a novel of manners,¹⁴³

although he qualifies this by saying that cases can be made for all of them. What are then the main themes of the *Jin Ping Mei*? In fact, many of them are introduced in Chapters 1-10, which can be likened to the *ruhua* 入話 of the colloquial short story. The time setting is during the Song dynasty, between 1112 and 1127, the background framework depicting the internal collapse of the dynasty followed by the conquest of Northern China by the Jin Dynasty in 1127. Ximen Qing is the incompetent ruler, a mirror to Emperor Huizong 徽宗 (r.1100-1125) of the Song and the Jiajing and/or Wanli Emperors of the Ming. The six evil ministers blamed for fall of the Song can be thought of as Ximen's six wives. The maids and servants are the eunuchs and lesser officials.¹⁴⁴ The central world of the household is a microcosm of the world at large. It is a society on the verge of collapse.¹⁴⁵

The novel is mainly situated in Shandong, in the town of Qinghe "Clear Water." Roy has used this place name to substantiate his theory that the vision behind the novel is Xunzian. If a true sage were on the throne then the water of the Yellow River would run clear, an argument delineated in the theories of Xunzi who resided in Lanling, Shandong. That the water of Qinghe is anything but clean is made very apparent.¹⁴⁶ Qinghe could actually be referring to Beijing due the numerous common place names, places which are peculiar to Beijing only. This furthers the assumption that Qinghe is intended as a microcosm.¹⁴⁷ Roy praises the author's comparisons:

¹⁴³ Roy, 1993, xviii.

¹⁴⁴ Katherine N. Carlitz, "Family, Society and Tradition in *Jin Ping Mei*," *Modern China* 10.4 (1984), 403-406.

¹⁴⁵ Tian Bing'e 田秉鐸, *Jin Ping Mei yu Zhongguo wenhua* 金瓶梅與中國文化, Jiangsu wenyi, 1992, 172-174; Li Xicheng 李西成, "Jin Ping Mei de shehui yiyi jiqi yishu chengjiu 金瓶梅的社會意義及其藝術成就," in Renmin wenxue chubanshe 人民文學出版社, ed., *Ming Qing xiaoshuo yanjiu lunwenji* 明清小說研究論文集, Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 1959, 155-172.

¹⁴⁶ Roy, 1993, xxxvi.

¹⁴⁷ Ding Lang 丁朗, *Jin Ping Mei yu Beijing* 金瓶梅與北京, Beijing: Zhongguo shehui, 1996.

By deliberately choosing to focus his attention on the quotidian minutiae in the household of an ordinary upwardly mobile individual from the midrange of the social pyramid, and periodically reminding his readers of the analogical relationship between this microcosm and the society as a whole, he created a far more effective picture of the self-destructiveness of a society in the process of moral disintegration than he could have done if he had chosen instead, as most of his predecessors did, to depict the stereotypical acts of the emperor and his ministers at court. No more devastatingly convincing indictment of a morally bankrupt society has ever been penned.¹⁴⁸

Characters range from the Emperor and the court at the top of the social hierarchy, to the down-and-outs at the bottom. Among the major topics is the portrayal of the newly emerging merchant class and the career of Ximen Qing could perhaps be considered a study of social mobility.¹⁴⁹ Although the title of the novel can be semantically construed as *Plum Blossoms in a Golden Vase*, it can also be seen to be composed of characters from three of the female characters' names: Pan Jinlian 潘金蓮, Li Ping'er 李瓶兒 and Pang Chunmei 龐春梅, perhaps indicating the importance of their roles, or the roles of the women in general in the novel. Yang et al. assert:

The *Chin P'ing Mei* was the first Chinese novel to portray women adequately. Some of its female characters are complex creatures and appear to be real individuals rather than stereotypes. In fact, the women are generally considered to be the center of interest in the novel.¹⁵⁰

The daily lives of the female characters are described in detail. This attention to the behaviour of women makes the novel an obvious choice as a source material for contemporary perceptions of women.

The *Sitan* 四貪 "Four Vices of Excess" are a major theme of the novel and 'desire' appears to form the foundation of the plot.¹⁵¹ The vices are *jiu* 酒 'drunkenness', *se* 色 'lust', *cai* 財 'avarice' and *qi* 氣 'wrath'. These originate from

¹⁴⁸ Roy, 1993, xxvi-xxvii

¹⁴⁹ W.L.Y. Yang, P. Li and N.K. Mao, *Classical Chinese Fiction - A Guide to its Study and Appreciation*, London: George Prior, 1978, 50.

¹⁵⁰ Yang et al., 1978, 57-8.

¹⁵¹ Tian Bing'e, 1992, 32.

the memorial Luo Yuren 雒于仁 presented to the Wanli Emperor in 1589,¹⁵² primarily in connection with the Wanli Emperor's favouritism for his consort Zheng Guifei 鄭貴妃, an obsession which is mirrored in Ximen Qing's love for Li Ping'er.¹⁵³ It can be argued here that such dangerous favouritism by an emperor towards a concubine can be found in many other periods too, as can imperial interest in *se*.¹⁵⁴ "Lust" is the aspect of the novel frequently condemned by later Chinese commentators who, in contrast to earlier Chinese critics, have ignored the essential role the erotic passages play in the text, particularly as the lack of sexual satisfaction fuels the jealous rivalries among the female characters.¹⁵⁵ In addition, the sexual scenes are depicted in such a way as to deflate any stimulatory effect and it is perhaps more likely that the novel is intended as a warning.¹⁵⁶ The themes of desire

¹⁵² Memorial reproduced in *Wanli dichao* 萬歷邸鈔, 3 vols., Taipei: Guting shuwu, 1968, 1.468-474. See also David Tod Roy, "The Case for Tang Xianzu's Authorship of the *Jin Ping Mei*," *CLEAR* 8 (1986), 56-57, on Tang and Luo's relationship and how the novel is a description of the four vices but on a smaller scale which is why the author remained anonymous. See also *Linshi yixing* 林石遺興, by Xue Lundao 薛論道, copy held in the Shoudu tushuguan 首都圖書館, 1.13a-14a.

¹⁵³ Plaks, 1987, 60; Roy, 1986, 37; *DMB*, 208-11; Ray Huang, 1587, *A Year of No Significance: The Ming Dynasty in Decline*, New Haven and London: Columbia University Press, 1981, 31-5 and Appendix A; Wei Ziyun, 1983, 63-80; Lu Ge 魯歌 and Ma Zheng 馬征, "Tan Jin Ping Mei dui Wanli di chongfei Zheng Guifei de yingshe 談金瓶梅對萬歷帝寵妃鄭貴妃的影射," in Jilin daxue Zhongguo wenhua yanjiusuo 吉林大學中國文化研究所, ed., *Jin Ping Mei yishu shijie* 金瓶梅藝術世界, Changchun: Jilin daxue, 1991, 182-93. Wei Ziyun 魏子雲 even suggests that the novel was originally a satire on this relationship. See *idem*, "Jin Ping Mei de zhengzhi fengyu 金瓶梅的政治諷喻," in Huang Lin 黃霖, ed., *Jin Ping Mei kaolun* 金瓶梅考論, Shenyang: Liaoning, 1989, 50.

¹⁵⁴ The Tang emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 and the destabilising influence of his favourite consort, Yang Guifei 楊貴妃, is one notable example. See Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank eds., *Cambridge History of China Vol.3: Sui and Tang China, 589-906, Part 1*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1979, 427-8 and 563. For imperial sexual exploits, see "Jin yao 進藥," in *WLYHB*, 21.1438-1439; Yang Qiqiao 楊啓樵, "Mingdai zhudi zhi chongshang fangshu jiqi yingxiang 明代諸帝之崇尚方術及其影響," in Bao Zunpeng 包遵彭, ed., *Mingdai zongjiao* 明代宗教, Taipei: Xuesheng, 1968, 203-97, esp 254-6.

¹⁵⁵ Tian Bing'e criticises the amount of sexual description and what he describes as the "abnormality of sexual behaviour" (*xing xingwei bingtai* 性行為病態) yet acknowledges its historical authenticity. *Idem*, 1992, 122-3. Fang Zhengyao 方正耀, on the other hand, believes that the descriptions do not depict reality and are, instead, thoroughly enjoyed by author. In *idem*, *Ming Qing renqing xiaoshuo yanjiu* 明清人情小說研究, Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue, 1986. The early twentieth century author Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881-1936) highly praises the author's writing skill, in spite of his inclusion of pornographic passages. *Idem*, 1925, 205. For a Western perspective, see Indira Satyendra, "Metaphors of the Body: The Sexual Economy of the *Chin P'ing Mei tz'u-hua*," *CLEAR* 15, 1993, 86.

¹⁵⁶ Roy, 1993, xxxvii-xxxviii; Keith McMahon, "Eroticism in Late Ming, Early Qing Fiction: The Beauteous Realm and the Sexual Battlefield," *T'oung Pao* 73 (1987), 218.

and excess frequently occur in connection with material goods, particularly dress and ornamentation, and these will be examined more closely in the main body of the thesis.

There has been much debate, especially recently, on the question of the overall vision of the novel: is it Confucian, Buddhist, or Daoist in outlook, or is it all three? Plaks believes that the work portrays a negative reflection of the Confucian ideal of self-cultivation (*xiu shen* 修身) in the failure of Ximen Qing to practise the central teachings of the Four Books.¹⁵⁷ Roy agrees that the vision is Confucian but he advocates a Xunzian framework. He believes the pseudonym *Lanling Xiaoxiao Sheng* 蘭陵笑笑生 "Scoffing Scholar of Lanling" alludes to Xunzi who "scoffed" contemptuously at the amoral status seekers of his day.¹⁵⁸

C.T. Hsia's comment that "the novel ends hopefully on a note of Buddhist redemption,"¹⁵⁹ has been the focus of many theories although, by the time of the composition of the novel, this had become a conventional narrative framework.¹⁶⁰ It is more likely that the novel displays a multivocal voice reflecting the pluralistic vision and syncretism of late Ming life as Paul Varo Martinson acknowledges:

The narrator indeed speaks with many voices, but no one alone, nor all in cacophony, need be equated with the author's. In fact, the author stands in the shadows behind all these voices, and the very ability to strum these seemingly discordant tunes in a single coherent piece of exceedingly intricate structure (...) strongly suggests a unifying vision sustaining the whole. It is not that the author cannot resolve the contradictions internal to his own thinking, it is rather that his thinking has deciphered primary fractures in an inconsistent world.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ See Plaks, 1987, 156-180.

¹⁵⁸ Roy, 1993, xxiv-xxvi.

¹⁵⁹ C.T. Hsia, *The Classic Chinese Novel: A Critical Introduction*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980, 173.

¹⁶⁰ Plaks, 1987, 137; Katherine Carlitz, "The Conclusion of the *Jin Ping Mei*," *Ming Studies* 10 (1980), 27.

¹⁶¹ Paul Varo Martinson, "The *Chin P'ing Mei* as Wisdom Literature: A Methodological Essay," *Ming Studies* 5 (1977), 46. Greenblatt argues for a co-existence of multiple, competing and conflicting histories rather than a single vision in a work. See S. Greenblatt, *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance*, Norman: Pilgrim Books, 1982, 5. M.M. Bakhtin had earlier advocated a 'novelistic discourse' which is dialogic and multivoiced. This variety of social voices thereby contests the

As will be shown in Chapter One, the late sixteenth-century was a period of great economic, social and philosophical change and these inconsistencies are an integral part of the novel. The plurality of voices can, in fact, reveal a more multi-faceted view of the time.

b) Authorship and Dating

There has been considerable debate over the authorship and dating of the *Jin Ping Mei* and investigation into these areas may influence the way the novel is approached. The dating, location and class of the author are all significant. Much remains inconclusive particularly due to the anonymity of the author. Although erotic stories and woodcuts were popular during the late sixteenth century, the pornographic and satirical nature of the text may have been one of the factors which led to the anonymity of the author and the composers of the prefaces.¹⁶²

Contemporary evidence proves that at least part of the novel was in existence by the mid-1590's.¹⁶³ The letter of the poet and critic, Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 (1568-1610),¹⁶⁴ to the painter and calligrapher Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555-1636)¹⁶⁵ of around 1596 mentions part of a text.¹⁶⁶ Yuan's brother, Yuan Zhongdao 袁中道

monologic canonisations and official ideologies which are disengaged from the diversity of contemporary reality. See Michael Holquist, ed., *The Dialogic Imagination - Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, Austin: University of Texas, 1981, esp. "Discourse in the Novel," 259-422.

¹⁶² Another reason may be that the novel is a veiled criticism of the Ming government. Many authors of *xiaoshuo* remained anonymous which suggests this may have become a convention.

¹⁶³ Although Tu Benjun 屠本峻 may have seen a copy at Wang Shizhen's house as early as 1584 - Zheng Run 鄭閏, *Jin Ping Mei he Tu Long* 金瓶梅和屠隆, Shanghai: Xuelin, 1994, 119; A Ying 阿英, *Xiaoshuo xiantan* 小說閒談, Shanghai: Gudian wenxue, 1958, 29-33.

¹⁶⁴ DMB, 1635-1638.

¹⁶⁵ ECCP, 787-89.

¹⁶⁶ *Yuan Zhongdao chidu* 袁中郎尺牘, by Yuan Zhongdao 袁中道, repr. Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi, 1991, 164; Patrick D. Hanan, "The Text of the Chin P'ing Mei," *Asia Major* 9.1 (1962), 39-51; Zhou Juntao 周鈞騅, *Jin Ping Mei xintan* 金瓶梅新探, Tianjin: Baihua wenyi, 1987, 1-22, dates letter to autumn, 1595.

(1570-1624), another writer, also mentions seeing the text at about the same time.¹⁶⁷ Shen Defu 沈德符 (1578-1642), in his *Wanli yehuo bian* 萬歷野獲編, reports meeting Yuan Hongdao in 1607 who claimed he knew of a complete manuscript in the possession of the family of Liu Chengxi 劉承禧 at Macheng 麻城.¹⁶⁸ He also suggests that the author of the novel was “a renowned literary figure of the Jiajing period” (*Jiajing jian da ming shi* 嘉靖間大名士),¹⁶⁹ as does one of the prefaces which writes of a “poet of an earlier age” (*qiandai saoren* 前代騷人).¹⁷⁰ By the early Qing, the rumour was circulating that the novel was written by Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526-90),¹⁷¹ a leading poet and essayist, to avenge the death of his father allegedly caused by the evil minister Yan Shifan.¹⁷² Modern scholar Zhu Xing 朱星 is a supporter of this theory,¹⁷³ although the majority of scholars have shown that there is no evidence to support it.¹⁷⁴ However, it still remains that Wang Shizhen appears to have played a central role in the copying and circulating of an early manuscript.¹⁷⁵

Other stories replace the Jiajing politician, Lu Bing 陸炳 (1510-60) as the villain,¹⁷⁶ or have the act of revenge carried out by an unknown retainer of an officer

¹⁶⁷ “Youju shilu 遊居柿錄” by Yuan Zhongdao, cited in Kong Lingjing 孔另境, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shiliao* 中國小說史料, Shanghai: Gudian wenxue, 1957, 81; Wei Ziyun, 1983, 51-62; Xu Shuofang 徐朔方, *Lun Tang Xianzu ji qita* 論湯顯祖及其他, Shanghai: Guji, 1983, 125-32.

¹⁶⁸ “*Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅,” in *WLYHB*, 25.1720-1721; Ma Tailai 馬泰來, “Macheng Liujia he *Jin Ping Mei* 麻城劉家和金瓶梅,” *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* 中華文史論叢 1982.1, 111-20.

¹⁶⁹ *WLYHB*, 25.1721.

¹⁷⁰ Xinxin Zi 欣欣子 preface *Jin Ping Mei cihua xu* 金瓶梅詞話序 to *JPMCH*.

¹⁷¹ *DMB*, 1399-1404.

¹⁷² See Nian Gong 廿公 preface *ba* 跋 to *JPMCH*; Xieyi 謝頤 preface to *DYQS*; *WLYHB*, 25.1721-1722, Kong Lingjing, 1957, 81-89; Wei Ziyun, 1983, 11-24.

¹⁷³ Zhu Xing, 1980, 31-35.

¹⁷⁴ See Wei Ziyun, 1983, 25-37; Wu Han 吳晗, “‘Qingming shanghe tu’ yu ‘*Jin Ping Mei*’ de gushi ji qi yanbian ‘清明上河圖’與‘金瓶梅’的故事及其衍變,” in *Wu Han shixue lunzhu xuanji* 吳晗史學論著選集, Beijing: Renmin, 1984, 37-54.

¹⁷⁵ Bu Jian 卜鍵, *Jin Ping Mei zuozhe Li Kaixian kao* 金瓶梅作者李開先考, Lanzhou: Gansu renmin, 1988, 349-50; Zheng Run, 1994, 119.

¹⁷⁶ See “Shangzheng ba 觴政跋,” by Tu Benjun 屠本峻, discussed in Liu Hui, 1986, 40-58.

in the imperial guard (*jīnwu qili* 金吾戚里).¹⁷⁷ C.T. Hsia believes the author to be an obscure writer. He says the leading intellectuals of the day such as Dong Qichang, Yuan Hongdao, Yuan Zhongdao and Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖 (1550-1616),¹⁷⁸ who all saw the manuscript in the 1590s, seem not to know the author.¹⁷⁹ Yuan Zhongdao himself describes the author as a Shaoxing scholar engaged in Captain Ximen's household in the capital.¹⁸⁰

Modern scholars Xu Shuofang 徐朔方, Bu Jian 卜鍵 and Peter Rushton, have suggested the Jiajing author Li Kaixian 李開先 (1502-68), based on Li's geographical origins, family history, lifestyle, literary orientation and his friendship with Wang Shizhen.¹⁸¹ Li's *Baojian ji* 寶劍記 "Tale of the Precious Sword" (pref. 1547) is frequently quoted and is the latest dateable piece in the novel.¹⁸² The author of the *Jin Ping Mei* was clearly knowledgeable about the numerous forms of contemporary entertainment and because of this Arthur Waley puts forward the playwright Xu Wei 徐渭 (1521-93).¹⁸³ The exclusion of *Kunqu* 昆曲 in a novel which includes every other major musical mode popular at the time is notable and suggest that the novel was completed by the 1570s when *Kunqu* began to dominate.¹⁸⁴

Roy has discovered a complex network of personal relationships linking the literary master Tang Xianzu to almost all of the scholars connected with the earliest

¹⁷⁷ Ma Tailai, 1982, 115.

¹⁷⁸ *ECCP*, 708-9.

¹⁷⁹ Hsia, 1980, 168; Hanan, 1963, 39-49.

¹⁸⁰ Kong Lingjing, 1957, 81.

¹⁸¹ Xu Shuofang, 1983, 133-47; Bu Jian, 1988; Rushton, 1994, 11-21.

¹⁸² See Hanan, 1963, 50-55 but notes attribution of entire play to Li not certain, 50 n.56.

¹⁸³ In the introduction to Bernard Miall, tr., *Chin P'ing Mei: The Adventurous History of Hsimen and His Six Wives*, London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1939, xviii-xix: xvi.

¹⁸⁴ Xu Fuming 徐扶明, "Jin Ping Mei xiezuo shidai chutan 金瓶梅寫作時代初探," in Xu Shuofang and Liu Hui, eds., 1986, 26-38. For songs used see Hanan, 1963, 49-63; Feng Yuanjun 馮沅君, "Jin Ping Mei cihua zhong de wenxue shiliao 金瓶梅詞話中的文學史料," in *idem*, *Guju shuohui* 古劇說匯, Beijing: Zuoja, 1956, 180-217.

circulation and printing of the novel. He also discusses noticeable parallels in structural and rhetorical devices and in philosophical message, linking the *Jin Ping Mei* to the plays *Nan ke ji* 南柯記 and *Han dan ji* 邯鄲記, in particular, although Tang may have been influenced by his reading of the *Jin Ping Mei* rather than the other way around.¹⁸⁵ It was reported that Tang was working on a controversial work shortly before his death touching on the "Four Vices of Excess." However, this may be the lost *Jin Ping Mei* sequel *Yu Jiao Li* 玉嬌麗.¹⁸⁶

Huang Lin 黃霖 proposes the important sixteenth century poet and dramatist Tu Long 屠隆 (1542-1605),¹⁸⁷ due to the inclusion of his work *Bietoujin wen* 別頭巾文 in the novel and aspects of his life such as his forced retirement in 1584, his knowledge of both official and business affairs, and his friendship with Wang Shizhen and Liu Chengxi.¹⁸⁸ Zheng Run 鄭閏 also points out his knowledge of Shandong and that his family were implicated by Lu Bing. However, the identification of Xiaoxiao Sheng with him in a Wanli work *Shan zhong yi xi hua* 山中一夕話 and his relative Tu Benjun with Xinxinzi is perhaps more significant.¹⁸⁹

Identifying the regional background of the author has figured in recent research. Some believe the author to be from Shandong while others point out the use of Wu 吳 dialect in the novel and cite details of life and customs from central and southern China.¹⁹⁰ Mote notes that the novel's northern locale is apparent in the

¹⁸⁵ Roy, 1986, 38, 44, 48-51.

¹⁸⁶ Roy, 1986, 59.

¹⁸⁷ *DMB*, 1324-1327.

¹⁸⁸ Huang Lin, 1989, 199-217.

¹⁸⁹ Zheng Run, 1994, 103-25.

¹⁹⁰ For Wu dialect see Dai Bufan, 戴不凡, *Xiaoshuo jianwen lu* 小說見聞錄, Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin, 1980, 137-139; Wei Ziyun, 1983, 132-37. For Shandong dialect, see Zhang Hongkui 張鴻魁, "Jin Ping Mei de fangyin tedian 金瓶梅的方音特點," in Ye Guitong 葉桂桐, ed., *Jin Ping Mei zuozhe zhi mi* 金瓶梅作者之謎, Yinchuan: Ningxia renmin, 1988, 320; Zheng Qingshan, 1987, 211-220; Zhang Yuanfen 張遠芬, *Jin Ping Mei zuozhe xinzheng* 金瓶梅作者新證, Jinan: Qi Lu, 1983, 22-29. For discussion of southern habits see Roy, 1986, 43; Dai Bufan, 1980, 160-61.

detailed descriptions of food, “but the richness of the cuisine in the private households of wealth matches anything found in descriptions of southern food of the time.”¹⁹¹ However, due to the increased mobility between north and south in this period, it would be difficult to use this as a criteria.¹⁹² The inconclusive nature of this evidence demonstrates that the novel cannot be pinpointed to a more definite locale. The mixture of influences from both north and south suggests a conglomeration of urban identities and customs typical of many provincial towns at this time. It would be unwise, therefore, to restrict other contemporary sources to be used for contrast and comparison to only those from the Shandong area.

An ancient and now outdated idea is that the novel evolved from storytelling. Pan Kaipei 潘開沛 believes that the novel developed from the recital of Ximen Qing tales but this is disputed by the majority of scholars.¹⁹³ Popular treatment of the *Jin Ping Mei* episodes occurs in various folk genres but these all appear to be derived from the novel and not the other way around.¹⁹⁴ Recently a number of scholars have returned to theory of collective authorship (*jiti chuangzuo* 集體創作), but they also acknowledge that the work was revised to produce the ‘definitive text’ (*xieding* 寫定).¹⁹⁵ Collective authorship could account for the *cihua* label and the many inconsistencies in the text;¹⁹⁶ in addition, a linguistic analysis by Torii Hisayasu

¹⁹¹ Mote, 1977, 243.

¹⁹² Xie Zhaozhe comments on customs moving from the South to the North in *WZZ*, 9.41.

¹⁹³ Pan Kaipei 潘開沛, “*Jin Ping Mei* de chansheng he zuozhe 金瓶梅的產生和作者,” in *Ming Qing xiaoshuo yanjiu lunwenji* 明清小說論文集, Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 1954, 173-80.

¹⁹⁴ Plaks, 1987, 69. Zhang Dai 張岱 and friends listen to a rendition of one such episode, see “Bu xi yuan 不系園,” in *TAMY*, 4.30. Pan Kaipei refers to a “Shuochang *Jin Ping Mei* 說唱金瓶梅” and a “*Jin Ping Mei* tanci 金瓶梅彈詞” in *idem*, 1954, 180. See also Xu Mengxiang 徐夢湘, “Guanyu *Jin Ping Mei* de zuozhe 關於金瓶梅的作者,” in *Ming Qing xiaoshuo yanjiu lunwen ji*, 1954, 181-84.

¹⁹⁵ For discussions on collective authorship see Xu Shuofang, 1983, 133-47 - suggests Li Kaixian as the compiler of the definitive text; Liu Hui, 1986, 36 - suggests Li Yu; Zhou Juntao, 1987, 70-124 - suggests Wang Shizhen.

¹⁹⁶ Hsia, 1980, 173-74; Wei Ziyun, 1983, 146.

鳥居久靖 suggests there could not have been just one author.¹⁹⁷ Problems with this theory, however, include the lack of evidence of prior versions, common in other long novels. However, it is clear that the novel passed through many hands before publication and it is not inconceivable that these may have had a hand in 'editing' the work.

There are many arguments against Jiajing authorship, including the view that the novel could not have been finalised until the Wanli period. Chapter 68, for example, refers to construction of the "New River" (*Xinhe* 新河) which indicates that the novel cannot have been finished before 1577.¹⁹⁸ Wu Han 吳晗 has noted numerous allusions to dateable Wanli institutions, scandals and events including appropriation of silver from the Court of the Imperial Stud (*Taipusi* 太僕寺), the power of eunuchs,¹⁹⁹ the existence of imperial estates, references to stolen imperial lumber destined for palace construction, marble shipments for the Mount Gen 艮 imperial park, the "Four Vices of Excess," the numerous references to Buddhism, and contemporary songs.²⁰⁰ He concludes that a draft had to have been started after 1568 and before 1582 and that the work must have been completed before 1602 and 1606 at the very latest. The criteria used by Wu Han to establish these dates have been questioned by several scholars who have provided evidence to suggest that the above events could be found in the Jiajing period too.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ Torii Hisayasu 鳥居久靖, "Kinpeibai no gengo 金瓶梅の言語," in Osaka shiritsu daigaku 大阪市立大學, ed., *Chūgoku no hachi daishōsetsu* 中國の八大小説, Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1965, 259.

¹⁹⁸ Mei Jie 梅節, "Jin Ping Mei chengshu de shangxian 金瓶梅成書的上限," in *Zhongguo Jin Ping Mei xuehui* 中國金瓶梅學會, ed., *Jin Ping Mei yanjiu* 金瓶梅研究 1, Nanjing: Jiangsu guji, 1990, 84-92.

¹⁹⁹ Robert B. Crawford, "Eunuch Power in the Ming Dynasty," *T'oung Pao* 49 (1961-2), 115-148.

²⁰⁰ Wu Han 吳晗, "Jin Ping Mei de zhuzuo shidai ji qi shehui beijing 金瓶梅的著作時代及其社會背景," in Wu Han and Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸, eds., *Lun Jin Ping Mei* 論金瓶梅, Beijing: Wenhua yishu, 1984, 11-47.

²⁰¹ Kusaka Akira 日下翠, "Jin Ping Mei chengshu niandai kao 金瓶梅成書年代考," in Huang Lin 黃霖 and Wang Guo'an 王國安, eds., *Riben yanjiu Jin Ping Mei lunwen ji* 日本研究金瓶梅 論文集, Jinan: Qi Shu, 1989, 124-129; Zhou Juntao, 1987, 125-66.

Other scholars have provided more evidence that the novel was completed post-1582.²⁰² In chapter 65, the appearance of a character Chen Sizhen 陳四箴 clearly refers to “four warnings;” therefore Huang Lin concludes that the novel refers to the Luo Yuren memorial, although Bu Jian claims the Jiajing had its own “four warnings.”²⁰³ The inclusion of Ling Yunyi 凌雲翼 in chapter 65, a contemporary of Wang Shizhen and Li Kaixian, suggests that the novel may have been completed after his death in 1592, as they would not have included his name otherwise.²⁰⁴ The edition of *Shuihu zhuan* shown to be used “Tiandu waichen xuben 天都外臣續本” is dated 1589.²⁰⁵

In her study of merchants in the Ming dynasty, Angela Hsi notes that up until 1596, merchants had favourable tax conditions in which to develop business, to prosper, and to exert power in society.²⁰⁶ Wang Qi (fl. 1565-1614), a scholar-official,²⁰⁷ pointed out that it was the sharp tax increases under Wanli that began to have a damaging effect on business.²⁰⁸ Large sums of money funded military expeditions and other defence requirements, and went to repair and strengthen portions of the Great Wall and improve the Grand Canal network.²⁰⁹

Prior to 1582 the emperor's spending was stemmed by Zhang Juzheng

²⁰² See also Hanan, 1962, 39 n.45 who feels post-1582 more likely.

²⁰³ Huang Lin, 1989, 38-51; Bu Jian, 1988, 31-36.

²⁰⁴ Huang Lin, 1989, 176-77.

²⁰⁵ Interview, Shanghai, 9/9/97.

²⁰⁶ Angela Hsi, “Social and Economic Status of the Merchant Class of the Ming Dynasty: 1368-1644,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1972, 21.

²⁰⁷ DMB, 1355-6.

²⁰⁸ “Zhengque 征權,” in *Xu wenxian tongkao* 續文獻通考, repr. 2 vols., Shanghai: Shangwu, 1936, 18.2935-8.

²⁰⁹ Ray Huang, “Military Expenditures in Sixteenth Century Ming China,” *Oriens Extremus* 17 (1970), 39-62; *idem*, *Taxation and Governmental Finance in Sixteenth-Century Ming China*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1974, 279-86, 301-05. For Grand Canal construction see Feng Yuejian 封越健, “Mingdai Jing Hang yunhe de gongcheng guanli 明代京杭運河的工程管理,” *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 中國史研究, 1993.1, 50-60.

張居正 (1525-1582);²¹⁰ however after Zhang's death, the emperor began spending excessively on himself and his family.²¹¹ The construction of his own tomb at the Ming imperial burial grounds was also on a huge scale.²¹² In a letter of 1608, the Jesuit missionary, Matteo Ricci (1552-1610),²¹³ estimated that the construction of imperial palaces had cost around 3 million gold pieces.²¹⁴ The emperor had needed funds to repair the palaces after the great fires of 1596-97 and so he had sent eunuchs to the flourishing commercial centres where they raised exorbitant taxes to amass funds.²¹⁵ By the end of the Wanli period, in many commercially vibrant cities, such as Suzhou 蘇州 and Nanjing 南京, business had slumped.²¹⁶ In the town of Linqing 臨清 in Shandong alone, more than two thirds of the silk fabric shops stopped business.²¹⁷ Thus, it can be seen that the avarice of the emperor caused devastation in flourishing economic areas from the mid-Wanli onwards. The merchant life depicted in the *Jin Ping Mei* appears to reflect the economic prosperity prior to the mid-Wanli period yet alludes to the abuse of funds by the court. The author, on the other hand, remains a mystery.²¹⁸

²¹⁰ DMB, 53-61. See Huang, 1981; "Jiangling lun caifu jietie 江陵論財賦揭帖," in *Jie'an laoren manbi* 戒庵老人漫筆, by Li Xu 李翹, repr. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1982, 6.293-294 (hereafter abbreviated to *JALRMB*).

²¹¹ DMB, 334.

²¹² Jonathan D. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*, London: Faber and Faber, 1985, 213. See Huang, 1981, 125-28 and 246. The Dingling tomb is described in Ann Paludan, *The Imperial Ming Tombs*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981, tomb no.10.

²¹³ DMB, 1137-1144.

²¹⁴ Spence, 1985, 213.

²¹⁵ Spence, 1985, 215; DMB, 331.

²¹⁶ Hsi, 1972, 126.

²¹⁷ Huang Peijin 黃佩璣, "Guanyu Mingdai guonei shichang wenti de kaocha 關於明代國內市場問題的考察," in Shang Yue 尚鉞, ed., *Ming Qing shehui jingji xingtai de yanjiu* 明清社會經濟形態的研究, Shanghai: Renmin, 1957, 258.

²¹⁸ Other notable scholars put forward include Li Zhi 李贄 (1527-1602), Shen Defu 袁無崖 (fl.1614) and Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574-1646). More obscure possibilities include Jia Sanjin 賈三近, Wang Zhideng 王穉登 and Zhao Nanxing 趙南星 (1550-1627). Lu Ge 魯歌 and Ma Zheng 馬征, *Jin Ping Mei ji qi zuozhe tanmi* 金瓶梅及其作者探秘, Xi'an: Huayue wenyi, 1989, 1-73 lists 46 theories on authorship. See also Zhou Juntao, 1987, 54-69; Wang Ying 王螢 and Wang Lianzhou 王連洲, "Jin Ping Mei zuozhe zhi mi 金瓶梅作者之謎," in Ye Guitong, 1988, 52-87; Zhang Yuanfen, 1983, 11-16, 30-54.

c) Editions of the Jin Ping Mei

Patrick Hanan has identified three principal texts of the *Jin Ping Mei* and has labelled them A, B and C.²¹⁹ The A edition, or *cihua* 詞話 edition, is considered by most scholars to be the text closest to the original work of the author. It is the only version complete with quoted material such as songs, poetry, and dramatic dialogue imported and incorporated into the text.²²⁰ Although Hanan believes the first recorded printed edition was published either in 1610 or 1611,²²¹ it no longer exists and the earliest extant edition was published some time after 1616.²²²

The B editions, thought to date from the Chongzhen 崇禎 reign period (1628-44), are usually referred to as the Chongzhen editions 崇禎本, and contain notes made by an anonymous commentator. Differences between the A and B editions include the content of chapters 1 and 53 to 55, chapter titles and quoted poems, division into *juan* 卷 'volumes' and *hui* 回 'chapters', and the greater attention to detail in the A edition. Some scholars believe that the Chongzhen text may actually be from the same period as the A edition.²²³ The C edition, commonly known as *Diyi qishu* 第一奇書, which contains the Zhang Zhupo commentary, is almost identical textually to the B editions.

This thesis refers to a photolithographic reprint of the Wanli reign period (1573-1619) blockprint A edition, *Jin Ping Mei Cihua* 金瓶梅詞話, which also

²¹⁹ For more detailed information on the different editions of the novel see Hanan, 1962, 1-57, esp. 1-11; Liu Hui 劉輝, "*Jin Ping Mei* banben kao 金瓶梅版本考," in Xu Shuofang and Liu Hui, eds., 1986, 224-48.

²²⁰ Roy, 1993, xxi.

²²¹ Hanan, 1962, 54. Yuan Zhongdao does not mention a published *Jin Ping Mei* in his diary of 1614 - Ono Shinobu 小野忍, "*Jin Ping Mei* pipan yanjiu - *Jin Ping Mei* riyiben yi houji 金瓶梅批判研究 - 金瓶梅日譯本譯後記," in Bao Zhennan 包振南, Kou Xiaowei 寇曉偉 and Zhang Xiaoying 張小影, eds., *Jin Ping Mei ji qita* 金瓶梅及其他, Changchun: Jilin wenshi, 1991, 146.

²²² For 1618, see Plaks, 1987, 65. For 1617, see André Lévy, "About the Date of the First Printed Edition of the Chin P'ing Mei," *CLEAR* 1 (1979), 43-47; Ono Shinobu, "*Chin P'ing Mei*: A Critical Study," *Acta Asiatica* 5 (1963), 79.

²²³ Hanan, 1962, 5-10. See also Plaks, 1987, 65-8. He discusses the possibility that Xie Zhaozhe may have borrowed a copy of one of the earliest manuscripts from Yuan Hongdao of which it is known he had in his possession as early as 1607. Xie's colophon describes a manuscript in 20 *juan* and we know that the Chongzhen text is composed of 20 *juan* of 5 *hui* whereas the *cihua* is composed of 10 *juan* of 10 *hui* each. Therefore the two editions may have been circulating at the same time. See also Ma Tailai 馬泰來, "Xie Zhaozhe de '*Jin Ping Mei* ba' 謝肇淪的金瓶梅跋," *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* 中華文史論叢 1980.4, 299-305.

contains the illustrations reproduced from one of the B editions.

d) Discourse on the novel

Multiple discourses on the *Jin Ping Mei* have existed from before its publication; however, discourse on clothing and ornamentation is sparse. Zhang Ruiquan 張瑞泉 has written a short article on the clothing and ornamentation as detailed in the *Jin Ping Mei*,²²⁴ and Araki Takeshi 荒木猛 has written an article on official insignia.²²⁵ Other Chinese works also contain short sections on clothing and textiles.²²⁶

The earliest discourse on the novel occurred between late Ming dynasty scholars. Yuan Zhongdao reports that Dong Qichang had described it as “extremely fine,”²²⁷ and Yuan Hongdao adjudged *Jin Ping Mei* “an unofficial classic” of the art of drinking.²²⁸ Other early critics of the novel such as Shen Defu and the scholar and poet, Xie Zhaozhe, cover the novel’s subject matter and themes, author, origin and development.²²⁹

There are three prefaces to the *Jin Ping Mei cihua*. The first is the *Jin Ping Mei xu* 金瓶梅序 signed Xinxin Zi 欣欣子. He discusses the novel’s intricate plot and the aim of the work to discourage vice and promiscuity. The second preface is a colophon, *ba* 跋, signed Nian Gong 廿公, who reinforces the admonitory intentions of the author in portraying flaws of the main characters. The third preface is another

²²⁴ Zhang Ruiquan 張瑞泉, “*Jin Ping Mei* fushi xiaokao erze 金瓶梅服飾二則,” *Shixue jikan* 史學集刊 38 (1990-1), 76.

²²⁵ Araki Takeshi 荒木猛, “Kinpeibai hofukukyû 金瓶梅補服考,” *Nagasaki Daigaku Kyôyôbu Kiyô* 長崎大學教養部紀要 31.1 (1990), 1-28.

²²⁶ Wu Han and Zheng Zhenduo, eds., 1984, 415-28; Cai Guoliang, 1984, 208-11.

²²⁷ Kong Lingjing, 1957, 81.

²²⁸ In his composition *Shang zheng* 觴政 “Rules of Drinking” (1605-6), by Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道, repr. in *Yuan Hongdao ji jian jiao* 袁宏道集箋校, 3 vols., Shanghai: Guji, 1981, 48.1419.

²²⁹ *WLYHB*, 25.1720-1722; Ma Tailai, 1980, 299-305; Wu Han and Zheng Zhenduo, eds., 1984, 302-306.

Jin Ping Mei xu 金瓶梅序, signed Nongzhu Ke 弄珠客 and dated 1617. Nongzhu Ke also says that the book should not be read as obscene and adds that the novel's "satirical shafts [are] directed at contemporary targets." None of these have been identified.²³⁰

Perhaps the most influential of all the early critics of the *Jin Ping Mei* is the Qing scholar Zhang Zhupo.²³¹ His edited version of the novel is interspersed with commentary and preceded by his essay *Jin Ping Mei dufa*. Zhang attempts to show how the work has been constructed with the utmost care and attention to detail. References to his comments are highlighted throughout this thesis.²³² Another commentator following in Zhang Zhupo's style was Wen Long 文龍 of the late nineteenth century, who produced a similar chapter by chapter analysis of the novel in 1880.²³³

More recently, scholars have studied the development of the novel from *Jin Ping Mei* to *Honglouloumeng*, noting the debt the latter has to *Jin Ping Mei*.²³⁴ Complementing the work of Andrew Plaks, Katherine Carlitz has researched aspects of the text with regard to the role of drama, allusion, and rhetorical devices.²³⁵ Using

²³⁰ Wang Liqi 王利器 suggests Yuan Wuya 袁無涯 in *idem*, "Nian Gong shi shei? Dongwu Nongzhuke shi shei? 廿公是誰? 東吳弄珠客是誰?" *Shehui kexue zhanxian* 社會科學戰綫 1991.3, 272-3. Zheng Run suggests Xinxinzi is Tu Benjun, Nongzhuke is He Sanwei 何三畏 and Nian Gong is Xu Nianzu 徐念祖 in *idem*, 1994, 113-125.

²³¹ Liu Hui 劉輝 and Gu Guorui 顧國瑞, "Zai tan Zhang Zhupo de jiaoshi, shengping jiqi ping *Jin Ping Mei* de niandai 再談張竹坡的家世, 生平及其評金瓶梅的年代," *Wenxue yichan zengkan* 文學遺產增刊 17 (1991), 267.

²³² For a complete translation of the *dufa* see David T. Roy, "Zhang Zhupo's Commentary on the Chin P'ing Mei," in David L. Rolston, ed., *How to Read the Chinese Novel*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990, 196-243.

²³³ Reproduced in Liu Hui, 1986, 184-276.

²³⁴ Mary Scott, "The Image of the Garden in *Jin Ping Mei* and *Honglouloumeng*," *CLEAR* 8 (1986), 83-94; Xu Junhui 徐君慧, *Cong Jin Ping Mei dao Honglouloumeng* 從金瓶梅到紅樓夢, Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1987; Sun Xun 孫遜 and Chen Zhao 陳詔, *Honglouloumeng yu Jin Ping Mei* 紅樓夢與金瓶梅, Ningxia renmin chubanshe, 1982.

²³⁵ Katherine Carlitz, "Allusion to drama in the *Chin P'ing Mei*," *Ming Studies* 6 (1986), 30-35; *idem.*, 1980, 23-29; *idem.*, "Puns and Puzzles in the *Chin P'ing Mei*: A look at Chapter 27," *T'oung Pao* 67, 3-5 (1981), 216-240.

the *Jin Ping Mei* as a source for social history, the depiction of the social decay of the late Ming has particularly been investigated.²³⁶ The new merchant class,²³⁷ prostitutes and the brothel culture are popular themes with Chinese scholars,²³⁸ as is the examination of the government and official system of the Ming dynasty.²³⁹ Aspects of Ming dynasty religion and superstition have also been investigated.²⁴⁰ The women in the novel have been a focus of research reflecting the recent trend for studying women in Ming and Qing literature.²⁴¹ Many Chinese scholars have examined areas varying from individual characters to the portrayal of women in general in the novel.²⁴²

The merit of the *Jin Ping Mei* was recognised very early, but its pornographic content has limited scholarly discourse until very recently; it has only been more widely available in unexpurgated editions for a few years. Contemporary scholars

²³⁶ Carlitz, 1984, 387-413; Gotô Motoi 后藤基己, "Jin Ping Mei de shidai Beijing 金瓶梅的時代背景," in Hu Wenbin 胡文彬, ed., *Jin Ping Mei de shijie 金瓶梅的世界*, Harbin: Beifang wenyi, 1987, 44-51.

²³⁷ Lu Xingji, "Jin Ping Mei: The Tragedy of a New Merchant of the 16th Century," Cao Dapeng, tr., *Social Sciences in China* 10.3 1988, 136-55; Yue Jin 躍進, *Jin Ping Meizhong shangren xingxiang toushi 金瓶梅商人形象透視*, Beijing: Wenhua yishu, 1993.

²³⁸ Tao Muning 陶慕寧, *Jin Ping Mei zhong de qinglou yu jinü 金瓶梅中的青樓與妓女*, Beijing: Wenhua yishu, 1993.

²³⁹ Chen Zhao 陳詔, "Jin Ping Mei yu Mingdai huanguan 金瓶梅與明代宦官," *Shanghai shifan daxue xuebao 上海師範大學學報* 45.3 (1990), 33-7; Zhou Jinjiang 周金降 and Zhu Yuying 朱玉英, "Cong Jin Ping Mei dui guanliao zhidu de jielu kan Mingchao de miwang 從金瓶梅對官僚制度的揭露看明朝的滅亡," *Xuzhou shifan daxue xuebao 徐州師範大學學報* 69.1 (1992), 15-20.

²⁴⁰ See Martinson, 1977, 44-56; Qu Xiaoling 屈小玲, "Cong Jin Ping Mei kan Mingdai shimin de zongjiao chongbai 從金瓶梅看明代市民的宗教崇拜," in *Zhongguo Jin Ping Mei xuehui 中國金瓶梅學會*, ed., *Jin Ping Mei yanjiu 金瓶梅研究* 2, Jiangsu: Guji, 1991, 136-152; Zhu Yueli 朱越利, "Lun Jin Ping Mei cihua zhong de fodaojiao miaoxie 論金瓶梅詞話中的佛道教描寫," in Du Weimo 杜維沫 and Liu Hui 劉輝, eds., *Jin Ping Mei yanjiu ji 金瓶梅研究集*, Jinan: Qi Lu, 1988, 172-96.

²⁴¹ See the various essays in Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang, eds., *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.

²⁴² Chien Yingying, "Sexuality and Power: a feminist reading of the *Chin P'ing Mei*," *Tamkang Review* 19.1-4 (1988-1989), 607-629; Kong Fanhua 孔繁華, *Jin Ping Mei de nüxing shijie 金瓶梅的女性世界*, Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji, 1991; Luo Derong 羅德榮, *Jin Ping Mei san nüxing toushi 金瓶梅三女性透視*, Tianjin: Tianjin daxue, 1992; Wang Rumei 王汝梅, Li Wenhuan, 李文煥 and Zhong Huaimin 仲懷民, eds., *Jin Ping Mei nüxing shijie 金瓶梅女性世界*, Changchun: Beifang funü ertong, 1994.

able to take a less prudish view have been able to see the qualities of the work untarnished by pornographic associations. The investigation into female material culture in the form of dress and ornamentation carried out in this thesis creates a new discourse on the novel which complements the current trends of research in both *Jin Ping Mei* studies and women's history.

CHAPTER ONE

SIXTEENTH-CENTURY DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE

In *Jin Ping Mei*, the town Linqing is described as a place with:

large, bustling and flourishing docks, a place where merchants come and go and boats congregate, a veritable hub of traffic. There are twenty-two flower and willow lanes and seventy-two singsong establishments.¹

Ximen Qing's wayward son-in-law Chen Jingji takes charge of a brothel here which has over 100 rooms and takes over 30-50 taels of silver a day.² A similar description of the town can be found in the late Ming novel *Taowu xianping* 櫓机閑評:

Although it is only a prefectural district, it is in fact the cross-roads for thirteen provinces, with famous docks where merchants converge with their goods. Besides this, in years of good harvest, the thirty-six trades enthusiastically take part in the traditional festivities and perform stories. What's more, they undertake all types of business deals; the rush to the city is such that there are mountains and seas of people, all crammed together.³

Linqing was situated on the banks of the Grand Canal and was an important dock in the North of China.⁴ The area was perceived to be commercially prosperous and sufficiently affluent to support an extensive entertainment quarter.

Who, then, in this society, were those with wealth and who were those with power? What did people desire and value? What was considered fashionable behaviour? Which groups in society defined these criteria? The answers to these questions about value judgements and concepts will facilitate an understanding of the

¹ *JPMCH*, 92.2a

² *JPMCH*, 98.4b.

³ *Taowu xianping* 櫓机閑評, by anon., repr. Beijing: Renmin Zhongguo, 1993, 14-15 (hereafter abbreviated to *TWXP*). The date of composition of this novel is unknown; however, it has been suggested that the author may have been the late Ming scholar Li Qing 李清 (1602-1683). The latest dateable event in the novel is 1630 which also suggests a late Ming composition. See *Zhongguo gudai xiaoshuo baike quanshu*, 1993, 532. For author's dates, see *ECCP*, 454.

⁴ "Linqing zhi 臨清志," in *Tianxia jinguo libing shu* 天下郡國利病書, by Gu Yanwu 顧炎武, repr. in *Sibu congkan sanbian* 四部叢刊三編, Shanghai: Shangwu, 1935-36, 16.12a (hereafter abbreviated to *TXJG*).

events that influenced contemporary perceptions of women and their activities in the sixteenth century, concepts which will be discussed in the next chapter.

The Ming held uncontested control over China proper for most of the dynasty and this political stability, combined with improvements in the transportation system, provided an environment for unprecedented economic and social change. We see the beginnings of a unified market supplied with consumer goods by mass production methods, all destined for the expanding urban centres. This early form of consumer society allowed the merchant class to become more powerful than it had ever been, and the *Jin Ping Mei* focuses on the tensions resulting from the claims for status of the merchant class. Women, too, were affected by these changes, becoming both consumers and objects of consumption, as will be demonstrated in the following chapters.

Economic expansion

It has been well documented that the sixteenth-century in China was a period of intense social and cultural change driven by rapid economic development. Most scholars agree that this economic expansion was helped by a relatively stable standard currency in the form of silver which became the basic medium of exchange in 1449. Up until this time people had been prohibited from using this metal as a medium of exchange and instead, were to use imperial paper currency and copper coinage. The government, however, neither kept metals to support the paper currency nor limited its issuance and consequently it depreciated and collapsed in the early fifteenth century. Problems occurred with copper coinage too as an acute demand for

the coins led to widespread counterfeiting.⁵ Silver, therefore, played an increasingly important role in the economy aided, in part, by merchants who needed a recognised form of portable money;⁶ although silver had actually been used despite restrictions, as had the privately coined copper cash, which was more valued than the state coined cash.⁷ Both forms of currency can be seen in use throughout the *Jin Ping Mei*.

Once the use of silver became more widespread, the Ming government was able to reform the outdated tax system with the Single Whip Reform (一條鞭法 *yitiao bianfa*) initiated in 1531, which aimed to commute most land taxes, labour service obligations, and extra levies to a single silver payment.⁸ This may not have been possible at all without the substantial imports of foreign bullion made from the export of porcelain and silk. The yields from China's own mines had been declining for many years.⁹ Maritime merchants had already built up a strong power base by the sixteenth century, as they continued to trade with Japan and Southeast Asia despite governmental trade restrictions.¹⁰ However, the growth of the Chinese export

⁵ Huang, 1974, 69-81; Albert Chan, *The Glory and Fall of the Ming Dynasty*, Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 1982, 129-148; W.S. Atwell, "Notes on Silver, Foreign Trade, and the Late Ming Economy," *Ch'ing-shih wen-t'i* 3.8 (1977), 1-33; *idem*, "Some Observations on the 'Seventeenth-Century Crisis' in China and Japan," *Journal of Asian Studies* 45.2 (1986), 223-244; Peng Xinwei, 彭信威, *Zhongguo huobi shi* 中國貨幣史, Shanghai: Renmin, 1988, esp. 632-752; *Ming shi gao* 明史稿, by Wang Hongxu 王鴻緒, repr. 7 vols., Taipei: Wenhai, 1962, 62.14a-22b.

⁶ Chan, 1982, 133.

⁷ Li Jiannong 李劍農, *Song Yuan Ming jingji shi kao* 宋元明經濟史稿, Beijing: Sanlian, 1957, 80-84; "Qianfa 錢法," in *Ming huiyao* 明會要, repr. 2 vols., Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1956, 55.1039-50; *WZZ*, 12.176; Louis J. Gallagher, tr., *China in the Sixteenth Century: the Journals of Matteo Ricci: 1583-1610*, New York: Random House, 1953, 14.

⁸ See Liang Fang-chung, *The Single-Whip Method of Taxation in China*, Camb. Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956; Huang, 1974, 112-33. The government had found that it could no longer accept paper money and copper coinage as tax payment and began to allow silver, paper currency, copper coins, or silk as currency as early as the fifteenth century. See Mark Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past*, London: Eyre Methuen, 1973, 222.

⁹ Atwell, 1977, 5. It is estimated that the total annual revenue from government mining of all kinds in the sixteenth century was less than 150,000 taels. See Huang, 1974, 243; W.S. Atwell, "International Bullion Flows and the Chinese Economy circa 1530-1650," *Past and Present* 95 (1982), 68-76.

¹⁰ Hsi, 1972, 42 and 106-9. Mark Elvin suggests that the 'pirate' attacks frequent 1562-63 perhaps were frustrated seagoing merchants, in *idem*, 1973, 223. For a discussion of the reasons behind the restrictions, see T'ien Ju-k'ang, "Causes of the Decline in China's Overseas Trade Between the Fifteenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Papers on Far Eastern History* 25 (1982), 31-44.

economy accelerated noticeably after a partial lifting of the ban in 1567,¹¹ and the establishment of Nagasaki and Manila as major trading centres in the early 1570's.

Atwell notes:

Within a short time Chinese silks were being worn in the streets of Kyoto and Lima, Chinese cottons were being sold in Filipino and Mexican markets, and Chinese porcelain was being used in fashioning homes from Sakai to London.¹²

With no concrete statistics, it is difficult to calculate the precise extent of the growth;¹³ however, Atwell suggests that "Japanese and Spanish-American silver may well have been *the* most significant factor in the vigorous economic expansion which occurred in China."¹⁴

Angela Hsi describes the development of credit as a "significant influence on the growth of trade" because it simplified the loan process and made it possible to undertake large scale enterprises.¹⁵ In the *Jin Ping Mei* Ximen Qing is often money-lending with high interest rates.¹⁶ The banking establishment of the Sun 孫 family of Huizhou 徽州 were known to have issued thousands of taels of credit.¹⁷ The increase in the number of such financial establishments shows how merchants and money-lenders took advantage of the new economic climate.¹⁸

¹¹ Elvin, 1973, 218; Li Jinming 李金明, *Mingdai haiwai maoyi shi* 明代海外貿易史, Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue, 1990, 109.

¹² William Atwell, "The T'ai-cheng, T'ien-ch'i, and Ch'ung-chen reigns, 1620-1644," in Frederick W. Mote and Denis Twitchet, eds., *The Cambridge History of China, Vol.17: The Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644, Part I*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 587.

¹³ For estimates see Liang Fangzhong 梁方仲, "Mingdai guoji maoyi yu yin de shuchuru 明代國際貿易與銀的輸出入," in *Zhongguo shehui jingji shi* 中國社會經濟史集刊 6.2 (1939), 276-324.

¹⁴ Atwell, 1977, 5. For discussions on expansion see Ramon H. Myers, "Some Issues on Economic Organization during the Ming and Ch'ing Periods: A Review Article," *Ch'ing-shih wen-t'i*, 3.2 (1974), 77-93; Evelyn Rawski, "Ming Society and the Economy," *Ming Studies* 2 (1976) 12-19.

¹⁵ Hsi, 1972, 39-40.

¹⁶ *JPMCH*, 38.1a-b and 45.3b.

¹⁷ *Taihan ji* 太函集 (pref. 1591), by Wang Daokun 汪道昆, repr. Taipei: Guoli zhongyang tushuguan, 1986, 52.8b-9a.

¹⁸ Peng Xinwei, 1988, 741-52.

The increasing sophistication of the monetary system in this period facilitated the growth of handicraft industries,¹⁹ as did the extension of local and inter-regional trade caused, in part, by the expansion of area specialisation.²⁰ Throughout the Ming there had been expansion in the volume and extent of trade, but important improvements in transportation resulting from the Grand Canal renovations and increased communication facilities between north and south China contributed further to the growth of transportation and trade routes, and facilitated the spread of technology.²¹ Areas on the water system, such as Linqing, benefited. According to contemporary observer Zheng Ruozeng 鄭若曾 (fl. 1505-1580)²² his native place, Suzhou, was another such example:

In general, goods which are difficult to obtain elsewhere in the world are all available here. Those who pass through are dazzled by its brilliance.²³

In the *Jin Ping Mei*, a constant stream of merchants arrive at the Ximen household. Meng Rui 孟銳, the brother of Meng Yulou, returns from trading all over Jingzhou 荊州, Henan 河南, Shaanxi 陝西 and Hanzhou 漢州, covering a total of 7-8000 li.²⁴

¹⁹ Albert Feuerwerker, *Studies in the Economic History of Late Imperial China: Handicraft, Modern Industry and the State*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1995, 87-122; Elvin, 1973, 270-84; Tanaka Masatoshi 田中正俊, "Rural Handicraft in Jiangnan in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in Linda Grove and Christian Daniels, eds., *State and Society in China: Japanese Perspectives on Ming-Qing Social and Economic History*, Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1984, 79-100.

²⁰ *Songchuang mengyu* 松窗夢語 (pref. 1593), Zhang Han 張瀚, repr. Shanghai: Guji, 1986, 4.72-76 (hereafter abbreviated to *SCMY*).

²¹ Hoshi Ayao, "Transportation in the Ming Dynasty," *Acta Asiatica* 38 (1980), 1-30; He Bingdi 何炳棣, *Zhongguo huiguan shi lun* 中國會館史論, Taipei: Xuesheng, 1966; "Huiguan 會館," in *WLYHB*, 24.160-1609; Timothy Brook, "Guides for Vexed Travelers: Route Books in the Ming and Qing," *Ch'ing-shih Wen-t'i* 4.5 (1981), 32-76; Michael Marmé, "Heaven on Earth: The Rise of Suzhou, 1127-1550," in Linda Cooke Johnson, ed., *Cities of Jiangnan in Late Imperial China*, Albany: State University of New York, 1993, 44.

²² *DMB*, 204-8.

²³ Cited in "Bingfang kao yi 兵防考一," in *Wuxian zhi* 吳縣志 (1933), repr. Taipei: Chengwen, 1970, 53.1a.

²⁴ *JPMCH*, 67.22b.

Ding Shuangqiao 丁雙橋, a silk merchant from Hangzhou 杭州,²⁵ and the wealthy Huzhou 湖州 merchant He Guan'er 何官兒 are also mentioned.²⁶

Other factors furthered the development of the handicraft industries. An increase in population meant that production was forced to improve to meet mass demands; this gave rise to some technological improvements in tools, machinery and techniques.²⁷ In addition, an increasingly affluent section of the population created a new market for goods such as woollen, silk and cotton textiles, metal wares and porcelain, lumber, wine, dried fruits and salt.²⁸ Merchants all benefited from these changes and found that the greatest profits to be had were in the salt, porcelain and textile industries.

The salt trade was originally a government monopoly. However, this long and complicated process which involved exchanging granary receipts for salt licences was altered in 1492 to allow monetary payment on salt.²⁹ By the sixteenth century large profits could be made in the salt trade due to widespread official corruption.³⁰ In the *Jin Ping Mei* Ximen Qing uses Cai Yun 蔡蘊, adopted son of Grand Tutor Cai Jing 蔡京, recently promoted to the Salt Commission for the Liang Huai 兩淮 region, to obtain 30,000 salt certificates with his associate Qiao Hong 喬洪.³¹ Ximen's servant Han Daoguo 韓道國 is sent to Yangzhou 揚州 to get the salt which he sells, and then goes to Huzhou with the profits to buy silk.³² He returns with ten great

²⁵ *JPMCH*, 20.14a-b.

²⁶ *JPMCH*, 97.10a.

²⁷ Han Dacheng 韓大成, "Mingdai shangpin jingji de fazhan yu ziben zhuyi de mengya 明代商品經濟的發展與資本主義的萌芽," in Shang Yue, 1957, 3-6; Li Renpu 李仁溥, *Zhongguo gudai fangzhi shigao* 中國古代紡織史稿, Changsha: Yuelu, 1983, 185-89.

²⁸ Hsi, 1972, 44.

²⁹ Hsi, 1972, 47-8 and 99-106; Huang, 1974, 189-224; "Yanfa 鹽法," in *Ming huiyao*, 55.1053.

³⁰ Huang, 1974, 200-201.

³¹ *JPMCH*, 48.

³² *JPMCH*, 51.

cartloads of textile goods,³³ and the servant Lai Bao 來保, who has also taken some of the profits, returns with twenty great cartloads of similar merchandise from Nanjing.³⁴

However, it was silk and porcelain which showed the greatest developments in this period, both fuelled by the internal demand for luxury goods and the growing export market. The largest and most technically advanced centre for porcelain production was Jingdezhen 景德鎮 in Jiangxi 江西, estimated to have employed daily several thousand workers in the sixteenth century producing products which were exported all over the world.³⁵³⁶ Michael Dillon states that this was “only possible within the context of the increasingly commercialised Chinese economy of the sixteenth century.”³⁷ The Ming dynasty, unlike any other before, witnessed a remarkable growth and expansion of its industrial base which both led to and was dependent upon an increased popular interest in material culture, as will be demonstrated later.

Developments in the Chinese Textile Industry

Literary critic Cai Guoliang 蔡國梁 asserts that “the superb collection of dazzling dress and jewellery worn by the characters in *Jin Ping Mei* reflects the unprecedented development of the textile industry.”³⁸ An assessment of the sixteenth-century textile industry may reveal perceptions of this aspect of material

³³ *JPMCH*, 58.

³⁴ *JPMCH*, 60.

³⁵ “Tao shu 陶書,” in *Jiangxisheng dazhi* 江西省大志 (1597), repr. Taipei: Chengwen, 1989, 7.50a-b; Huang Peijin, 1957, 212-214.

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³⁷ Michael Dillon, “Jingdezhen as a Ming Industrial Center,” *Ming Studies* 6 (1978), 37-44: 42. See also Yuan Tsing, “The Porcelain Industry at Ching-te-chen, 1500-1700,” *Ming Studies* 6 (1978), 45-54.

³⁸ Cai Guoliang, 1984, 208.

culture as they emerge from the *Jin Ping Mei*, and will provide a framework for the analysis of female dress and ornamentation in Chapters Three to Six.

Agricultural improvements had been implemented at the start of Ming by the first emperor who ordered that a certain percentage of land be turned over to the production of silk and cotton.³⁹ This laid the foundation for significant expansion in subsequent centuries. By the mid-sixteenth century, the demand for silk fabrics by affluent people in both urban and rural areas, together with the overseas market, had an important impact on the expansion of the silk textile industry. This was an industry which, according to Mi Chu Wiens, “was the single most important enterprise in initiating intense rural-urban communication, regional specialization of crops, interregional dependence of subsistence and commercial goods, and urban absorption of rural labour force.”⁴⁰

The main centre of the textile industry was located between Suzhou and Huzhou. Machinery for silk production had advanced greatly and production could be separated into individual processes such as reeling, spinning and weaving utilising complicated new equipment such as the *yaoji* 腰機 and *huaqi* 花機 which could produce more and more complicated fabrics.⁴¹ A host of intricate fabrics are detailed in the *Jin Ping Mei*, all identifiable contemporary products. The main groups of fabrics common in the sixteenth century -- *si* 絲 ‘silk’, *zhu* 苧 ‘silk’, *qi* 綺 ‘silk’, *luo* 羅 ‘tussore’, *ling* 綾 ‘damask’, *duan* 緞 ‘satin’, *chou* 綢 ‘pongee’, *juan* 絹 ‘thin silk’, *sha* 紗 ‘gauze’, *jin* 錦 ‘brocade’ -- were further differentiated into internal varieties

³⁹ Wu Shusheng 吳淑生 and Tian Zibing 天自秉, *Zhongguo ranzhi shi* 中國染織史, Shanghai: Renmin, 1986, 230.

⁴⁰ Mi Chu Wiens, “Socioeconomic Change During the Ming Dynasty in the Kiangnan Area,” Ph.D. Harvard University, 1973, 111.

⁴¹ “Naifu 乃服,” in *Tiangong kaiwu* 天工開物 (1637) by Song Yingxing 宋應星, repr. in Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸, ed., *Zhongguo gudai banhua congkan* 中國古代版畫叢刊, 5 vols., Shanghai: Guji, 1988, *shang* 上. 718 and 720.

such as *zhouchou* 綢綢 ‘crepe pongee’ and *chunchou* 春綢 ‘spring pongee’, *jinxiansha* 金縷紗 ‘gold thread gauze’ and *shuisha* 水紗 ‘water gauze.’ These were ornamented with an increased variety of embroidery styles often with local

characteristics, for example, *Suxiu* 蘇綉

‘Suzhou embroidery’, *Luxiu* 魯綉 ‘Lu (modern Shandong 山東) embroidery’,

Jingxiu 京綉 ‘Beijing embroidery’.⁴² The

patterns woven into the textiles were

innumerable and ranged from flora and

fauna, to natural phenomena to geometric

styles.⁴³ The *zhuanghua* 妝花 ‘figuring’

mentioned throughout the *Jin Ping Mei*

was a new invention which used from

four to over ten different coloured weft

threads, usually with gold thread forming

Illustration 2: Figured satin patterned with phoenix intertwined with peonies



a background over the satin [See Illustration 2].⁴⁴ Inventories of confiscated estates such as the *Tianshui bingshan lu* reveal the full variety of late sixteenth-century textiles, many of which are the same as those mentioned in the *Jin Ping Mei*.⁴⁵

Improvements were also made in silk *kesi* 絨絲 ‘tapestry’ production. This was used for intricate patterning and pictures and could often be found on clothing of

⁴² Chen Juanjuan 陳娟娟, “Mingdai tihua sha, luo, duan zhiwu yanjiu 明代提花紗、羅、緞織物研究,” *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 故宮博物院院刊 1986.4, 79-86; *idem*, “Mingdai tihua sha, luo, duan zhiwu yanjiu xu 明代提花紗、羅、緞織物研究續,” *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 故宮博物院院刊 1987.2, 78-87; Wang Mingze 王明澤, *Zhongguo gudai fushi* 中國古代服飾, Beijing: Kexue jishu, 1995, 50.

⁴³ Chen Juanjuan 陳娟娟, “Mingdai de sichou yishu 明代的絲綢藝術,” *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 故宮博物院院刊 1992.2, 45-60.

⁴⁴ Wu Shusheng and Tian Zibing, 1986, 237-238.

⁴⁵ *Tianshui bingshan lu* 天水冰山錄, edn. *Ming Wuzong waiji* 明武宗外紀, repr. Shanghai: Shudian, 1982, 100-123.

the upper classes, indicating its popularity.⁴⁶ Most imperial clothing was embroidered and in the Jiajing there were over 800 specialists. Designs became more and more like paintings, employing techniques such as *mandixiu* 滿地綉 ‘complete coverage embroidery’ combined with *sanzhen* 散針 ‘scatter stitch’, *shanzhen* 摻針 ‘fine stitch’, *gunzhen* 滾針 ‘roll stitch’, *jiezi* 結子 ‘knotting.’⁴⁷ The intricacy of both embroidery and the woven textiles meant that a wider variety of styles of clothing could be produced.

An important centre of the silk textile industry, Lu’an 潞安 in Shaanxi, demonstrated the scale of textile production in this period. The factories in this town were estimated to possess between 9,000 and 13,000 machines, giving employment to many thousands of people.⁴⁸ Silk products from Zhejiang 浙江 and the lower Yangzi region were well known for their quality, attracting many wealthy merchants from afar.⁴⁹ Contemporary scholar Zhang Han 張瀚 (1511-1593),⁵⁰ himself a descendant of a silk-weaver, reported that the clothing and ornaments worn by the people of this area were so dazzling that the rich and affluent from other areas competed to emulate them.⁵¹ The remarks of official Wang Shixing corroborate this:

The people of Suzhou consider themselves elegant and the rest of the country follows suit and considers them elegant. Whatever Suzhou considers vulgar then so does the rest of the country.⁵²

⁴⁶ “Neizhuang 內裝,” in *Yueshi bian*, 8.180; Wu Shusheng and Tian Zibing, 1986, 249-251; Gao Hanyu, “Technical and Artistic Development of Chinese Patterned Silk,” in Hong Kong Museum of Hong Kong, Urban Council of Hong Kong and the Oriental Ceramic Society of Hong Kong, *Heaven’s Embroidered Cloths: One Thousand Years of Chinese Textiles*, Hong Kong: Urban Council of Hong Kong, 1995, 48.

⁴⁷ Wu Shusheng and Tian Zibing, 1986, 261.

⁴⁸ *Lu’an fuzhi* 潞安府志 (1661), repr. Taipei: Taiwan Xuesheng, 1968, 1.25a.

⁴⁹ *SCMY*, 4.75.

⁵⁰ *DMB*, 72-74.

⁵¹ *SCMY*, 4.70 and 4.74.

⁵² “Liang du 兩都,” in *Guang zhi yi*, 2.33.

The majority of silk goods bought by Ximen Qing in the novel come from these silk regions of Nanjing, Huzhou, Songjiang 松江 and Hangzhou, enabling him to open silk, satin and floss shops which line the streets of Qinghe.⁵³ The *Gujin tushu jicheng* reveals a similar scene in Xuanhua 宣化, Hebei 河北:

In the market there are rows upon rows of merchant shops, each with their own name. For example, there is the Yunnan Capital Tussore Shop, the Suzhou and Hangzhou Silk Satin Store, the Luzhou Pongee Store, the Zezhou Hanky Store, the Linqing Cloth Store, the Floss Store, and the General Store. These business outlets from every trade extend for approximately 4-5 *li* and all the merchants compete to live there.⁵⁴

We can therefore begin to see how the novel reveals perceptions of aesthetics. The characters in the *Jin Ping Mei* appear to follow the trends of the day and search for goods of the highest quality. Ximen Qing, as a trader in textiles, is able to pick out particular goods for the consumption of his own household, the women of the household being the major recipients. The women themselves employ various strategies to search out particular goods and follow certain trends.

Alongside the silk industry, the cotton textile industry, which was concentrated mainly in the Yangzi Delta, particularly in the cities such as Songjiang and Suzhou, also saw notable development.⁵⁵ Particular textiles and products from specific areas were prized, a good example being Songjiang 'three-shuttle cotton' (*sansuobu* 三梭布) which was known for its light, delicate whiteness. The

⁵³ See *JPMCH*, 33.1b-2a (Huzhou), 58.1b-2a (Hangzhou), 67.3b (Huzhou and Songjiang).

⁵⁴ "Xuanhuafu fengsu kao 宣化府風俗考," in "Zhifang 職方," in *Qinding gujin tushu jicheng* 欽定古今圖書集成 (1726), repr. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1934, 155.1b.

⁵⁵ Ramon H. Myers, "Cotton Textile Handicraft and the Development of the Cotton Textile Industry in Modern China," *The Economic History Review* 2.18 (1965), 614-632; Mi Chu Wiens, "Cotton Textile Production and Rural Social Transformation in Early Modern China," *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiusuo xuebao* 中國文化研究所學報 7.2 (1974), 515-531; *JPMCH*, 66 (Songjiang).

Nongzheng quanshu 農政全書 by Xu Guanqi 徐光啓 (1562-1633)⁵⁶ records that this textile “clothed the empire.”⁵⁷

In the *Jin Ping Mei* Meng Yulou is described as having two-three hundred *tong* 筒 ‘rolls’ of ‘three-shuttle cotton’ amongst her possessions which would class her as a very wealthy woman by sixteenth-century standards.⁵⁸ Indeed, this very cloth was reportedly used by the Emperor for his underwear.⁵⁹ By the late fifteenth century, cotton had become quite popular at the imperial court and was subsequently patterned with dragons, phoenix, *douniu* 斗牛 [mythical beast] and *qilin* 麒麟 [mythical horned lion], in the imperial colours of scarlet, purple and yellow, sometimes costing 100 taels of silver for just one bolt of material.⁶⁰

Cotton became so popular that it even overtook silk and hemp as the favoured material for clothing.⁶¹ Beside the most famous ‘three-shuttle cotton’ many more varieties appeared, including *lingbu* 綾布 ‘damask cotton’, *jinbu* 錦布 ‘brocade cotton’, *yunbu* 雲布 ‘cloud cotton’, *zihuabu* 紫花布 ‘purple flower cotton’, *Ding niangzi bu* 丁娘子布 ‘Mrs Ding’s cotton’.⁶² The women of all statuses of the *Jin Ping Mei* wear cotton garments. For example, Pan Jinlian sports a white summer cotton top in Chapter 3 and Ru Yi’er wears a white cotton skirt later in the novel.⁶³

Vogues for unlikely items benefited the growth of certain areas and indicate the growing awareness of fashion in China. Contemporary Fan Lian 範濂 highlighted the Songjiang sock industry:

⁵⁶ *ECCP*, 316-319.

⁵⁷ *Nongzheng quanshu* 農政全書, by Xu Guanqi 徐光啓, repr. 4 vols., Taipei: Xin wenfeng, 1975, 35.12b.

⁵⁸ *JPMCH*, 7.1b.

⁵⁹ *Shuyuan zaji zhaichao* 菽園雜記摘抄, by Lu Rong 陸容, edn. *Shoushange congshu* 守山閣叢書, repr. Taipei: Yiwen, 1968, 1.2a.

⁶⁰ Wu Shusheng and Tian Zibing, 1986, 254.

⁶¹ Wu Shuzheng and Tian Zibing, 1986, 233.

⁶² Wu Shusheng and Tian Zibing, 1986, 254-256.

⁶³ *JPMCH*, 3.8a and 74.2b.

In the past there were no shops for summer socks in Songjiang. Most people wore felt socks in the hot months. Since the Wanli reign, Youdun cotton cloth 尤墩布 was used to make the summer socks which were extremely light and attractive. People from distant places competed to purchase them. Consequently, over a hundred shops for summer socks were opened in the hinterland to the west of the prefectural capital; men and women throughout the prefecture made their living from the manufacture of these socks.⁶⁴

The sixteenth-century cotton industry was booming and this was favourable for the merchants, particularly due to the nature of its production. Cotton production was concentrated in certain areas, namely Shandong and the Yangzi Delta. Shandong profited by growing raw cotton which was sold primarily in the Jiangnan area, but in return, had to depend on Jiangnan for cotton fabrics, and seventy per cent of their food, clothing, implements, and utensils. The warm weather near Zhejiang and the Yangtze River, on the other hand, was favourable for the cultivation of mulberry trees and the raising of silkworms.⁶⁵ The grasslands of Shaanxi and Shanxi 山西, on the other hand, were used for sheep herding and in this new economic climate some families even became wealthy by specialising in sheep and spun wool products.⁶⁶ Merchants played a vital role in circulating these various textile goods around the empire, facilitating the diffusion of styles and fashions.

A wide variety of colours are mentioned in the *Jin Ping Mei*. Variants of yellow include soft yellow, willow yellow, goose yellow, honey, beige and aloewood; variants of green include sand green and pea green; variants of blue include turquoise, dark blue and light blue; variants of red include scarlet, peach and pink. Even white is further differentiated into jade, scallion white and moon white. The *Tiangong kaiwu* shows that by the Ming the number of plants suitable for dyeing

⁶⁴ "Ji fengsu 記風俗," in *Yunjian jumu chao* 雲間據目鈔, by Fan Lian 範濂, repr. in *Biji xiaoshuo daguan* 筆記小說大觀, Yangzhou: Jiangsu guangling guji, 1984, 2.2b; Fu Yiling 傅衣凌, *Ming Qing shidai shangren ji shangye ziben* 明清時代商人及商業資本, Beijing: Renmin, 1956, 11.

⁶⁵ Hsi, 1972, 35-36.

⁶⁶ SCMY, 4.76.

in the Ming had increased with improved techniques ensuring that the colours produced were more vibrant and longer-lasting.⁶⁷ Particular areas specialised in different colours. For example, Fuzhou 福州 and Quanzhou 泉州 were noted for their blue dyes. The popularity of Chinese indigo (靛藍 *dianlan*) even spread to Europe in the sixteenth century.⁶⁸ The increasing shades of colours led to an increased potential for variation from the regulated norms.

Jin Ping Mei details the existence of businessmen who dealt in the processing of semi-manufactured goods in the textile industry. In Chapter 7 Matchmaker Xue 薛 describes the textile business of the Yang family, of which Meng Yulou was a member by marriage, saying that they often employed 20-30 temporary dyers. Later in the novel, Ximen instructs his servants to employ dyers and open a shop in Lion Street.⁶⁹ Centrally managed textile production was highly specialised with regard to division of labour. There were craftsmen for every job and the scale was extensive. At one time, the Nanjing Textile Bureau of the Interior (南京內織染局 *Nanjing nei zhiranju*) had over 300 machines worked by over 3000 craftsmen.⁷⁰ Not only were there government controlled production lines, but also private concerns. Commercial capital of this kind had a significant effect as it infiltrated production and processing, structuring the emerging economy.

The emergence of manufacturers, merchants, textile and style development meant that a whole economy could become dependent on fashion. The above phenomena gave greater prominence to the sartorial system in China. The increased quality, greater variety and wider availability of textiles, coupled with a more

⁶⁷ "Zhangshi 彰施," in *Tiangong kaiwu*, *shang* 上.49-51.

⁶⁸ Wu Shusheng and Tian Zibing, 1986, 257-260.

⁶⁹ *JPMCH*. 33.

⁷⁰ Chen Juanjuan 陳娟娟, "Mingdai sichou yishu 明代絲綢藝術," *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 故宮博物院院刊 1992.1, 56.

pronounced social mobility and affluence, led to conditions in which fashion could begin to emerge more prominently. Merchant families such as that of Ximen Qing were in an ideal position to take advantage of such developments.

Changing Patterns of Culture

China experienced a steady increase in population after 1368. However, increases in the production of material and foodstuffs meant that rising health standards resulted in a birth rate which exceeded the death rate.⁷¹ This led to a period of more rapid population growth which meant that by the late sixteenth century China's total population had probably reached between 150 and 175 million.⁷²

Urban areas in the economically advanced regions around Hangzhou, Nanjing and Beijing expanded rapidly,⁷³ as did smaller towns which grew into important centres.⁷⁴ Most of the latter, such as Linqing, developed along the communication nerve centres such as the eastern and southern coast, the middle and lower Yangzi River, and the Grand Canal, but others developed because they produced a special industrial product. Small towns such as Linghuzhen 菱湖鎮 of Huzhou, a silk textile centre, and Songjiang, a cotton textile centre, developed and became densely populated cities by the 1570's.⁷⁵ In the early Ming, the village of Shengze 盛澤,

⁷¹ For example, there was a substantial increase in varieties of new seeds and crops from America such as sweet potato, tobacco, corn and peanuts which were introduced in the sixteenth century. Evelyn Rawski, *Agricultural Change and the Peasant Economy of South China*, Camb. Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972. See also Ho Ping-ti, *Studies on the Population of China*, Camb. Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959, 169-195; Dwight H. Perkins, *Agricultural Development in China, 1368-1968*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1969.

⁷² Atwell, 1988, 586; Ho Ping-ti, 1959.

⁷³ Han Dacheng, 1957, 59-60; Xu Daling 許大齡, "Shiliu shiji, shiqi shiji chuqi Zhongguo fengjian shehui neibu ziben zhuyi de mengya 十六世紀, 十七世紀初期中國封建社會內部資本主義的萌芽," in *Zhongguo renmin daxue zhongguo lishi jiaoyanshi 中國人民大學中國歷史教研室*, ed., *Zhongguo ziben zhuyi mengya wenti taolun ji 中國資本主義萌芽問題討論集*, Beijing: Sanlian, 1957, 907-911; *SCMY*, 4.72-78; *WZZ*, 3.102 (Nanjing); *WZZ*, 3.87 (Beijing); "Fengsu zhi," in *Hangzhoufu zhi*, 19.8b-9a.

⁷⁴ Elvin, 1973, 268-70.

⁷⁵ Liu Shiji 劉石吉, *Ming Qing shidai Jiangnan shizhen yanjiu 明清時代江南市鎮研究*, Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue, 1987, 10-72.

Jiangsu 江蘇, had only 50-60 families, but during the Chinghua period merchants and other people came to reside there in ever increasing numbers. By 1561 it had become a market place for the floss silk and pongee industry, with several hundred families in residence.⁷⁶ The nearby market town of Zhenze 震澤 had been a similarly quiet hamlet; yet by the latter half of the fifteenth century its residents had increased to three or four hundred families, doubling by the Jiajing.⁷⁷

This period saw increased links between cities and market towns and this facilitated what James T. Liu calls the ‘radiating diffusion’ of urban culture into more rural areas and this was one of the main factors which influenced the form of popular culture.⁷⁸ Peasants, merchants and gentry came into increased contact with each other: this affected culture in both rural and urban areas.⁷⁹ The influence of the material prosperity of city dwellers also influenced urban growth as prosperity had an effect on the nearby smaller towns and villages. Expressions such as they have “abandoned ‘the essential’ (本 *ben* i.e. agriculture) for ‘the peripheral’ (末 *mo* i.e. trade and craft),” can be found in many gazetteers and unofficial histories.⁸⁰ The landed gentry, too, were moving to the urban areas attracted by the economic and cultural opportunities. This led to a change in the pattern of élite investment and consumption.⁸¹

⁷⁶ “Zhen shi cun 鎮市村,” *Wujiangxian zhi* 吳江縣志 (1747), repr. Taipei: Chengwen, 1975, 4.16a

⁷⁷ *Zhenzhexian zhi* 震澤縣志 (1746), repr. Taipei: Chengwen, 1970, 4.1b.

⁷⁸ James T. Liu, “Integrative Factors Through Chinese History: Their Interaction,” in James T. Liu and Wei-ming Tu, eds., *Traditional China*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1970, 14; G. William Skinner, “Urban Development in Imperial China,” in *idem*, ed., *The City in Late Imperial China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977, 28.

⁷⁹ G. William Skinner, “Chinese Peasants and the Closed Community: An Open and Shut Case,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 13.3 (1971), 277.

⁸⁰ *SCMY*, 4.70; “Fengsu zhi 風俗志,” in *Shaoxingfu zhi* 紹興府志 (1587), repr. Taipei: Chengwen, 1983, 12.2b; Wang Xin 王新, “Ming Qing shiqi shehui fengshang biange juyi 明清時期社會風尚變革舉隅,” *Jilin daxue shehui kexue xuebao* 吉林大學社會科學學報 1990.3, 42-43.

⁸¹ David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan, Evelyn S. Rawski, eds., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1985, 8.

The Confucian literati were concerned at the speed at which the extravagant display of material wealth had begun to appear in many prosperous commercial and industrial areas, and had even spread to smaller centres in the proximity.⁸² The writer and artist Chen Jiru puts the starting date as early as 1521 in his home town of Songjiang.⁸³ Zhang Han describes how the rich and high-class households of the Wu 吳 district (around Suzhou) regarded extravagance and opulence highly, spending money on clothing and ornamentation, household articles and singing and acting troops.⁸⁴ It has been suggested that it may have been popular emulation of the Wanli emperor's extravagance which led to a demand for luxuries, large homes with ornate gardens, expensive clothing and ornamentation, and lavish entertainment with exotic foods and drink.⁸⁵

At the start of the *Jin Ping Mei* the Ximen household occupies a frontage of five *jian* 間 and goes back for seven. However, Ximen later purchases the house and garden of next door's Hua Zixu and builds himself a huge, luxurious garden.⁸⁶ According to Joanna Handlin Smith, the actions of Ximen Qing accord with the 'garden-mania' of the late Ming among élite members of the community who vied to create more and more idyllic gardens.⁸⁷ Later in the novel Ximen expands the property he owns by purchasing several other estates and gardens so that his property almost extends the length of Lion Street. The decoration in the buildings themselves

⁸² For example see "Yuesu saomu 越俗掃墓," in *TAMY*, 1.6; *SCMY*, 4.67, 68 and 70, 5.122.

⁸³ "Fengsu 風俗," in *Baishiqiao zhengao* 白石樵真稿, by Chen Jiru 陳繼儒, repr. Shanghai: Zhonghua, 1935, 2.25. The Changshu 常熟 gazetteer puts the starting date as early as the Tianshun/Chenghua periods, "Fengsu zhi 風俗志," in *Changshuxian zhi* 常熟縣志, repr. Taipei: Xuesheng, 1965, 4.20b.

⁸⁴ *SCMY*, 5.122-123.

⁸⁵ For food see Mote, 1977, 245-48; Willard J. Peterson, *Bitter Gourd: Fang I-chih and the Impetus for Intellectual Change*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979, 70-3, 139-45.

⁸⁶ *JPMCH*, 19.1b-2a.

⁸⁷ Joanna F. Handlin Smith, "Gardens in Ch'i Piao-chia's Social World: Wealth and Values in Late Ming Kiangnan," *Journal of Asian Studies* 51.1 (1992), 55-81. See also Craig Clunas, *Fruitful Sites: Garden Culture in Ming Dynasty China*, London: Reaktion Books, 1996.

is sumptuous as can be seen by the brief description of furniture to be put in Pan Jinlian's apartment. Sixteen taels of silver is spent on a black lacquer bed, scarlet silk curtains with gold tracery, an ornamented toiletry box, tables, chairs and stools covered in brocade.⁸⁸

Banquets play a very important part in the *Jin Ping Mei* -- not only are the official ones filled with sweet and savoury delicacies too numerous to mention, the family gatherings are just as lavish. The food is often accompanied by singing girls, troops of actors and even fireworks.⁸⁹ Even literary men of the time were accomplished in the cultures of food and drink, clothing and ornamentation, architecture and travel.⁹⁰ Songjiang scholar He Liangjun 何良俊 (1506-73)⁹¹ noted that in the Jiajing period people competed with each other with regard to drink and food, going to great lengths to obtain delicacies from afar. He, on the other hand, advocated restraint in food and drink, perhaps influenced by his frugal upbringing.⁹²

Gui Youguang 歸有光 (1507-71),⁹³ a wealthy scholar himself, observed that the merchants from Xin'an 新安 (Huizhou) were famous for having rows of mansions and shops, riding in fine carriages with plump horses, wearing fine silks, and employing beautiful girls to dance and sing for them.⁹⁴ In Huai'an 淮安 and Yangzhou 揚州, Li Mengyang 李夢陽 (1473-1529)⁹⁵ had earlier noted this,

⁸⁸ *JPMCH*, 9.1b.

⁸⁹ Yue Jin, 1993, 86-91.

⁹⁰ Zhang Dai spends some time detailing the interest he and his friends take in food and drink -- *TAMY*, 3.22, 4.38 and 8.75. A discussion of the delights of Beijing can be found in *Chang'an kehua* 長安客話, by Jiang Yikui 蔣一葵, repr. Beijing: Guji, 1982. See also "Zhenwu 珍物," in *KZZY*, 1.15a-16b.

⁹¹ *DMB*, 515-18.

⁹² *Siyoushai congshuo* 四友齋叢說, by He Liangjun 何良俊, repr. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1959, 32.291 and 34.314.

⁹³ *DMB*, 759-71.

⁹⁴ "Bai'an Cheng weng bashi shou xu 白菴程翁八十壽序," in *Guichuan xiansheng ji* 歸川先生集 (1673), by Gui Youguang 歸有光, repr. 2 vols., Shanghai: Guji, 1981, 13.319.

⁹⁵ *DMB*, 841-45.

suggesting that their wealth was comparable to that of princes.⁹⁶ Some commoners were reported to have paid 1000 taels of gold for houses which matched those of officials and even dukes and marquises.⁹⁷

The proliferation of pawn shops (當舖 *dangpu*) shows how merchants took the opportunity to become wealthy from the luxury goods market.⁹⁸ In the *Jin Ping Mei*, Ximen Qing is often described as profiting from his pawn shop which, we are told, handles items such as fur coats, gold articles, musical instruments and elaborate pieces of furniture.⁹⁹ Contemporary scholars reflect the changing attitudes towards the appreciation of these luxury items by mentioning specific artisans by name.¹⁰⁰

Clunas argues that changing objects of consumption meant the construction of new forms of social identities.¹⁰¹ By emulating what they perceived to be the behaviour of the highest classes, wealthy merchants in the sixteenth-century were attempting to define new social identities for themselves, the identities of the upper classes to which they aspired. In the busy commercial cities, it was the merchants who were famed for their ostentatious display and they were often blamed in the current trend for extravagance as commentators lamented the disintegration of customs and proper attention to *li* 禮.¹⁰² Prior to the Zhengde reign, Gu Yanwu

⁹⁶ *Kongtong ji* 空同集 (1602), by Li Mengyang 李夢陽, repr. Shanghai: Guji, 1991, 40.6a-b and 59.7a-8a.

⁹⁷ See "Jianye fengsu ji 建業風俗記," in *KZZY*, 5.170. For other accounts, see "Da Fan sheng 答範生," in *Dabi shanfang ji* 大泌山房集 (Wanli), by Li Weizhen 李維楨, repr. Taipei: Guoli zhongyang tushuguan, 1986, 1.34a-b; "汪長君論最序 Wang Changjun lunzui xu," in *Taihan ji*, 2.19b.

⁹⁸ Ho Ping-ti, 1966; Peng Xinwei, 1988, 741-52.

⁹⁹ See, for example, *JPMCH*, 46.9b and 95.2b.

¹⁰⁰ Zhang Dai, for example, praises the pottery of Wang Yuanji 王元吉 from Yixing 宜興, the bamboo carving of Pu Zhongqian 濮仲謙, and even the exquisite skill of Mr. Li 李 the lantern-maker - *TAMY*, 2.16, 1.9 and 4.36; *SCMY*, 4.68. Clunas quotes similar sentiments by Wang Shizhen in *idem*, 1991a, 374.

¹⁰¹ Craig Clunas, "Regulation of Consumption and the Institution of Correct Morality by the Ming State," in Chun-chieh Huang and Erik Zürcher, eds., *Norms and the State in China*, Leiden, New York and Köln: E.J. Brill, 1993, 39-49.

¹⁰² "Fengsu zhi 風俗志," in *Weiyangfu zhi* 惟揚府治 (1571), edn. *Tianyigecang Mingdai fangzhi xuankan* 天一閣明代方志選刊, Shanghai: Guji, 1981, 11.2b.

顧炎武 (1613-1682)¹⁰³ asserts that Shexian 歙縣 in Huizhou was prosperous and morally upright. Men and women carried out their proper tasks in a peaceful and secure environment. However, the rise of the merchants in the Zhengde and Jiajing reigns led to instability, increasing ambitions, mutual exploitation and extravagance:

By the end of the Jiajing and the Longqing reigns, the situation differed even more. Instances of wealth from 'the peripheral' were numerous, whereas those from 'the essential' were few. The rich became richer and the poor became poorer. Those who had risen were overbearing and those who had fallen were nervous. Property thus was oppressive, and possessions did not stay long with anyone. Trade was a tangle. Unchecked desires made people calculating. Powerful corrupt people created turmoil. Men without scruples preyed on others.¹⁰⁴

Similar perceptions are revealed in the *Jin Ping Mei* as, through his relationship with Cai Jing, Ximen Qing is able to avoid charges of murder and corruption, and effect the release of his business associates from prison.¹⁰⁵ One contemporary scholar notes that the merchants were so ambitious and profit-seeking no-one could do anything about them.¹⁰⁶ Merchants were able to protect themselves through the use of their wealth, sometimes through corrupting local magistrates. For example, it is recorded that a Suzhou merchant beat a debtor to death and bribed the magistrate with 500 taels when the widow brought a lawsuit. The magistrate then allegedly lashed the widow and son to death.¹⁰⁷ Here one is reminded of the Song Huilian 宋惠蓮 affair when Ximen Qing causes the death of her father who is attempting to look into her suicide.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ *ECCP*, 421-426.

¹⁰⁴ "Shezhi fengtu lun 歙志風土論," in *TXJG*, 9.76a.

¹⁰⁵ *JPMCH*, 55.6a, 10.4a-b, 14.4b, chapter 17, 27.1a and 48.8b.

¹⁰⁶ *Baishiqiao zhengao*, 6.22a.

¹⁰⁷ *Linju manlu* 林居漫錄 (Wanli), by Wu Yuancui 伍袁萃, repr. 2 vols., Taipei: Weiwen, 1977, 6.3a.

¹⁰⁸ *JPMCH*, 27.1a-b.

The Wu district magistrate from 1559-1563, Cao Zishou 曹自守, emphasised the darker side to this period. The affluent exterior of Suzhou could be deceiving:

Nowadays the population is increasing, yet the sources of profit are few. The common people of Wu do not purchase land; they live by producing goods and welcoming merchants. The area within the walled market looks like an embroidered brocade. The people vie for trifling amounts of profit; although this does not offset the cost as they compete in extravagance with luxurious feasts and splendid clothing. When taxes are levied, all their wealth goes out; a single stint of corvée duty breaks up families. Those who discuss the matter say that corvée wearies the native people and the profits all go to the merchants. Will you not find it really so? Hence, externally Suzhou had a reputation for riches and abundance, yet within it is actually full of want and distress.¹⁰⁹

The 1582 anti-gentry uprisings indicate the developing problems caused by the urban changes of the late Ming.¹¹⁰ Ximen Qing does not become the target for such uprisings which suggests that the *Jin Ping Mei* was completed before the demonstrations and riots became widespread.

When Ximen dies his total capital is over 100,000 taels, most of which is working capital,¹¹¹ a principle he speaks of frequently, as does Meng Yulou in Chapter 7.¹¹² Merchants were known for their preference for having money work for them rather than being bound up by land and others were breaking away from the land as a power base.¹¹³ In marriage, monetary power began to become just as important a standard as family status (門第 *mendi*). In Chapter 7 Meng Yulou chooses the money of Ximen Qing over the academic Scholar Shang 尚舉人. Throughout the novel Ximen Qing uses marriage connections to obtain capital for his business ventures. Ximen is annoyed that the proposed betrothal of Guan'ge is to the

¹⁰⁹ "Wu xian cheng tu shuo 吳縣城圖說," in *TXJG*, 5.11b-12a.

¹¹⁰ Susumu Fuma, "Late Ming Urban Reform and the Popular Uprising in Hangzhou," in Johnson, ed., 1993, 47-79.

¹¹¹ Yue Jin estimate. See *idem*, 1993, 17.

¹¹² *JPMCH*, 7.10a.

¹¹³ Yue Jin, 1993, 18.

Qiao family who are only landlords, possessing neither money or power.¹¹⁴ As for his own marriages, Li Jiao'er brings in money, as do Li Ping'er and Meng Yulou. With these financial boosts he can set up shops and engage in merchant activities. Marriages in the novel are also used by Ximen to establish closer ties with powerful officials, at first locally and then in the capital. His marriage to second legal wife Wu Yueniang establishes a link with her father who is a battalion commander. His daughter is married to Chen Jingji, a relative of the powerful commander Yang Jian 楊戩 by marriage and Ximen uses the daughter of Wang Liu'er 王六兒 to forge closer links with Zhai Qian 翟謙 which ensures easier access Grand Tutor Cai Jing in the capital.

Officials reported that extravagant marriages were widespread.¹¹⁵ In some areas the competitive nature of marriages was crippling some families. Many gazetteers have reports of families falling into bankruptcy because daughters' dowries had become so extravagant and female infanticide was seen by some as a way of avoiding it.¹¹⁶ In the Yongle period, Wang Yuan 王源, the district magistrate of Shenze 深澤, felt obliged to prohibit the prevailing vogue for money marriages.¹¹⁷ Contemporary writers from all over the empire lamented that the race for social advancement and profit had led to the decline of social values across all classes.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ *JPMCH*, 41.6a.

¹¹⁵ "Fengsu zhi," in *Hangzhoufu zhi*, 19.8b.

¹¹⁶ "Fengsu lun 風俗論," in *Xu Wenzhang sanji* 徐文長三集, by Xu Wei 徐渭, repr. in *Xu Wei ji* 徐渭集, 4 vols., Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983, 17.497-498; *Wenzhou fuzhi* 溫州府志 (1605), edn. *Xijian Zhongguo difangzhi huikan* 稀見中國地方志匯刊, Beijing: Zhongguo shuju, 1992, 2.48b; "Fengsu zhi," in *Shaoxingfu zhi*, 12.3a.

¹¹⁷ "Wang Yuan zhuan 王源傳," *Ming shi*, 281.7196. See similar prohibition in *Shizheng lu*, 3.41a-42b. "Wuping lingguai lu 武平靈怪錄," in *Jiandeng yuhua* 剪燈餘話, by Li Changqi 李昌祺, repr. in *Jiandeng xinhua* 剪燈新話, Shanghai: Guji, 1981, 206. (Depicts story of Xiang Zijian 項子堅 of Wuping in the Hongwu period who wished to make his family more illustrious).

¹¹⁸ "Zhengsu 正俗," in *Siyoushai congshuo*, 34.310-317, 35.318-324; *Beichuang suoyu* 北窗鎖語, by Yu Yonglin 余永麟, repr. in *Qiyu jingjian jiqita si zhong* 丘隅竟見及其他四種, Shanghai: Shangwu, 1936, 40-41.

Merchants came in for the most severe criticism and the reasons for this concern shown by writers and officials is related to the *ideal* hierarchical nature of Chinese society.

Merchant, Official, Scholar

Most early Chinese philosophers asserted that society should be hierarchical.¹¹⁹ With the establishment of the Ming dynasty, the founding emperor, Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (r.1368-1398),¹²⁰ instituted a social system which he divided into three distinct social strata. At the top was a ruling stratum, comprising the imperial household, hereditary nobility, ranking officers, and the majority of officialdom. Next, a middle stratum was made up of the four orders of commoners -- scholars, peasants, artisans and merchants.¹²¹ The one per cent who were at the bottom of society were known as the "base" (*jianmin* 賤民), and this group was composed of people such as bondservants, prostitutes and actors.¹²² Thus, in imperial China, adherence to status and position was considered vitally important for the smooth running of the state and society.¹²³ This begins to explain the official reactions to the rise of merchants and the changes in their lifestyles as detailed above.

Angela Hsi asserts that the first emperor of the Ming, recognised the power and importance of merchants and helped to protect their interests. Rich merchant families were even treated like other wealthy families, both to win support and to

¹¹⁹ Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy Vol.1*, Derk Bodde, tr., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952, chp. 5, esp. 100-3.

¹²⁰ DMB, 381-92.

¹²¹ Originally set out by statesman Guanzhong 管仲 of Qi 齊 (7th century BC). "You shi nong gong shang 右士農工商," in *Guanzi* 管子, repr. 2 vols., Changsha: Shangwu, 1936, 20.

¹²² See Ho Ping-ti for a more thorough and detailed discussion of social stratification, *idem*, *The Ladder of Success in Imperial China*, New York: Da Capo, 1976, 17-41.

¹²³ Arthur F. Wright, "Values, Roles and Personalities," in Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, eds., *Confucian Personalities*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962, 6.

curb their economic power.¹²⁴ However, it was not until the period of more rapid economic growth of the mid- to late Ming that the merchants were able to become more powerful and wealthy. Affluent merchants were beginning to take an active role in the running of society and there were even cases where prominent merchants participated in local government.¹²⁵ Gu Lin 顧璘 (1476-1545), a well known scholar and official of the Jiajing period, tells that his friend, a wealthy salt merchant, was always invited to assist in important decision making in Meinan 梅南, Suzhou.¹²⁶

In the *Jin Ping Mei* Ximen first obtains the position of vice-captain and assistant magistrate in Chapter 30 and is later promoted to captain and magistrate in Chapter 70. He has to combine merchant and official duties to be successful in trade and politics, a term known as “both official and merchant”(亦官亦商 *yi guan yi shang*), a method in which business capital is converted to bureaucratic capital.¹²⁷ Throughout the novel, he entertains powerful officials, commissioners, censors, scholars and eunuchs in the hope of benefiting from their protection and help.¹²⁸ In the late Ming the imperial purses were empty and official salaries limited, insufficient to satisfy increasing requirements and desires. Officials and eunuchs had to use their power to involve merchants, obtaining money from them, in order to secure their own power and position.¹²⁹ The merchant/official relations described in the novel are of mutual benefit and from such occasions Ximen is able to obtain official positions for his friends and family.¹³⁰

¹²⁴ Hsi, 1972, 15-18.

¹²⁵ See Hsi, 1972, 120-121.

¹²⁶ “Shou Meinan jun xu 壽梅南君序,” in “Xiyuan cungao san 息園存藁三,” in *Gu hua yu ji* 顧華玉集, by Gu Lin 顧璘, edn. *Jinling congshu* 金陵叢書, n.p., n.d., 32.17b-18a.

¹²⁷ Yue Jin, 1993, 49.

¹²⁸ *JPMCH*, 65.12b-14b, 74.7a and 77.2b.

¹²⁹ Yue Jin, 1993, 54.

¹³⁰ *JPMCH*, 75.29b and 77.20b.

Not all merchants were perceived to be as corrupt as Ximen Qing. Besides exercising political power some merchants undertook other functions in society such as charity work, public construction, arbitration and military defence activities.¹³¹ Some merchants were even praised by scholars, particularly when they expressed such Confucian virtues as filial piety, chastity, affection for brothers, and generosity toward kinsmen, clansmen and acquaintances.¹³² As early as 1449 the government actually gave indirect recognition to the power of wealth through fund-raising campaigns for military activities, famines or construction projects, by selling official ranks and titles, as well as the privilege of becoming a student at the Imperial Academy.¹³³ Merchants were no longer barred from taking civil service examinations simply because of their occupation. According to estimates, 36% of officials/degree holders in the period 1590-1683 came from families below elite status.¹³⁴

The distinguished scholar Wang Shizhen, by contrast, lamented that illiterate children from wealthy families were wearing the outfits of officials and carrying books as though they were scholars.¹³⁵ The *Jin Ping Mei* takes a satirical look at this phenomenon as its merchant protagonist Ximen Qing shows little literary competence despite being promoted to official status. By contrast, certain scholars reported that a large number of merchants actually preferred to gain political power

¹³¹ See Hsi, 1972, 171-77. For merchant philanthropy of monasteries, see Timothy Brook, *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in late-Ming China*, Camb. Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1993, 217-223.

¹³² Hsi, 1972, 171-173.

¹³³ Hsi, 1972, 138; "Guoxue 國學," in *Ming huiyao*, 25.405.

¹³⁴ Robert M. Marsh, *The Mandarins: The Circulation of Elites in China, 1600-1900*, Glencoe: Free Press 1961, 163. Similar findings in Ho Ping-ti, "Aspects of Social Mobility in China 1369-1911," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 1.4 (1959), 347.

¹³⁵ *Gu bu gu lu* 觚不觚錄, by Wang Shizhen 王世貞, repr. in *Fengzhou zabian (er)*, *Gu bu gu lu*, *Kui tianxia cheng* 鳳州雜編 (二), 觚不觚錄, 窺天下乘, Beijing: Zhonghua, 1985, 12.

and prestige through entering the examinations. Confucian scholar Wang Daokun 汪道昆 (1525-93)¹³⁶ explains:

The merchants want large profits while scholars desire fame. Now after a person has prepared himself through study but it has not been effective, he has to give up study to take up trade. However, when this merchant has enjoyed the benefits of profits, he then reckons that his children should give up trade to take up study.¹³⁷

This rather unorthodox view can be clarified by the fact that Wang was from a merchant family and perhaps does not reflect the position of more traditional thinking. Another notable example is Wang Gen 王艮 (ca. 1483-1540), son of a salt farmer and trained in trade, whose thinking was propagated by the Taizhou 泰州 School which he established and which influenced individualistic and sometimes eccentric behaviour in his followers.¹³⁸

The economic boom stimulated the expansion of the education system with new schools and academies. This increased the number of exam candidates competing for degrees and stimulated fresh currents of thinking.¹³⁹ A commercial publishing industry flourished in the economically prosperous Jiangnan area boosted by highly developed printing techniques.¹⁴⁰ The volume of books printed was increasing. Instead of just the classics, histories or anthologies, many novels, plays, short stories and guide books for the socially mobile were printed, corresponding to popular tastes. As early as the fifteenth century, it is stated that previously

¹³⁶ DMB, 1427-1430.

¹³⁷ "Haiyang chushi Jin Zhong weng pei Dai shi hezang muzhiming 海陽處士金仲翁配戴氏合葬墓志銘," in *Taihan ji*, 52.12a.

¹³⁸ DMB, 1382-1385; William Theodore de Bary, "Individualism and Humanitarianism in Late Ming Thought," in *idem*, ed., *Self and Society in Ming Thought*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1970, 145-247.

¹³⁹ Johnson et al., 1985, 9; John Meskill, *Academies in Ming China: A Historical Essay*, Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 1982, 66-138.

¹⁴⁰ K.T. Wu, "Ming Printing and Printers," *HJAS* 7 (1942-3), 254. See also Kai-wing Chow, "Writing for Success: Printing, Examinations, and Intellectual Change in Late Ming China," *Late Imperial China* 17.1 (1996), 120-157; Johnson et al., 1985, 17.

uneducated people such as merchants and ‘ignorant women’ had become literary consumers.¹⁴¹ On a visit to the Yangzi region in the 1480’s the Korean monk Ch’oe Pu (1454-1504) reports that even people of the lower classes were demonstrating a degree of literacy.¹⁴² It can be assumed that the level literacy must have been even more widespread by the late sixteenth century.¹⁴³

Rich merchants were even participating in such traditionally élite activities as book collection and patronage of the arts.¹⁴⁴ They purchased old paintings and rare seals much to the dismay of the scholars such as Shen Defu and Huang Yunjiao 黃允交.¹⁴⁵ In the *Jin Ping Mei* Ximen Qing decorates his ‘study’ with such objects. However, contemporary readers would perhaps have mocked his pretensions as he hangs all of his seasonal scrolls up at the same time.¹⁴⁶

The development of cultural scholarship in areas such as Huizhou was intimately connected to the wealth from the prospering economy, and vice versa, the speed of the development of the trade in this area may have been due in part to many merchants starting off as scholars. This exchange and merging of roles, according to modern scholars Zhang Haipeng 張海鵬 and Tang Lixing 唐力行, meant that *Rudao* 儒道 or ‘Confucian Way’ was also transmitted to merchants.¹⁴⁷ Wolfram Eberhard suggests that the gentleman merchants carried bourgeois culture into new urban

¹⁴¹ *Shuidong riji* 水東日記 (1680), by Ye Sheng 葉盛, repr. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1980, 21.213-214.

¹⁴² John Meskill, *Ch’oe Pu’s diary: A Record of Drifting across the Sea*, Tucson: University of Arizona, 1965, 155.

¹⁴³ Meskill, 1982, 66.

¹⁴⁴ Sandi Chin and Cheng-chi Hsü, “Anhui Merchant Culture and Patronage,” in James Cahill, ed., *Shadows of Mt. Huang: Chinese Painting and Printing of the Anhui School*, Berkeley: University Arts Museum, 1981, 19-24; Johnson et al., 1985, 9.

¹⁴⁵ “Jiuhua kuanshi 舊畫款識,” in *WLYHB*, 26.1740; “Han yuyin 漢玉印,” in *WLYHB*, 26.1743; *Zazuan sanxu* 雜纂三續, by Huang Yunjiao 黃允交, repr. in *Zazuan qi zhong* 雜纂七種, Shanghai: Guji, 1988, 114.

¹⁴⁶ Clunas, 1991a, 76.

¹⁴⁷ Zhang Haipeng 張海鵬 and Tang Lixing 唐力行, “Lun Huishang “gu er hao ru” de tese 論徽商“賈而好儒”的特色,” *Zhongguoshi yanjiu* 中國史研究 1984.4, 57-70.

centres, and this was imitated by ordinary merchants. Therefore, the new 'bourgeois/merchant culture' could be called a sub-culture of 'gentry culture'.¹⁴⁸ Helen F. Siu goes further to suggest that merchants imitated literati culture or rather the images and symbols they considered literati culture, creating a new compound culture.¹⁴⁹ The role of merchants in spreading regional variations of culture, whether good or bad in Confucian terms, appears to have been quite influential, and may be one reason the boundaries between different cultures were beginning to become less pronounced.¹⁵⁰

This period saw the emergence of *shanshu* 善書 or 'morality books' which were intended as guides to new social roles for the upwardly mobile emphasising the ability to shape one's own destiny, but were also seen by the literati as a means of opposing the moral decline brought about by rise of the bourgeoisie.¹⁵¹ The boundaries of culture were being redefined by this group despite concerted efforts by the literati-élite to prevent it. William Skinner identifies a traditional dichotomisation of class structure in China in which "the elite were the carriers of the great tradition whilst the peasants were carriers of the little traditions."¹⁵² However, as the use of written communications became more widespread, and the value systems of the élite and peasant traditions closer together.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ Wolfram Eberhard, *Social Mobility in Traditional China*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1962, 268.

¹⁴⁹ Helen F. Siu, "Redefining the Market Town through Festivals in South China," in *Selected Papers Given at the Town and Country in China: Identity and Perceptions' Conference*, University of Oxford (April 1997), 2-3.

¹⁵⁰ Wang Zhenzhong 王振忠, "Ming Qing Yangzhou yanshang shequ wenhua jiqi yingxian 明清揚州鹽商社區文化及其影響," *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 中國史研究 1992.2, 104-116: 104.

¹⁵¹ Cynthia J. Brokaw, *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit: Social Change and Moral Order in Late Imperial China*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991.

¹⁵² Skinner, 1971, 273-274.

¹⁵³ Johnson et al., 1985, 29-33.

Summary

The mid- to late sixteenth century was a period of unprecedented change and development in China. Economic expansion led to increased wealth and a fluid social structure. Old ideas were turned upside down as formerly lowly members of society, particularly merchants who were at the forefront of these economic and social changes, became powerful and wealthy. Traditional values were changing and a society which Confucians perceived to be characterised by affluence and extravagance emerged. Even as society was being subjected to radical change, those who were up and coming such as pseudo-official Ximen Qing were emulating those who were at the top of the social ladder. The boundaries of culture were being redefined.

The developments of the textile industry in this period contributed to the increasing variety of material culture which was sponsored, to a great extent, by the wealthy merchants. These people contributed to the spread of more and more materials and styles around the empire, as did the increasingly commercialised nature of textile production. The competitive nature of society stimulated emulation of the upper classes much to the concern of the contemporary observers.

What then can be said of the perceptions and values of women in sixteenth-century China? Did the above changes affect women too? Were women like merchants in that they had to manipulate to achieve recognition and status? Could the activities of women affect the values of society at large? The following chapter analyses how the changes and developments outlined above began to alter perceptions of the place and roles of women of varying strata in society.

CHAPTER TWO

FEMALE SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

From the very first page of the *Jin Ping Mei* we are assaulted by a warning of the dangers of women:

With a single hand our hero grips his 'hook of Wu,'
Eager to decapitate ten thousand heads.
How is it that his mettle, forged from iron and stone,
Can be melted by a flower?

Take a look at Xiang Yu and Liu Bang:
Both cases are equally distressing.
They had only to meet with Yuji and Lady Qi,
And all their valour came to nought.¹

Does this mean that such a perception was generally accepted in the sixteenth-century or are more positive perceptions about women and their roles revealed in the *Jin Ping Mei* and other contemporary texts?

The main thrust of this thesis is to assess how hierarchical aspects of female material culture were experienced in sixteenth-century China. However, germane to this is an understanding of other areas in which it was possible for women to become influential, whether through the acquisition of positions of authority in the home and community, or through participation in cultural and literary activities which might be appreciated by society at large. As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, the sixteenth century was a period of great social upheaval for many and literati discourse focused on the activities of the bourgeoisie who formed a perceived threat to the stability of Confucian society.

Women in this period were also subjected to such similar scrutiny. Didactic texts became more and more vehement in the face of a perceived increase in female

¹ *JPMCH*, 1.1a.

visibility, both physical and cultural. However, contrasting voices emerge from this period which actively encourage female participation in traditionally male activities and spheres. The *Jin Ping Mei* reveals perceptions of women which echo descriptions of female behaviour in contemporary essays and gazetteers, but contrast with concepts set down in prescriptive canons. The absence of heroic figures or exemplars in the novel, and its plethora of parodies and images of the darker side of the female character, only serves to highlight the concerns of the author and his class. The women in the novel are seen to fashion their own spheres of influence and power both in the Ximen household and in the society they frequent.

Images of women in the Chinese Classics and traditional legal thought

Although, Nü Gua 女媧, sister to the legendary emperor Fu Xi 伏羲, comprised one of the *Sanhuang* 三皇 “Legendary Emperors” and was credited with the role of creator of man,² the later Chinese Classics appear to reveal a fear of female power. In the *Shu jing* “Classic of History” it is written: “The crowing of a hen in the morning indicates the subversion of the family.”³ The *Shi jing* 詩經 “Classic of Poetry” states:

A wise man builds up the wall [of a city],
But a wise woman overthrows it.
Admirable may be the wise woman,
But she is [no better than] an owl.
A woman with a long tongue,
Is [like] a stepping-stone to disorder.

² Marcel Granet, *Chinese Civilization*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Tribner and Co., 1930, 9-11; Edward H. Schafer, *The Divine Woman: Dragon Ladies and Rain Maidens in T'ang Literature*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California, 1973, 29-32 and 48-51. Several Western scholars have suggested that the earliest Chinese communities were actually matriarchal -- Granet, 1930, xviii; Van Gulik, 1961, 5-9; Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, New York and London: Marion Boyars, 1986, 60. However, by the time of the earliest written records it is clear that Chinese society was patriarchal in arrangement. See recent article by David Keightley, “Out of the Stone Age: Women in the Shang Bone Inscriptions,” *Nan nü: Men, Women, and Gender in Early and Imperial China* 1.1 (1999), 46-53.

³ James Legge, tr., *The Chinese Classics 3: The Shoo King or The Book of Historical Documents*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960b, 302-303.

[Disorder] does not come down from heaven:-
It is produced by the woman.
Those from whom come no lessons, no instruction,
Are women and eunuchs.⁴

One of the earliest works, the *Yijing* 易經 “Classic of Changes” proposed the interplay and equal importance of both *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽. Early Confucians interpreted this to mean that *yin* is ‘shade,’ ‘passive’ and ‘yielding’ and, therefore, ‘female;’ whereas *yang* is ‘sunlight,’ ‘aggressive,’ ‘assertive’ and, therefore, ‘male.’⁵ Confucius 孔子 (550-479BC) is reported to have said: “Women are those who become capable through following the instruction of men.”⁶ The *Sancong* 三從 “The Three Followings,” taken from the *Li ji* 禮記, elaborates:

The woman follows the man: when young she follows her father and elder brother; when married she follows her husband; when her husband is dead, she follows her son.⁷

In addition to the *sancong* were the *side* 四德 ‘four virtues’: *fude* 婦德 ‘woman’s moral virtue,’ *fuyan* 婦言 ‘woman’s speech,’ *furong* 婦容 ‘woman’s appearance’ and *fugong* 婦工 ‘woman’s work,’ popularised by Ban Zhao 班昭 (ca. 49-120BC) of the Han in her *Nüjie* 女誡 “Instructions for Women,” a work which was highly influenced by the Classics. These emphasised chastity, decorum, cleanliness and the pursuit of sewing, weaving and serving others.⁸ The *Nüjie* was included as one of the *Nüsishu* 女四書 “Four Classics for Women,” edited by Wang Xiang 王相 of the

⁴ James Legge, tr., *The Chinese Classics 4: The She King or The Book of Poetry*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960c, 561.

⁵ Hellmuth Wilhelm, *Heaven, Earth, and Man in the Book of Changes*, Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1977, 193-194.

⁶ “Benming jie 本命解,” in *Kongzi jiaoyu* 孔子家語, edn. *Baizi quanshu* 百子全書, 8 vols., Shanghai: Zhejiang renmin, 1984, 6.3a.

⁷ *Kongzi jiaoyu*, 6.3a-b;

⁸ Nancy Lee Swann, *Pan Chao, Foremost Woman Scholar of China*, New York and London: Century, 1932, 82-90. Western feminists assert that despite her claim to help improve the lives of women, Ban Zhao’s belief that women were born inferior to men aided later generations in their subordination. See, for example, Marina H. Sung, “The Chinese Lientü Tradition,” in Guisso and Johannesen, eds., 1981, 67.

Ming, which became a popular didactic text.⁹

Works of this kind devoted to the behaviour of women were numerous and demonstrate the way in which Confucian philosophy provided a degree of constancy in prescriptions for female behaviour. However, discrepancies in even the Confucian texts themselves led to deviations in practice.¹⁰ Many scholars have urged caution when examining writings such as these as they may actually indicate the *élite ideal* of female conduct as opposed to *actual* female behaviour.¹¹ Anthropologist Henrietta Moore suggests that we must not take writings on women at face value because “gender stereotypes are developed and used in the strategies which individuals of both sexes employ to advance their interests in various social contexts.”¹²

Susan Mann points out that, on careful reading, the *Li ji* could, in fact, be “interpreted to emphasise *distinctions* and *difference* more than hierarchy, dominance, or submission.” In other words, it stressed gender differences and the complementary and separate responsibilities of men and women.¹³ According to the Confucian ideal, society is composed of hierarchical relationships, with social order maintained by all recognising their particular roles.¹⁴ The family is central to both

⁹ This compilation also included the *Nü lunyu* 女論語 “Analects for Women” by Song Ruohua 宋若華 (Tang), the *Neixun* 內訓 “Instructions for the Inner Quarters” by Empress Xu 徐 (Ming), and the *Nüfan jielu* 女範捷錄 “Brief Outline of Rules for Women” by the mother of Wang Xiang. Didactic works such as the *Lienü zhuan* 列女傳 compiled by Liu Xiang 劉向 were even specially illustrated for illiterate women. See Julia K. Murray, “Didactic Art for Women: The *Ladies Classic of Filial Piety*,” in Marsha Weidner, ed., *Flowering in the Shadows: Women in the History of Chinese and Japanese Painting*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990, 27-53.

¹⁰ Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Confucianism and Family Rituals in Imperial China: A Social History of Writing About Rites*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991a, 226-7.

¹¹ Joanna F. Handlin, “Lü Kun’s New Audience: The Influence of Women’s Literacy on 16thC Thought,” in Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke, ed., *Women in Chinese Society*, California: Stanford University Press, 1978, 13; Jennifer Holmgren, “Widow Chastity in the Northern Dynasties,” *Papers on Far Eastern History* 23 (1981), 176; Francesca Bray, *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China*, Berkeley: University of California, 1997, 270.

¹² Henrietta Moore, *Feminism and Anthropology*, Oxford: Polity Press and Basil Blackwell, 1988, 37.

¹³ Susan Mann, “Grooming a Daughter for Marriage: Brides and Wives in the Mid-Ch’ing Period,” in Watson and Ebrey, eds., 1991, 209.

¹⁴ See Michael H. Bond and Kwang-kuo Huang, “The Social Psychology of Chinese People,” in Michael H. Bond, ed., *The Psychology of the Chinese People*, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press,

political and ethical thought; a well-ordered family is essential for a well-ordered society.¹⁵ The Classics refer to women in their *idealised* roles and delineate the different roles and spheres of action of men and women. The *Neize* 內則 “Domestic Regulations” section of the *Li ji*, for example, regulates the duties of female members of a household.¹⁶ Families in later dynasties often compiled their own rules and regulations on the running of the household based on these formulations.¹⁷ Although these too provide an idealised version of the traditional Chinese family, they are useful as much as they highlight the anxieties and hopes of those compiling them.¹⁸

Marriage in traditional China was considered one of the main rituals alongside ancestral sacrifices and funerary rites. On the ceremony, the Song philosopher Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019-1086) states that “the boy leads the girl, the girl follows the boy; the duty of husbands to be firm and wives to be submissive begins with this.”¹⁹ However, it was often stated that a wife was her husband’s partner, and therefore, they formed an indivisible whole.²⁰ Due to the nature of arranged marriages, new brides still tended to be in a more precarious and isolated position in the family. They were “temporary sojourners” in their own natal household and only underwent a partial integration into their family by marriage.²¹

1986, 213 and 216; James Legge, tr., “The Li Ki, Books I-X,” in F. Max Müller, ed., *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 27, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885a, 449-479.

¹⁵ James Legge, tr., *The Chinese Classics 1: The Great Learning*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960a, 357.

¹⁶ Legge, 1885a, 449-479.

¹⁷ See, for example, *Yan shi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓, by Yan Zhitui 顏之推, repr. Tianjin: Guji, 1995; *Yuan shi shifan* 袁氏世範 (1788), by Yuan Cai 袁采, repr. Tianjin: Guji, 1995; Charlotte Furth, “The Patriarch’s Legacy: Household Instructions and the Transmission of Orthodox Values,” in Kwang-Ching Liu, *Orthodoxy in Late Imperial China*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford: University of California, 1990, 187-211.

¹⁸ Ann Waltner, *Getting an Heir: Adoption and the Construction of Kinship in Late Imperial China*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990, 23.

¹⁹ *Sima shi shuyi* 司馬氏書儀, by Sima Guang 司馬光, repr. Shanghai: Shangwu, 1936, 3.35.

²⁰ Chen Peng 陳鵬, *Zhongguo hunyin shigao* 中國婚姻史稿, Beijing: Zhonghua, 1990, 526-28; Tjan T’joe Som, *Po Hu T’ung: The Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall*, 2 vols, Westport: Hyperion Press, 1949, 1.261.

²¹ Margery Wolf, *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972,

Women were generally in a least secure position in their husband's family. In the Ming, husbands could punish and even kill their wives with impunity. Wives, on the other hand, were punished with 100 strokes if they beat their husband and would be sentenced to death should they kill him.²² Despite this, women did receive some protection from the law as men were prohibited from renting out their wives and concubines.²³ It was also possible that women could commute punishments for most crimes into cash payments which, according to Ann Waltner, implies "that they never assumed a state of full responsibility" equivalent to their men.²⁴ Women were unable to divorce their husbands but their husbands were able to divorce their wives according to the 'Seven Outs' (七出 *qi chu*) - being disobedient to parents-in-law, barrenness, adultery, jealousy, incurable illness, garrulousness and theft. A woman was protected from divorce if she had no close relatives to go home to, if she had undergone three years of mourning for her parents-in-law or if the family had grown rich since her marriage.²⁵ However, as divorce was considered shameful, it was to be avoided.²⁶

The *zhuixu* 贅婿 form of marriage, commonly depicted in literature, occurred when the woman's family took in a husband, perhaps to help run the family business in the absence of sons.²⁷ This type of marriage probably ensured greater emotional

32-37 and 128-41.

²² "Qiqie oufu 妻妾毆夫," in "Xinglu dou'ou 刑律斗毆," in *Ming lu jijie fuli* 明律集解附例 (1898), 5 vols., Taipei: Chengwen, 1969, 20.29a-b.

²³ "Diangu qiqie 典雇妻妾," in "Hulu hunyin 戶律婚姻," in *Ming lu*, 6.6b.

²⁴ Ann Waltner, "The Moral Status of the Child in Late Imperial China: Childhood in Ritual and Law," *Social Research* 53.4 (1986), 685.

²⁵ *Kongzi jiaoyu*, 6.3b; "Chuqi 出妻," in "Hulu hunyin 戶律婚姻," in *Ming lu*, 6.37b-38a; Tai Yen-hui, "Divorce in Traditional Chinese Law," in David C. Buxbaum, ed., *Chinese Family Law and Social Change in Historical and Comparative Perspective*, Seattle: University of Washington, 1978, 84-91.

²⁶ Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1993, 258.

²⁷ For example, see the two Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 tales "Jin Yunu bangda boqinglang 金玉奴棒打薄情郎," in *Yushi mingyan* 喻世明言, repr. Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 1995, 27.431-443 and "Zhang Xiaoji chenliu renjiu 張孝基陳留認舅," in *Xingshi hengyan*, 17.343-369.

stability and security for a new bride. The husband would be the stranger to the household and therefore the wife would perhaps hold more sway.²⁸ Such a practice, however, was rare and it was more often the case that, in a more traditional marriage, the wife was respected because she managed the inner quarters, served her husband's parents, worshipped his ancestors and provided for the continuation of the family line.²⁹ Although subordinate to her husband in many respects, there were many avenues for women to establish areas of influence and authority over other members of the household, both male and female.

Female authority in the home

Female hierarchies

The major setting for the *Jin Ping Mei* is the Ximen household. The women's quarters are composed of three suites of rooms and each of the wives is identified with the part of the house in which she lives. Wu Yueniang, the principal wife, whose south facing rooms are the largest, is referred to as 'the one in the highest (status) room' (*shangfang de* 上房的). Second in line, Li Jiao'er's rooms are on the east side and those of Meng Yulou, number three, are on the west. Behind this courtyard there is a smaller courtyard including Sun Xue'e's rooms and this indicates her lowlier fourth position.³⁰ Zhang Zhupo notes that as Pan Jinlian and Li Ping'er, ranked fifth and sixth, are in the garden, rather than in the main women's quarters, it demonstrates their ambiguous standing in the household and intensifies their rivalry

²⁸ In the *Jin Ping Mei*, Li Ping'er marries the doctor, Jiang Zhushan, and sets him up in business. Although not quite the same thing as Ping'er's marriage, the fact that the woman may have been more secure than the man in a marriage in which the female side is the initiator is reflected when Ping'er throws Jiang out of the house having become dissatisfied with him. See *JPMCH*, chapters 17-19.

²⁹ James Legge, tr., "The Li Ki, Books XI-XLVI," in F. Max Müller, ed., *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 28, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885b, 261-269; Tjan, 1949, 1.260.

³⁰ Scott, 1986, 83-84.

for Ximen's favour.³¹ In traditional China, the principal wife was known as the *zhengfang* 正房 or *zhengshi* 正室 'occupant of the principal room' whereas the concubines were known as the *ceshi* 側室, *ershi* 二室 or *pianfang* 偏房 'occupant of the side/secondary room.' Servants were housed at the very back or very front of the house, areas which were geomantically inauspicious.³² The physical setting of the household mirrored the female hierarchy in the home.

Although China tended to be polygamous there could only be one legal principal wife 妻 *qi* who was usually of similar status as her husband. She was betrothed with the assistance of a matchmaker, provided with a dowry and underwent a formal marriage ceremony.³³ In the *Jin Ping Mei*, this position is occupied by Wu Yueniang, daughter of a battalion commander. In charge of the day-to-day running of the household, she theoretically has authority over all the women, maids, servants and children.

According to Ming law, a man who had reached the age of forty and had no sons by his wife could take a concubine 妾 *qie*.³⁴ However, research shows that that concubines were often taken for individual reasons rather than family reasons.³⁵ Concubines were those taken in marriage not in accordance with the *li* and they could be expelled from the household at will.³⁶ They were frequently from families which were not prominent and were sold by parents who could not afford a dowry or who were in debt. In the novel Pan Jinlian is taken into the Ximen household out of lust.

³¹ *DYQS*, *dufa*.12.

³² Bray, 1997, 125.

³³ Rubie S. Watson suggests that it was the property-holding status which defined a "wife". See *idem*, "Wives, Concubines, and Maids: Servitude and Kinship on the Hong Kong Region, 1900-1940," in Watson and Ebrey, eds., 1991, 250.

³⁴ "Hunying 婚姻," in *DMHD*, 57.12b.

³⁵ Eberhard, 1962, 129.

³⁶ Wang Shaoxi 王紹璽, *Xiaoqie shi* 小妾史, Shanghai: Wenyi, 1995, 13-24.

Meng Yulou and Li Ping'er, both wealthy widows, are taken for a combination of material gain and sexual desire. A common method of upward mobility for serving girls was to be established as a concubine, of which Sun Xue'e is an example.³⁷ This was also highly desirable for prostitutes and singing girls; however, Ming scholar Huang Yunjiao warns us that it was common knowledge that the prostitute's motives can be far from trustworthy in such cases.³⁸ Former prostitute, Li Jiao'er, is an example from the novel.

Everyday rules regarding titles and duties maintained the difference in status between wives and concubines, as did legal regulations.³⁹ The Ming punishment for treating a concubine as a wife went as high as 100 strokes and for treating wife like a concubine the punishment was 90 strokes. It was illegal to convert a concubine to principal wife on the death of the latter. However, in Ming it was often the case that concubine was made into a *fuzheng* 扶正 'relief wife' after the death of the first wife. This could only occur with the approval of the husband's and deceased wife's family.⁴⁰ There are also cases where a concubine was made into a *jishi* 繼室 or 'replacement wife'. In the Jiajing period, the secretary of the Board of Rites, Xia Yan 夏言 (1482-1548), requested to make his concubine Ms Su 蘇 his replacement wife and she received emoluments due to her new status.⁴¹ In the *Jin Ping Mei* Chunmei takes the place of Commander Zhou's first wife after her death and she too receives

³⁷ Patricia Ebrey, "Women in the Kinship System in the Southern Song Upper Class," in Guisso and Johannesen, eds., 1981, 125; James L. Watson, "Transactions in People: The Chinese Market in Slaves, Servants and Heirs," in *idem*, ed., *Asian and African Systems of Slavery*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980, 223-250; Eberhard, 1962, 129.

³⁸ *Zazuan sanxu*, 111.

³⁹ Wang Shaoxi, 1995, 27-29. Ann Waltner suggests that the Ming Code makes a concubine's status closer to that of a wife than a maid. See *idem*, "Breaking the Law: Family Violence, Gender and Hierarchy in the Legal Code of the Ming Dynasty," *Ming Studies* 36 (1996), 38.

⁴⁰ "Shixu 失序," in "Hulu hunyin 户律婚姻," in *Ming lu*, 6.8b.

⁴¹ *DMB*, 527-531; "Feng jiqi 封繼妻," in *Shuhua suibi* 漱華隨筆, by Yan Youxi 嚴有禧, edn. *Jieyue shanfang huichao* 借月山房匯鈔, by Zhang Haipeng 張海鵬, repr. Taipei: Yiwen, 1967, 2.3a-b.

all the emoluments due to her new status.⁴²

Despite his philanderings and infatuations, Ximen Qing never attempts to elevate any of his concubines over Wu Yueniang. The hierarchical positions between his numerous concubines, however, are much more ambiguous. From the imperial household down there existed a very highly regulated concubine system; the more concubines one possessed, the more illustrious one became.⁴³ However, it appears that the restrictions on the maximum number of concubines set out in Ming laws were rarely carried out.⁴⁴ Contemporary observer Matteo Ricci noted:

All men are free to have concubines, and class or fortune means nothing in their selection [as opposed to legitimate wives], as the only standard of preference is physical beauty. These concubines may be purchased for a hundred pieces of gold and at times for much less. Among the lower classes wives are bought and sold for silver and as often as a man may wish.⁴⁵

Among the gentry and wealthy merchants, concubines were usually ranked according to favouritism and their order could be changed at will. The first to produce a son would probably be elevated above the others. Those concubines loved for their youth, beauty and talent could also be positioned above others.⁴⁶ Little attention is paid to the designations of rank among the concubines of the Ximen household; it is merely an indicator of the timing of their entrance into the household. The lack of a constant and fixed hierarchy only fuels the rivalries between the women as they battle for attention and power, both of which could consolidate their precarious positions.

At the bottom of the female hierarchy of the household were the maids who were often bought for a certain period after which they were to be found a husband.

⁴² *JPMCH*, 95.6a.

⁴³ "Hunying," in *DMHD*, 57.11b-12b; Wang Shaoxi, 1995, 34-38; Eberhard, 1962, 130.

⁴⁴ Bao-Hua Hsieh, "The Acquisition of Concubines in China, 14th-17th Centuries," *Jindai Zhongguo funü shi yanjiu* 近代中國婦女史研究 1 (1993), 128.

⁴⁵ Gallagher, 1953, 75.

⁴⁶ Wang Shaoxi, 1995, 32-34.

They too had their own hierarchy, with body servants at the top and scullery maids at the bottom, as the relationship between Pan Jinlian's bodymaid Chunmei and the menial servant Qiuju 秋菊 indicates. Throughout the *Jin Ping Mei* the maids and concubines are bought and sold. A particularly pertinent example occurs after Jinlian is expelled from the household and various men bid to purchase her from the matchmaker who is demanding 100 taels of silver.⁴⁷ Thus, it can be seen that the wife was separated from the other, more menial women in the family, as Rubie Watson states:

The language of gifts and reciprocity was used for wives; the idiom of the marketplace was used for concubines and maids.⁴⁸

Women often had more authority as they grew older; throughout their lives, rituals and ceremonies marked the next stage up the ladder.⁴⁹ The *ji* 笄 “hairpinning” ceremony enacted at fifteen *sui* was considered parallel to the capping ceremony of boys (冠 *guan*) and formed the first step up the ladder.⁵⁰ Often combined with the symbolic gift of a set of hair ornaments,⁵¹ a woman would assume an adult hairstyle, an adult name and adult responsibilities in her domestic role. This is demonstrated by one aspect of the ceremony whereby the principal guest is selected from among female relatives. This indicated that the woman was ready to marry and take on domestic responsibilities, which contrasted with the capping ceremony when young man selects friend or colleague of father, indicates he was ready to begin public life

⁴⁷ *JPMCH*, 86.14a.

⁴⁸ Watson, 1991, 239.

⁴⁹ Wolf, 1972, 215-229.

⁵⁰ In some classical texts such as the *Ili* 儀禮 and “Quli 曲禮” section of the *Li Ji* it is described it as an integral part of the marriage ceremony. But the “Neize 內則” and “Zaji 雜記” sections of the *Li Ji* indicates that they are distinct ceremonies with hairpinning occurring at 15 and marriage at 20. “Guanli 冠禮,” in *Wuli tongkao* 五禮通考 (1880), by Qin Huitian 秦蕙田, repr. Jiangsu: Shuju, n.d., 150.31b-34a; “Guanli 冠禮,” in *Wengong jiali yijie* 文公家禮儀節 (1608), by Qiu Jun 丘濬, n.p., n.d., 2.22b-26b; *Shuyuan zaji*, 2.8a.

⁵¹ *Zheng shi guifan* 鄭氏規範, by Zheng Dahe 鄭大和, edn. *Xuehai leibian* 學海類編, repr. Yangzhou: Jiangsu guangling, 1994, 10b.

outside of household.⁵²

Age could form a significant factor in the power relationships between female members of the household. Between wives and husbands there was an average age gap of five years, between replacement wives and husbands there was an average of ten years difference and between concubines and masters an average of nineteen years.⁵³ Therefore a wife could be considerably older than a concubine and thus be in a stronger position. The fact that all of the women of the Ximen household are a relatively similar age to each other and to Ximen Qing himself, is one of the reasons the female hierarchies in the household become blurred and hotly contested.

It was recognised that the longer a woman was married, the more power she had over the other members of the household. After the death of a husband, a rich principal wife could even become a matriarch. In the *Jin Ping Mei*, Wu Yueniang attempts to assert herself over the household after the death of Ximen Qing. However, her authority is diminished by the scarcity of descendants and the disintegration of the household in the final 20 chapters. By the end of the novel Yueniang is left only with Ximen's servant Dai'an 玳安 who is married off to her maid Xiaoyu 小玉 and made into the heir to the household.⁵⁴ Yueniang's authority is clearly dependent upon the existence of Ximen Qing, rather than any respect she has built up among the other members of the household.

Motherhood

According to Andrew Plaks:

The sense of the fragility, in effect the nonentity, of all Ximen Qing's offspring helps to explain why his wives and concubines invest so much time and effort

⁵² Waltner, 1986, 672-3.

⁵³ Eberhard, 1962, 134-5.

⁵⁴ *JPMCH*, 100.16a.

in their attempts to become pregnant - the key to their status and even survival, as we see in the fatal rivalry between Pan Jinlian and Li Ping'er that ultimately destroys Guan'ge.⁵⁵

In the *Jin Ping Mei*, Yueniang's initial efforts to bear a son despite her moonlit prayers on a snowy night,⁵⁶ conclude with a miscarriage in the Qiao family house.⁵⁷ However, she later acquires a fertility drug *renzi* 姪子 (literally 'to conceive a child') from the nuns in Chapter 50. After Jinlian also obtains a similar pill in Chapter 73, the desperation of both women to sleep with their husband on the day causes intense rivalry between them.⁵⁸

Why were the female characters of the novel so concerned with producing a male heir? It has been argued that motherhood could considerably strengthen the position of women in the traditional Chinese household. Margery Wolf interprets giving birth, especially to a first son, as giving a wife the opportunity to build up her own 'uterine family' in opposition to the power of her mother-in-law.⁵⁹ Therefore, many women, conscious of the benefits of bearing a son, were anxious to conceive and used fertility potions and prayed to fertility deities.⁶⁰ For Wu Yueniang in the *Jin Ping Mei*, the lack of any form of superiors of relatives by marriage negates the need to build up her own 'uterine family.' Her desperation to conceive is more a reflection of her own insecurity in the face of the philanderings of her husband and his failure to abide by the rules and regulations of concubinage.

Women in traditional China are often portrayed as victims of the patriarchal

⁵⁵ Plaks, 1987, 173.

⁵⁶ *JPMCH*, 21.1b.

⁵⁷ *JPMCH*, 33.9a-b.

⁵⁸ In Chapter 53, Yueniang refuses to sleep with Ximen because it is not the *renzi* day and sends him to Jinlian. In Chapter 75 Jinlian waits for Ximen on a *renzi* day, but instead he goes to spend the night with Yulou.

⁵⁹ Wolf, 1972, 32-41.

⁶⁰ Christopher Cullen, "Patients and Healers in Late Imperial China: Evidence from the *Jinpingmei*," *History of Science* 31 (1993), 126; Watson, 1985, 320.

drive for sons; however, Bray wants to show that this might not have always been the case. She argues that biological motherhood was less ‘real’ than social motherhood. Upper class women were able to exploit the reproductive capacities of lower class women whilst still retaining status as principal wife:

The medical sources show that orthodox gynecology provided elite women in late imperial China with an approved technology of reproductive control that offered certainly not total reproductive freedom but rather room to maneuver, the possibility of cultivating the role of *mater*, or social mother, maybe at the expense of that of an endlessly fruitful *progenitrix*, or biological mother.⁶¹

The tasks of educating the children, for example, which required breeding, education and character, were probably beyond the capacities of maids and of most concubines. By contrast, the élite wife was distinguished by her *wen* ‘cultured/civilised’ nature.⁶² It was stressed that official wives should pay attention to the education of the sons of concubines in case they were tainted by their origins.⁶³

Unlike the chaotic depictions of attempted and foiled conceptions and unplanned pregnancies found in the *Jin Ping Mei*, it was possible that the mistress of the Ming household could decide upon the reproductive timetable of the rest of the women in the family. Ms Feng 馮, the mother of the scholar Ye Shaoyuan 葉紹袁 (1588-1648), refused to allow him to sleep with his new fourteen-*sui* wife Shen Yixiu 沈宜修 (1590-1635) without her explicit permission. Their first child was born five years after their marriage.⁶⁴

The news that Li Ping’er has conceived is received surprisingly well by Yueniang in the *Jin Ping Mei* who is placated by the knowledge that she, like the biological mother, will be honoured should the boy attain success in official life.⁶⁵ By

⁶¹ Bray, 1997, 334.

⁶² Bray, 1997, 360 and 364.

⁶³ Waltner, 1990, 30.

⁶⁴ Ko, 1994, 188; *DMB*, 1576-1579.

⁶⁵ *JPMCH*, 57.5a. See further discussion in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

contrast, Jinlian's jealousy at Ping'er's conception is immense. With the birth of Guan'ge in Chapter 30, Jinlian's jealousy intensifies as Ximen dotes on Ping'er and the baby, leaving her sexually and emotionally frustrated. As a result she attempts to detract from Ping'er's triumph by claiming that the child must have been fathered by Jiang Zhushan.⁶⁶ She indirectly harasses Ping'er and the baby, weakening the boy's already fragile condition until Guan'ge is pounced upon by the cat Jinlian has been training. The shock is fatal and Guan'ge dies shortly after. The intensity of this rivalry makes clear that women of lower status relied much more heavily on their ability to conceive in order to retain or improve their position within a household.⁶⁷

The women of the *Jin Ping Mei* appear to be the antithesis of the Confucian ideal mother-educator as epitomised by Mengmu 孟母, the mother of the Confucian philosopher Mengzi 孟子 (372-289BC).⁶⁸ In the late Ming, discourse surrounding the role of the mother was intense and the novel, in its pointed omission of images of ideal mothers, reveals further perceptions about this issue. Ming debates on female education often centred on whether it would help them to become superior mothers.⁶⁹ The Ming state formally recognised women's contribution to men's education by conferring honorary titles on the wives and mothers of scholar-officials.⁷⁰ Gui Youguang praises the efforts made by Ms Cai 蔡孺人, a Lady of Nurture,⁷¹ who taught her son Cai Qing 蔡卿 most earnestly after the death of her husband Zhu Gongbao 朱公豹, Prefect of Fuzhou.⁷²

⁶⁶ *JPMCH*, 41.

⁶⁷ Bray, 1997, 365.

⁶⁸ *Lientu zhuan*, 3.33b-35a.

⁶⁹ Ko, 1994, 158-60; Ebrey, 1993, 183; Mann, 1991, 213-216.

⁷⁰ Huang, 1981, 193.

⁷¹ Honourary title for wives of the 7th grade..

⁷² "Cai ruren zhuan 蔡孺人傳," in *Zhenchuan xiansheng ji* 震川先生集 (1673), by Gui Youguang 歸有光, repr. Taipei: Yuanliu, 1983, 27.447.

It was conventional for officials to attribute their successes to their mother, often their *dimu* 嫡母 “principal mother.” This was, in fact, the principal wife as opposed to their biological mother. Hsiung Ping-chen states:

Motherhood can be as much a socially and culturally constructed phenomenon as one rooted in the biological lineage.⁷³

The principal mother of Gu Yanwu, Madame Wang 王 (d.1645), was highly educated and gave her own life for the collapsing Ming dynasty. Her influence made Gu a vehement Ming loyalist.⁷⁴ In many instances in the Ming and Qing it was the mother, not the father, who showed a stronger interest in their son’s education and career development, as her formative influence over her son was a way of achieving social recognition for herself.⁷⁵ The literary and moral education of children by their mothers ensured that a woman was not limited by her sequestration. Bray emphasises that she could ensure that her sons and daughters could cross the boundaries of the inner quarters to be sent out into the wider world as representatives of their lineage, and of her own maternal virtue.⁷⁶ The mother of the young woman visionary Tanyangzi 曇陽子, Ms Zhu 朱 (1533-1598), for example, was publicly praised for her influence on her children.⁷⁷

A highly contrastive depiction of the ideal late Ming mother/son relationship in the *Jin Ping Mei* is that of Lady Lin 林太太 and Wang Cai 王采. Lady Lin is the 35 year-old widow of Wang Yixuan 王逸軒, an hereditary Imperial Commissioner,

⁷³ Hsiung Ping-chen, “Constructed Emotions: The Bond Between Mothers and Sons in Late Imperial China,” *Late Imperial China* 15.1 (1994), 88.

⁷⁴ *Gu Dinglin xiansheng nianpu* 顧亭林先生年譜 (1843), by Zhang Mu 張穆, repr. Taipei: Guangwen, 1971, 1.4b; *ECCP*, 421-426.

⁷⁵ Hsiung, 1994, 87-117.

⁷⁶ Bray, 1997, 282.

⁷⁷ Ann Waltner, “The Grand Secretary’s Family: Three Generations of Women in the Family of Wang Hsi-chüeh,” *Jinshi jiazu yu zhengzhi bijiao lishi lunwenji* 近世家族與政治比較歷史論文集, Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1992, 541-577.

and therefore a woman of some standing. However, the profligacy of her son is so great that the household is in danger of financial collapse, and she resorts to seducing Ximen Qing to ask him to adopt her son under the pretext that he will provide moral guidance. The *Jin Ping Mei* not only ridicules the lack of posterity among the women of the Ximen household with the premature death of Guan'ge and the loss of Xiaoge to the priesthood, but also emphasises the lack of virtuous mothers in the upper classes. The novel reflects anxieties over the possible consequences of women not undertaking the role of mother-educator considered so vital in Confucian thought.

Female Rivalries and Jealousy

The insecurity of the women in the *Jin Ping Mei* manifests itself in the increasingly violent rivalries among the Ximen women. Pan Jinlian, in particular, typifies the jealous wife or shrew as she creates havoc in the household, bullying those beneath her and behaving disrespectfully towards the principal wife. Jealous and domineering women can be found in many literary genres; however, the late sixteenth century saw an increase in the popularity of this subject, in such novels as *Jin Ping Mei*, *Liaodu geng* 療妒羹 by Wu Bing 吳炳 (1595-1648), *Cu hulu* 醋葫蘆, and *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻緣傳.⁷⁸ The reasons behind this give an indication of the anxieties of those compiling them.

The nature of the female had long been a topic of philosophical debate. Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) considered women jealous and emotional.⁷⁹ Yuan Cai 袁采 (fl.

⁷⁸ Yenna Wu, *The Chinese Virago: A Literary Theme*, Camb. Mass. and London: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University and Harvard University Press, 1995, esp. 7-9, 51-123. See also *idem*, "The Inversion of Marital Hierarchy: Shrewish Wives and Henpecked Husbands in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Literature," *HJAS* 48.2 (1988), 363-382. For a discussion of powerful women in later fiction see Louise P. Edwards, *Men and Women in Qing China: Gender in the Red Chamber Dream*, Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1994, in particular Chapter 5, "Wang Xifeng: Young Women and Power," 68-86.

⁷⁹ Wing-tsit Chan, *Reflections on Things at Hand: The Neo-Confucian Anthology Compiled by Chu Hsi and Lü Tsu-ch'ien*, New York and London: Columbia University, 1967, 203.

1140-1195), too, was most concerned about the damage caused by the female vice of gossiping. He warns against the ease with which women could be flattered and misled by the gossip of ignorant maids. The wives themselves are accused not only of being easily flattered but causing disharmony with their own opinions, inciting animosity between their husband and his family because they were not 'natural relations' of family and consequently might not share its beliefs.⁸⁰ Women were too severe with maids because they were often "petty, quick-tempered, quarrelsome, obstinate, cruel, oppressive, and ignorant of the ancient and recent moral truths."⁸¹

The theoretical authority a wife had in the inner quarters also provided an opportunity for abuse of power in the form of bullying concubines and maids. Their husbands were often unaware or even unable or unwilling to intervene.⁸² By contrast, a concubine who was favoured by her husband could often behave arrogantly.⁸³ When compared to wives, concubines were in a particularly insecure and highly dependent position and this increased their tendencies to manipulate their husbands.⁸⁴ In theory, jealousy appears to be directly related to access to financial resources and a sexual partner.⁸⁵ However, it is probable a Chinese wife may have been more fearful of losing power and status than any feeling for her husband.⁸⁶

According to the Zheng 鄭 family instructions from the Ming, concubinage

⁸⁰ Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Family and Property in Sung China: Yuan Ts'ai's Precepts for Social Life*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, 205-8.

⁸¹ Ebrey, 1984, 290.

⁸² Ebrey, 1993, 168.

⁸³ Wu, 1995, 24.

⁸⁴ Maria Jaschok, *Concubines and Bondservants: A Social History*, London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1988, 67-8; Ellen Birscheid and Jack Fei, "Romantic Love and Sexual Jealousy," in Gordon Clanton and Lynn G. Smith, eds., *Jealousy*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1977, 107-108.

⁸⁵ Margaret Mead, "Jealousy: Primitive and Civilised," in Clanton and Smith, eds., 1977, 118.

⁸⁶ Wu, 1995, 39. Cultural values are known to affect the motivations for jealousy. See Ralph B. Hupka, "The Motive for the Arousal of Romantic Jealousy: Its Cultural Origin," in Peter Salovey, ed., *The Psychology of Jealousy and Envy*, New York and London: The Guildford Press, 1991, 261-67.

“caused chaos in the distinctions between superior and inferior.”⁸⁷ Because of the problems jealousy created in a polygamous household, it was branded an ‘evil trait’ (*ede* 惡德).⁸⁸ The reasons for this are made clear by Xie Zhaozhe who commented on the increasing number of jealous wives in the late Ming:

Ugly wives are dreaded because they hold power over the household; young wives are dreaded because they bewitch their husbands in bed; wives who have sons are dreaded because they obtain power by this fact; wives without sons are dreaded because they are intimidating in and of themselves.⁸⁹

Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574-1640)⁹⁰ too noted the increasingly widespread nature of female jealousy in this period:

Eight out of ten women openly display their feelings of jealousy, while two out of ten conceal their jealousy inside. Only one or two out of a thousand are genuinely free of jealousy.⁹¹

Huang Yunjiao cites numerous Ming sayings which refer to the often unsolvable problems created by a wife’s jealousy of her husband’s concubines.⁹²

The large number of domineering and jealous women in the merchant towns of Pucheng 浦城 and Xin’an in Huizhou is explained by Xie Zhaozhe as the result of commerce.⁹³ However, this change in the behaviour of women was a cause of great concern and prompted the printing of family rules in genealogies, *lienü* records and other Confucian Classics such as the *Nüzi jing* 女子經 “Classic for Girls,” by those very merchants who were leading the economic changes.⁹⁴ Huizhou became renowned for its support for the Cheng/Zhu 程朱 philosophy, and records show that

⁸⁷ *Zheng shi guifan*, 13b. This is one of the reasons the instructions echoes the regulation that a man can only take a concubine should his wife fail to bear a son by the age of 40.

⁸⁸ Ch’ü T’ung-tsu, *Law and Society in Traditional China*, Paris: Mouton & Co., 1961, 119.

⁸⁹ WZZ, 8.309. See also “Mingfu yi du shouzhang 命婦以妒受杖,” in WLYHB, 補遺.2387-2388.

⁹⁰ DMB, 450-452.

⁹¹ *Mohanzhai dingding wan shizu chuanqi* 墨慈齋訂定萬事足傳奇, by Feng Menglong 馮夢龍, repr. in *Mohanzhai dingben chuanqi* 墨慈齋定本傳奇, 2 vols., Hefei: Huangshan, 1992, 1.281.

⁹² *Zazuan sanxu*, 109, 110, 115 and 124.

⁹³ WZZ, 8.308.

⁹⁴ Tang Lixing 唐力行, “Shangrenfu yu Ming Qing Huizhou shehui 商人婦與明清徽州社會,” *Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Ming History*, Kyoto University, 1991, 9-14.

most of the educated Huizhou merchant women had moved away from this strict environment.⁹⁵

The shrewish behaviour of the women in the *Jin Ping Mei* and other literature echoes the late Ming anxieties over the perceived increase in dominant women.⁹⁶ The growing popularity of concubinage in the late Ming due to increasing bourgeois fortunes created its own problems too. These households were least well-equipped (by upbringing and education) to be able to cope with the tensions inherent in a polygamous situation. Those women who were least secure in the household would naturally take steps to consolidate their position and exert power whenever possible in order to retaliate for abuse or humiliation.⁹⁷ The depiction of these assertive women may also be connected to concerns over the increasing visibility of women and their perceived influence outside of the home.

Female influence in the wider world

The categorisations of female spheres of authority in this chapter are not exclusive. As we have seen, motherhood, for some, was a means to have their views heard in wider society, through their influence on her children. The following areas of work and education, too, have both domestic and public aspects to them.

Women's work

For the women of the Ximen household, motherhood and household management are the only jobs they can aspire to. The significance of these domestic

⁹⁵ Tang Lixing, 1991, 14 and 17.

⁹⁶ Wu, 1995, 14-17. She suggests, that although some authors wrote with the intention of instructing a female audience against shrewish behaviour, it sometimes had the opposite effect. These works may have even increased women's awareness of their own inequality and encouraged them to take more control of their lives, although there is little evidence to suggest that this actually happened.

⁹⁷ Wu, 1995, 6 and 20.

roles were frequently emphasised in many forms of discourse on the virtues and obediences of women. Xu Youzhen 徐有貞 (1407-1472)⁹⁸ typifies the traditional view:

The virtue of the earth is merely to follow and this too is way of women. Obedience is correct behaviour and this is how it should be at home. It is a woman's duty to manage the household and assist at sacrifices. With regard to weaving and spinning, this too is the task of women. Within the inner quarters, she should pay proper attention to everything, but of things on the outside, there is nothing she should know. She must be filial to her parents-in-law, harmonious with her sisters-in-law, tolerant of concubines and diligently assist her husband.⁹⁹

As the inner helper, the principal wife was, traditionally, the *zhongkui* 中饋 or *neizheng* 內政 “manager of the household” which included control over the household finances.¹⁰⁰ The husband of Shen Yixiu wrote that all monetary transactions were handled by his wife.¹⁰¹ In more wealthy households the wife would not physically work in the kitchen which was the domain of servants. In less eminent households, the concubine had to undertake these chores, basically serving the wife as a subordinate.¹⁰²

However, managing the family could involve looking after hundreds of people. Some women managed the family's financial estate and real estate and it would therefore be advantageous for them to be literate. Many skilled and diligent wives were praised for their competence in management. Late Ming literatus Chen Jiru praises the literate and numerate mother of a colleague for her ability to run her household intelligently and resourcefully.¹⁰³ Of the aunt of Wang Shizhen, it is written:

⁹⁸ DMB, 612-615.

⁹⁹ “Xu Wugong shunzhengtang ming 徐武功順正堂銘,” in JALRMB, 6.258-259.

¹⁰⁰ *Yan shi jiaxun* 1.24.

¹⁰¹ Ko, 1994, 191.

¹⁰² Tjan, 1949, 1.260.

¹⁰³ “Zhenyi Wu mu zhuan 貞懿吳母傳,” in *Wanxiangtang*, 18.317-318



Madam would make her toilette at dawn, seated in her bedroom. Her 100 serfs, young and old, male and female, would all come to report upon what they had been doing.¹⁰⁴

A woman could attain a powerful position through control of the household finances as she could even dominate other family members.¹⁰⁵

At the age when boys started schooling, girls started weaving or embroidery, an area rich in symbolic values in many cultures.¹⁰⁶ Through the study of textile skills, it was believed women could learn the female virtues of diligence, frugality and self-discipline.¹⁰⁷ The *perceived* ability to contribute to the family finances was an important factor that powerfully affected the status of women in working families. Those responsible for the production of a valuable commodity, particularly those who carried out sericulture or weaving, were respected by their families and by the community.¹⁰⁸ A woodcut from the Ming *Nongzheng quanshu* demonstrates female participation in not only small-scale textile production, but also larger-scale weaving [See illustration 3].

Philip Huang argues that the commercialisation of the Chinese rural economy in the late imperial period increased the involvement of all family members in production, including women.¹⁰⁹ However, the economic expansion of the late Ming saw several important changes which would affect women's work. The industrialisation of silk production saw the relocation of the industry from rural households to urban factories and the rise of complex, machine-made silks and

¹⁰⁴ Fu Yiling, 1957, 61.

¹⁰⁵ Wu, 1995, 25.

¹⁰⁶ For analyses of non-Chinese cultures, see Jane Schneider, "The Anthropology of Cloth," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 16 (1987), 409-48; Weiner and Schneider, 1989.

¹⁰⁷ Bray, 1997, 189.

¹⁰⁸ Bray, 1997, 257-79.

¹⁰⁹ Philip C.C. Huang, *The Peasant Family and Rural Development in the Yangzi Delta, 1350-1988*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990, 52-54. Refers to cotton and silk production.

competition from cotton led to a decline in demand for simple home-made silk tabbies.¹¹⁰ This was exacerbated by the fact that silk was not required for tax after 1581 due to the Single Whip Reform. The increase in infanticide in this period may have been compounded by the fact that girls were no longer able to contribute significantly to household earnings.¹¹¹



¹¹⁰ Bray, 1997, 206-236.

¹¹¹ Bray, 1997, 254.

The female characters of the *Jin Ping Mei* do not take part in textile production. Late Ming scholars were alarmed by this state of affairs as the order of society was threatened when women abandoned proper women's work. In Luzhou 潞州 in Shanxi, for example, Governor Lü Kun 呂坤 (1536-1618) tried to encourage women to weave but to no avail.¹¹² Zhang Lüxiang 張履祥 (d.1674), later echoed the importance of women in weaving in Tongxiang 桐鄉, Zhejiang.¹¹³ By contrast, the female characters of the *Jin Ping Mei* are often depicted engaging in embroidery, particularly in the decoration of shoe tops.¹¹⁴

On her arrival at the residence of Mao Xiang 冒襄 (1611-1693),¹¹⁵ his concubine, Dong Xiaowan 董小宛 (1625-1651), confined herself to separate quarters, dispensing with powder and rouge to practise musical instruments and needlework. Within a few months she had mastered needlework so well that she could produce marvellously embroidered articles of clothing.¹¹⁶ Having been a courtesan, embroidery was her way of attaining a level of respectability; it was a symbolic expression of her retirement from her previous trade. Embroidery was considered a symbol of conspicuous leisure for the élite which distinguished them from peasant women and contributed symbolic rather than material capital to the family.¹¹⁷ Moreover, it was during this period that embroidered clothing became very popular.¹¹⁸ Bray notes:

The elite worked with culture, *wen*, and within this sphere embroidery was a female counterpart of writing (...) sometimes seen as a substitute for literacy

¹¹² Chao Kang, *The Development of Cotton Textile Production in China*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977, 21; *Shizheng lu*, 2.13b-15a.

¹¹³ *Bunongshu jiaoshi* 補農書校釋, Chen Hengli 陳恒力 and Wang Dacan 王大參, ann., Beijing: Nongye, 1983, 151.

¹¹⁴ *JPMCH*, 29.1a-2a.

¹¹⁵ *ECCP*, 566-567.

¹¹⁶ *Yingmei'an yiyu* 影梅菴憶語, by Mao Xiang 冒襄, repr. Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1976, 8-9.

¹¹⁷ Susan Mann, "Women's Work in the Ningbo Area, 1900-1936," in Evelyn Rawski and Lillian Li, *Chinese History in Economic Perspective*, Berkeley: University of California, 1992, 262.

¹¹⁸ Wilson, 1996, 58.

and the moral cultivation it permitted.¹¹⁹

In Jiangnan, embroidery even took on the characteristics of the male art of painting at this time, and became a means of expressing individual creativity.¹²⁰ [See Chapter Six for further discussion.]

Women were not just confined to weaving and embroidery. In the *Jin Ping Mei*, the women are seen to be highly significant in terms of trade. As discussed in the previous chapter, Ximen's marriages to Meng Yulou and Li Ping'er both bring in substantial funds which increase his business capital. His marriage to Wu Yueniang provides business contacts. Although men in traditional China usually took the role of merchants, women also took part in business in many different ways. The women of Huizhou had always been involved in business, but as merchants from their area began to prosper in the sixteenth century, the women of Huizhou also became more significantly involved in trade. These women, in fact, made up the greatest proportion of women in Huizhou.¹²¹

Tang Lixing has identified several areas where the women were prominent. They provided capital for their merchant husbands, principally through their dowries, but also from working themselves, their marriages helped to create merchant business networks, and sometimes enabled their husbands to obtain official positions via family connections. The women of Huizhou were also renowned for taking control of household affairs so their husbands would have no domestic worries when they went out of the area to trade.¹²² Those who had grown up in merchant households often had very strong business ideas and were able to counsel their husbands as well. For

¹¹⁹ Bray, 1997, 266.

¹²⁰ Ko, 1994, 172-5.

¹²¹ Tang Lixing, 1991, 1.

¹²² For example, see "Jin Mu qishi shou xu 金母七十壽序," in *Taihan ji*, 11.16b; "Cheng shen bao zhuan 程神保傳," in *Dabi shanfang ji*, 73.17b.

example Wang Daokun's grandmother was known to advise her husband on commercial matters.¹²³ Some women in Huizhou were directly involved in business. A woman from the Hu 胡 family was considered extremely virtuous even though she had taken charge of the calculation of salt certificates and rapidly made a fortune for the family, all from within the inner quarters.¹²⁴

Governor Hai Rui 海瑞 (1513-87) was troubled, however, by the blurring of occupational distinctions between the sexes. He forbade women to go out on streets and ordered that they limit themselves to work inside the homes, their vacancies to be filled by men.¹²⁵ The *Jin Ping Mei* reflects some of the concerns of scholar-officials such as Hai Rui. Although the merchant women of Huizhou were engaged in the male pursuit of commerce and trade it was balanced by frugality and virtuous behaviour. The women of the novel, however, tend to be anything but frugal and virtuous, highlighting the concerns of Confucian officials.

Education and cultural fields

It is clear that the majority of the female protagonists of the *Jin Ping Mei* are unable to read or write. Only Pan Jinlian, due to her upbringing in the Wang 王 household, is literate to a limited degree.¹²⁶ From early times there are recorded the names of women who excelled in literary skill.¹²⁷ However, these women are the exception rather than the norm. Girls were to be educated together with their brothers only until the age of ten.¹²⁸ A male fear of women becoming equal or superior to men

¹²³ "Xiandamu zhuang 先大母狀," in *Taihan ji*, 43.13a-14b; *DMB*, 1427-30.

¹²⁴ "Shou Zhang chu shi xu 壽張處士序," in *Taihan ji* 12.5a.

¹²⁵ *Hai Rui ji* 海瑞集, by Hai Rui 海瑞, repr. 2 vols., Beijing: Zhonghua, 1962, 4.445-6; *DMB*, 474-479.

¹²⁶ *JPMCH*, 78.23a.

¹²⁷ Rexroth and Chung, tr. and eds., 1972; Hu Wenkai 胡文楷, *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao* 歷代婦女著作考, Shanghai: Guji, 1985.

¹²⁸ Legge, 1885a, 478-479.

may have been one of the reasons men prevented daughters from having as full an education as their brothers.¹²⁹ It was often the case that women who were not under the limits of a Confucian household traditionally found more opportunities to become educated.¹³⁰

The expansion of commercialism and developments in the printing industry in the sixteenth-century led to a wider range of books. Book compilers wrote works specifically for an increasing literate female audience. For example, religious *baojuan* 寶卷 “precious records” became popular.¹³¹ Many works were didactic in intent. The *Guifan* 閨範 “Regulations for the Inner Quarters” (preface 1590), by Lü Kun, was based on the *Lienü zhuan* 烈女傳, but was brought up to date for his contemporary readers.¹³² Earlier didactic literature had all been aimed at upper class women. Lü, on the contrary, composed songs for illiterate women. For the semi-literate he condensed and simplified the original biographies, and had the *Guifan* illustrated with wood-block prints.¹³³ Distribution of such images enabled the *élite ideal* of female conduct to be disseminated among the populace.¹³⁴

There was an increasing awareness of not only literate, but talented women too, during this period. Wang Siren 王思任 (1575-1646), the father of the talented Wang Duanshu 王端淑 (1621-ca. 1701), considered her the only one who could

¹²⁹ Wu, 1995, 33-4

¹³⁰ The *Biqiuni zhuan* 比丘尼傳, a collection of biographies of nuns (516AD), records a high rate of literacy. Many nuns are described as being educated in both the Confucian Classics and Buddhist scriptures, able to write commentaries to the scriptures and give lectures. See Kathryn A. Tsai, “The Chinese Buddhist Monastic Order for Women: The First Two Centuries,” in Guisso and Johannesen, eds., 1981, 12-14.

¹³¹ Daniel L. Overmyer, “Attitudes Toward the Ruler and the State in Chinese Popular Religious Literature: Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century *Pao-chüan*,” *HJAS* 44.2 (1984), 353.

¹³² Handlin, 1978, 16-17.

¹³³ *Guifan*, 2a.

¹³⁴ Tanya McIntyre, “Images of Women in Popular Prints of the Early Modern Period,” in Antonia Finnane and Anne McLaren, eds., *Dress, Sex and Text in Chinese Culture*, Monash: Monash Asia Institute, 1999, 61.

understand his writings despite the fact that he had eight sons.¹³⁵ For literate women like Wang Duanshu, their talent was something to be shared and this period saw the emergence of many different types of communities of literate women centred on the Jiangnan area.¹³⁶ These women taught others and supported and encouraged each other through the exchange of letters and poems.¹³⁷ Religious women too would support each other through poems, letters and other commemorative writings.¹³⁸

Many literate women also took a keen interest in art. The Qing work *Yutai huashi* 玉臺畫史 by Tang Shuyu 湯漱玉 provides the names of 216 female artists from ancient times to the Qing Jiaqing 嘉慶 period (1796-1821). According to the figures, half of these are from the Ming and 80-90% of those from the Ming are specifically late Ming.¹³⁹ These women came from varied backgrounds. Wen Shu 文淑 (1595-1634) was the great-great-granddaughter of literatus Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470-1559).¹⁴⁰ Qiu Zhu 仇珠 was the daughter of Qiu Ying 仇英 (1506-1555), the renowned figure painter, a skill which he passed on to his daughter. These girls benefited from the cultured environment in which they were reared.¹⁴¹ The experience of prostitutes was somewhat different, yet they too benefited from a wide range of contact with scholars and artists. Xue Susu 薛素素 (b.ca.1552), a famous Jiaxing 嘉興 (in Zhejiang) prostitute, was admired by literati Dong Qichang and Li Rihua 李日華 (1565-1635).¹⁴²

¹³⁵ See *ECCP*, 1420-5; Duanshu's biography in Hu Wenkai, 1985, 248.

¹³⁶ Ko, 1994. For translations of poetry by women, see Rexroth and Chung, tr. and eds., 1972, 55-65.

¹³⁷ Ellen Widmer, "The Epistolary World of Female Talent in Seventeenth-Century China, *Late Imperial China* 10.2 (1989), 1-43.

¹³⁸ Beata Grant, "Female Holder of the Lineage: Linji Chan Master Zhiyuan Xinggang (1597-1654)," *Late Imperial China* 17.2 (1996), 66.

¹³⁹ Yang Xin, 1995, 1.

¹⁴⁰ *DMB*, 1471-1474.

¹⁴¹ Li Shi 李滢, "Guige zhong de tiancai - tan Wumen nühuajia Wen Shu yu Chou Zhu de yishu 閨閣中的天才 - 談吳門女畫家文淑與仇珠的藝術," *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 故宮博物院院刊 1990.3, 92-95.

¹⁴² *DMB*, 826-30; Yang Xin, 1995, 2-3; Tseng Yuho, "Women Painters of the Ming Dynasty," *Artibus*

For élite women, painting could be considered a social asset as artistic talent went alongside literary talent and could help in the formation of a companionate marriage (*jintong yunü* 金童玉女 “golden boy and jade girl”), a form of marriage which became increasingly popular during this period.¹⁴³ Furthermore, painting could become an economic asset through the selling of paintings and teaching skills, although this was usually more common with courtesans than women of élite status.¹⁴⁴ Female painters tended to be the second wife or concubine which suggests that men were able to find a more sympathetic partner in their second partner rather than relying on his parents to find a wife who could improve or sustain the family’s prestige or social or economic status.¹⁴⁵ As seen earlier with the *Jin Ping Mei*, Ximen Qing’s choice of concubines is motivated out of a personal desire for money or sexual gratification.

Joanna Handlin suggests that the increase in female literacy and talent in the sixteenth century “provoked men for the first time to perceive not the equality of women but their comparability, and to ask just how, given their obvious talents, they differed from men.”¹⁴⁶ Of his concubine Dong Xiaowan, Mao Xiang writes that “her carefulness and ability to concentrate could rarely be equalled by us earnest scholars.”¹⁴⁷ Widow Mei Dan 梅澹 studied with the philosopher Li Zhi 李贄 (1527-1602)¹⁴⁸ who described her as a Guanyin 觀音.¹⁴⁹ Some men began to argue that women could surpass men. Ming literati such as Lü Kun and Feng Menglong praised

Asiae 53 (1993), 249-261.

¹⁴³ Ko, 1994, 86-90 and 111; Paul Ropp, “Love, Literacy, and Laments: Themes of Women Writers in Late Imperial China,” *Women’s History Review* 2.1 (1993), 107-141.

¹⁴⁴ Ellen Johnston Laing, “Women Painters in Traditional China,” in Weidner, ed., 1990, 87-91.

¹⁴⁵ Laing, 1990, 87-88.

¹⁴⁶ Handlin, 1978, 16 and 23-9.

¹⁴⁷ *Yingmei’an yiyu*, 10. See section on Dong in *Banqiao zaji* 板橋雜記, by Yu Huai 余懷, repr. in *Lidai xiaoshuo biji xuan: Qing (yi)* 歷代小說筆記選: 清 (一), Taipei: Shangwu, 1980, 172.

¹⁴⁸ DMB, 807-18.

¹⁴⁹ “Guanyin wen 觀音問,” in *Fen shu* 焚書, by Li Zhi 李贄, repr. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1961, 4.167.

the intelligence and courage of some women which could surpass those of men.¹⁵⁰ Other scholars proposed that men could even learn from women.¹⁵¹ These liberal attitudes were reflected in contemporary literature.¹⁵² Late Ming scholar Wang Heng 王衡 (1561-1609) considered his mother his moral and intellectual superior,¹⁵³ and recalled that his grandfather had said about her: “Her demeanour is similar to my own, but her intelligence and acumen are superior to mine. In this way she is like a man (*zhangfu* 丈夫).”¹⁵⁴

It is interesting to note that extraordinary women such as female religious leaders and female poets, women who possessed virtues not considered to be traditionally feminine, were often referred to as *zhangfu* ‘great man’ or ‘man of spirit’ by others and even themselves.¹⁵⁵ Waltner suggests that these ‘gender-bending’ attributions meant that the women served as models of male virtue rather than female virtue. Furthermore, she concludes that these women did not conceptualise their kin interests and values any differently from those of their men.¹⁵⁶

Although notable female writers of the period came from different classes, many were praised for combining talent and virtue.¹⁵⁷ However, the saying: “Only

¹⁵⁰ *Guifan*, 2.15b-16a; *Zhinang quanji* 智囊全集, by Feng Menglong 馮夢龍, repr. Jiangsu: Guji, 1986, 26.533.

¹⁵¹ A. Waltner, “Learning from a Woman: Ming literati responses to Tanyangzi,” *International Journal of Social Education* 6.1 (1991), 42-59.

¹⁵² Zhao Xingqin 趙興勤, “Cai yu mei: Ming Qing xiaoshuo chutan 才與美: 明清小說初探,” in *Ming Qing xiaoshuo luncong* 明清小說論叢 1986.4, 14-23.

¹⁵³ “Cai Mozhai xiansheng zhuan 蔡默齋先生傳,” in *Goushan xiansheng ji* 緱山先生集 (Wanli), by Wang Heng 王衡, repr. in Shen Yunlong 沈雲龍, ed., *Mingren wenji congkan* 明人文集叢刊, Taipei: Wenhai, 1970, 14.34a; *DMB*, 1378.

¹⁵⁴ *Goushan xiansheng ji*, 14.30a. See also “Zhu furen 朱夫人,” in *Meihuacaotang ji* 梅花草堂集, by Zhang Dafu 張大復, repr. in *Meihuacaotang bitan* 梅花草堂筆談, Shanghai: Shanghai zazhi gongsi, 1935, 4.70.

¹⁵⁵ Grant, 1996, 72-73.

¹⁵⁶ Waltner, 1992, 571-2.

¹⁵⁷ See Hu Wenkai, 1985, 85 for chaste widows Fang Weiyi 方維儀 and her sister Fang Weize 方維則. See also “Xianglian 香奩” section of *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 列朝詩集小傳, by Qian Qianyi 錢謙益, repr. 2 vols., Beijing: Zhonghua, 1961. Other prominent examples include Shang Jinglan 商景蘭 (1605-ca. 1676), wife of the Ming loyalist Qi Biaojia 祁彪佳 (1602-45) and the outspoken Gu Ruopu 顧若璞 (1592-c.1681).

the virtuous man is talented; only the untalented women is virtuous,” epitomised the feelings of those who vehemently opposed the above views.¹⁵⁸ Huang Yunjiao, a Ming collector of maxims and proverbs, notes: “It would be best if the literate in the boudoir did not understand!”¹⁵⁹ Other scholars warned that literate women might even get hold of erotic fiction.¹⁶⁰ Susan Mann suggests, however, that such concerns over female literacy and “boundary crossing” was, in fact, a metaphor for concern over the crossing of boundaries in society as a whole.¹⁶¹

The surprise and admiration with which husbands such as official Luo Yifeng 羅一峰 realised the poetic talent of their wives demonstrates the rarity of female literacy in the late Ming.¹⁶² For this reason, it is not surprising that literary exemplars are absent from the world of the *Jin Ping Mei*. Women were very much influenced by the environment in which they were brought up and the value of the novel here lies in its attention on those lower down the social scales. It highlights literati anxieties over the perceived inability of uneducated women to control a disorderly polygamous household. Furthermore, the perceived distance between Confucian ideals and praxis was a problem for some literati and the confusion among them over the roles of the women of their own class suggests that those women lower down the scale would have had little concrete information of how women from the upper classes behaved. Consequently, their behaviour in aspiring to higher status would have been coloured by this confusion.

¹⁵⁸ *Zhinang quanji*, 26.504

¹⁵⁹ *Zazuan sanxu*, 108.

¹⁶⁰ Handlin, 1978, 28.

¹⁶¹ See Mann, 1991, 221.

¹⁶² *Beichuang suoyu*, 4.12b.

Alternatives to the traditional marriage

Not all women in traditional China were confined to the family household. Others were able to carve out niches for themselves outside the home. In many respects, palace women lived lives more comparable to male officials than women yet they were not considered deviant in Confucian society. They too were segregated from most men, served the emperor and could be filial daughters or mothers.¹⁶³ Women in the palace were graded like the male official bureaucracy.¹⁶⁴ They could be promoted and were able to manoeuvre themselves into positions of power whereby they could not only obtain honours for themselves and their families who had access to the imperial gifts given to their daughters. Their families subsequently gained the respect of the local community.¹⁶⁵

Palace women exemplify the power which women in Confucian society could attain and notable examples from the pre-Ming period include Empress Lü 呂 (r.188-180BC) of the Former Han,¹⁶⁶ Empress Deng 鄧 (r. 105-121AD) of the Later Han,¹⁶⁷ and Wu Zetian 武則天 (ca. 623-705) of the Tang.¹⁶⁸ The Ming is notable for its lack of female regents. The first emperor had ordered tablets to be placed in the women's

¹⁶³ Priscilla Ching Chung, "Power and Prestige: Palace Women in the Northern Sung (960-1126)," in Guisso and Johannesen, eds., 1981, 109-110; Ellen Soullière, "Imperial Women in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)," in Barbara Garlick, Suzanne Dixon and Pauline Allen, eds., *Stereotypes of Women in Power: Historical Perspectives and Revisionist Views*, New York and London: Greenwood Press, 1992, 122-140.

¹⁶⁴ *Chunmingmeng yulu* 春明夢餘錄, by Sun Chengze 孫承澤 (1592-1676), repr. 2 vols., Beijing: Guji, 1992, 6.90-94; "Gongzhong nüguan zhi zhi 宮中女官之制," in *Fengzhou zhibian* 鳳州雜編, by Wang Shizhen 王世貞, edn. *Jilu huibian* 記錄彙編, repr. Taiwan: Yiwen, 1966, 158.9a-16b.

¹⁶⁵ Chung, 1981, 101-108.

¹⁶⁶ "Lü taihou benji 呂太后本紀," in *Shiji*, 9.395-412.

¹⁶⁷ Nancy Lee Swann, "Biography of the Empress Teng: A Translation from the Annals of the Later Han Dynasty (Hou Han Shu, Chuan 10a)," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 51 (1931), 138-159.

¹⁶⁸ C.P. Fitzgerald, *The Empress Wu*, Melbourne: F.W. Cheshire, 1955; R.W.L. Guisso, *Wu tse-t'ien and the Politics of Legitimation in T'ang China*, Western Washington University, 1978; Chen Jo-shui, "Empress Wu and Proto-Feminist Sentiments in T'ang China," in Frederick P. Brandauer and Chun-chieh Huang, eds., *Imperial Rulership and Cultural Change in Traditional China*, 1994, 102.

living quarters ordering them not to interfere in government affairs;¹⁶⁹ however, it was recognised that women outside the palace were just as able to influence affairs of government by advising their male relatives who occupied positions of power in the official bureaucracy.¹⁷⁰ The actions of Zhu Yuanzhang limited the powers of imperial women throughout the Ming dynasty, with many empresses being deposed and replaced by their husband's favourites.¹⁷¹ Although imperial ladies do not feature in the *Jin Ping Mei*, this provides us with an understanding of the heights of power to which some women could aspire. It also emphasises how women further down the social scale had to find other means of attaining influence and standing in society, should they desire it.

Despite the typical image of women as the partners of men in one form or another, there were other ways for women without men to gain independence and power in the community. In early times, the shamaness was a powerful person in the local community as she controlled communication with the spirits.¹⁷² Women also gained influence through religion, not least as the convent provided an all-female society. Although in popular Buddhism women were considered inferior and polluting, they were not barred from attaining Buddhist goals. Combined with the fact that it formed an alternative to the confines of Confucian tradition, this made it attractive to many women.¹⁷³

Wu Yueniang becomes increasingly interested in religious matters as the *Jin*

¹⁶⁹ *Chunmingmeng yulu*, 6.89.

¹⁷⁰ Herrlee G. Creel, *The Origins of Statecraft in China 1: the Western Chou Empire*, Chicago and London: Chicago University, 1970, 130; Holmgren, 1981, 176-77; *Wei shu* 魏書, by Wei Shou 魏收, repr. 8 vols., Beijing: Zhonghua, 1974, 92.1978-1983.

¹⁷¹ These included the empresses of the Jingtai, Chenghua, Jiajing and Longqing thrones. Soullière, 1992, 129-132. See, for example, "Shizong feihou 世宗廢后," in *WLYHB*, 3.232-234.

¹⁷² K.C. Chang, *Art, Myth and Ritual: the Path to Political Authority in Ancient China*, Camb. Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1983, 44-48; Schafer, 1973, 8-11.

¹⁷³ Bray, 1997, 129 and 133

Ping Mei progresses and her husband's philanderings increase.¹⁷⁴ She even undertakes a pilgrimage to Taishan 泰山 after his death, although this ends in disaster when she is assaulted in a temple.¹⁷⁵ Zhu Xi, the Song Neo-Confucian philosopher blamed for many of the restrictions on women's lives, approved of women studying Buddhist texts due to the passivity it was supposed to induce. It was hoped that this would ease the strains of concubinage.¹⁷⁶ However, this does not seem to be the case in the *Jin Ping Mei*. Yueniang's devotion and attempts to maintain a moral purity is constantly brought into question, particularly as it leads to her neglecting her household duties as principal wife and failing to regulate the increasingly destructive behaviour of the concubines and serving maids beneath her.

Powerful female goddesses such as Xiwangmu 西王母 'Queen Mother of the West',¹⁷⁷ Guanyin,¹⁷⁸ Wusheng Laomu 無生老母 'Eternal Venerable Mother',¹⁷⁹ Niangniang 娘娘¹⁸⁰ and Bixia yuanjun 碧霞元君,¹⁸¹ were particularly popular among women. However, it is interesting to note that women usually played no role whatsoever in the formal organisation of temple cults, an activity which was solely carried out by men.¹⁸² Some women were able to achieve status through becoming

¹⁷⁴ *JPMCH*, 73-74.

¹⁷⁵ *JPMCH*, 84.

¹⁷⁶ Bettine Birge, "Chu Hsi and Women's Education," in William Theodore de Bary and John W. Chaffee, eds., *Neo-Confucian Education: The Formative Stage*, London: University of California Press, 1989, 357-59; Ebrey, 1993, 124-27.

¹⁷⁷ Homer H. Dubs, "An Ancient Chinese Mystery Cult," *Harvard Theological Review* 35.4 (1942), 221-240; Suzanne E. Cahill, *Transcendence and Divine Passion: The Queen Mother of the West in Medieval China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993.

¹⁷⁸ P. Steven Sangren, "Female Gender in Chinese Religious Symbols: Kuan yin, Ma Tsu and the 'Eternal Mother'," *Signs* 9.1 (1983), 6-8.

¹⁷⁹ Daniel L. Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist Religion. Dissenting Sects in Late Traditional China*, Camb. Mass and London: Harvard University Press, 1976, 135-145; Yu Songqing, 1982, 29-33.

¹⁸⁰ Kenneth Pomeranz, "Power, Gender, and Pluralism in the Cult of the Goddess of Taishan," in Theodore Huters, R. Bin Wong, and Pauline Yu, eds., *Culture and State in Chinese History: Conventions, Accommodations, and Critiques*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997, 182-204.

¹⁸¹ Overmyer, 1984, 363-64.

¹⁸² James L. Watson, "Standardizing the Gods: The Promotion of T'ien Hou ("Empress of Heaven") Along the South China Coast, 960-1960," in Johnson et al., eds., 1985, 320.

religious leaders.¹⁸³ One example is Linji Chan Master Qiyan Xinggang 祇園行剛 (1597-1654). Originally Ms Hu 胡 from Jiaying, Xinggang was permitted to begin religious training by her fiancé's parents whom she had gone to serve after his death. It was often the case that these women carried out traditional roles of betrothal and marriage before joining an order.¹⁸⁴

The late Ming witnessed an increase in the interest of élite men in female religious exemplars and this is also reflected in the fiction of the time.¹⁸⁵ Tanyangzi, born Wang Daozhen 王燾貞 (1558-1580), was a young woman visionary who attained immortality in the late Ming. The daughter of Grand Secretary Wang Xijue 王錫爵 (1534-1611),¹⁸⁶ she had taken up the religious vocation on the death of her fiancé Xu Jingshao 徐景韶 (d. 1574),¹⁸⁷ and she attracted a number of eminent scholars such as Wang Shizhen.¹⁸⁸ Like Xinggang, Tanyangzi was able to pursue her religious vocation following her refusal to marry.¹⁸⁹

The *Jin Ping Mei* was for private consumption and focuses on down-to earth women. The women discussed above, by contrast, were rare exemplars held up for public acclaim. These discourses on women, only furthered to increase the visibility of women in the public domain; private actions were made public, and this fuelled

¹⁸³ See Kathryn M. Tsai, *Lives of the Buddhist Nuns: Biographies of Chinese Buddhist Nuns from the 4th to the 6th Centuries*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994.

¹⁸⁴ Grant, 1996, 51-76.

¹⁸⁵ For example, Mme Chao 晁, a widow who attains immortality in the late Ming novel *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻緣傳. For a discussion of this character see Daria Berg, "Reformer, Saint and Saviour: Visions of the Great Mother in the Novel 'Xingshi yinyuan zhuan' and its Seventeenth Century Chinese Context," *Nan nü: Men, Women, and Gender in Early and Imperial China*, (forthcoming).

¹⁸⁶ *DMB*, 1376-79.

¹⁸⁷ *DMB*, 1425.

¹⁸⁸ "Tanyang dashi zhuan 曇陽大師傳," in *Yanzhou shanren xugao* 弇州山人續稿 (Chongzhen), by Wang Shizhen 王世貞, repr. Taipei: Wenhai, 1970, 78.1a-31a; "Jia Tanyang 假曇陽," in *WLYHB*, 23.1564-1566.

¹⁸⁹ Ann Walther, "T'an-yang-tzu and Wang Shih-chen: Visionary and Bureaucrat in the Late Ming," *Late Imperial China* 8.1 (1987), 105-133; *DMB*, 1425-1427.

the attention being paid to the activities of women in general.

The increasing visibility of women

The female characters in the *Jin Ping Mei* are often depicted going on outings to the houses of friends and relations, such as in Chapter 24 when they walk the streets to celebrate the feast of lanterns, a custom known as “walking off the one hundred illnesses” (*zoubaibing* 走百病).¹⁹⁰ In his discussions on the two capitals “Liang du 兩都,” Ming official and geographer Wang Shixing writes:

The people of the capital love to go out, and *this is particularly true of the women*. Each New Year’s Day they pay new year visits. On the sixteenth they “cross the bridges” and “walk off the one hundred illnesses,” lantern light shines throughout the night. At Yuanxiao 元宵 there are lantern festivals, lofty mansions are decorated attractively, and people bustle and jostle about. At Qingming 清明, they go for walks and the panoramic view from the Gaoliang Bridge is that of a painting. In the third month it is the birthday of the God of the Eastern Peak so they play in the pine forests. Each time three or five get together, loosen skirts and sit down around a pine tree to make sacrificial offerings from grass and play dice. Although carts and horses trundle by, they pay them no heed. Back home they put on their tall head-dresses and wide-sleeved robes, engage in drunken dances and play donkey-back. Sometimes they fall off and lie on the floor forgetful they are not at home. Once the Mid-Autumn festival has passed, then only then do these outings cease. The ancients said: “Under the carriage of the Emperor the people crowd together.” No wonder drunken people are considered auspicious.¹⁹¹

Although critical of some of the aspects of female drunken behaviour, Wang appears to suggest that it *was* acceptable for women to make outings outside of their homes.

It was long argued that the two sexes were involved in differing spheres of activity, as the *Neize* states: “The men should not speak of what belongs to the inside [of the house], nor the women of what belongs outside.”¹⁹² Women were considered *neiren* 內人 ‘the inner person’ or *neizhu* 內助 ‘the inner helper’. Bray emphasises the

¹⁹⁰ See also the visit to Li Ping’er’s house in Lion Street, *JPMCH*, 15 and the betrothal party at the Qiao’s, *JPMCH*, 41.

¹⁹¹ *Guang zhi yi*, 2.18. Emphasis my own.

¹⁹² Legge, 1885a, 454.

importance of the Chinese house in teaching a young girl her proper place in society:

she internalizes the hierarchies of gender, generation and rank that are marked by walls and stairs and practiced in the rules of etiquette of receiving guests, performing rites of passage, and going about daily tasks.¹⁹³

Formal prescriptions for the segregation of the household were set out by Sima Guang and were taken up by Zhu Xi's *Jiali* 家禮 "Family Rituals".¹⁹⁴ It was at this time that the confinement of women increased, beginning among the ladies of the élite and soon emulated by women of lower status.¹⁹⁵ The seclusion of women may have become popular among the lower classes because it was an achievable marker of respectability.¹⁹⁶ In wealthier or more educated families there could be considerable social rewards in seclusion for women as they could, according to Bray, be commended for "a moral purity and clarity of vision beyond that of their men."¹⁹⁷

For some, the restrictions on women's movement was seen as a method of controlling their sexuality. Song philosopher Yuan Cai emphasised the problems caused by maids getting pregnant by another with the child being passed off as the master's.¹⁹⁸ Women who crossed the boundaries of the inner quarters such as the *sangu liupo* 三姑六婆 'three hags and six crones' were considered dangerous by men.¹⁹⁹ Buddhist nuns were the favourite counsellors of the ladies of the household. They often officiated at intimate household ceremonies, acted as healers for female diseases and were employed as teachers. In the *Jin Ping Mei*, Buddhist nuns are

¹⁹³ Bray, 1997, 52.

¹⁹⁴ Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Chu Hsi's Family Rituals*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991b, 29.

¹⁹⁵ Ebrey, 1993, 23-7.

¹⁹⁶ Bray, 1997, 138-9 and 169-170.

¹⁹⁷ Bray, 1997, 170. See also, Widmer, 1989, 16-18.

¹⁹⁸ Ebrey, 1984, 286-88.

¹⁹⁹ Tao Zongyi warns: "The 3 *gu* are the Buddhist nun, the Taoist nun and the female fortune-teller. The 6 *po* are the procuress, the female go-between, the sorceress, the female thief, the female quack and the midwife." See "Sangu liupo 三姑六婆," in *Chuogeng lu* 輟耕錄 (1366), by Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀, repr. 3 vols., Shanghai: Shangwu, 1936, 10.157; Huang Liuhong, 1984, 609.

frequent visitors to the Ximen household in these capacities.²⁰⁰ It was also commonly alleged that nuns procured love potions and acted as go-betweens for illicit relationships, again a prominent theme in the novel.²⁰¹

As initially stated in the introduction to the thesis, women of the late Ming were known to undertake outings to religious sites. Travelling by West Lake 西湖 in Hangzhou, Qian Yuqian 錢與謙 of the late Ming describes women travelling around Mt Tianzhu 天竺:

Slender curved shoes walk at a leisurely pace,
They have come to burn Tianzhu incense.
Eyes fix on green water slightly rippling,
Palms enclose white lotus flowers yet to bloom.
Waists so slim slowly sway like willows in spring sun,
Faces first made-up are like plum blossom on a snowy day.
I know not what they whisper about,
Gold hairclasp stuck in askew stir cold ash.²⁰²

Women sometimes held picnics and parties with other women, often on festival days. In his poetic description of the Qingming 清明 festival, the late Ming writer Chen Jiru remarks upon the “red blouses and powdered faces” all flirting and laughing together.²⁰³ In another poem, he describes women out on a spring outing:

The flowers of the willow resemble snow at first,
The women out travelling are just like a cloud.
Birds avoid their painted fans,
White silk skirts clustered in springtime.
Few venture to the hidden creek,
Where, from time to time, clear singing can be heard.
Within the pine and sandalwood boudoir,
A lonely perfumed girdle is fragrant.²⁰⁴

Modern scholar Dorothy Ko asserts that the majority of sequestered upper

²⁰⁰ See, for example, *JPMCH*, 39, 40, 50, 62, 68, 73-75.

²⁰¹ Wu Yueniang - *JPMCH*, 50. Pan Jinlian - *JPMCH*, 73.

²⁰² *Beichuang suoyu*, 4.1b-2a.

²⁰³ “Man ting fang 滿庭芳,” in *Wanxiangtang*, 8.162. See also “Buchu Chongwenmen 步出崇文門,” in *Qiaoya 嬌雅*, by Guang Lu 鄺露, repr. *Guangdong: Guangdong gaodeng jiaoyu*, 1990, 2.177.

²⁰⁴ “Chun you 春游,” in *Wanxiangtang*, 3.43.

class women, on the other hand, made proxy journeys by looking at the paintings, poems, letters of others.²⁰⁵ Whether women saw sequestration as deprivation or independence often depended on class.²⁰⁶ These women considered their confinement as a symbol of their respectability and moral purity. Their actions contrast greatly with the behaviour of the women in the *Jin Ping Mei* who are often highly visible outside the Ximen household. Sequestration appears to hold no social rewards for them.

Summary

It has been suggested that Chinese women became even stronger in character due to the restrictions placed on them, establishing for themselves a “fairly exalted” position as “builders of homes and the country.”²⁰⁷ Despite the restrictions placed upon women, they were able to forge for themselves positions of power and authority. Inside the Confucian household they could be promoted up the female hierarchy, some to the status of principal wife, mother, mistress of the household, and eventually matriarch. Outside the household they could undertake the role of religious leader or warrior woman. For women in the palace the ultimate position of power that a woman could attain -- that of regent or even ruler of the Empire -- was a tantalising possibility. In the Ming, women were experiencing greater freedoms and found that they could compete in traditional male activities and still be upheld by

²⁰⁵ Ko, 1994, 224-26.

²⁰⁶ Dorothy Ko, “Pursuing Talent and Virtue: Education and Women’s Culture in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-century China,” *Late Imperial China* 13.1 (1992), 14; Bray, 1997, 55, 140-141; Furth, 1990, 196-97.

²⁰⁷ Hu Shih, “Women’s Place in History,” in Li Yuning, ed., *Chinese Women Through Chinese Eyes*, New York and London: East Gate, 1992, 3; Charles O. Hucker, *China’s Imperial Past: An Introduction to Chinese History and Culture*, Stanford University Press, 1975, 11; Richard W. Guisso, “Thunder over the Lake: The Five Classics and the Reception of Women in Early China,” in Guisso and Johannesen, eds., 1981, 60.

some as exemplars of talent and virtue. Certain significant areas of sixteenth-century discourse have been omitted from this chapter, for example, the debate which raged over widow chastity and the importance of female property in the construction of female hierarchies and influence. However, these will be covered in more detail in later chapters.

The value of the *Jin Ping Mei* is that it can provide insights into how women of the bourgeoisie were perceived, a world which orthodox sources may have ignored. In addition, it may reveal just as much about the concerns of the author and his class. The increasing visibility of women, both socially, in their emergence from the inner quarters for work and pleasure, and also culturally, through their increasing renown as poets and painters, was received in contrasting ways. The concentration of attention on the behaviour of women in this period indicates the influence female behaviour could have within society, redefining concepts of female roles in the home, the workplace and artistic fields.

Kang-i Sun Chang highlights the diverging goals women from different classes in this period may have pursued. Whilst courtesans, such as Dong Xiaowan were attempting to construct identities of virtue, gentry women were trying to become talented women.²⁰⁸ This is significant as it demonstrates emulation by the lower classes of the upper classes. However, it can be seen that the mixed messages sent out by literati concerning the roles of the women of their own class, led to differing perceptions of ideal female behaviour among women of the lower classes.

Merchant women are noticeably absent from the lists of talented women; however, they do play a significant role in the family as household and business

²⁰⁸ Kang-i Sun Chang, "Ming-Qing Women Poets and the Notions of 'Talent' and 'Morality,'" in Hutters at al. eds., 1997, 250.

managers, an influence which could stretch as far as the wider community. In the nouveau-riche household belonging to Ximen Qing, the women take little real or positive interest in even that. Their lack of both education and culture means that their attention is pointed towards other, more material, forms of pleasure and satisfaction. They are unaware of other activities and possibilities which had become, for some women, a new and fulfilling way to express themselves. Taking their lead from their husband, the women of the *Jin Ping Mei* exploit other methods of attaining influence, or even notoriety, in society.

A young girl was surrounded by images which taught her future role as a wife and mother.²⁰⁹ Investigation of other choices made by women about objects such as dress and ornamentation may disclose hitherto unknown aspects of women, how they perceived themselves and how they were perceived.²¹⁰ The following four chapters focus on specific areas in which material culture dominates, to investigate whether the actions of women were supporting the redefinition of concepts of this area of Chinese social life in the sixteenth century.

²⁰⁹ Bray, 1997, 265; Verity Wilson, "Identifying Women's Things in the T.T. Tsui Gallery," *Orientalism* 22.7 (1991), 35-40.

²¹⁰ Clunas emphasises the usefulness of artefacts for the study of women in Craig Clunas, "Books and Things: Ming Literary Culture and Material Culture," in Frances Wood, ed., *Chinese Studies. British Library Occasional Papers 10*, London: The British Library, 1988, 137.

CHAPTER THREE

IMAGES OF RANK AND OFFICIAL STATUS

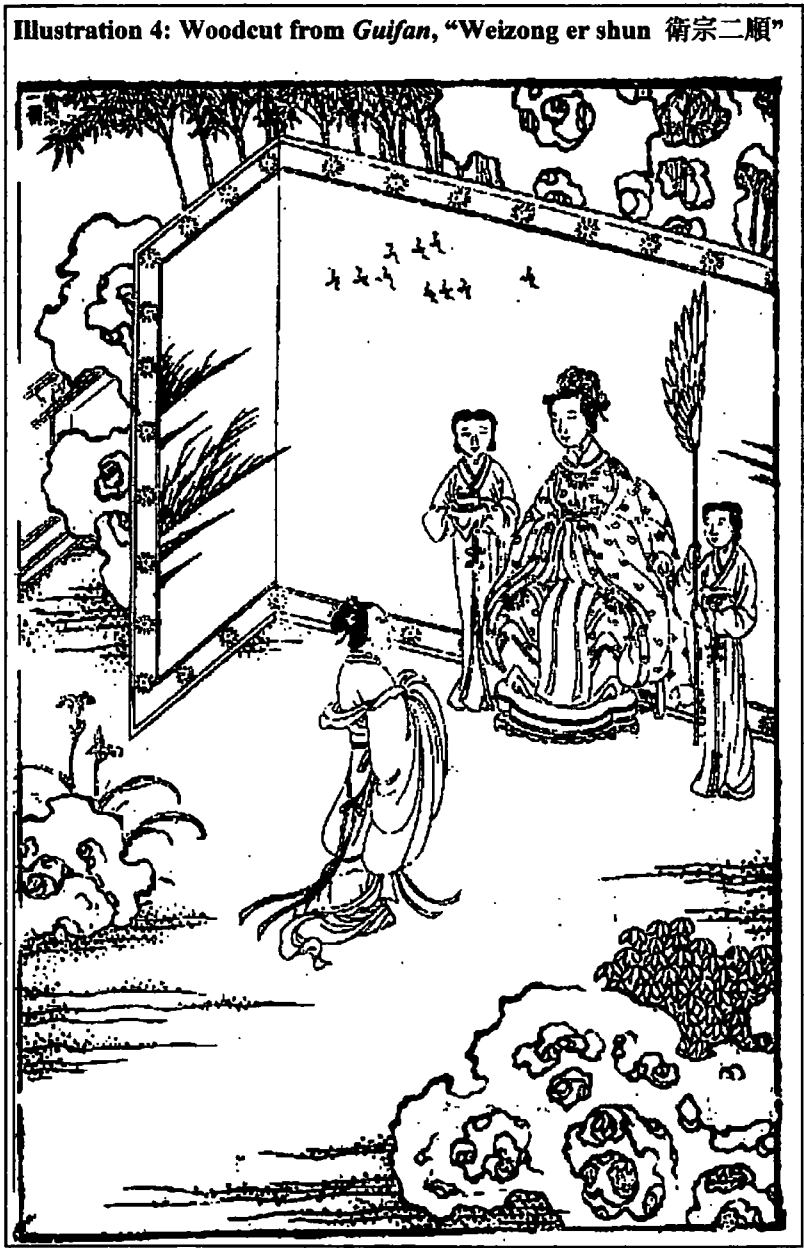
In Chapter 40 of the *Jin Ping Mei*, a complaint by Pan Jinlian that she has no clothes to match those of the other women for visiting the wealthy Qiao family prompts Ximen Qing to order the tailoring of numerous outfits for the ladies of his household:

For Wu Yueniang, there was a scarlet variegated *tongxiu* robe which was in figured brocade, a satin gown decorated with the 'animals face the *qilin*' badge of rank, an ebony variegated gauze gown decorated with a pattern of gourds and phoenix intertwined with flowers highlighted in gold; a scarlet satin brocade *tongxiu* robe with a *qilin* badge of rank matched with a kingfisher-blue brocade skirt with wide train; a beige brocade silk gauze gown figured with a badge of rank and matched with a scarlet skirt with train embroidered with gold branches and green leaves and the 'hundred flower motif'. Li Jiao'er, Meng Yulou, Pan Jinlian and Li Ping'er each received a scarlet *tongxiu* gown of variegated satin figured with the golden pheasant and two sets of figured tussore outfits. Sun Xue'e was given two outfits but no gown.¹

The hierarchy amongst the wives is clearly represented in this section. As principal wife, Yueniang receives seven items of clothing, those concubines in favour receive five items and Sun Xue'e gets just four. Furthermore, if we look closely at the items received we see that the distinctions are even more pronounced. Of the seven items received by Yueniang many have indicators of rank embroidered onto them. The favoured concubines have one piece of clothing each with a symbol of rank designated, yet as a concubine reduced to working in the kitchen, Sun Xue'e receives no such piece of clothing. This is what one would expect, as an illustration from the *Guifan* depicting an exchange between the wife and concubine of King Ling of Wei 衛靈王 demonstrates. The ideal demarcation in dress between a wife, a concubine

¹ JPMCH, 40.9b.

and the serving girls is clearly shown; the wife is in highly decorated formal robes, the concubine in more informal flowing garments, and the maids in plain clothing [Illustration 4].



The official dress of Qing mandarins is well-renowned and adorns the showcases of many a museum around the world. Much less is known, however, about the clothing of their wives and mothers; less still is understood about that of daughters,

concubines and other women. Just as men were subject to a code which regulated their dress, women too followed strict regulations which outlined their clothing and ornamentation. A woman's status depended upon the status of her father before marriage and, after marriage, upon that of her husband or son. The mother or wife of an official became a 'lady of rank' or *mingfu* 命婦 and was entitled to wear official garments, which varied according to the rank of the husband or son.²

Chinese dress and ornamentation was highly regulated according to sex, class and occupation. Jessica Rawson suggests that in the Chinese context:

As much as the laws of society and the Confucian rules of conduct, objects of all sorts became a component of the adhesive that held together the Chinese elite.³

All kinds of symbols and cultural devices such as rituals and ceremonies are used to define the boundaries of status groups in many societies.⁴ In the rigidly ordered society of China, dress, furnishings and utensils were perceived to be comparatively more important. Such objects could be made in large numbers for an extensive, yet regulated, distribution. In addition, a wide range of quality and varieties could be produced to match the complex official hierarchy, the highest level of goods made up of those objects the élite chose for religious and political ceremonies.⁵

Early Chinese philosophers had discussed notions of regulating consumption and expenditure. The *Guanzi* 管子 advocates strict distinctions between superior and inferior, age and youth, warning that if people exceed the rights, duties, and styles of life for their class, respect for superiors and elders cannot be maintained. It elaborates:

² *DMHD*, 61.37b-38b.

³ Jessica Rawson, ed., *The British Museum Book of Chinese Art*, London: British Museum Press, 1992, 28.

⁴ Barnes, 1988, 97.

⁵ Rawson, ed., 1992, 27-28.

Clothing must be regulated according to gradations in rank. Wealth should be spent according to gradations in salaries. The consumption of food and drink should be measured and the wearing of clothing should be regulated. Dwellings should be graded, the number of animals and retainers should be limited, and boats, chariots, and military equipment should also be restricted.⁶

By imposing such 'normative' types of consumption on the populace it was hoped that sumptuary laws could maintain a stable social and political hierarchical order.⁷

From the beginning of the Ming dynasty even more detailed regulations and sumptuary laws separated the various classes. Marriage ceremonies, ancestor worship, funerals, and the size of tombs were all used to differentiate the classes. The ruling class also enjoyed certain legal, economic, and political privileges, such as exemption from *corvée* services and immunity from corporal punishment.⁸ As far as female clothing and ornamentation are concerned, the regulations set out in minute detail the requirements for every rank, both male and female. From the Empress down to the common woman, styles and materials used for robes and skirts, decorations on emblems of rank, types of head-dresses and even which particular jewels to embellish them with are prescribed.

This power structure was maintained by a system of reward and punishment: those who succeeded to office were honoured with restricted items, whereas those who violated the regulations were castigated. In the Ming, commoners were given fifty strokes and officials were dismissed and given 100 strokes. The rationale behind this being that the officials were supposed to be more familiar with the sumptuary laws than the commoners.⁹

Clothing and ornaments for the majority of women were divided into two

⁶ "You fu zhi 右服制," in *Guanzi*, 1.15.

⁷ Clunas, 1993, 40.

⁸ *DMHD*, *juan* 61-62.

⁹ Ch'ü, 1961, 151.

main types in the Ming - one for ceremonies or celebrations (禮服 *lifu*) and the other for normal wear (常服 *changfu*). The formal dress of a Ming woman of rank principally comprised a piece of outer clothing emblazoned with symbols of rank. This was commonly ornamented with a *xiapei* 霞帔 or 'rosy-cloud stole' and a decorative belt (帶 *dai*), both of which were subject to strict specifications in size and patterning. On her head would have been worn a head-dress of varying decoration according to rank and which would have been supplemented by other pieces of jewellery. The outfit for normal wear comprised a long robe decorated in the same style as the *xiapei*, matched with a skirt, plus various hair ornaments.¹⁰

Chapter Two demonstrated how the merchants were engaging in conspicuous consumption, purchasing luxurious houses, fancy clothing and luxurious entertainments, all beyond their allotted quota. Were the ideals of hierarchy as set down in the sumptuary regulations followed by women in the sixteenth century or were women able to fashion their own hierarchies and identities through the adoption of alternative modes of dress? Item by item, this chapter examines perceptions of the use and role of female formal attire in the late Ming, as revealed in the *Jin Ping Mei* and other texts.

Women, too are described as becoming increasingly competitive with regard to dress and ornamentation. Merchant women and the lower classes come in for the most severe criticism and are contrasted with élite models of frugality. Emulation of the upper classes was seen to be occurring on a wide scale; however, lower class habits were also permeating their way up the social ladder. Aesthetic sensibility was not limited to the emulation of more noble attire. The women of the *Jin Ping Mei* not

¹⁰ For basic descriptions of these outfit see Dai Zheng 戴爭, ed., *Zhongguo gudai fushi jianshi* 中國古代服飾簡史, Beijing: Qinggongye, 1988, 183-6 and 191-2; Garrett, 1994, 19-23; Zhou Xun and Gao Chunming, *5000 Years of Chinese Costume*, San Francisco: China Books and Periodicals, 1984, 147 and 150-51. Regulations set out in the *Ming shi*, 66.1641-1646.

only utilise valuable objects to further their own status aspirations in the Ximen household, they also engage in communal displays of wealth and status before the wider community.

Badges of rank and the tongxiu gown

Badges of rank or “mandarin squares” (補子 *puzi* or 補方 *pufang*) first appeared in 1391.¹¹ Worn on the front of gowns, they were used to indicate the different ranks of the imperial household and officials. Birds represented civil officials and animals, military officials. Each grade of official was entitled to wear a specific emblem as set out in the sumptuary laws [Appendix 1].¹² There is a lack of any reference to insignia for the wives of officials in Ming records and thus it is difficult to obtain a complete view of those worn by women; however, Ming ancestral portraits show us that the wife wore a square of her husband’s rank and Qing sources state that mothers were also entitled to wear the badge of rank of their son.¹³ Women wore their squares sewn on to their wide-sleeved gowns of scarlet or dark blue.

¹¹ Three Chinese encyclopedias of origins discuss the early badge system. *Gezhi jingyuan* 格致鏡原 (1718), repr. Yangzhou: Jiangsu Guanling guji, 1989, 16.6b; *Shiwu yuanyhui* 事物原會 (1796), repr. Yangzhou: Jiangsu guangling guji, 1989, 25.2b; *Yi shi ji shi* 壹是紀始 (1823), repr. Yangzhou: Jiangsu Guanling guji, 1990, 7.43. The *Ming Taizu shilu* 明太祖實錄, states the date July 5th 1391 as the initiation of badges of rank to be used for the State Sacrifices, for court functions and for everyday wear -- *Ming Taizu shilu* 明太祖實錄, repr. 8 vols., n.p.: Zhongguo yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1968, juan 209. For a full discussion on the badge of rank see Cammann, 1944-45, 71-130.

¹² For information on the use and development of squares, see “Yifu 衣服” sections of the *Ming shi* juan 66-7; *Sancai tuhui* 三才圖會 (1585), by Wang Qi 王圻, repr. 6 vols., Taipei: Chongwen, 1970, 2.30a-35a. For a discussion of embroidery techniques and styles of badges of rank and festival squares, see Schuyler Cammann, “Embroidery Techniques in Old China,” *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America* 15 (1961), 16-39 and *idem*, “Ming Festival Symbols,” *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America* 7 (1953), 66-70.

¹³ *Qingbai leichao* 清稗類鈔, by Xu Ke 徐珂, repr. 13 vols., Beijing: Zhonghua, 1986, 13.6199; “Neizhuang,” in *Yueshibian*, 8.180.

Illustration 5: Detail from portrait of the family of Zhou Yong



Illustration 5 demonstrates the usage of badges of rank. It forms a detail from the painting of the family of Zhou Yong 周用 (1476-1547) from Wujiang 吳江 in Suzhou who rose to the position of Minister of Personnel (second rank). Pictured are Zhou Yong, his wife Ms Shi 施氏, a lady of the first rank, and concubine Ms Jiang 姜氏, awarded the title *tai yiren* 太宜人 “Dame of Suitability.”¹⁴ Below are pictured his son Zhou Shinan 周式南 (*juren* 1558), a Chief Minister at the Court of the Imperial Stud (third rank) and his wife Ms Yu 郁氏, awarded the title *shuren* 淑人 “Lady of Virtue”.¹⁵ They are wearing the symbols of cranes and peacocks appropriate to their respective ranks.¹⁶

¹⁴ Awarded to mothers of officials of the fifth rank.

¹⁵ Awarded to wives of officials of the third rank. Liang Baiquan 梁白泉, *Nanjing bowuyuan cang xiaoxianghua xuanji* 南京博物院藏肖像畫選集, Nanjing: Wenwu, 1993, 146.

¹⁶ Prior to 1527, the crane was applicable to both rank one and rank two. Garrett, 1994, 15.

Illustration 6: Mother of Li Chunfang



The *tongxiu* gown (通袖袍 *tongxiu pao*), as worn by Wu Yueniang in the above excerpt from the *Jin Ping Mei*, was classed as a part of the formal dress for women of the aristocracy and wives of the officials. *Tongxiu* indicates that the pattern embroidered onto the gown extended from the back and chest down the sleeves.¹⁷ From estimates made from artefacts in the Shaanxi museum, the ‘hundred animals face the *qilin*’ (百獸朝麒麟 *baishou chao qilin*) pattern on a *tongxiu* gown probably indicated that the *qilin* on the chest and back was depicted

surrounded by many smaller animals. There probably were not one hundred but four, as in Chapters 78 and 96. From extant artefacts it can be seen that there were actually five animals, two on the shoulders and three on the stomach, but if looked at from the front only four could be seen.¹⁸ From illustration 6, a portrait of the mother of Senior Grand Secretary (first rank) Li Chunfang 李春芳 (1510-1584),¹⁹ it can be seen how the *tongxiu* pattern worked; the intricate dragon pattern forms a continuous whole around the main body and sleeves of the gown. This pattern was also referred to as *guojian* 過肩 “across the shoulders.”

¹⁷ As such *tongxiu* is difficult to translate, thus I have retained the romanisation of the style.

¹⁸ Shanghaishi Hongloumeng xuehui 上海市紅樓夢學會 and Shanghai shifan daxue wenxue yanjiusuo 上海師範大學文學研究所, eds., *Jin Ping Mei jianshang cidian* 金瓶梅鑒賞辭典, Shanghai: Guji, 1993, 803 (hereafter abbreviated to *JSCD*).

¹⁹ *DMB*, 818-819.

In the above passage from the *Jin Ping Mei*, Wu Yueniang is depicted as wearing the *qilin* emblem. Illustration 7 depicts a contemporary *qilin* badge of rank which is made of silk gauze woven with gold. This was reserved as the symbol for dukes, earls and imperial sons-in-law and their wives. The concubines have the golden pheasant (錦鷄 *jinji*) pattern which represented a civil official of the second grade.²⁰ Yet at this time Ximen Qing is a military official of the fifth grade being both a vice captain and assistant magistrate, permitted only to wear the symbol of a bear.²¹

Illustration 7: Silk gauze *qilin* badge of rank (15th century)



This arrogation of badges of rank appears to have been a common event during the late sixteenth century.

In Taizhou 泰州, Jiangsu, an example of using an inappropriate badge of rank was unearthed from the tomb of Zhang Panlong 張盤龍, daughter of Zhang Cunjian 張存簡, Director of the Board of

Punishments, and wife of Xu Fan 徐蕃, the Right Vice Director of the Ministry of Works, who died in the Jiajing period. A jade-coloured *qilin* was woven onto badges of rank on the chest and back of her plain satin outer clothing. The layer of clothing beneath, tailored from bean-yellow satin patterned with the 'eight treasures and flowers,' was decorated with badges of rank on the chest and back depicting two

²⁰ Camman, 1944-5, 105.

²¹ *JPMCH*, 31.5a -- Ximen Qing wears a lion badge of rank. Wang Shizhen commented that, although there are animals set for all the military ranks below three, people "all wear the lion and it is not prohibited in the least." See *Gu bu gu lu*, 13.

cranes (first grade). According to the regulations, she was supposed to wear a peacock following the rank of her husband who was a third grade official. In addition to these, Ms Zhang was found to be wearing a bean-yellow skirt in a patterned satin, woven with the 'eight treasure and peony' pattern embellished with a phoenix, another restricted design.²²

Reports from contemporary gazetteers suggest that illegal usage was rife. The Yuncheng 鄆城 (Shandong) gazetteer states:

Recently, people have been competing in extravagance. The masses wear the clothing of the gentry, the gentry wear the headgear of the high officials; from food, drink and utensils to marriages, funerals, outings and banquets, all the old notions have changed. Those who are poor even herd oxen swathed in fresh goods and engage in joint worship and communal sacrifices, competing with the rich in grandeur and opulence to the extent that they think nothing of emptying their purses.²³

The well-respected late Ming writer Chen Jiru lays the blame for this competitive element in opulent regions around Suzhou specifically at the feet of women:

As for the tall chignons, fine silks and linens, the dazzling adornments and resplendent dress, these do not come from impoverished, but from hereditary houses which compete with each other. Indeed, these things do not originate with the regulated officials, but with the *ignorant women* who know nothing.²⁴

A gazetteer from nearby Shaoxing also lamented this phenomenon.²⁵ Women from both merchant and upper class household were seen to be competing in extravagant dress and ornamentation. Wealth was identified as one of the reasons for this, female ignorance of the ideal Confucian norms regarding limits on dress is cited as another.

²² Taizhoushi bowuguan 泰州市博物館, "Jiangsu Taizhou shi Mingdai Xu Fan fufu mu qingli jianbao 江蘇泰州市明代徐蕃夫婦墓清理簡報," *Wenwu* 文物 1986.9, 1-15.

²³ *Yunchengxian zhi* 鄆城縣志. Cited in Xia Xianchun 夏咸淳, *Wan Ming tufeng yu wenxue* 晚明土風與文學, Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue, 1994, 31.

²⁴ "Shou Fan mu Feng yiren qishi xu 壽範母馮宜人七十叙," in *Wanxiangtang*, 16.291. Emphasis my own.

²⁵ "Fengsu zhi," in *Shaoxingfu zhi*, 12.3a.

This perceived state of affairs was worrying to local officials. For Confucians, noncompetitiveness was a central concept in the creation of a frictionless society.²⁶ Ming idealistic communes such as the one run by the Zheng 鄭 family from Pujiang 浦江 in Zhejiang advocated a rather different approach to the allocation of female dress and footwear which took account of age differences. In addition women would receive a uniform issue of cosmetics and ornamentation.²⁷ It was hoped that such equal apportioning of necessities would help to avoid competitiveness. Should the women engage in more conspicuous adornment then they would be punished.²⁸

The female characters in the *Jin Ping Mei* are able to portray an impression of increased official standing whilst still retaining their own internal hierarchy. In a novel concerned with the intense competition for status among its female protagonists, it is clear that the image of the group in the community takes precedence over internal wrangling, they are dependent upon each other, even though they are of different status, when portraying a particular impression to outsiders.²⁹ The expense Ximen Qing goes to purchase outfits for the ladies furthers his aspirations to higher status in the eyes of the local community.

Other characters in the novel utilise clothing in this way. For example, in Chapter 7 Meng Yulou appears in “a kingfisher blue short gown of figured silk gauze emblazoned with a *qilin* badge of rank” to arrange a marriage with Ximen Qing.³⁰ As the *qilin* was reserved as the symbol for dukes, earls and imperial sons-in-law and their wives, and her deceased husband was merely a successful cloth merchant with no official title or honorary position, she is in defiance of the strict regulation of such

²⁶ Wright, 1962, 8.

²⁷ *Zheng shi guifan*, 10b and 11a. For a more detailed discussion of this unusual family system see John W. Dardess, “The Cheng Communal Family: Social Organization and Neo-Confucianism in Yuan and Early Ming China,” *HJAS* 34 (1974), 7-52.

²⁸ *Zheng shi guifan*, 23a.

²⁹ Goffman, 1959, 83-108.

³⁰ *JPMCH*, 7.6a-b.

symbols of status. These items would have been costly as they had to be tailored to order and usually contained gold thread in the background as the fashion of the time dictated.³¹ The matchmaker has already given Ximen Qing a detailed report of Yulou's wealth which appears to be by no means insignificant. However, that she has the means to purchase such a representation of rank no doubt confirms the matchmaker's spiel.

Expenditure on dress has an advantage over most other methods of consumption as it provides an indication of financial standing to observers at the first glance.³² For Yulou, her attire on this occasion has the desired effect as Ximen offers her the position of legitimate wife despite the fact he already has one, but it is perhaps in the belief that a woman with such means for a show of status would be unwilling to become a concubine, ranking third in his household.³³ Similarities can be found in the late Ming tale "Xiao furen jinqian zeng nianshao 小夫人金錢贈年少." Rich secretary Zhang 張員外 is looking for a wife who must fill three conditions. She must have beauty, position and a large dowry. The former concubine who meets the requirements undergoes the marriage ceremony dressed in a dark red wide-sleeved robe decorated with gold, a *xiapei* and gold head-dress.³⁴ Both merchants and officials are depicted as being highly aware of the benefits a good marriage could bring. Dress and ornamentation were externally visible indicators of female wealth and power.

The characters in the *Jin Ping Mei* are unaware that their actions are anything out of the ordinary; indeed, not to wear garments of rank on such a visit would be demeaning. Although of merchant-official status, the women must compete in

³¹ Camman, 1944-5, 78.

³² Veblen, 1925, 167.

³³ *JPMCH*, 7.6b.

³⁴ "Xiao furen jinqian zeng nianshao 小夫人金錢贈年少," in *Jingshi tongyan* 警世通言, by Feng Menglong 馮夢龍, repr. Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 1995, 16.229-230.

appearance with the ladies of the Qiao household, former landed gentry. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, this is the fear of the literati who felt threatened by the bourgeoisie competing on material terms with their traditional social superiors.

Ornamented Belts

When the ladies receive the Qiao women on a return visit in Chapter 43 it is only Yueniang who is afforded a complete description:

Wu Yueniang wore a scarlet variegated brocade, 'hundred animals face the *qilin*' satin *tongxiu* gown with a gold belt inlaid with a variety of precious gems. On her head the ornamented chignon rose imposingly with phoenix hairclasps inserted on either side and heaped with pearls and kingfisher feather ornaments. From the embroidered ribbon on the front of her chest was suspended a gold neck-ring strung with pearls and there was a pearl girdle pendant by her skirt.³⁵

Yueniang's gown is most probably the same item tailored for the visit to the Qiao's in Chapter 40; however, in that instance it is described as a robe. Throughout the *Jin Ping Mei*, *ao* 襖 "robe" often means *pao* 袍 "gown". Both garments were long-sleeved but the *ao* usually reached to around the knees whereas the *pao* was a long gown which just revealed a skirt underneath. Both would have been buttoned up the front with embroidered hems, however the *ao* would usually have been seen with a stiff upright collar whereas that on the *pao* was low.³⁶ Similarly, *shan* 衫 can be interpreted as both a type of outer short gown which lengthened throughout the dynasty to reach to around the knees by the Jiajing or a blouse which was tucked into the skirt.³⁷ Again, in the *Jin Ping Mei* *shan* is sometimes interchangeable with *ao* and *pao*. This confusion over names for garments did exist in the Ming. For example, the

³⁵ JPMCH, 43.11a.

³⁶ "Yifu 衣服," in *Sancai tuhui*, 3.4a-5b.

³⁷ JSCD, 750.

historian and poet Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀 (14th century)³⁸ pointed out that the ceremonial garment for women was referred to as *pao*, *tuanshan* 團衫 ‘enveloping gown/top’ or *dayi* 大衣 ‘over-garment’.³⁹ To a Ming reader this interchangeability of terminology may not have seemed unusual. It may also indicate why people of the lower classes sometimes “got it wrong” when attempting to emulate those above them.

In the above passage, Yueniang is described as wearing a gold belt inlaid with various precious stones (金鑲寶石鬧妝 *jinxiang baoshi naozhuang*).⁴⁰ An example of such a belt can be found in the Sichuan Museum. Examples too are listed in the *Tianshui bingshan lu* 天水冰山錄 which indicates the exclusive nature of the belt style.⁴¹ Such an object is also used by Ximen Qing as a bribe for Cai Jing in Chapter 48 when he is impeached for covering up for the murderer Miao Qing 苗青.⁴² If this belt was seen fit to be presented as a bribe to the Grand Tutor Cai Jing then it was not for common usage and would have been noticed as such.

Belts were an important indicator of status and were worn by men and women alike. In the Ming dynasty the type of belt to be worn according to rank changed almost with the change of reign [see Appendix 2], and not knowing precisely when the *Jin Ping Mei* was composed makes it rather problematical deciding which belt corresponds to which rank. The majority of belts depicted in the novel are either made from jade plaques, plain or set in a gold frame or are fashioned from gold. These would have been worn on a belt of leather.

At her marriage to Li Gongbi, Meng Yulou is described as wearing a gold-set

³⁸ DMB, 1268-1272.

³⁹ “Xianxiao 賢孝,” in *Chuogeng lu*, 11.173.

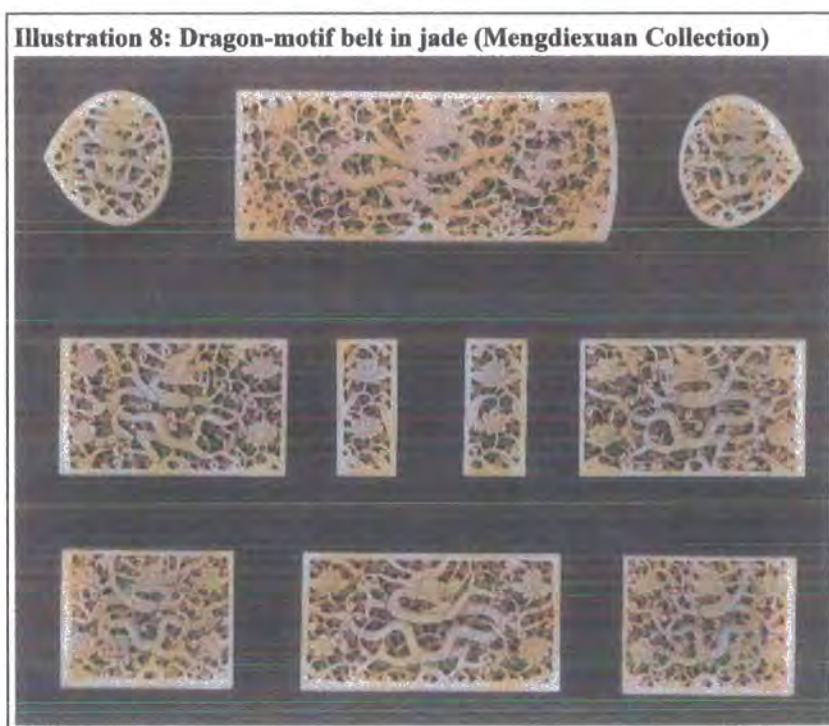
⁴⁰ JPMCH, 43.11a.

⁴¹ *Tianshui bingshan lu*, 1982, 94-95.

⁴² JPMCH, 48.10a.

agate belt (金鑲瑪瑙帶 *jinxiang mannao dai*) which was given to her as a betrothal gift.⁴³ *Manna* 瑪瑙 is a dull red or reddish-white agate which is a type of quartz. A similar item composed of 13 pieces of agate backed by wood has been retrieved from the Sichuan tomb of Lady Wang 王, wife of Zhao Bingran 趙炳然, a minister at the Ministry of War.⁴⁴ She was ranked first grade and therefore authorised to wear such a belt. Meng Yulou, on the other hand, is far from eligible to do so, only being the wife of the son of the Assistant Prefect of Yanzhou 嚴州 in Zhejiang (rank 6). This illegal use of ornamentation further reinforces the notions of Meng Yulou's aspirations to higher status.

According to Ming regulations the empress, imperial consorts, princesses and concubines of the various princes, and wives of the nobles and officials had to wear leather belts decorated with jade on ritual or ceremonial occasions.⁴⁵ A plain white



⁴³ *JPMCH*, 91.8b.

⁴⁴ Sichuansheng bowuguan 四川省博物館 and Jian'gexian wenhuaguan 劍閣縣文化館, "Ming bingbu shangshu Zhao Bingran fufu hezang mu 明兵部尚書趙炳然夫婦合葬墓," *Wenwu* 文物 1982.2, 36. Agate belts are included in the Yan Song inventory -- *Tianshui bingshan lu*, 95.

⁴⁵ *Ming shi*, 66.1621, 1624, 1627-30 and 1642 respectively.

jade belt formed by eight rectangular and four peach sections was found in the tomb of the high-ranking Ms Wang 王氏 (1513-1587), wife of Li Wei 李偉 (1510-1583), the marquis of Wuqing 武清侯.⁴⁶ Confiscated estates of wealthy eunuchs and officials included numerous jade belts. That of the powerful eunuch of the Zhengde period, Liu Jin 劉瑾 (d.1510),⁴⁷ alone lists over four thousand such belts.⁴⁸ Illustration 8 provides a marvellous example of the workmanship which went into making these symbols of the highest rank. Not only is the belt made from one of the most precious substances known to the Chinese, the time taken to complete the intricate carving of the dragon-motif would also add to its value.

From early times, jade had been used to fashion the most precious ritual and ceremonial objects in Chinese society.⁴⁹ The biography of the influential minister Zhang Juzheng indicates the value attached to such items. When the talent of young Zhang was spotted by Governor Gu Lin 顧璘 (pre-1547), he presented him with his own belt of rhino horn (second grade), saying: "Another day you will be wearing one of jade. Those made of rhino horn are not fitting for idiots."⁵⁰ Gu's prophecy later came true when Zhang had risen in rank to become a favourite of the Wanli Emperor and the Empresses Dowager and was presented with a jade belt by the palace.⁵¹ The inference here is that anything less than the jade belt of the first rank was not worth having and should be aspired to.

In Chapter 72 Lady Lin wears a scarlet *tongxiu* gown bound by a gold-set

⁴⁶ Zhang Xiande 張先德, Liu Hui'yi 劉精義 and Hu Wanghuan 呼王恒, "Beijing shijiao Ming Wuqing hou Li Wei fufu mu qingli jianbao 北京市郊明武清侯李偉夫婦墓清理簡報," *Wenwu* 文物 1969.4, 57.

⁴⁷ *DMB*, 941-945.

⁴⁸ "Liu Zhu huocai 劉朱貨財," in *Qixiu leigao* 七修類稿, by Lang Ying 郎瑛, repr. 2 vols., Shanghai: Zhonghua, 1959, 13.197.

⁴⁹ Rawson, ed., 1992, 44-5.

⁵⁰ *Ming shi*, 213.5643.

⁵¹ *Ming shi*, 213.5649.

green jade belt (金鑲碧玉帶 *jinxiang biyu dai*).⁵² Prior to this description, she has never worn items indicating rank when meeting with Ximen Qing for their trysts. The occasion is more formal because she hopes that Ximen will adopt her rakish son Wang Sanguan 王三官. In dressing this way Ximen is reminded of her status by her dress and perhaps therefore adopts her son, forming an alliance which he later claims he did not care for. A similar outfit is worn by Ms Lan 藍氏, the wife of his newly appointed assistant magistrate, He Yongshou 何永壽, and provides a different reaction. It is described through Ximen Qing's eyes as he peeks on her as she leaves his house:

Aged about twenty, tall and slender, she was dressed up like a powdered jade carving. On her head the pearls and kingfisher feather ornaments were piled high and phoenix hairpins were inserted on either side. She wore a scarlet *tongxiu* variegated figured 'four animals face the *qilin*' gown, bound by a gold-set green jade belt and lined by a flower brocade blue skirt below with tinkling girdle pendants on either side. A scent of musk and perfume filled the air.⁵³

At this point in the narrative Lady Lin is also described but in less particular detail, and the only outstanding feature is her scarlet *tongxiu* robe.⁵⁴ This draws attention to the more elaborately depicted Ms Lan with whom Ximen Qing is entranced.⁵⁵ The fact that she is wearing a jade belt and *tongxiu* gown depicting the 'four animals face the *qilin*' would have been in defiance of the regulations as her husband was only an official of the fifth rank, and thus she is replaying the previous occasion when the wife of Ximen Qing also wore the *qilin* emblem.

By the late sixteenth century, it was reported that few people wore the styles and colours of clothing appropriate to their status in China. Xu Xian 徐咸 (*jinshi*

⁵² *JPMCH*, 72.12b.

⁵³ *JPMCH*, 78.28a.

⁵⁴ *JPMCH*, 78.9a.

⁵⁵ *JPMCH*, 78.28b.

1511)⁵⁶ describes how male hat styles of the rich began to change in the Zhengde period, and by the start of the Jiajing even the commoners were emulating them, stimulating the production of a multitude of different styles. More surprisingly, officials, too, are criticised for their arrogation of inappropriate dress.⁵⁷

In a further diatribe against the behaviour of the gentry women in the affluent Yangtze region, Chen Jiru demonstrates particular concern over the threat of emulation by the lower classes:

Recently, they have been sporting dazzling adornments and resplendent dress; they love to make themselves beautiful. Their looks are flirtatious and their language immoral; they love to act licentiously. On valuable horses and painted boats they are fond of going on jaunts to famous mountains and embankments. In the beginning, those who were acquainted with this gasped, when it continued they laughed. Worst of all, if the women of the villages will take it as customary, admire it and copy it, it will be impossible to halt this tendency.⁵⁸

It is interesting to note that his comments reveal a general acceptance of the ongoing outrageous behaviour perceived to be occurring among the gentry women; it has become a joke. His anxieties lie with the effects this may have on those below them in the social scale, those in the less affluent areas who aspire to higher status. As long as the social distinctions were intact the perceived problem was diminished somewhat. When social boundaries were beginning to be threatened, however, it was a different case altogether.

In Europe, the period from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century saw the enactment of more sumptuary laws forbidding commoners to dress like nobles than ever before. They were an expression of the upper class resentment of the nouveaux

⁵⁶ DMB, 866.

⁵⁷ *Xiyuan zaji* 西園雜記, by Xu Xian 徐咸, repr. 2 vols., Beijing: Zhonghua, 1985, 1.80-81; *Yunjian jumu chao*, 67-8.

⁵⁸ "Shou Gu gongren wushi xu 壽顧恭人五十叙," in *Wanxiangtang*, 16.285-286. Sentiments echoed in "Neizhuang," in *Yueshi bian*, 8.178; "Fengsu 風俗," in *KZZY*, 1.26 and "Wangfu qianfu lun 王符潜夫論," in *KZZY*, 4.127.

riches imitating them.⁵⁹ Because of this, fashion scholar Gilles Lipovetsky concludes that:

The diffusion of fashion has been less a form of social constraint than an instrument of social representation and affirmation, less a type of collective control than a sign of social pretension.⁶⁰

Byron described the factors which made a man someone in the Regency. He wrote of wealth, talent, family and

Fashion, which indeed's the best
Recommendation; and to be well drest
Will very often supersede the rest.⁶¹

Provided one looked the part, he suggests that one could crash 'high society.' This, in a sense, resembles the situation of the late Ming when people from all walks of life were able to utilise their financial advantage to advance social standing. The traditional route to social success in China via the examination system was becoming less significant. The wider availability of higher quality goods, particularly clothing and jewellery, facilitated social rise for those from the merchant class. This is seen clearly from the above passage from the *Jin Ping Mei* as Ms Lan automatically assumes the attire worn by Yueniang when her husband takes over Ximen's former official position at the yamen.

Towards the end of the novel Wu Yueniang is invited to celebrate the wedding of Yulou and to this she wears a scarlet *tongxiu* gown matched with a gilt belt (蒙金帶 *mengjin dai*).⁶² Her use of different belts for different occasions appears

⁵⁹ Wilson, 1985, 23-25; Max Von Boehn, *Modes and Manners, vol. 1: From the Decline of the Ancient World to the Renaissance*, London: Harrap, 1932, 168; Frances Elizabeth Baldwin, *Sumptuary Legislation and Personal Regulation in England*, Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1926; Braudel, 1981, 311.

⁶⁰ Lipovetsky, 1994, 30.

⁶¹ Cited in Ellen Moers, *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1978, 61.

⁶² *JPMCH*, 91.10a.

to indicate that this was as much a fashion statement as a demonstration of status. Lü Kun states:

The women of today adorn themselves in tussore silks, pearls and embroidery, with overflowing trunks and copious dowries, wide-sleeved long top, covered in gold and replete with colours. They admire and vie to emulate each other. Every day and month there is something new and different, something has only just come about before it is done away with.⁶³

Competition and emulation stimulated the changes in female clothing habits. The novelty identified by scholars such as Lü Kun was made possible by advances in handicraft technology which provided the potentiality for increased variations in patterns, colours and styles. According to Arjun Appadurai:

Sumptuary laws constitute an intermediary consumption-regulating device, suited to societies devoted to stable status displays in exploding commodity contexts, such as India, China and Europe in the pre-modern period.⁶⁴

In China, however, no account whatsoever was taken by the state of the rapid developments in the textile industries that occurred during this period, and it is for this reason that Clunas asserts that the failure to update sumptuary regulations was one of the factors which led to confusion.⁶⁵ This was compounded by the fact that less regulated private textile concerns could reproduce restricted designs and pass them straight on to the merchants. Another significant factor was that the increasing visibility of women permitted comparison and this then stimulated imitation. Without this, the competitive nature of clothing in this period would not, and could not, have come about.

⁶³ "Han shi jiafa 韓氏家法," in *Guifan*, 3.87b.

⁶⁴ A. Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *idem*, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 25.

⁶⁵ Craig Clunas, "The Art of Social Climbing in Sixteenth-Century China," *Burlington Magazine* June 1991b, 371.

The phoenix head-dress and xiapei (鳳冠霞帔 fengguan xiapei)

In Chapter 57 Li Ping'er tells Wu Yueniang that the phoenix head-dress and *xiapei* will be hers when Guan'ge has grown up and obtained official position. Pan Jinlian is outside and overhears this.⁶⁶ Just the mention of these articles of apparel is enough to make Jinlian furiously jealous as she realises that they are hoping that in the future honours will be given to both of them on account of the success of Ping'er's son. Thus, in the power struggle in the household, this would be a great blow to Jinlian. In order to understand the fury of Jinlian it is necessary to see what exactly the phoenix head-dress and *xiapei* meant to the women of the Ming dynasty.

The *xiapei* or 'rosy clouds stole' was worn as early as the fifth century AD and its popularity grew through the Sui and Tang, so that by the Ming dynasty, it had become a special part of the ceremonial wear for women of the imperial family and the wives of officials. Later in the dynasty it began to be worn with semi-formal dress also.⁶⁷ It was an embroidered band which was subject to strict measurements,⁶⁸ which was worn around the neck and hung in front of the chest. It was usually decorated with a background of rosy clouds, hence the name. Different symbols were embroidered upon it to distinguish rank among the wives of officials, working in a similar way to the badge of rank [see Appendix 3]. The *xiapei* was combined with the phoenix head-dress and came to be an appellation for wives of officials. In the Tang Xianzu play *Mudan ting* 牡丹亭, the mother of the female protagonist Du Liniang 杜麗娘, is dressed in a head-dress and *xiapei* described as 'dignified.'⁶⁹ The article is not described as being worn by any of the women in the *Jin Ping Mei*. However, it is

⁶⁶ JPMCH, 57.5a.

⁶⁷ Camman, 1944-5, 79.

⁶⁸ "Yifu," in *Sancai tuhui*, 3.9b-10a.

⁶⁹ *Mudan ting* 牡丹亭, by Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖, repr. in *Tang Xianzu ji* 湯顯祖集, 4 vols., Shanghai: Renmin, 1973, 46.2016.

conceivable that this item was worn by women of the lower classes as a plain one was found in the tomb of the unranked Ms Xiong 熊 (1482-1537) of De'an 德安 prefecture in Jiangxi.⁷⁰ Two of the ladies from the family of Zhou Yong depicted in illustration 5 can be seen to be wearing *xiapei* which correspond exactly to their badges of rank.

The phoenix head-dress was made of gold and silver wire lined with silk gauze and the top inlaid with pearls and jewels. It was decorated with phoenixes or pheasants and those of highest status had golden dragons. This type of head-dress would have been worn by the Empress who was entitled to wear one decorated with nine dragons and four phoenix. Lower grades were entitled to wear correspondingly fewer creatures. The head-dress shown in illustration 9 was excavated from the tomb of a Ms Liu 劉氏 from Qichun 圻春 district in Hubei and is decorated with a single phoenix. When Wu Yueniang goes on her pilgrimage to Taishan 泰山, the statue of the goddess Niangniang 娘娘 is described as wearing a 'nine-dragon and flying phoenix head-dress.'⁷¹ In the temple dedicated to Bixia Yuanjun on Taishan there survive three statues of immortals which were constructed in the Ming period, one of whom has been identified as Niangniang. All are ornately dressed with phoenix head-dresses and *yingluo* 纓絡 necklaces.⁷²

⁷⁰ De'anxian bowuguan 德安縣, "Jiangxi De'an Mingdai Xiong shi mu qingli jianbao 江西德安明代熊氏墓清理簡報," *Wenwu* 文物 1994.10, 35.

⁷¹ *JPMCH*, 84.3a.

⁷² Cui Xiuguo 崔秀國 and Ji Aiqin 吉愛琴, *Taidai shiji* 泰岱史迹, Jinan: Xinhua, 1987, 117. The *yingluo* comprised a metal hoop decorated with pearls and/or other precious stones. The *Ming shi* noted that this was frequently worn by women in the Zhengde period, yet it was classed under "clothing oddities" (服妖 *fuyao*). See *Ming shi*, 29.476. This may have been due to its associations with goddesses such as Guanyin. See "Zhu yingluo 珠纓絡," in *Liuqing rizha* 留青日札 (pref. 1573), by Tian Yiheng 田藝衡, repr. 3 vols., Shanghai: Guji, 1985, 22.11b-12a.

Illustration 9: Phoenix head-dress in gold decorated with a variety of precious gems



The tomb of Prince Zhu Yiyin 朱翊鉞 revealed two imperial head-dresses which had belonged to his Principal Consort Li 李元妃 and his Secondary Consort Sun 孫繼妃, both of whom were buried with him.⁷³ That of the Principal Consort is decorated

with nine pheasants with pearls in their beaks. On either side of the head-dress are inserted a pair of gold phoenix hairclaspers with threads of stringed pearls. It is engraved with “Made in the 8th month of the 26th year of Jiajing (1547) in the Silver Workshop from 7 *qian* 4 *fen* of gold.” That of the Secondary Consort was made in 1580; however, due to its construction from felt rather than bronze it has not lasted as well.

In “A Poem on the Chastity of the Mother of Mr Yu” Xu Wei recounts the solitude of a lady from Wuxi 無錫 whose education of her son enabled him to achieve *jinshi* status:

When they were parted⁷⁴ her tears streamed down her cheeks,
The ink not yet dry upon the letter he left behind in the ice and snow.
Each time she took up the cold lamp she could not read it all,
Alone in the silken curtains she has few years left.

⁷³ Jiangxisheng wenwu gongzuodui 江西省文物工作隊, “Jiangxi Nancheng Ming yixuan wang Zhu Yiyin fufu hezangmu 江西南城明益宣王朱翊鉞夫婦合葬墓,” *Wenwu* 文物 1982.8, 16-27.

⁷⁴ i.e. husband and wife probably following his execution.

Long ago she ceased to apply makeup, a solitary phoenix in the mirror,
Her hair still sporting the five phoenix head-dress.
Meeting in the underworld, there will surely be questions,
Her husband, indeed, knows it is difficult to raise an orphan alone.⁷⁵

The fact that she is still depicted wearing her 'five phoenix head-dress' suggests the importance of the item in maintaining some form of dignity after being widowed. Rejecting the sexuality intimated by the use of make-up, she preserves her status still through the employment of this item of rank.

There were, in fact, two types of phoenix head-dress. The first was that discussed above which was worn by the Empress and consorts of the emperor. The second type referred to a colourful head-dress worn by the wives of officials which had no dragons or phoenixes on it but was decorated with pearls, feathers and flower hairclasps.⁷⁶ Excavations of the Nanjing tomb of the Grand Tutor Xu Fu 徐輔 (1450-1517) have uncovered one such object. The head-dress is decorated with leaves of *lingzhi* 靈芝 and flowers of thin silk, matched with *ruyi* 如意 emblems. On top are coiled several pearls threaded on silver wire and on either side are inserted four pairs of hairpins and hairclasps including a gold phoenix pair. It belonged to his first wife Ms Zhu 朱, a "Lady of the State of Wei" (魏國夫人). She is also buried with a white jade belt comprising twenty pieces with plain surfaces, some rectangular and others peach-shaped. This also corresponds to her rank.⁷⁷

In Chapter 29 of the *Jin Ping Mei* the ladies in the household all have their fortunes told, during the course of which it is predicted that Chunmei will marry a man of rank and wear a pearl head-dress (*zhuguan* 珠冠). Chunmei was wearing a

⁷⁵ "Yumu jie shi 俞母節詩," in *Xu Wenzhang yigao* 徐文長遺稿, by Xu Wei 徐渭, repr. in *Xu Wei ji* 徐渭集, 4 vols., Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983/4, 814.

⁷⁶ Dai Zheng, 1988, 191.

⁷⁷ Nanjingshi wenhua baoguan weiyuanhui 南京市文物保管委員會 and Nanjingshi bowuguan 南京市博物館, "Ming Xu Da wushisun Xu Fu fufu mu 明徐達五世孫徐輔夫婦墓," *Wenwu* 文物 1982.2, 28-32.

silver cloud-chignon fret (銀絲雲冠 *yinsi yunguan*) and Ximen supposes it is because of this that the fortune teller thought she was their daughter,⁷⁸ but he later promises Chunmei such a pearl head-dress should she bear him a son.⁷⁹ Wu Yueniang rubbishes the fortune teller as she does not believe that Chunmei will wear a pearl head-dress or become a lady of rank.⁸⁰ Ironically, her later husband Zhou Xiu 周秀 eventually becomes a Commander General for Shandong and so Chunmei is actually a lady of rank and entitled to wear one.

Although she is never mentioned as wearing a pearl head-dress in the novel, she is eventually depicted as sporting a phoenix head-dress. This occurs in Chapter 97 when Chunmei, now Lady Zhou, goes to meet Chen Jingji's new bride, Ge Cuiping 葛翠屏. She also wears a scarlet *tongxiu* gown bound by a gold-set green jade belt.⁸¹ The fact that she is wearing a phoenix head-dress stands her above the rest of the women in the novel who have gone before her and thus represents the most spectacular rise in power and status. It would be fitting for her to wear this type of outfit to meet a new bride as this would immediately establish the hierarchy in the household.

We have seen how the rise in Chunmei's fortunes has been mirrored in her clothing; however, the most memorable occasion in the novel comes in Chapter 96. This describes the visit by Chunmei to her old household at the invitation of Wu Yueniang. It is the two year anniversary of the death of Ximen Qing and it is Xiaoge's birthday. After an exchange of gifts and a letter couched in terms of respect sent by Yueniang, Chunmei arrives with much pomp and ceremony in an ornate sedan chair accompanied by soldiers and servants:

⁷⁸ *JPMCH*, 29.10b.

⁷⁹ *JPMCH*, 29.11b.

⁸⁰ *JPMCH*, 29.10a.

⁸¹ *JPMCH*, 97.11a.

Her head was covered in pearl and kingfisher feather ornaments, gold phoenix jewellery, hairclasps and combs, *hu* 胡 pearl loop earrings. On top she wore a scarlet *tongxiu* gown decorated with the 'four animals facing the qilin', her skirt was of kingfisher blue woven with the 'hundred flower motif' and decorated with 'ten-pattern brocade', a jade tinkling girdle pendant, bound by a gold belt. On her feet she wore embroidered scarlet shoes with white damask high heels.⁸²

This is a description on which Zhang Zhupo comments that this is "described with the utmost effort," indicating that he feels the author has gone to particular pains to depict this image of Chunmei as a contrast to her former status and perhaps also to the ensuing meagre portrayal of Yueniang.⁸³ She greets Chunmei

fully dressed in the plain white silk of mourning. Her five-arch head-dress was decorated with only a few gold and kingfisher hair ornaments, she wore twin pearl loop earrings and a gold collar ornament. On top she wore a thin white silk robe and below a kingfisher blue satin skirt with gold embroidered train. On her feet she had jade satin high-heeled shoes.⁸⁴

At this time Zhou Xiu occupies the rank of Regional Military Commandant. He has not yet risen to the post of Commander General of Shandong. Thus adorned in many of the aspects of clothing of rank discussed above -- *tongxiu* gown ornamented with the *qilin* pattern (the very same item worn by Yueniang in the visit to the Qiao household), gold belt and expensive phoenix jewellery -- there is a distinct contrast between Chunmei and the more humble Yueniang still in mourning for her husband. The prophecy made back in Chapter 29 has come true. They exchange reverences and Chunmei is treated as an honoured guest as propriety demands.

The late Ming story "Qu Fengnu qingqian sigai 瞿鳳奴情愆死蓋" by Langxian 浪仙 shows many similarities to this episode in *Jin Ping Mei*. The maid Chunlai 春來 appears to be based on Chunmei as she too undergoes a

⁸² JPMCH, 96.1b.

⁸³ DYQS, 96.1592.

⁸⁴ JPMCH, 96.2a.

transformation.⁸⁵ Qu Fengnu's mother, Ms Fang 方氏, like Wu Yueniang, is shocked when Chunlai, her former maid, reappears before her dressed in fine silks which were far more stunning than her previous attire, and accompanied by two maids. She has been promoted from the status of maid to concubine having found favour with the new master of her mistress, Fengnu.⁸⁶ Scholar Xie Zhaozhe had noted this phenomenon of changing status. He was distressed to see former 'slaves' entering into marriages with eminent families, while former masters had to bow their heads to the children of their 'slaves'.⁸⁷ Varying sources articulate concerns over role-reversal. The almost identical outfits worn by Yueniang and Chunmei, Yueniang and Ms Lan, reveals how emulation was perceived.

In Chapter 32 the maids in the Ximen household entertain at a party wearing pearl head-dresses.⁸⁸ The party is to celebrate Ximen Qing's recent promotion to assistant magistrate and is attended by district officials. These are obviously not the type of head-dress referred to above but perhaps are elaborate hair ornaments decorated with pearls. The fact that they appear to be wearing headwear similar to ladies of rank would enhance the standing of Ximen in the eyes of the other officers. According to Ming popular adage, it was a sign of wealth and standing if serving girls appeared in precious hairclasp and silk clothing.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Patrick D. Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story*, Camb. Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981, 125.

⁸⁶ *Shi diantou* 石點頭, by Tianran chisou 天然痴叟 (Lang Xian 浪仙), repr. Shanghai: Guji, 1985, 4.113.

⁸⁷ WZZ, 14.31b-32a; "Wuping lingguai lu 武平靈怪錄," in *Jiandeng yuhua*, 3.206. (Depicts story of Xiang Zijian 項子堅 of Wuping in the Hongwu period who wished to make his family more illustrious).

⁸⁸ *JPMCH*, 32.5b.

⁸⁹ *Zazuan sanxu*, 116.

Illustration 10: Painting on silk by Qiu Ying



Later in the novel, Chunmei demands that new clothes be created for the maids for the Qiao visit. Ximen suggests a set of satin clothes and a brocaded sleeveless overdress. Never satisfied, Chunmei does not wish to be compared to the other girls and asks for a white damask skirt to set off a scarlet brocaded sleeveless overdress.⁹⁰ Contemporary observers such as Tian Yiheng 田藝衡 (1524-74?)⁹¹ and Ye Mengzhu reported that even servant girls wore fine *qi* silks and tussore silks and singing girls considered brocade and embroidered clothing mediocre.⁹² This is suggested in illustration 10 from the Ming which shows two serving girls dressed in ornate clothing as they serve on the scholars-officials around the table. Gu Qiyuan lamented that nuns were not immune to temptation. Instead of performing sacrifices and worship, they busied themselves with fancy clothing and fornication.⁹³

In theory, commoner women were only permitted to wear thin silk cloth, and

⁹⁰ *JPMCH*, 41.1b-2a.

⁹¹ *DMB*, 1287-1288.

⁹² “Fuyi 婦衣,” in *Liuging rizha*, 20.9b; “Neizhuang,” in *Yueshi bian*, 8.181.

⁹³ “Ni’an 尼庵,” in *KZZY*, 2.68.

not damasks, brocades, *qi* silks or embroidery. These had to be in light colours such as blue, lilac, peach, and not dark colours such as dark blue, green and scarlet. As for jewellery, only silver and gilt-silver were allowed.⁹⁴ The late Ming scholar Xu Xian lamented that women of the commoner class were also wearing the style of pearl head-dress and decorated gown which were the apparel of wives of officials.⁹⁵ He relates the course of these changes:

At the start of the dynasty, women of the commoner class, on occasions of marriage and banquets, all wore enveloping robes as a form of ceremonial wear. Some were of tussore, others of raw silk, and all with an embroidered collar which hung down as a *xiapei*. I got to see this when I was young. No-one would dare to wear them unless they were from an official family which had been the recipient of favours from the Emperor. Nowadays, when a marriage takes place in the household of a scholar they wear pearl head-dresses, gowns and belts in order to make the event magnificent. Rich country folk borrow yellow parasols to shade their women. Chaotic excess to this extent is really laughable. Without the strict restrictions of the authorities, how can this be curbed? ⁹⁶

Zhang Han, too, laments the lack of attention paid to sumptuary restrictions by the women of his time. For example:

The pearl and kingfisher head-dress, and dragon and phoenix dress and ornamentation can only be worn by Empresses and Principal Consorts. The ceremonial dress of the wives of officials of the fourth rank and above used gold ornaments, whereas those of the fifth grade and below used gilt silver ornaments. The wide sleeved robes of the fifth rank and above should be made of *zhu* silks, damasks and tussore, whereas that of the sixth grade and below should be made of damasks, tussore, satins, and thin silks, all had their limits. Nowadays, men wear brocade and fine silks and women decorate themselves with gold and pearls, it is boundless extravagance which disregards the prohibitions of the state.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ *Ming shi*, 67.1650.

⁹⁵ *Xiyuan zaji*, 1.80. See also "Fengsu zhi," in *Hangzhoufu zhi*, 19.8b.

⁹⁶ *Xiyuan zaji*, 1.81-82.

⁹⁷ *SCMY*, 5.123. See also *SCMY*, 4.69.

It is well known that Confucian officials such as these would have had an agenda in writing such reports, usually as a form of remonstrance or as a show of public indignation. However, that these sorts of observations tend to be found in their unofficial writings and jottings, which would have had a more limited circulation, would suggest that occurrences such as the above were perceived to have been taking place. Zhang himself has been praised for his keen observation and descriptive abilities in his historical commentaries.⁹⁸ However, Xu Xian highlights a major concern of those writing such reports about the arrogation of dress and ornamentation -- the fact that the authorities were not doing enough to prevent it.

Another important aspect to this is voiced by contemporary Ye Mengzhu who drew attention to the distinct problem female usurpation of illegal dress posed to officials. If men were to exceed the regulations in public, then the legal authorities would have no problem in preventing it. With women, however, who carried out such activities within the inner quarters, there was no possibility for correction as the laws could not reach them there.⁹⁹

It is clear that the female characters in the *Jin Ping Mei* do not consider themselves extravagant in their dress and ornamentation. With regard to the principal wife and concubines there is no discussion in the dialogue or comment from the narrator/author. On the contrary, it appears as if such standards were the norm. Comments made by Jinlian and even Chunmei which suggest they would be laughed at should they not be “properly attired” indicate acceptance of this state of affairs or ignorance of their extravagance as perceived by Confucian officials.¹⁰⁰

The contemporary example of Ms Zhou “Lady of Nurture” 周孺人, the wife of Yu Jifu 俞輯甫, suggests that this ‘ignorance’ may have existed. She came from

⁹⁸ DMB, 74.

⁹⁹ “Neizhuang,” in *Yueshibian*, 8.178.

¹⁰⁰ JPMCH, 40.8a-b and 41.1b.

an eminent family being the daughter of, Kang Fengming 康鳳鳴, Left Assistant Minister at the Court of the Judicial Review, and Ms Gu “Lady of Suitability” 顧宜人.¹⁰¹ She was so talented her father is reported to have said that he would be satisfied if he were to bear a son like her. It is said that when young she secretly desired the brocades and fine silks bought to the house by merchants. However, her father knew of her feelings and said to her mother: “If our son-in-law is poor, our daughter will have to wear hairpins of thorn and skirts of linen. She will have no use for such things as these.” On hearing this, she was so ashamed that from then on she refused to wear anything which was colourful or attractive.¹⁰²

Ye Mengzhu, too, highlights the lack of awareness of frugal attitudes among gentry women in the late Ming:

Those who acquired [such clothing] did not consider themselves extravagant but splendid, and those who could not were not satisfied but shamed by the lack of it.¹⁰³

If the educated daughters of the upper classes were unaware of their perceived extravagance then what more could be expected of the unenlightened women of the lower classes as portrayed in the *Jin Ping Mei*? The Zheng family instructions warned of the extent to which people valued clothing in this period as it remonstrated with commoners who would often drown daughters for fear that no-one would want to marry a poor girl dressed in “hairpins of thorn and skirts of linen.”¹⁰⁴

The *Qingbai leichao* 清稗類鈔 states that in the Ming women of the commoner classes had begun to wear the clothes of the ninth rank for their wedding celebrations. Due to competition this usage had spread to the extent that it had become commonplace and would not be investigated. In fact, it became the

¹⁰¹ Honorary title for ladies of the 5th grade.

¹⁰² “Yu Jifu qi zhuan 俞輯甫妻傳,” *Zhenchuan xiansheng ji*, 27.448.

¹⁰³ “Neizhuang,” in *Yueshi bian*, 8.178.

¹⁰⁴ *Zheng shi guifan*, 25a.

ceremonial wear for the legal wife.¹⁰⁵ Indeed it would have been quite difficult for those at the top to criticise those lower down the social scale, as Luo Yuren pointed out in his memorial to the Wanli throne: “The Emperor truly covets wealth! How then can he admonish the avarice and gluttony of his subjects?”¹⁰⁶

It was the opinion of the later seventeenth-century official Huang Liuhong that it was the duty of every high government official and political leader to set an example to the populace and exhort them to frugality:

Ordinary people should not wear silk, satin, damask, or brocade; clothing decorated with patterns of exotic animals is suitable only for princely families. Commoner’s wives should not wear jewelry made of gold, precious stones, pearls or jade with ornate designs.¹⁰⁷

In attempting to do just this, contemporary observers composed biographies of more notable women in society, women who epitomised both nobility and frugality. A prominent example can be found in the *Guifan* biography of the virtuous Empress Ma 馬后 composed by Lü Kun. The empress of the first emperor of the Ming, she was renowned for her frugality and lack of nepotism:

I am the mother of the Son of Heaven. I wear coarse unrefined silks and do not eat rich foods. Those about me only wear basic cloth and there are none who adorn themselves with fragrant ornamentation. I wish to set an example to those below me.¹⁰⁸

Lü Kun so impressed by this rare show of frugality in the palace that he placed it at the head of his section entitled “The Womanly Way” (*Furen zhi dao* 婦人之道). Contemporary to this account is an anecdote about Ms Yuan, a “Dame of Nurture” 袁孺人, which praises her on the occasion of her sixtieth birthday. Unlike the other

¹⁰⁵ *Qingbai leichao*, 13.6198.

¹⁰⁶ *Wanli dichao*, 471.

¹⁰⁷ Huang Liuhong, 1984, 547.

¹⁰⁸ “Mingde Ma hou 明德馬后, in *Guifan*, 3.5a-7a; “Houfei yi 后妃一,” in *Ming shi*, 113.3505-3508.

honoured ladies of high rank who dressed in pearl-strewn head-dresses and fancy silks, she alone wore plain, coarse clothing.¹⁰⁹

A factor which may have perpetuated and stimulated the rise of opulent clothing customs is identified by the scholar of Western fashion, Gilles Lipovetsky:

With fashion, human beings begin observing each other endlessly, appreciating each other's looks, evaluating nuances of cut, color, and pattern in dress. As an apparatus for generating aesthetic and social judgement, fashion has favored the critical gaze of the worldly-wise; it has stimulated more or less agreeable judgements of the elegance of others. Whatever the scope of the mimetic trends that subtend it, fashion has served as an agent for the autonomizing of taste. Yet fashion has not been merely a stage for the appreciation of the spectacle provided by others; it has also unleashed an investment of self, an unprecedented aesthetic self-observation. Fashion goes hand in glove with the pleasure of seeing, but also with the pleasure of being seen, of exhibiting oneself to the gaze of others.¹¹⁰

Chinese scholarship has identified a similar argument. Literary critics Sun and Zhan contend that the reason Ximen Qing generously gives women things such as clothing and ornaments is because he is able to show off his possessions, thus making his possession perceptible, making him able to perceive the significance of his accumulated wealth. Because of this, "being seen" (*bei kan* 被看) is very important to him.¹¹¹ Ximen Qing derives pleasure from exhibiting his beautifully-dressed women to his friends and acquaintances just as his wife and concubines derive pleasure and satisfaction from wearing expensive clothes of rank on social occasions.

Lü Kun identified this phenomenon at the time suggesting that there was no one to lead women down the path to economy and frugality as it was their menfolk (those who were supposed to do the leading) who acquiesced to their every whim,

¹⁰⁹ "Shou Li mu Yuan ruren liushi xu 壽李母袁孀人六十叙," in *Wanxiangtang*, 16.286.

¹¹⁰ Lipovetsky, 1994, 29.

¹¹¹ Sun and Zhan, 1989, 40-41.

taking much delight from the results.¹¹² In the wider society it was the officials who came in for indirect criticism.

Veneration of Ancestral Status

When arranging the burial clothes of Ping'er following her untimely demise at the hands of Jinlian, Yueniang orders that Ping'er be dressed in her 'recently-tailored scarlet brocade satin robe:' this perhaps refers to the gown tailored for the Qiao visit in Chapter 40 which would be decorated with the golden pheasant symbol of status.¹¹³ To be buried along with symbols of status was not unusual. Ms Xiong from De'an was buried with clothing of rank tailored from satin which was the colour of old bronze emblazoned with paradise flycatchers (煉鵲 *lianque*) on badges on the chest and back. She was the grand-daughter of the *jinshi* Xiong Yuan 熊淵 and the wife of Gui Deguang 桂德光. There are no records indicating his status but it is clear from the representation of the unclassed paradise flycatcher, that it may have been of some minor official. Although the status of Ms Xiong was not high, the presence in the tomb of a few gold and silver items of jewellery and several silk items, albeit lower quality silk gauzes, indicates some wealth. The majority of her burial clothes, on the other hand, are very plain and simple, made from cotton and hemp in basic colours.¹¹⁴ In a recent article Linda Wrigglesworth uses the phrase "dressed to death," to emphasise the relevance of clothing to every aspect of the lives of women in the Qing, to the extent that they were buried in their most formal clothes.¹¹⁵

Not only is Li Ping'er buried in a stately manner, adorned in symbols of rank, she is also immortalised in a portrait commissioned by Ximen Qing. She is depicted

¹¹² "Han shi jiafa 韓氏家法," in *Guifan*, 3.87b.

¹¹³ *JPMCH*, 62.20a.

¹¹⁴ De'anxian bowuguan, 1994, 32-36.

¹¹⁵ Linda Wrigglesworth, "Dressed to Death," *Antiques Bulletin* 520 (1993), 38-39.

as wearing a crow black kerchief on her head with a head-dress made of pearls and kingfisher feathers, which encloses the hair and is ornamented by a pair of phoenix holding strings of pearls in their beaks on either side of her head. She wears a scarlet variegated brocade *tongxiu* gown and skirt decorated with the 'one hundred flowers' motif.¹¹⁶ Li Ping'er is still making her presence known in the form of the portrait as late as Chapter 78 when Mother Pan is led in to view her painting.¹¹⁷ The features which originally depicted her rank are not mentioned, yet the image of Ping'er in her formal wear perpetuates her former influence in the Ximen household.

Memorial portraits such as that created of Li Ping'er were invariably painted after the death of the subject, and were intended to be hung in the family temple or altar room at important anniversaries. They were painted by artisans who had notebooks of conventionalised features, from which the relatives of the deceased picked out those most fitting. They were considered as objects for ritual use and, as such, the face was generally not a particularly important part of the portrait.¹¹⁸ Portraiture in traditional China was intimately linked with the projection of official and social status through public rituals of commemoration, as Camman states:

What the descendants were concerned with was not the personal appearance of their ancestor, but his position in the social system. For this reason, the badges of rank received greater attention and were usually painted with meticulous detail.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ This description has been compiled from the three separate descriptions of the portrait. See *JPMCH*, 63.2b, 63.4a and 63.7b.

¹¹⁷ *JPMCH*, 78.20b.

¹¹⁸ Camman, 1944-5, 123-7. The Song Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xu railed against portraiture for women who had just died, especially when the painter copied their physical likeness from first-hand experience, as a "gross violation of ritual!" That the portrait was embellished with particular items of clothing compounded the indecency. See Ebrey, 1991b, 78.

¹¹⁹ Camman, 1944-5, 123-4; Vinograd, 1992, 13. See also Richard Vinograd, *Boundaries of the Self: Chinese portraits, 1600-1900*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 13; Huang Miaozi 黃苗子, "Cong chuanshen xiaogao shuoqi 從傳神小稿說起," *Zhongguo meishu* 中國美術 9 (1984), 63.

It appears as if the aim of portraiture was to *chuanshen* 傳神 or ‘transmit the spirit’ of the subject in order to create an ancestral presence.¹²⁰ However, modern scholar Shan Guoqiang 單國強 notes that both appearance and spirit may have been equally important (*xingshen jianbei* 形神兼備).¹²¹ The aim of the late Ming portrait by Qian Gu 錢穀 (1508-1578)¹²² of concubine Dong 董姬 as stated on the accompanying

calligraphy, is to portray a ‘true appearance’ 真容 *zhenrong* [See illustration 11]. The purpose of Li Ping’er’s portrait appears to be for more than just ceremonial purposes. More attention is paid to her facial features and the painting is sent to the other ladies first for approval and suggested changes before its completion. However, this behaviour in the novel appears to be in line with the new mood of individualism emergent in the late Ming as typified by Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472-1529)¹²³ and his student Wang Gen.¹²⁴ This

Illustration 11: “Dong ji xiang 董姬像” by Qian Gu, on paper.



¹²⁰ Vinograd, 1992, 10-11.

¹²¹ Shan Guoqiang 單國強, “Shilun gudai xiaoxianghua xingzhi 試論古代肖像畫性質,” *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 故宮博物院院刊 1988.4, 50.

¹²² *DMB*, 236-237.

¹²³ *DMB*, 1408-1416.

¹²⁴ de Bary, 1970, 145-247.

tendency was perhaps most exemplified by the ‘arch-individualist’ Li Zhi who believed that people should be permitted to satisfy their desires. In this way they could find their own place in the world. He states: “To wear clothing and to eat food - these are the principles of human relations.”¹²⁵ His radical views were almost certainly shaped by his upbringing; his ancestors were Chinese Muslims and merchants.

However, even members of the Wang Yangming School condemned his moral spontaneity. Zou Shan 鄒善 (*jinsi* 1566) explained that according to Li: “wine, sex, money, and wrath do not block the road to Buddhahood. With such advantageous methods who would not want to follow him?”¹²⁶ Although Zou Shan is intentionally exaggerating Li’s philosophy, his comments tie into the theme of the four vices dominant in the *Jin Ping Mei*. Confucian moralists were concerned that people *were* following their own paths, creating their own ways of doing things. Their anxiety was most apparent when the participants in these trends came from unorthodox backgrounds such as Li’s.

In the Tang Xianzu play *Mudan ting* a portrait serves the purpose of uniting Du Liniang and her lover, and is an image of her dream self as opposed to her true reflection.¹²⁷ The predominant theme of the play is the exaltation of *qing* 情 “love/emotion/romanticism” which virtually became a cult in the late sixteenth- early seventeenth centuries.¹²⁸ The three ‘wives’ of Wu Wushan 吳吳山 (1647- still living 1704) all annotated the play which immediately gained cult status among women

¹²⁵ “Da Deng Shiyang 答鄧石陽,” in *Fen shu*, 1.4; de Bary, 1970, 188-222.

¹²⁶ “Yingquan xiansheng 穎泉先生,” in *Ming ruxue an* 明儒學案 (1676), by Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲, edn. *Sibu beiyao* 四部備要, repr. Taipei: Zhonghua, 1970, 16.10b.

¹²⁷ Vinograd, 1992, 16-17.

¹²⁸ Tang Xianzu, *The Peony Pavilion*, Cyril Birch tr., Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980, ix; *Qing shi* 情史, by Feng Menglong 馮夢龍, repr. Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1986.

after its publication in 1598.¹²⁹ These women were his fiancée Chen Tong 陳同 who died before marriage, his first wife Tan Ze 談則 (d.1674) who was inspired by Chen's copy but died young too, and the second wife Qian Yi 錢宜 (1671-?) who even offered to sell her jewellery to pay for the publication of her commentary and those of her predecessors.¹³⁰

Li Ping'er and Ximen Qing, too, are reunited in dreams which suggests that portraits in fiction were perceived to have a more personal role than the more staid ancestral portraiture of the time. Her portrait embodies Ximen's attachment to her and is, therefore, reminiscent of the mood of *qing* and of individualism. However, these actions take on a satirical nature when other aspects of their behaviour is examined.

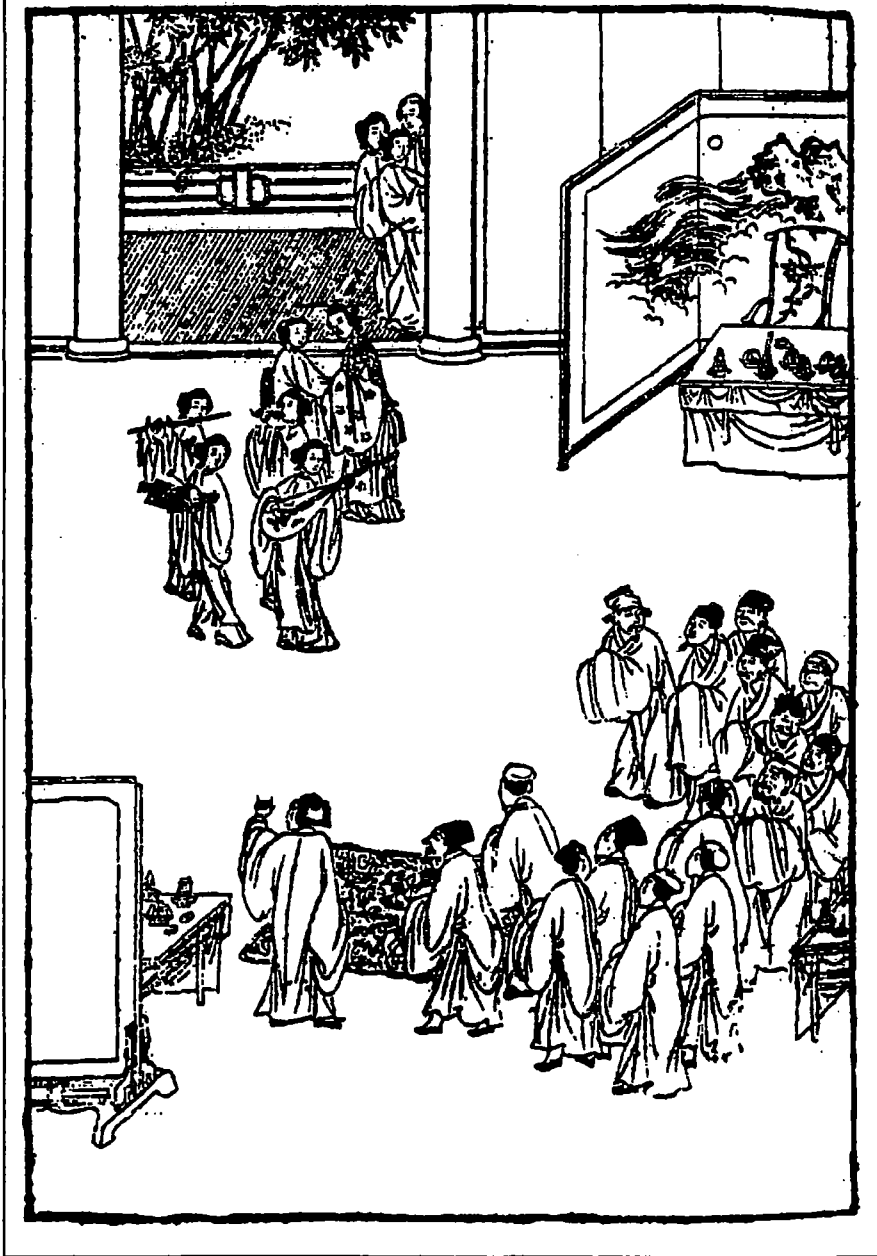
Even before her exposure in the portrait, it is Li Ping'er who is the least secluded of all Ximen Qing's wives. From her entrance into the household even to after her death she is treated as an object on show for admiration. In Chapter 20, shortly after her entrance into the household, Li Ping'er is presented to Ximen Qing's cronies (Illustration 12).¹³¹ She wears a scarlet variegated *tongxiu* gauze gown and green jade belt (碧玉 *biyu*). The jade belt is obviously contravening regulations as Ping'er is merely the sixth ranking concubine of a merchant; however, within the narrative of the novel it perhaps plays an important role of displaying the wealth and power of Ximen Qing. He has gathered his cronies together and is showing off his newly acquired woman, who just happens to be the wife of their ex-brother Hua Zixu 花子虛. The fact that she is ornamented and wearing symbols of rank would be

¹²⁹ Judith T. Zeitlin, "Shared Dreams: The Story of the Three Wives' Commentary on *The Peony Pavilion*," *HJAS* 54.1 (1994), 127-179; 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.

¹³⁰ Mao Xiaotong 毛校同, *Tang Xianzu yanjiu ziliao huibian* 湯顯祖研究資料匯編, 2 vols., Shanghai: Guji, 1986, 891-892.

¹³¹ *JPMCH*, 20.10a.

Illustration 12: Woodcut from Chapter 20 of the *Jin Ping Mei*



impressive to the gathered men who fawn over her and Ximen himself.

Anthropologist Victoria Ebin notes the tendency for many societies to concentrate wealth in the decoration of the woman particularly during the wedding ceremony:

dressed in gold and precious stones she advertises her charms and adds to them, offering herself as a prize or toy, and representing in her person those two

prime bases of power, sex and wealth. She is seen as the medium through which the struggle for power is acted out.¹³²

Although this appears to resemble the behaviour in the above instance, a Confucian would certainly find difficulty in accepting the parading of a wife, or even concubine for that matter. The early Qing magistrate and Confucian, Huang Liuhong, found this type of behaviour most alarming:

The most despicable behavior is that of a husband who takes pride in displaying the beauty of his wife in public and permits her to flirt with others without taking offence. This kind of behavior is no different from that of a prostitute whose husband assumes the role of pimp. If this trend is not resolutely suppressed, there will be no limit upon its harm to the morals of society.¹³³

Similar sentiments from the late Ming are echoed in the tale from the *Qing shi* 情史 collection “Hejian fu 河間婦.” The female protagonist states: “To boast of one’s carriage and clothing, to show off one’s ornaments, to go out to feasts, pleasure seeking and sight-seeing in a rowdy group, these are all improper activities for a woman.”¹³⁴

Confucian readers of the *Jin Ping Mei* would have been amused at the vulgarity of the behaviour of Ximen Qing in displaying his concubine as a prize object, highlighting anxieties over the increasing visibility of women. Other perceptions also emerge from the text which cast an interesting light on how women may have been perceived. The other ladies of the household, Wu Yueniang in particular, are intensely jealous of the attention she is receiving.¹³⁵ This again reveals concerns that women were desirous of attention and unaware of the dignity and

¹³² Ebin, 1979, 74.

¹³³ Huang Liuhong, 1984, 608-609.

¹³⁴ “Hejian fu 河間婦,” in “Qinghui 情穢,” in *Qing shi*, 587.

¹³⁵ *JPMCH*, 20.10b

propriety Confucians attached to seclusion.

Palace goods and exotic commodities

Chapter 14 sees Li Ping'er visiting the ladies on the occasion of Pan Jinlian's birthday. Jinlian goes to change outfits and returns with a gold *shou* character 壽字 'longevity' hairpin Ximen has given her highly visible at the front of her hair. The pin was originally given to Ximen by Li Ping'er who uses the pin to buy Jinlian's silence over their secret trysts:

Taking them in her hand, Jinlian saw that they were two gold open-work hairpins in the shape of the character for long life on a passionflower mount inset with azurite. Due to their extreme intricacy, you could tell that they must have been manufactured for imperial use and had come from the palace. Jinlian was absolutely delighted.¹³⁶

Illustration 13: Gold phoenix hairpins



Yueniang remarks on the pin and Ping'er explains to the ladies that they were brought out of the palace by her late father-in-law the old Eunuch and that the design cannot be found outside the palace.¹³⁷ Yueniang suggests that they too would like to have some made and Ping'er offers to send a pair over for each of them and belittles their value and rarity as a modest gesture. Zhang Zhupo asserts here that Yueniang covets Ping'er's wealth.¹³⁸ Yueniang obviously

¹³⁶ *JPMCH*, 13.11a.

¹³⁷ *JPMCH*, 14.11b.

¹³⁸ *DYQS*, 14.229.

realises the rarity of the design of the pins. The fact that they have been sneaked out of the palace indicates that only those on the inside would have been privileged enough to wear them and therefore desires to possess similar pins. No wonder Jinlian was so delighted to be presented with them. Illustration 13 depicting a pair of gold hairpins excavated from the tomb of Prince Zhu Youbin 朱祐檣 and made in the palace workshops demonstrates the exquisite workmanship of such palace ornaments.¹³⁹

Some of the silver vessels found in the tomb of Li Wei and Ms Wang are inscribed with “Cining Palace” (*Cining gong* 慈寧宮) and “Made for imperial use in the 10th year of Wanli” (*Wanli renwu nian yuyong jianzao* 萬曆壬午年御用監造). The Cining Palace was the home of Empress Dowager Li 李太后, the mother of the Wanli emperor, and the daughter of Li Wei. Many of the items found with Ms Wang were produced in the palace and include a selection of hairpins, two of which are fashioned from a turquoise jade and gold to form the character for longevity and inset with rubies and sapphires.¹⁴⁰

Goods such as these which were smuggled out of the palace were another indicator of rank, not in the official sense, but in the sense of social envy. The fact that one was able to obtain such items demonstrated powerful connections related to the court. This is demonstrated in Chapter 43 of the *Jin Ping Mei* when Madam Qiao the Fifth wears a scarlet palace-embroidered gown on her visit to confirm the betrothal of Guan’ge.¹⁴¹ The present Precious Consort (貴妃 *guifei*, highest ranking imperial consort) of the Eastern Palace is a niece whom she looked after when she became orphaned, and therefore, it is conceivable that she is the recipient of such

¹³⁹ Jiangxisheng bowuguan 江西省博物館, “Jiangxi Nancheng Ming Yiwang Zhu Youbin mu fajue baogao 江西南城明益王朱祐發掘報告,” *Wenwu* 1973.3, 36.

¹⁴⁰ Zhang Xiande et al., 1969, 54-58.

¹⁴¹ The original text reads 大孔 *dakong* which I have taken as an error for 大紅 *dahong*. *JPMCH*, 43.11b.

restricted palace items.¹⁴² Contemporary readers would have recognised this phenomenon.

Other occurrences of palace goods can be found in Chapter 69 when Lady Lin wears a scarlet wide-panelled skirt of palace brocade to greet Ximen Qing on their first encounter,¹⁴³ and towards the end of the novel when Meng Yulou is given two gowns of scarlet palace brocade as part of the betrothal presents to Li Gongbi.¹⁴⁴ These types of objects were highly regarded due to their fine workmanship and perhaps jealously guarded as a consequence. Therefore, goods from the palace rarely find their way down to the lower levels of society in the novel. However, this phenomenon in which the source of fashion change was the palace or capital had already been captured by Bai Juyi in the Tang:

Fashionable attire, fashionable attire,
Spreads from the capital across the whole empire.¹⁴⁵

Lu Rong from the late Ming also considered the palace a source of envy and emulation by the people in the capital.¹⁴⁶

Due to her past connections with the palace as the concubine of Palace Secretary Liang 梁中書 and wife of the nephew of Eunuch Hua 花太監, Li Ping'er's possessions are replete with restricted items, such as *mang* 蟒 'four-clawed dragon' robes, jade belts, hat buttons, chatelaines, bracelets, armlets, valuable jewels and objets d'art.¹⁴⁷ The most significant of these are the *mang* robes which were considered extremely valuable items of clothing in the Ming as they could only

¹⁴² *JPMCH*, 43.12a-b. Roy identifies her as Consort Zheng 鄭 (1081-1132) of the Emperor Huizong. Roy, 1993, liv.

¹⁴³ *JPMCH*, 69.6a.

¹⁴⁴ *JPMCH*, 91.8b.

¹⁴⁵ "Shishizhuang 時世妝," in *Bai Juyi ji* 白居易集, by Bai Juyi 白居易, repr. 4 vols., Beijing: Zhonghua, 1979, 4.82.

¹⁴⁶ *Shuyuan zaji*, 2.8a.

¹⁴⁷ *JPMCH*, 14.3b.

be worn if presented by special appointment. Gifts to the mother of Zhang Juzheng from the palace included a head ornament set in the form of the 'flower of everlasting spring' made of gold filigree inset with sapphires, rubies and pearls, a bolt of red *zhu mang* robe silk, one of dark blue *zhu* silk, one of red tussore and one of dark blue tussore, a *mang* robe with red sleeves, an outfit decorated with embroidered panels, a *mang* robe in dark blue *zhu* silk and a green skirt of patterned *zhu* silk.¹⁴⁸

Although no particular comment is made on the fact that Li Ping'er possesses these items, through the voice of Ying Bojue we hear astonishment and concern as Ximen Qing appears clothed in a *mang* robe which was a gift from his host, Eunuch He 何, in the capital.¹⁴⁹ From the mid-fifteenth century, such *mang* robes were regularly given to eunuchs, high officials and courtiers in recognition of their achievements.¹⁵⁰ Zhang Juzheng himself was a frequent recipient of gifts of *mang* robes from the palace; both the Longqing and Wanli Emperors presented him with such items.¹⁵¹ The scholar Xu Lin 徐霖 (1462-1538) was presented with a *mang* robe emblazoned with a *douniu* by Emperor Wuzong 武宗 having become a favourite of his. This is quite ironic as he had turned to literary pursuits following failure to pass the higher examinations, proclaiming that a true scholar did not require an official garment to achieve respect.¹⁵² By the mid-sixteenth century many officials had begun to wear *mang* robes on their own authority to the extent that in 1537 the Jiajing Emperor felt it necessary to issue a further decree against the practice.¹⁵³ According the Shuyler Cammann, this law did not curb the desire to wear dragon

¹⁴⁸ "Xieci mu shoushi dengwu shu 謝賜母首飾等物疏," repr. in *Zhang Juzheng ji* 張居正集, Zhang Shunhui 張舜徽, ed., Hubei: Xinhua, 1987, 8.367.

¹⁴⁹ *JPMCH*, 73.5b.

¹⁵⁰ "Peichen feiyufu 陪臣飛魚服," in *WLYHB*, buyi 補遺.2189.

¹⁵¹ *Ming shi*, 213.5644 and 5649.

¹⁵² "Xu Ziren chongxing 徐子仁寵幸," in *JALRMB*, 4.133; *DMB*, 591-593.

¹⁵³ *Mingshi*, 67.1640.

robes: "It merely caused them to make greater effort to get those robes conferred on them."¹⁵⁴

The unchecked circulation of goods to the lower classes was, in fact, the faux pas of the *upper* classes; the concern shown by Confucian officials over this arrogation of dress should be thought of as a reaction to their own perceived failure to execute sumptuary regulation to the letter. If luxury goods were supplied from the top down, as they should have been in theory, then wealth alone could not have bought these desired objects. However, in the changing environment of the sixteenth-century wealthy merchant households were able to purchase such goods because of failures in regulating production and distribution.

In the *Jin Ping Mei* we are told that Li Ping'er has a hundred Western Ocean pearls in her possession which she has appropriated from the house of Palace Secretary Liang.¹⁵⁵ The female protagonist in a tale from the Feng Menglong collection also possesses a string of one hundred Western pearls.¹⁵⁶ Items such as these pearls were finding their way into China via merchant activity. Border trade with countries such as Burma and sea trade handled through ports such as Guangzhou all expanded during the Ming, bringing in precious and exotic commodities.¹⁵⁷ Among Li Ping'er's other possessions are more examples of imported products - aloewood, white wax, quicksilver and pepper.¹⁵⁸

Ming readers of the *Jin Ping Mei* would have recognised that it would not have been impossible that a woman such as Li Ping'er with her palace connections could have come to possess such items. In his reminiscences, the late Ming scholar Mao Xiang writes that he had been sent "a *duan* (端 '18 ft') of occidental cotton (西

¹⁵⁴ Cammann, 1952, 18.

¹⁵⁵ *JPMCH*, 20.4a.

¹⁵⁶ "Xiao furen jinqian zeng nianshao 小夫人金钱赠年少," in *JSTY*, 16.236.

¹⁵⁷ *SCMY*, 4.72 and 4.76; *Changshuxian zhi*, 4.11a.

¹⁵⁸ *JPMCH*, 16.3a.

洋布 *xiyangbu*) as thin as the wing of a cicada and as clean as snow. This was made into a light top [for his concubine Dong Xiaowan] with a pink lining no less beautiful than the rainbow skirt of Zhang Lihua 張麗華 of the Cassia Palace.”¹⁵⁹ Such occidental cotton would have been highly prized in the Ming. According to Wang Shizhen, five bolts of such cloth were given as gifts by the Emperor Xuanzong.¹⁶⁰

A further example of the wealth of Li Ping'er is provided when she and Ximen are going through her possessions shortly after her entrance into the household. She shows him a gold filigree chignon fret weighing nine *liang* and, as the other ladies only have two or three inferior silver ones, asks Ximen to make her a gold nine-phoenix pin to hold her chignon in place, with a string of pearls hanging from the beak of each phoenix. She also asks him to have a gold-set jade tiara in the form of “Guanyin in her full glory” just like the one Wu Yueniang wears in front of her coiffure made from whatever is left over.¹⁶¹ This suggests that Li Ping'er is more concerned with maintaining the appropriate hierarchy in the household than any public display of frugality.

This behaviour contrasts with attitudes to opulent costume in the Classics which are exemplified by the actions of the famous beauty Zhuang Jiang 莊姜, daughter of the marquis of Qi 齊. Despite her high rank which permitted her to adorn herself in dazzling clothing, she wore a plain single garment (*jiongyi* 綱衣) over her embroidered robe, intimating a dislike of the elegance of the former.¹⁶² Official and historian He Qiaoyuan 何喬遠 (1558-1632)¹⁶³ records the following tale of a virtuous woman from the Zhengde period which exemplifies the ideal of

¹⁵⁹ *Yingmei'an yiyu*, 7. *

¹⁶⁰ *Fengzhou zhibian*, 159.10b.

¹⁶¹ *JPMCH*, 20.4a-b. Later Jinlian discovers this and asks Ximen to make her a nine-phoenix diadem with the leftover gold. *JPMCH*, 20.5a-b

¹⁶² Legge, 1960c, 94-7.

¹⁶³ *DMB*, 507-109.

female conduct with regard to clothing customs:

Zheng Guixiu 鄧閨秀 from Xin'gan 新淦 was married to Zeng Jingzhao 曾景昭 aged 15 *sui*. She served her parents-in-law well and was congenial like her mother-in-law. But among her sisters-in-law there were those who were rather common. As it was a merchant family they had some money and these women made themselves up and wore fine silks, being used to indolence and extravagance. Guixiu, on the other hand, dressed in cloth and toiled at her weaving without rest. Should someone make fun of her simplicity and self-induced hardship she would reply: "Although cloth is unrefined and commonplace, extravagance makes one seductive; hemp is woman's work, for indolence does not a woman make."¹⁶⁴

Among the merchant women of the *Jin Ping Mei* there are none who resemble the exemplar Guixun. Li Ping'er's understanding of less conspicuous sartorial behaviour still fails to accord with Confucian ideals. Both the novel and such didactic sources reveal Confucian anxieties over the behaviour of merchant women with regard to extravagance. 'Frugality' could have had different meanings to different people.¹⁶⁵ Indeed, the fact that women such as this were held up as exemplars on account of their clothing habits emphasises the perceived need by the ruling class to re-establish control over such aspects of material culture.

If we return to the passage cited at the start of the introduction in which the Ximen ladies attend the birthday party of Li Ping'er in Chapter 15, another aspect of dressing above oneself is revealed. A young man passing by is so struck by their fabulous dress that he remarks: "They must be exquisite concubines of sons of the Imperial family who have come here to view the lanterns; otherwise, how could they be dressed in court costume?"¹⁶⁶ According to another critic, Wang Weidi, certain

¹⁶⁴ *Mingshancang*, 2.12b-13a.

¹⁶⁵ Clunas, 1993, 48-49.

¹⁶⁶ *JPMCH*, 15.4a. Women in the late Ming are described going to see the lantern boats at the Duanwu festival "leaning on balustrades and laughing out loud. See "Qinghuai hefang 秦淮河房," in *TAMY*, 4.30.

clothing and adornment in traditional China would have required a certain standard of behaviour to conform with it.¹⁶⁷ The way the women, Pan Jinlian in particular, openly flirt with the passers-by scarcely conforms to the demeanour expected of the imperial household and is perhaps more reminiscent of the comment by the Song scholar Wang Junyu 王君玉 referring to people dressing above their status but failing to match it with the required manners: "As for village girls making themselves up - it is laughable."¹⁶⁸ This sentiment is echoed in the Ming saying noted by Huang Yunjiao: "As for village men sporting new clothes - it is a vulgar sight."¹⁶⁹

A rather poignant tale from a century or so prior to the composition of the *Jin Ping Mei* may illustrate this further. The epitaph of the wife of the highly honoured Grand Secretary Yang Shiqi 楊士奇 (1365-1444),¹⁷⁰ Ms Yan 嚴 (d. 1425), ascribes all his children to her; however, rumour had it that his third son was actually the son of a maid, Ms Guo 郭. Gossip also had it that Guo paid little attention to her appearance:

When Yang Shiqi worked at the Grand Secretariat, his wife had already passed away. He had just one maid to supervise his towel and comb. One day the imperial palace women invited the wives of the high officials to come to court. When the Empress Dowager heard that Yang had no regular wife, she ordered the courtiers to summon his maid. By the time she arrived all the wives of the officials had left. When the Empress Dowager saw how lowly and ragged the maid was, she ordered the consorts to restyle her hair and dress her in palace-made ornaments and clothing, and sent her off, with the laughing remark: "Master Yang won't recognise her now!" The next day she had the authorities confer a title upon her, as per regulation.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ Wang Weidi, 1991, 113.

¹⁶⁸ *Zazuan xu* 雜纂續, by Wang Junyu 王君玉, in *Zazuan qi zhong* 雜纂七種, by Li Yishan 李義山 et al., repr. Shanghai: Guji, 1988, 73.

¹⁶⁹ *Zazuan sanxu*, 115.

¹⁷⁰ *DMB*, 1535-1538.

¹⁷¹ *Shuyuan zaji*, 5.12a; *Yujian zunwen* 玉劍尊聞, by Liang Weishu 梁維樞 (1587-1662), repr. 2 vols., Shanghai: Guji, 1986, 8.26b.

Despite having a title conferred upon Guo, it was clear to the empress and presumably those around her that it was an amusing diversion to dress up a maid, albeit a favoured one, in the attire of someone far above her current station.

The passages from the *Jin Ping Mei* take a satirical look at the rise of the merchant bourgeoisie. The women are emulating the dress of the upper classes, yet are failing to match it with the ideal appropriate behaviour. Despite the publication of various books for women on ideal conduct, it was perceived that their influence was failing to reach the very people who needed it.

Emulation of the lower classes

In Chapter 96 of the *Jin Ping Mei*, Both Wu Yueniang and Chunmei are described as wearing earrings which, even as late as the Qing, were considered by scholars such as Tian Yiheng and Xu Ke 徐珂 the domain of the lower classes and *not* the upper classes.¹⁷² Although it appears that earrings were indigenous to China, Han Chinese regarded them as a symbol of non-Chineseness and this was particularly so in times of social, political and geographical division; the separation of the élite from the multitude, Confucian from non-Confucian, Han from non-Han.¹⁷³ The painting of a lady carrying a *pipa* lute by the Ming artist Wu Wei 吳偉 (1459-1508) depicts a woman of the lower classes wearing large earrings [Illustration 14].

¹⁷² “Chuan’er 穿耳,” in *Liuqing rizha*, 20.14a; *Qingbai leichao*, 13.6220.

¹⁷³ Tsao, 1997, 80-87.

Illustration 14: “Lady with *Pipa*” by Wu Wei



Although it first appears that the *Jin Ping Mei* is mocking the pretensions of both Wu Yueniang and Chunmei who sport high-class clothing yet retain the common trait of wearing earrings, this may not be the case. Illustration 5, on closer inspection, reveals that the women of the family of the high-ranking Zhou Yong are all wearing earrings. This seems to indicate that women of the upper classes were emulating the customs of women of lower status. The *Tianshui bingshan lu* lists 267 pairs of varying styles of earrings, which again suggests that this item of jewellery

was as common, if not more so, among the upper classes.¹⁷⁴

Another custom which seems to have moved from the lower classes to the upper classes was the use of the *sashan* 撒扇 ‘spread fan.’ Previously the domain of the prostitutes, this fan was seen to be used by women from ‘good families’ and this was indicative of declining morals according to the late Ming scholar Lu Rong 陸容. They should have been using the *tuanshan* 團扇 ‘circular fan,’ popular among the ladies of the Jiangnan region.¹⁷⁵ This is the type of fan used by Pan Jinlian in the *Jin Ping Mei*.¹⁷⁶

The author of the novel may be satirising the merchant classes for their usurpation of such symbols of gentility; however, it seems more likely that the novel reveals perceptions of the general blending of fashions from the varying social classes. Indeed, contemporary scholars such as Tao Shiling 陶大齡 were lamenting the fact that “common customs” (*su* 俗) had become fashionable among them.¹⁷⁷ Others such as Yuan Hongdao, on the other hand, were convinced that they should not regard themselves as superior to them but be “happy to be the same as common people (世俗人).”¹⁷⁸

Summary

If we return to the ordering of Chinese society as described by ancient philosophers, then the picture we obtain from the *Jin Ping Mei* is of a society in chaos. The ‘proper’ order of society is being turned upside-down as the women usurp the costume prescribed for those of higher rank. Throughout the *Jin Ping Mei* sumptuary regulations are transgressed yet there is no mention of legal action at all.

¹⁷⁴ *Tianshui bingshan lu*, 64-66.

¹⁷⁵ *Shuyuan zaji*, 5.2a.

¹⁷⁶ *JPMCH*, 52.17a,

¹⁷⁷ *Xiaochaisang nannan lu* 小柴桑喃喃錄. Cited in Xia Xianchun, 1994, 35.

¹⁷⁸ “Deshan chentan 德山廬譚,” in *Yuan Hongdao ji jianjiao*, 44.1299.

The number of contemporary accounts of people wearing clothing inappropriate to their rank suggests that the laws were widely flouted with impunity.

It is known that cultural values tend to legitimate the social order as the approving consensus that endows expected social conditions with value, stabilises and promotes them.¹⁷⁹ Furthermore, the prevailing values and norms in society are the matrix that forms the social relations among groups and individuals.¹⁸⁰ Sumptuary regulation in China was a state attempt to stamp its authority on material culture, and thereby social behaviour, through the establishment of values and norms. Concern over the flouting of sumptuary laws as expressed in literati-official writings of the late Ming indicated that regulation of material culture was perceived to be slipping from state grasp. The old order attempted to cling to their privileges by citing the regulations which buttressed their position; however, the failure of this ideal meant that in practice an increasingly fluid and mobile society led to a redefining of material culture by other, less-privileged groups in society.

The disintegration of sumptuary regulation meant that the barriers to fashion were also collapsing.¹⁸¹ New groups attempted to emulate aspects of upper class modes of dress and ornamentation, but matched them with values other than Confucian ones. Lower class habits also crept their way up the social ladder, producing conditions which contrasted with traditional assertions of particular items being the domain of particular classes. This was connected to the increased fluidity and contact between the classes: between merchants and officials, between gentry women and prostitutes.

The attention paid by writers to women in this period, as they criticised extravagance in dress and ornamentation and praised economy, suggests that

¹⁷⁹ Weber, 1947, 124-127.

¹⁸⁰ Blau, 1967, 253.

¹⁸¹ Lipovetsky, 1994, 18-19.

anxieties over the increased visibility of women ran deeper than mere concern at physical boundary-crossing in the emergence from the inner quarters. A perceived female influence in other areas previously off-limits to those who were to concern themselves solely with matters of the household reveals itself. Their influence was causing great waves not only in the literary world, but also in the area of material culture where female sartorial choices were escaping the bounds of Confucian control. From the *Jin Ping Mei* in particular we see how women were perceived to be corrupted by wealth when they lacked both the education and culture to moderate their behaviour when presented with the opportunities material wealth provides.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE POWER OF MOURNING RITUAL

Following the death of Li Ping'er, in Chapter 62 of the *Jin Ping Mei* we are told that Yueniang and the other concubines all wear the chignon for mourning and mourning skirts (actually full outfits) of hemp cloth, their heads bound in a hempen band and waists tied around with hempen cords. Aunt and Uncle Hua are in the straight Daoist gowns of heavy mourning. Other guests are in light mourning.¹ Zhang Zhupo comments that this situation is “laughable,”² and comparable to the rush to make clothes before the lantern festival.³ On that occasion the clothes were specifically designed to display wealth and thus this show of mourning is linked to such a display in the mind of the reader.

What, then, did the ritual donning of such clothing as a sign of mourning mean to women and those who wrote about them in the late sixteenth century? Were rituals the same for one and all, élite and commoner, male and female? This chapter traces the uses and abuses of mourning ritual of the women in the *Jin Ping Mei*. While a principal wife chooses to display her moral superiority and fidelity through coarse dress and abstinence, concubines, maids and prostitutes seek material and social gain through the donning of ritual garments. However, the situation is seen to be reversed when a prostitute aspires to virtuous widowhood, whilst wives cut short their mourning periods. Competition among the women is particularly intense during these transitional points in relationships. Ritual practices evident in the novel are set against historical and literary records of changes in Ming mourning practices and

¹ *JPMCH*, 63.7a.

² *DYQS*, 63.1002.

³ *DYQS*, 62.986.

philosophical thought on their meaning and significance. Notions of the value of social unity enacted through codified display of ritual, female morality and widow chastity are compared and contrasted with the discrepancies and variations of the behaviour of the individuals narrated in the *Jin Ping Mei*.

Social hierarchies and ritual

Initially set down in the Zhou dynasty in the *Yili* 儀禮,⁴ the Chinese mourning system is based on lineage structure. There are five mourning grades or *wufu* 五服 which discriminate the degrees of relationship between agnates with “ego” as a point of reference. The higher the mourning grade the coarser the material used for the garment and the longer the mourning period.⁵

The Five Mourning Grades⁶

Degree	Name		Period
First	<i>zhancui</i>	斬衰	3 years (actually 27 months)
Second	<i>zicui</i>	齊衰	3 years/1 year/9 months/5 months/3 months dependent on the relationship
Third	<i>dagong</i>	大功	1 year
Fourth	<i>xiaogong</i>	小功	5 months
Fifth	<i>sima</i>	總麻	3 months

In the *Jin Ping Mei* we see the deaths of husbands, fathers, mothers,

⁴ John Steele, tr., *The I-Li or Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial*, 2 vols., London: Probsthain & Co., 1917, 2.9-44.

⁵ For a more in-depth discussion relating to kinship and mourning in both traditional and modern China, see Maurice Freedman, *Family and Kinship in Chinese Society*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970; Emily M. Ahern, *The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973; James L. Watson and Evelyn S. Rawski, eds., *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China*, Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 1988; Ebrey, 1991b.

⁶ See “Sangfu zongtu 喪服總圖,” in *Ming lu, tu* 圖.13a.

concubines, and sons. Wives mourning for their husband and concubines for their master would be expected to wear the *zhancui* or ‘unhemmed mourning’ which is the heaviest mourning grade. According to the late Ming *Jiali yijie* 家禮儀節 by Qiu Jun 丘濬 (1420-1495),⁷ a work based on Zhu Xi’s *Jiali*, this clothing consisted of an unhemmed wide-sleeved top in coarse hemp which reached down to the knees and a long skirt which trailed on the ground, an unhemmed veil of slightly finer hemp, a twisted girdle, and hemp shoes. The hair could be decorated with a bamboo hairclasp 5 or 6 *cun* 寸 (Chinese inch) in length, and a hair binder which would be made from a strip of slightly finer cloth, 8 *cun* in length.⁸

A married daughter mourning for her father and a concubine for her parents would wear the *zucui* or ‘hemmed mourning’. This consisted of garments similar to the *zhancui* mourning but the clothing would be hemmed.⁹ An illustration from the *Guifan* “Jinü queqian 季女卻錢” [Illustration 15] shows a mother and daughter in full *zhancui* mourning. The mother is wearing a hair binder, the daughter a head scarf. A concubine, by contrast, would wear the *beizi* 背子 jacket instead of the wide-sleeved top. This would reach to the ground and be made of the most coarse raw cloth.¹⁰ These clothes would have to be worn for the majority of the mourning period and were an outward display for the loss of the deceased member of the family.

⁷ DMB, 249-252.

⁸ “Sangli 喪禮,” in *Jiali yijie* 4.57a-59a. Garment also set out in Ming encyclopaedia. See, for example, “Yifu” in *Sancai tuihui*, 3.15a.

⁹ “Sangli,” in *Jiali yijie*, 4.59b-60a.

¹⁰ “Sangli,” in *Jiali yijie*, 4.58b.

Illustration 15: Woodcut from the *Guifan* tale “Jinü queqian”



Many commentators have argued that the whole Chinese social structure is built upon the basis of this ‘extended family’ organisation.¹¹ The *Li* 禮, ritual works, form the basis for the systematisation of these relationships between the family members, and it has long been recognised that the ideas that structured Chinese kinship organisation were conveyed through family rituals. According to Patricia

¹¹ The mutual relationships are first set down in the *Erya* 爾雅 of first millennium BC. Feng Han-yi, *The Chinese Kinship System*, Camb. Mass.: Havard-Yenching Institute, 1948, 4. See also Maurice Freedman, *The Study of Chinese Society*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979, 242. He asserts that kinship was a form of state control.

Ebrey:

Conceptions of gender inequalities and social hierarchies that were basic to social relations beyond kinship - how to serve and how to be served, the ambiguities of dependence and deference - were also reproduced through the performance of weddings, funerals, and ancestral rites.¹²

Ritual can reinforce and reaffirm social differences and status differences. The way in which participants wear special forms of dress and act in special ways emphasises in an exaggerated way the formal social distinctions among them.¹³

The way in which people performed rites in China varied according to rank. They used differing amounts and qualities of objects and items of dress. For example, in funerary ritual, the size and number of coffins, and the number of burial objects increased with status. The joint tomb of Xu Fu 徐俯 (1450-1517), Duke of Wei 魏國公 and Grand Tutor, and his two wives in Nanjing is one such example. His first wife, Ms Zhu 朱氏, a Lady of the State of Wei 魏國夫人, was buried alongside her husband in full ceremonial dress with phoenix head-dress and jade belt, and many other items of ornament. The second wife Ms Wang 王氏, on the other hand, although also a Lady of the State of Wei, was buried in a side tomb with fewer possessions.¹⁴ The philosopher Xunzi asserted that the sage kings had set up such distinctions to prevent competition. Therefore, distinctions were differentiations that facilitated the smooth functioning of society rather than limitations.¹⁵

John Dardess asserts that *li* “conveyed immediate visibility to the hierarchy of national control.”¹⁶ Chinese rulers such as the Ming Emperor Taizu 太祖 (r. 1368-

¹² Ebrey, 1991a, 4-5.

¹³ Edmund R. Leach, *Culture and Communication: The Logic by which Symbols are Connected*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976, 53-54.

¹⁴ Nanjingshi wenhua baoguan weiyuanhui and Nanjingshi bowuguan, 1982, 28-32.

¹⁵ “Lilun 禮論,” in *Xunzi jianshi* 荀子簡釋, Liang Qixiong 梁啟雄, ann., Beijing: Guji, 1956, 19.253; John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works. Volume 3, Books 17-32*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994, 55.

¹⁶ John W. Dardess, *Confucianism and Autocracy: Professional Elites in the Founding of the Ming*

1398) regarded ritual as a means of controlling and ordering society.¹⁷ Through the performance of ritual people were expected to acknowledge their social and ethical responsibilities. Howard Wechsler comments that as the Confucians served as experts in this field they were able to manipulate it for political ends:

At the same time, in their roles as historians, ritualists, and scriptural exegetes, they served as the guardians of political legitimacy and as some of the most powerful manipulators of its symbols. Since early times in China, legitimacy, ritual, and symbol have, as elsewhere, been inextricably commingled.¹⁸

In theory, mourning ritual was the domain of the Confucian orthodoxy. However, did this imply that the rites were immutable, unchanging in the face of social transformation?

As we have seen, the late sixteenth century was a time of increased commercialism and social mobility. Philosophical discourse attempted to comprehend these changes in society. Some advocated restraint and a return to traditional morality, whilst others accepted that individuals had the right to make their own fate. Ritual practice was very much affected by these factors. Ways of engaging in ritual varied from place to place and from class to class.

Ming changes in mourning practice

In the *Jin Ping Mei* Li Ping'er's elaborate funeral typifies Ximen Qing's attitude to ostentatious behaviour. Not only is she laid to rest in an expensive coffin,¹⁹ but the funeral procession creates a stir in the whole of the town:

There was a great din of carriages and horses and the streets of the town were packed with people. More than one hundred sedan chairs carried the female

Dynasty, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1983, 201.

¹⁷ Dardess, 1983, 196-204. See also Maurice Bloch, *Ritual, History, and Power: Selected Papers in Anthropology*, London: Athlone, 1989, 19-45; Leach, 1976, 524-5.

¹⁸ Wechsler, 1985, 9-10.

¹⁹ *JPMCH*, 62.10a.

relatives of the household and there were several tens of chairs just for procuresses and singsong girls.²⁰

It has to be remembered at this point that this was all for just a concubine who was excluded from the classical mourning grades. Although many scholars dismiss the descriptions in the novel as exaggerated or ironic, there is support for such large-scale events in information from contemporary observers. Zhang Dafu 張大復 noted that over 1200 mourners were present for the funeral of his wife in 1606.²¹

Matteo Ricci reports:

There really is nothing in which these people are more religiously scrupulous than in their devotion to the details of parental funeral rights, in wearing mourning garments (...) and in furnishing a casket or a funeral bier of costly material. In general one would say that their obsequies are *too pompous and frequently surpass their means*.²²

Death ceremonies, as well marriage ceremonies, are reported to have become increasingly elaborate during the sixteenth century. Shen Bang 沈榜 (fl. 1550-1596),²³ a Beijing magistrate, noted in the early 1590s that the cost of Buddhist funerals could run into the thousands of taels.²⁴ Huang Liuhong suggested that funeral and even celebration ceremonies should be moderate and within the family means. He particularly criticised those who failed to aid their parents whilst living, yet performed extravagant ceremonies when they pass away. He also censured those who failed to render acts of charity yet performed lavish religious ceremonies in the hope of being blessed by the gods.²⁵ Lü Kun asserted that conspicuous consumption

²⁰ JPMCH, 65.5a.

²¹ “Jian guce 檢故冊,” in *Meihuacaotang ji*, 14.295.

²² Gallagher, 1953, 72. Emphasis my own.

²³ DMB, 1185-1187.

²⁴ *Wanshu zaji* 宛暑雜記 (1593), by Shen Bang 沈榜, repr. Beijing: Guji, 1980, 194.

²⁵ Huang Liuhong, 1984, 550.

and partying at funerals in an attempt to forget one's sorrow was "an evil crime!"²⁶

Gao Miaoying 高廟瑩, the daughter of Gao Ruofeng 高若鳳, was the epitome of frugality in the early Ming. On reaching 70 she gathered her descendants around her and told them of her impending death:

In death, one is just like a withered old tree-trunk, the body and earthly soul are like they have been abandoned. There is no use in burying articles with the deceased. Gold, pearls and precious things could lead to further disaster. I have experienced disaster and separations, I have seen a lot. When you bury me it must be close-by, with a plain white coverlet and false switch of hair knotted up, in a simple coffin down a deep burial tunnel.²⁷

As we saw in the previous chapter, women were praised for extolling virtues of economy and frugality. The death of Li Ping'er contrasts with this. Here, not only immediate family, friends and household servants wear mourning dress but also prostitutes compete to display the greatest mourning, as they process along the streets of Qinghe.

The Donglin 東林 scholar, Zhao Nanxing 趙南星 (1550-1628)²⁸ condemned the extravagance of the period, whilst recognising that it was the "responsibility of those in our position to rectify and transform the current customs and habits."²⁹ In criticising such behaviour Donglin members such as Zhao had a very specific moral and political agenda. As conservative Confucians they were concerned by corruption at court and the individualistic teachings of Li Zhi.³⁰ Perhaps this mood

²⁶ *Shizheng lu*, 3.34a-b; "Fengsu zhi 風俗志," in *Shaoxingfu zhi*, 12.2b and 7a-b. See also "Jiejian 節儉," in *Chishan huiyue* 赤山會約, by Xiao Yong 蕭雍, repr. in *Zhengren sheyue ji qita wu zhong* 證人社約及其他五種, Shanghai: Shangwu, 1936, 6; "Fengsu 風俗," in *Ningbofu zhi* 寧波府志, repr. Taipei: Chengwen, 1983, 4.30b.

²⁷ "Lienü ji," in *Mingshan tang*, 1.3b-4a.

²⁸ *DMB*, 128-132.

²⁹ "Lü Fuji zhiyi xu 呂輔季制義序," in *Zhao Zhongyi gong wenji* 趙忠毅公文集, by Zhao Nanxing 趙南星, edn. *Qiankun zhengqi ji* 乾坤正氣集 (1892), by Pan Xi'en 潘錫恩, n.p., n.d., 1.27a.

³⁰ Peterson, 1979, 8-9.

of individualism was one of the reasons a concubine would be provided with an elaborate funeral.

Although the forms of ritual as set down in the *Yili* and *Liji* were considered standards, mourning practices were liable to differing interpretation. The Song Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi updated the details for rituals in his work the *Jiali*.³¹ Ming regulations later pronounced that commoners should conform to his ritual guidelines,³² whilst the first emperor of the Ming also revised some sections of the rituals, especially those which referred to women. For example, he ordered that mothers, whether a legitimate wife, a concubine or even a step-mother be mourned for three years, the same as the father. Also, unmarried daughters and married daughters after their 'great return home' (大歸 *dagui*) would mourn their parents in the first degree.³³ Contemporary scholar Zha Jizuo 查繼佐 (1601-76)³⁴ reports that these guidelines were observed in the late Ming.³⁵

Patricia Ebrey has documented forty-nine Ming revised editions of the *Jiali* of which nineteen are extant,³⁶ and asserts that Qiu Jun's *Jiali yijie* became even more widely used than its predecessor.³⁷ Simplified versions of the *Jiali* which appeared in the Ming may reflect the rise in basic literacy at this time, but may also reflect how ritual, as an investment in cultural capital reinforcing social distinctions, could be adopted by social climbers.³⁸ Wang Yangming was one of those who promoted rituals as a component of moral education for the common people.³⁹ It was not merely

³¹ See Ebrey, 1991a, 102-5 and *idem*, 1991b.

³² "Shuren nafu 庶人納婦," in "Hunli 婚禮," in *DMHD*, 71.7a.

³³ *Xiaoci lu* 孝慈錄, (1375), repr. in *Kômin seisho* 皇明制書, Tokyo: Koten kenkyûkai, 1966, 12.16b-17a.

³⁴ *ECCP*, 18-19.

³⁵ *Zuiwei lu* 罪惟錄, by Zha Jizuo 查繼佐, repr. Zhejiang: Guji, 1986, 7.687 and 689.

³⁶ Ebrey, 1991b, 231-4.

³⁷ Ebrey, 1991b, 173.

³⁸ Ebrey, 1991b, 176.

³⁹ Wing-tsit Chan, tr., *Instructions for Practical Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings by Wang*

the élite who followed the rituals: many families from the lower classes could gain elementary knowledge of Confucian funerary ritual. Even a merchant was said to have studied ritual with He Qin 賀欽 (1437-1511), a Confucian teacher.⁴⁰

By the late Ming people were beginning to argue that rituals should reflect human emotions rather than forcibly mould them. Scholar and literary critic Gui Youguang believed that “all the world’s ritual begins with human emotion.”⁴¹ Because of this, Norman Kutcher contends:

This development was of critical importance because once rituals were seen as manifestations of emotion, rather than as channels of emotion - once they were effects, rather than causes - people who practised them felt free to change them so that they could better conform to human emotions.⁴²

Xie Zhaozhe noted that it was becoming more common for students to mourn their teachers, and for friends to mourn friends.⁴³ The Changshu 常熟 (Jiangsu) gazetteer noted that in funerary practice people “transgressed the rites by following their emotions.”⁴⁴ This suggests that not all scholars were content to let the populace make their own decisions when it came to mourning practice. Indeed, this freedom threatened the very regulated kinship structure upon which Chinese society was based.

From the *Jin Ping Mei* voices emerging from the text reflect a sensitivity to these issues. Although Li Ping’er was the lowest ranking concubine, Ximen’s insistence on enacting mourning ritual resembles the way in which those formerly excluded from the orthodox canons were being mourned. This must be qualified, as

Yang-ming, New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1962, 15-16.

⁴⁰ *DMB*, 509-510; Ebrey, 1991a, 156.

⁴¹ *Zhenchuan xiansheng ji*, 5.118.

⁴² Norman Alan Kutcher, “Death and Mourning in China, 1550-1800,” Ph.D. Dissertation Yale 1991, 37 and 59-64.

⁴³ *WZZ*, 14.264.

⁴⁴ “Fengsu zhi,” in *Changshuxian zhi*, 4.21a.

this fictional representation depicts the climax of his infatuation with Ping'er and goes further in antagonising the already heightened rivalries among the women of his household. This irony suggests that the author may have perceived that people were straying too far, that commoner merchants were failing to understand the finer points to mourning ritual.

However, the case of the late Ming scholar Mao Xiang and his concubine, a former singsong girl named Dong Xiaowan demonstrates that intense emotions were involved in relationships with concubines. Mao's *Yingmei'an yiyu* 影梅菴憶語 "Reminiscences of the Convent of Shadowed Plum Blossoms" is devoted to recalling fond memories of Xiaowan. He laments:

Although I have laboured over an elegy of several thousand words in an attempt to assuage my grief, it could not be expressed fully due to the restrictions of the tone and rhyme scheme. So, once more, I intend to jot it all down. Each time in grief I think of my concubine's life and the nine years we spent together, it all wells up inside me, blurring my eyes.⁴⁵

Dong Xiaowan's biographer, Zhang Mingpi 張明弼, on his first reading of Mao's memoir, was startled at his frankness:

On his concubine's death, Mao cried out: 'I don't know whether my concubine has died or I have died.' I believe that when one's parents are still alive, one should not talk of death in this way, particularly when it is over a "thing from between the sheets."⁴⁶ But after reading his elegy, I then began to understand one who has experienced intense love (*qing*).⁴⁷

Through Zhang's comments are revealed perceptions of the initial shock the literati may have experienced when faced with an outpouring of grief for someone outside the prescribed mourning canon. It was only on reflection that Zhang began to comprehend the nature of *qing* in the relationship.

⁴⁵ *Yingmei'an yiyu*, 2.

⁴⁶ i.e. a concubine.

⁴⁷ "Mao ji Dong Xiaowan zhuan 冒姬董小宛傳," in *Yingmei'an yiyu*, 5.

In a way, this is a similar public expression of grief to that depicted in the *Jin Ping Mei*. The literati put it down on paper, whereas the bourgeoisie engaged in material display. However, both sources demonstrate an awareness of the possibilities for a demonstration of grief over a beloved person who was not included among the five traditional mourning grades.

There appears to have been a contrast between accepted notions of scholar-élite and commoner practice in funerary ritual. The 1579 Hangzhou gazetteer recorded that the majority of gentry families carried out the correct ritual practice whilst, despite the efforts of officials, those in the surrounding towns and villages, clung to their wicked (病 *bing*) habits.⁴⁸ By contrast, other texts asserted that the *li* need not apply too strictly to the lower classes whose houses and means would be too limited to engage in full rituals.⁴⁹ Ming law, too, accepted that commoners might not be expected to carry out ritual prescriptions to the letter, though officials should. The emphasis for commoners was on using whatever the household had or could afford to do.⁵⁰

The philosophical syncretism of the late Ming saw a merging of various aspects of Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism.⁵¹ The mourning and funeral held for Li Ping'er in the *Jin Ping Mei* is a pertinent example of this as it includes practices which are Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist.⁵² Although *Family Rituals* forbids Buddhist influence in rituals, Buddhist practices such as sacrifices every

⁴⁸ "Fengsu zhi," in *Hangzhoufu zhi*, 19.25b.

⁴⁹ *Shuyuan zaji*, 2.9a.

⁵⁰ "Pinguan sangli 品官喪禮," in *Ming shi*, 60.1490; "Shishuren sangli 士庶人喪禮," in *Ming shi*, 60.1492.

⁵¹ See Judith A. Berling, *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-en*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1980; Chun-fang Yu, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China: Chu-hung and the Late Ming Synthesis*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1981.

⁵² The most prominent Confucian example is the use of mourning garments. Other notable events can be found in *JPMCH*, 62.22b-22a (*Yinyang* master); *JPMCH*, 65.1a (Daoist abbot); *JPMCH*, 65.4a (Buddhist seventh-day rites); *JPMCH*, 65.9a (ancestral tablet).

seven days for forty-nine days after death, the *Shuilu* 水陸 mass held on the hundredth day, and the non-consumption of meat, were widely adopted in Confucian funerary rituals.⁵³ Even the Buddhist practice of cremation was practised.⁵⁴

Women were known to support more popular cultural values and they were blamed for the prevalence of Buddhist funerals. However, due to the widespread illiteracy among women, it has been shown how the higher culture of élite families was infused with more popular values through its women.⁵⁵ The influence of women of the gentry may have been one of the factors that persuaded their families to direct charity toward monasteries in the late Ming.⁵⁶ For all the remonstrations of officials, Buddhism was absorbed into gentry culture in this period, as Kutcher notes:

so far had people come from true orthodox perceptions of the Confucian rites that they were no longer aware of what was Confucian and what Buddhist.⁵⁷

Even Xie Zhaozhe, an anti-Buddhist, assumed that meat and wine should be avoided for one hundred days, originally a Buddhist duration.⁵⁸

The democratic thinker of the seventeenth-century, Huang Zongxi 黄宗羲 (1610-1695),⁵⁹ was especially scathing of the amount of Buddhist influence in rites of celebration and mourning which had displaced the ancient rites, as was Hai Rui who sternly warned against inviting priests to attend to ceremonies.⁶⁰ Although

⁵³ Ebrey, 1991b, 79-80; For descriptions of both Buddhist and Neo-Confucian funerary procedures see Timothy Brook, "Funeral Ritual and the Building of Lineages in Late Imperial China", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 49.2 (1989), 481-2.

⁵⁴ Kutcher, 1994, 81. See also the cremation of Wu Song in *JPMCH*, 6.3b and that of Song Huilian in *JPMCH*, 27.2a. These two cremations are for the purpose of quick disposal of the body rather than belief in a practice.

⁵⁵ See David Johnson, "Communication, Class, and Consciousness in Late Imperial China," in *idem* et al., eds., 1985, 62; *WZZ*, 14.266.

⁵⁶ Brook, 1993, 190-191.

⁵⁷ Kutcher, 1994, 86. See also Brook, 1993, 89-126.

⁵⁸ *WZZ*, 14.265.

⁵⁹ *ECCP*, 351-354.

⁶⁰ "Caiji san 財計三," in *Ming yidai fanglu* 明夷待訪錄 (1663), by Huang Zongxi 黄宗羲, edn. *Sibu beiyao* 四部備要, repr. Taiwan: Zhonghua shuju, 1966, 34-35; "Jinyue 禁約," in *Hai Rui ji*,

magistrates like Hai Rui attempted to promulgate the *Jiali yijie* in the middle decades of the sixteenth century as the ideal for élite culture,⁶¹ other reports suggest that many people did not take them seriously.

There appeared to be a general confusion about the performance of rites, in general, in the late Ming. In the 1570's and 1580's, the gentry of Jiangpu 江浦 and Shaoxing 紹興 in Zhejiang followed the rituals for mourning and sacrifice, but rarely adhered to those for capping and marriage.⁶² By the seventeenth century, however, the situation was considered to have deteriorated, as Xie Zhaozhe noted that everyone carried out ancestral sacrifices accurately, seventy percent of the gentry mourned correctly, but only half performed weddings properly and capping was never practised.⁶³ Xie also writes that although the people from the nearby Changle 長樂 were well acquainted with the *Jiali* and there were *some* who used it, the rest of them "laughed at their excesses."⁶⁴ The 1543 gazetteer of Shaowu 邵武 prefecture, Fujian, also comments: "No one follows the *Jiali yijie*, and those who do attempt to perform these ancient rituals are laughed at by their neighbours."⁶⁵

The *Jin Ping Mei* reflects the concerns of contemporary officials that "wicked habits" such as Buddhist and Daoist funerary practices were prevalent not only among commoners but also among the official class. As a pseudo-official household, the household of Ximen Qing embodies both merchant and official aspects. Whilst on the one hand, the family attempts to adhere to certain guidelines set down in Confucian texts, the rituals they perform still retain heterodox practices. In a wide

3.188.

⁶¹ "Jinyue," in *Hai Rui ji*, 3.188. Lü Kun promoted the *Jiali - Shizheng lu*, 3.34a-b.

⁶² *Jiangpuxian zhi* 江浦縣志(1579), edn. *Tianyige cang Mingdai fangzhi xuankan* 天一閣藏明代方志選刊, Shanghai: Guji, 1990, 4.22b; "Fengsu zhi," in *Shaoxingfu zhi*, 12.7a.

⁶³ *WZZ*, 14.266.

⁶⁴ *WZZ*, 14.266.

⁶⁵ *Shaowufu zhi* 邵武府志 (1543), edn. *Tianyige cang Mingdai fangzhi xuankan* 天一閣藏明代方志選刊, Shanghai: Guji, 1981-1982, 2.46b.

variety of sources, women and merchants are seen as the source for the introduction or continuation of such practices in upper class or upwardly mobile households.

In Chapter 75 of the *Jin Ping Mei*, the ladies of the Ximen household go to visit the wife of Ying Bojue. From the dialogue at this point in the narrative, it appears as if the women feel that by this time the mourning period for Li Ping'er should be over. However, Ximen Qing insists that the women still wear pale colours for her as a mark of respect. Pan Jinlian has already put on her makeup and inserted flower and feather ornaments in her hair when the women agree on an outfit comprising:

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

As principal wife, Yueniang is singled out for attention:

a white crepe head-dress with gold arches, a sealskin cap, pearl headband and *hu* 胡 pearl hoop earrings. On top she wore brown figured brocade robe decorated with a badge of rank, and below a sand-green brocade skirt.⁶⁶

On their return from the party the women are again differentiated according to status.

Wu Yueniang wears:

an ermine cape, satin robe and kingfisher-blue skirt. Li Jiao'er and the others were in sable capes, white damask robes, deep lilac skirts woven with gold.⁶⁷

These outfits appear not dissimilar to the descriptions given of everyday wear in the novel and we only know that these are considered a form of mourning due to the stated aim of the women to wear pale colours as a mark of respect.

Women in mourning would not have to remain in heavy mourning garments

⁶⁶ JPMCH, 75.9a.

⁶⁷ JPMCH, 75.15a.

for three years. After one year of mourning, women could cut the long skirt so it did

Illustration 16: Shoe for heavy mourning



Illustration 17: Lighter mourning shoe



not drag on the ground. Those who owed one year of mourning at this point could change into *jifu* 吉服 ‘auspicious clothes’ but until the end of the month were not to wear gold, pearls, brocade, embroidery or red or purple.⁶⁸ After two years, women should wear post-mourning garments which entailed head-dresses, combs and chignon frets. Their shoes could be yellow, blue, black or white but they should not wear red, gold, pearls or embroidery.⁶⁹ Illustrations 16 and 17 demonstrate the subtle changes in shoe ornamentation between different mourning periods.

With regard mourning garments, they too were not immutable. Even as early as the Song the clothing actually worn seems to have altered. Sima Guang wrote that:

Recent custom is full of superstition and no-one is willing to wear hemp except a child for parents, a wife for parents-in-law, a wife for her husband, or a concubine for her master. Anyone who tried to wear it [in other cases] would certainly be ordered to stop by his seniors and elders, and ridiculed by others, so it cannot be insisted on.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Qiu Jun thought that people should follow the ancient custom of making a new set of mourning garments out of more refined hemp rather than the contemporary custom of adjusting the old mourning garments. “Sangyu 喪虞,” in *Jiali yijie*, 6.16b-17a. See “Jusang suo shou 居桑所守,” in *JALRMB*, 6.228-229 for the civilities of mourning.

⁶⁹ “Sangyu 喪虞,” in *Jiali yijie*, 6.19a-b.

⁷⁰ *Simashi shuyi*, 6.68.

Instead of hemp, for the lower three grades of mourning, Sima Guang advocated the use of raw white silk.⁷¹ Zhu Xi too thought that mourning garments were too detailed and so different to contemporary custom that people could not relate to them.⁷² Qiu Jun's commentary to the prescriptions on female ornaments elucidates one new aspect to Ming practice:

Nowadays it is the custom for women in mourning to use a white cloth on top of bound hair and it is called a *xiaowei* 孝圍 or "filial band" and it has the same significance. However, others add it on top of a chignon without either binding up the hair or letting the rest hang down behind.⁷³

Therefore we can assume that in many cases, the mourning garments may not have been in accordance with the prescriptive guidelines in this period.

Although the *Jiali* and *Jiali yijie* were considered orthodox ritual texts, they were not compulsory.⁷⁴ Due to the improvements in communications, some scholars, such as He Liangjun 何良俊 (1506-73),⁷⁵ began to realise how ritual could vary from place to place anyway.⁷⁶ The changing social and philosophical environment led to a situation where mourning could become more a matter of personal choice rather than following strict guidelines to the letter. Concubines were mourned as fervently as any other member of the Confucian canon. Who to mourn and how to mourn deviated from the classical blueprints, despite exhortations by certain scholars to do otherwise. Although the women of the *Jin Ping Mei* appear to engage in mourning ritual through the use of mourning apparel immediately following the death of Li Ping'er, Ximen's continued insistence for them to wear mourning raises voices of

⁷¹ *Simashi shuyi*, 6.67.

⁷² "Lun xiu lishu 論修禮書," in *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類 (1270), by Zhu Xi 朱熹, Li Jingde 黎靖德, comp., repr. 8 vols., Beijing: Zhonghua, 1986, 84: 2185.

⁷³ "Sangli," in *Jiali yijie* 4.57a-59a.

⁷⁴ Ebrey, 1991a, 7.

⁷⁵ *DMB*, 515-518.

⁷⁶ "Zhengsu 正俗," in *Siyoushai congshu*, 34.310-11.

dissent. The clothing the women wear to visit the wife of Ying Bojue is clearly a compromise between mourning and display. The liberal use of pearls and materials woven with gold, and even a badge of rank all attest to this.

The power of display and unity

In the *Jin Ping Mei*, following Ping'er's death, the prostitute Zheng Aiyue 鄭愛月 appears at the household in mourning, wearing "a robe of white cloud-silk which opened down the front, a blue silk tabby skirt, and on her head a pearl headband and white drawnwork handkerchief".⁷⁷ The next day, she makes an offering and Yueniang gives her a bolt of thin silk to be made into a mourning outfit. The prostitutes Li Guijie 李桂姐 and Wu Yin'er 吳銀兒 also make small offerings and Ximen Qing tells Yueniang to "give them all a bolt of thin silk to be made into mourning headbands and belts no matter what they have offered."⁷⁸

Later, the singing girls all wear the same "white damask robe which buttoned up the front and blue satin skirts" to the funeral. Zhang Zhupo remarks how clever it is that the girls are wearing practically the same outfit as Ping'er wore to visit the women.⁷⁹ This is an important observation as it links Ping'er and the prostitutes on two levels. On one level it simply emphasises the well-recognised joining of the ladies in the household and the prostitutes on the outside, in particular, Ping'er with Wu Yin'er and Pan Jinlian with Li Guijie. More specifically, as will be demonstrated in the discussion on fidelity, the behaviour of the lady and the prostitutes in both cases are identical. They are both using mourning clothes in order to win confidence and allegiance. Official Lü Kun strongly advised against inviting people such as prostitutes to funerals for their presence would only made a mockery of the

⁷⁷ *JPMCH*, 63.9a.

⁷⁸ *JPMCH*, 63.10b.

⁷⁹ *DYQS*, 63.1005.

sentiments embodied in the ritual.⁸⁰ Indeed, these are the very sentiments expressed in the *Jin Ping Mei* as the singing girls try to profit from the funeral.⁸¹

Ritual, such as that of mourning, enhances social unity and integration, creating sentiments of solidarity. It plays a positive role in the maintenance of social systems through the co-operation of its participants. Assembling as a group to celebrate rites, people are able to renew interpersonal relationships and create an enhanced collective consciousness, all of which reaffirm common bonds and reinforce social unity.⁸² Collective display was an important part of ritual and in Chinese society, this was especially true with mourning rites. Funerals and weddings were public events which involved elaborate processions, its participants dressed in distinctive clothing. These events were watched and judged by others and the public gathering of a group of kinsmen served as a public display of solidarity and power.⁸³

According to Ebrey and Watson:

Throughout the imperial period, not only were family and kinship of major importance to ordinary people, as they have everywhere, but they were central to the practical, political, and ethical concerns of the elite. Kinship organization provided a means of preserving property and privilege and of developing bodies of followers and allies.⁸⁴

Thus kinship provided individuals with a social structure which had the potential for more power and influence as a group and gentry families used Neo-Confucian rites in

⁸⁰ *Shizheng lu*, 4.87b.

⁸¹ The singing girls are not the only ones to try to profit from the funeral: Pan Jinlian is also seen looking for some white thin silk to make her mother a filial mourning skirt and a hempen head band and waistband -- *JPMCH*, 64.3a. Ru Yi'er 如意兒, too, asks Ximen Qing for mourning clothes for her mistress, specifically scallion white pongee to make a cape. He gives her that and more behind Yueniang's back, arousing the jealousy of Pan Jinlian -- *JPMCH*, 67.14b-15a.

⁸² Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu ritual*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1967, 360 and 392; Raymond Firth, *Elements of Social Organization*, London: C.A. Watts and Co. Ltd., 1961, 224.

⁸³ Ebrey, 1991b, 68-75.

⁸⁴ Patricia Buckley Ebrey and James L. Watson eds., *Kinship and Organization in Late Imperial China 1000-1940*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, 1.

the late Ming to strengthen their dominance in the local community.⁸⁵ However, as historical geographer Wang Shixing, in his comments on popular customs in Henan province, noted, the commoners may have had differing agendas. Although commoners adhered to the regulations regarding mourning garments, they conducted Buddhist rites. Unlike the gentry families who gathered as kinship groups, the commoners tended to gather only in close-knot family groups.⁸⁶

In Chapter 68 of the *Jin Ping Mei*, Wu Yin'er arrives in mourning for a party at Zheng Aiyue's house:

She wore a white crepe chignon with pearl headband and a kingfisher cloud clasp, studded all around with small hairpins. She had golden clove-shaped earrings. On top she wore a damask robe which buttoned-up the front with figured purple edging, below she wore a sand-green skirt of Luzhou silk bordered with gold thread. Her shoes were of plain dark silk. ⁸⁷

Ximen Qing asks for whom she is wearing the white chignon and she replies that it is for Li Ping'er. The girl is trying to buy Ximen's favour by pandering to his weak point, Li Ping'er, and although she is Ping'er's adopted daughter, there is no true feeling in her mourning.⁸⁸ This is not missed by Zhang Zhupo, who links the spurious relationship between the 'mother' and 'daughter',⁸⁹ and exclaims: "All along the outfits describe completely the extent of falsehood!"⁹⁰ This falsehood is further emphasised when Zheng Aiyue goes out of the room to change clothes. She returns:

in an ash-coloured robe of brocade decorated with the *hui* 回 pattern and which was buttoned up the front, a skirt of goose yellow Hangzhou silk flecked with kingfisher and threaded with gold. She wore figured leggings and scarlet phoenix-beak shoes and under the lamplight the sealskin cap emphasised her snow-white face which had been thickly powdered. She was a match for any

⁸⁵ Brook, 1989, 485. •

⁸⁶ "Jiangbei sisheng 江北四省," in *Guang zhi yi*, 3.43.

⁸⁷ *JPMCH*, 68.8b.

⁸⁸ Kim Thoa Doan, 'The True-False Pattern in the *Jin Ping Mei*,' *Ming Studies* 13 (1981), 37.

⁸⁹ *DYQS*, 68.1089.

⁹⁰ *DYQS*, 68.1089.

beauty.⁹¹

The competition factor among all the women is great throughout the novel, and it is especially with mourning dress that we see this phenomenon of changing clothes to retake the limelight from the one in mourning garb. In this case, Zheng Aiyue is the victor and she takes Ximen off to her room. In the main, it is Ximen Qing whom the prostitutes are trying to impress when they wear or ask for mourning clothes. He was so besotted with the dead Ping'er that those who make a show of mourning gain the upper hand and those who do not fall from favour.

In a novel concerned with the flouting of convention and values, it is only natural that we see many of the occurrences of mourning in the *Jin Ping Mei* possessing far from moral grounds. On many occasions the female characters use mourning as an excuse to obtain more clothes. For some it is a means of ingratiating themselves with the family in question. Ingratiating themselves with the powerful family is seen as a way of obtaining power and influence.

The to-ing and fro-ing of the women of all classes in the *Jin Ping Mei* as they pay visits of condolence becomes quite frenetic. It was generally assumed that only men went out pay condolences; however, according to the 1579 gazetteer, it appears to have been a Hangzhou custom that the women, too, entertained those who had come to pay respects (陪吊陪殯 *peidiao peibin*). This was considered acceptable if it was between relatives of the five mourning grades, but they were also doing it for other relatives and friends. Whole groups of them would go out in their full attire, acting just like the wives of ministers. The compiler of the gazetteer was so concerned with this state of affairs that he urged for it to be prevented.⁹²

Both contemporary accounts and literary sources also stress the increasing

⁹¹ *JPMCH*, 68.11a.

⁹² "Fengsu zhi," in *Hangzhoufu zhi*, 19.8a.

tendency for women to take on a more visible appearance, not only on social or festival occasions, but also at ritual events. Like the female characters in the *Jin Ping Mei*, the women of sixteenth-century China were seen to undertake mourning for those traditionally excluded from the Confucian canon. The mourning garments they wore were symbolic of the friendships they had forged, female friendships which were barely recognised in Confucian thought. The intimate links developed and maintained between women in the traditional household and in the wider community are discussed further in the following chapter.

Transition and the assertion of status

With the demise of her husband, Wu Yueniang is left alone in charge of an unwieldy household consisting of four concubines, numerous maids and servants, and various others. In addition, as a fifth grade official, Ximen Qing's official and social obligations were substantial and his business empire was extensive, and as principal wife, she is forced to take over control of these. The funeral for her husband gives Yueniang the opportunity to assert her authority over an unruly household. The funeral is a much more modest affair than the previous funeral of Li Ping'er. This perhaps reflects Yueniang's status as a woman and her acknowledgement of the need for frugality, but also, it emphasises the extravagance of the funeral for Li Ping'er which was a confirmation of Ximen Qing's status.

As the host, Wu Yueniang greets the other guests who have come to pay their respects to her dead husband. She is simply mentioned as wearing "the heaviest mourning" when she meets Commissioner Cai 蔡.⁹³ Meeting with such people, Yueniang emphasises her new power role although Zhang Zhupo comments that she

⁹³ *JPMCH*, 80.10a.

is “laughable” in this respect.⁹⁴ Her power is an illusion which will soon be shattered. As power is heavily reliant on perception, if people do not perceive her role in a similar manner then her power is non-existent.⁹⁵

Rituals often takes place at a time of transition. In this case, mourning is a time of transition not only for the dead but also for those they leave behind. The death of the head of the household leaves gaps which must be filled by another and relationships to others change as a consequence. Power bases shift and this also causes others to re-evaluate their own positions in the social order. Mourning ritual is, therefore, an opportunity to express and affirm those new differences as people act out their new roles.⁹⁶ Chinese ritual is known to enhance a participant’s awareness of power relations and hierarchies.⁹⁷

Some of the formal properties of collective ritual -- the repetition of occasion, content or form; self-conscious acting; ‘special’ behaviour or stylisation where symbols or actions used are extra-ordinary or ordinary ones used in an unusual way; evocative presentational style -- make ritual an ideal vehicle for the conveying of messages in an authenticating and arresting manner, particularly when things are in doubt.⁹⁸ *Luan* 亂 ‘confusion’ or ‘chaos’ was the direct outcome of death in China and therefore had to be controlled by ritual.⁹⁹ Chaos is the predominant image emerging from the narrative of the *Jin Ping Mei* following the death of Ximen Qing, as his principal wife is forced, time and time again, to prove herself a worthy head of the Ximen household.

⁹⁴ *DYQS*, 80.1373.

⁹⁵ Barnes, 1988, 57-61.

⁹⁶ Turner, 1977, 59-62. *

⁹⁷ Emily Ahern, *Chinese Ritual and Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, 91.

⁹⁸ Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff, eds., *Secular Ritual*, Amsterdam: Van Gorcum 1977, 7-8, 24.

⁹⁹ Evelyn S. Rawski, “Historian’s Approach to Chinese Death Ritual,” in Watson and Rawski, eds., 1988, 27.

Wu Yueniang wears mourning to go to court when she charges Chen Jingji with causing the death of her daughter-in-law, Dajie. She is dressed:

in plain white silk with a mourning skirt bound at the waist. She was ranked the wife of a fifth grade official, of principled appearance and displaying self-possessed manners.¹⁰⁰

The magistrate is impressed by her refined appearance and rank and it seems as though her mourning garb is significant in the magistrate's appraisal of her. As a magistrate, his behaviour should accord with and uphold the Confucian canon and on this occasion he supports her case against Jingji. The Qing commentator Zhang Zhupo is, as usual, highly sceptical of the incident and of Wu Yueniang's role in particular. He asserts that this episode demonstrates the utter disgrace of Ximen Qing and is also a reflection of the magistrate's court at Qinghe.¹⁰¹ However, the fact that she has to go to court at all is a reflection of the lack of a husband. In her weaker position she is more likely to fall foul of others, yet here she is, asserting her authority and power as head of the household.

Another depiction of widows going to court can be found in the Feng Menglong tale "Yu Tangchun luonan fengfu 玉堂春落難逢夫". After murdering her husband, a jealous wife, Mme Pi 皮, accuses the new and favoured concubine Yu Tangchun 玉堂春 of the crime. Mme Pi arrives before the magistrate, her head covered in white cloth as a sign of mourning. This is distinct from the concubine of whom nothing is mentioned. With the addition of a few bribes, the case is swayed in favour of the principal wife and Tangchun is thrown into prison.¹⁰²

The early Qing magistrate Huang Liuhong was concerned about the humiliation and shame brought about by forcing young women who are not

¹⁰⁰ *JPMCH*, 92.13b-14a.

¹⁰¹ *DYQS*, 92.1541.

¹⁰² "Yu Tangchun luonan fengfu 玉堂春落難逢夫," in *JSTY*, 2.282-283.

adulteresses to suffer the indignation of a public appearance:

Young girls especially should not be casually summoned to appear at hearings. For those who are engaged, their presence at a public hearing would humiliate the families of their fiancés. For those who are not engaged, no respectable family would want to ask for them in marriage after they have been involved in a lawsuit. This precept will preserve good social customs by giving proper consideration to young girls.¹⁰³

Although he is not referring to married women, his opinion is clear that public appearances, particularly in an open court room, are not suitable places for women of a more genteel upbringing. However, the above examples are more concerned with exigency due to absence of a male figure rather than choice. An open display of mourning intensifies the power of status of the wife, enabling her to cope in otherwise abnormal situations. However, the depiction of both Yueniang and Mme Pi reveals another side to mourning garments, that of perceived morality.

Morality

In Chapter 84 of the *Jin Ping Mei* Wu Yueniang makes the pilgrimage to Taishan she vowed to take should Ximen Qing recover from his fatal illness. On arriving at the temple, Yueniang, Uncle Wu and the servants are met by the evil abbot of the Mount Dai Temple 岱岳廟. The narrative explains how the abbot allows the local villain Yin Tianxi 殷天錫 to seduce women in his quarters. He notices Yueniang

possessed a beauty which was not commonplace. On her head she wore the head-dress of mourning. If she was not the wife of an official then she was certainly from the inner quarters of a powerful family.¹⁰⁴

He forces the party to stay the night so Yin Tianxi can attempt rape; however, Uncle

¹⁰³ Huang Liuhong, 1984, 272.

¹⁰⁴ *JPMCH*, 84.3b.

Wu and the servants come to her rescue just in time and they escape. Here, the abbot and Yin perceive mourning as a symbol of frailty and weakness in a woman. Although not explicitly stated, it is clear that Yueniang sees the wearing of mourning as a symbol of her strength as chaste principal widow.

During her flight from Yin Tianxi, Wu Yueniang's group is captured by the Liangshan 梁山 bandits. Song Jiang 宋江, who later becomes the bandit leader but at this point has yet to join them, sees Yueniang

wearing a mourning chignon on her head and clothes of plain white silk, of dignified bearing and refined manners. She certainly was not the wife of a commoner and had to be from the inner quarters of a rich household.¹⁰⁵

Yueniang introduces herself as "a chaste widow". From this first glimpse of Yueniang, Song Jiang pretends to know her and her husband and asks for her release. He not only pleads to the bandit king not to marry her off to one of the bandits, promising instead to find a replacement bride, but he also even vows to avenge Yueniang's maltreatment at the hands of Yin Tianxi.¹⁰⁶

It appears that Yueniang's state of mourning and obvious good breeding has the power to incite Song Jiang to jump to her defence even though he has never previously set eyes upon her. Ironically, little does he know that her husband was hardly the sort of righteous *haohan* 好漢 ('hero' or 'real man') he respects. His own *haohan* nature is emphasised as he is shown to be above the other bandits who see only a powerless woman in mourning, fit only to become a prize captive wife. Their attitude is much the same as that of the abbot and Yin Tianxi who, although recognising her status, view her wearing mourning as a sign of vulnerability. Song Jiang responds to this social power whereas Yin Tianxi fails to. This is because Song Jiang has been brought up in this environment and Yin has lived outside the law and

¹⁰⁵ JPMCH, 84.9a.

¹⁰⁶ JPMCH, 84.9b.

Confucian Code.

For early Confucians such as Xunzi, *li* signified the highest sense of morality, duty and social role as well as the more everyday etiquette and good manners.¹⁰⁷

Ritual became, according to Ebrey:

a central concept in Confucian thinking about human nature, ethics, social harmony, cultural identity, and the relationships between the human world and the sphere labeled heaven.¹⁰⁸

The proper observance of ritual was the very hallmark of civilisation, a practice which separated the Chinese from the barbarians.¹⁰⁹ The wearing of mourning garments would have been the symbol of morality in the context of bereavement.¹¹⁰

We often find, both in the West and in China, that mourning garments are usually unprovocative in colour, are made of unrefined material and tend to cover most of the body. Psychologist J.C. Flügel suggests that such clothes are therefore “symbolic of inflexibility of character, severity of moral standard, and purity of moral purpose”.¹¹¹ The above characteristics are demonstrated by the actions of the late Ming female visionary Tanyangzi who, when her fiancé died, assumed the status of widow despite resistance from her father. She had made a plain white silk garment and straw shoes which she wore, telling her parents, “Although I was to have been Xu’s wife, out of concern for my parents, I will not seek death. Nonetheless, I want to serve as Xu’s widow.”¹¹²

In both instances from the *Jin Ping Mei*, it can be seen how the values and

¹⁰⁷ Knoblock, 1994, 49.

¹⁰⁸ Ebrey, 1991a, 14. For an historical survey see Noah Edward Fehl, *Li 禮. Rites and Propriety in Literature and Life: A Perspective for a Cultural History of Ancient China*, Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1971.

¹⁰⁹ Wechsler, 1985, 9.

¹¹⁰ Ritual, as a basic social act, implicitly subsumes the moral. See Roy A. Rappaport, *Ecology, Meaning and Religion*, Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1979, 198.

¹¹¹ Flügel, 1950, 75.

¹¹² “Tanyang dashi zhuan 曇陽大師傳,” in *Yanzhou shanren xugao*, 78.4a.

norms of society were perceived to change according to class and exposure to Confucian ideals. Wu Yueniang is aware of the influence such a display of mourning may have on those who derive similar meanings from the symbolic clothing. The symbolic nature of rituals such as mourning means that rituals can often take on many meanings at once.¹¹³ How they are perceived is variable, depending on whether the observer is working from the same set of references.¹¹⁴

However, Yueniang's foolishness in attempting such a pilgrimage is emphasised throughout the episode. It is said of Lady Zhu, from the gentry family of Wang Xijue, that she alone refused to set foot outside the house to go on pilgrimages to mountain temples.¹¹⁵ This indicates that other women from the household *were* taking such trips. An exemplar from her own household, it suggests that other women did not consider such trips unbecoming for ladies of their class, highlighting the fact that women who conformed to the ideals of society were held up for public praise.

Another character in the *Jin Ping Mei* who, like Yueniang, appears to have more honourable intentions in wearing mourning is Han Aijie 韓愛姐, erstwhile prostitute lover of Chen Jingji. She is wearing a mourning outfit complete with head-dress when visiting Chen Jingji's grave and is seen by Chunmei and Ge Cuiping 葛翠屏.¹¹⁶ The fact that she is mourning startles the two women and it is the sincerity of her mourning that forces Chunmei and Cuiping to accept her into their home. In the final Chapter, she continues to wear light coloured clothes on her journey south.¹¹⁷ In a similar way to Yueniang, Han Aijie, ironically a former prostitute, displays the devotion and purity of moral purpose one would expect from a wife.

¹¹³ Firth, 1961, 222.

¹¹⁴ Marilyn J. Horn, *The Second Skin: An Interdisciplinary Study of Clothing*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968, 122-126.

¹¹⁵ *Goushan xiansheng ji*, 14.36b.

¹¹⁶ *JPMCH*, 99.11a.

¹¹⁷ *JPMCH*, 100.7a.

The *Banqiao zaji* 板橋雜記 records the affairs of some of the most well-known courtesans in late Ming Nanjing and suggests that they, too, could be praised for more attributes usually associated with those from the inner quarters. For example, although Wang Jie 王節 was a prostitute, she was said to have the demeanour of one who wore “thorn hairclasps and cloth skirts.”¹¹⁸ Prostitutes and courtesans were concerned with creating self-images of virtue. In a strange anecdote from the Tianshun 天順 (1457-1464) period, a singing girl is praised as ‘righteous’ (義 *yi*) for appearing in the plain white of mourning shortly before the death of a former client Yang 楊 who had been implicated by the military leader Shi Heng 石亨 d.1460.¹¹⁹ The perceptions of prostitutes and serving women in the *Jin Ping Mei* are contrasted by this contemporary account which suggests that prostitutes could be credited with more positive moral motives than mere greed for financial gain or social advancement.

Mourning has long been regarded as a sacred state in Chinese literature and in Ming literature one of the most memorable examples of this is associated with the character Yingying 鶯鶯 in the drama *Xixiang ji* 西廂記. Both she and her maid are clad in white mourning garments for her father when Yingying is spotted by scholar Zhang 張. The vision of her reminds him of the goddess Guanyin 觀音,¹²⁰ the goddesses of the Xiang 湘 River and the goddess of the moon, Chang’e 嫦娥.¹²¹ Images of radiance, beauty, purity, innocence and morality are all evoked. A similar association can be found in the *Zhaoyang qushi* when a fox spirit changes into a beautiful woman wearing an outfit of plain white silk (*gaosu* 縞素) and is described

¹¹⁸ *Banqiao zaji*, 176.

¹¹⁹ “Yichang 義娼,” in *Qixiu leigao*, 51.748.

¹²⁰ Wang Shifu, *The Moon and the Zither: the Story of the Western Wing*, Stephen H. West and Wilt L. Idema, tr., Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991, 87-89.

¹²¹ Wang Shifu, 1991, 204.

as looking just like Chang'e.¹²² The fourteenth-century historian Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀 reports a strange encounter reminiscent of the *zhiguai* genre, experienced by an acquaintance in which the man's attention is attracted by a beautiful women clad in plain white clothing. She later turns out to be the spitting image of an immortal depicted on a mural.¹²³

Both fiction and purportedly historical texts reveal similar associations of female plain white clothing with morality and purity. Even prostitutes, those traditionally considered the most base in Chinese society, were attempting to create virtuous self-images. Through the adoption of mourning dress, they claim to be part of a kinship group. Values such as these were enhanced by the changes in the late Ming which led to an emphasis being placed upon female behaviour. It was in this period that the actions of women following the demise of a husband or fiancé were put under intense scrutiny.

Fidelity

Immediately after the death of her first husband, Wu Da, Pan Jinlian puts on a mourning outfit. Her "plain white outfit and white paper chignon" is accompanied by "false tears" and worn solely to impress the neighbours and, more importantly, the coroner, He the Ninth 何九.¹²⁴ He has already been bribed by Ximen Qing to cover up the cause of Wu Da's death; however, the dramatic appearance of a distressed Jinlian in mourning garb is intended to reinforce He's conclusions as to the cause of Wu Da's death, whatever evidence lies before him and whatever doubts he may

¹²² *Zhaoyang qushi* 昭陽趙史, anon., repr. Taipei: Shuangdi, 1991, 3 (hereafter abbreviated to ZYQS). For information on the earliest edition of 1621 see *Zhongguo gudai xiaoshuo baike quanshu* 中國古代小說百科全書, Beijing: Zhongguo gudai baike quanshu, 1993, 743.

¹²³ "Qiyu 奇遇," in *Chuogeng lu*, 4.71-72. See similar associations in "Ji meng ge 記夢歌," in *Wanxiangtang*, 2.29-30.

¹²⁴ *JPMCH*, 6.2b.

entertain. Thus, a vision of seemingly chaste widowhood has the power to ensure an official's illegal actions initiated by economic gain. However, Jinlian's period of wearing mourning is short-lived, and her premeditation is made even more clear as just over two months later she has abandoned it and is dolling herself up in "colourful clothes," waiting for Ximen Qing to visit.¹²⁵

Towards the end of the novel, Jinlian is widowed for the second time with the death of Ximen Qing. Again, she changes out of mourning before her mourning period is over when she goes to marry Wu Song.¹²⁶ It is clear that for Jinlian mourning is something first to be manipulated and then cast aside when no longer required. According to the ritual prescriptions, it was only if a woman was divorced during mourning that she could return to wearing her original clothing.¹²⁷

Changing out of mourning before the allotted time is repeated by other characters throughout the novel. It is not yet past the fifth of the seven weeks of commemoration of her husband's death when Li Ping'er attends Pan Jinlian's birthday dressed in:

a white damask robe with a blue skirt embroidered with gold, a white ramie chignon and pearl headband.¹²⁸

The light-coloured clothing and more particularly the white chignon fret indicates she is still wearing a form of mourning for her husband; however, as a widow she should be still in full mourning at this time. No wonder, then, that Zhang Zhupo comments at this point that "she deserves to die for such an outfit". He later continues, "her mind is concerned with treachery".¹²⁹ He is keen to emphasise the false nature of Ping'er's behaviour. Her outfit attracts attention and gives the impression that she is an

¹²⁵ JPMCH, 6.5a-b.

¹²⁶ JPMCH, 87.8a.

¹²⁷ "Sangli," in *Jiali yijie*, 4.52a.

¹²⁸ JPMCH, 14.8b.

¹²⁹ DYQS, 14.226.

innocent widow in mourning, a paragon of morality. However, it is clear that she has other intentions and is using this opportunity to ingratiate herself with the women of the household.

Pan Jinlian disappears half way through the party. As Yueniang is explaining to Ping'er how Jinlian redoes her makeup numerous times a day, a trait she describes as "childlike", she reappears in:

a beige Luzhou silk robe with a button-up front and decorated with a 'wild geese holding reeds in their beaks' motif. It had a white damask stand-up collar, embroidered purple edging and gilt buttons in the shape of bees rifling chrysanthemums. Beneath this she wore a drawnwork skirt with a foot-wide, gold cord border representing sea horses frolicking in clouds, shoes of crimson satin with white damask heels and figured ankle leggings. She also wore onyx pendant earrings, a pearl headband and was dressed exactly the same as Meng Yulou.¹³⁰

Although we are led to believe that Ping'er's intentions are far from honourable, the impression of a woman in mourning is sufficient to fool the gullible Wu Yueniang in particular, if only for a moment. Jinlian, on the other hand, is wise to Ping'er's motives and, as if threatened by this vision of morality, goes to change outfits, drawing attention back to herself. In Jinlian's clothes we see two traditional lucky symbols. The 'wild geese holding reeds in their beaks' symbolises promotion.¹³¹ 'Sea horses frolicking in the clouds' is also a lucky design as both are related to heaven. Sea horses were also known as heavenly horses 天馬 *tianma* and clouds 雲 *yun* has the same pronunciation as *yun* 運 fortune/luck.¹³² Therefore, in addition to the fact that she has obviously changed into more stunning clothes, the motifs depicted on her outfit are all extremely auspicious. This makes a marked contrast to Ping'er who is clothed in supposed semi-mourning garments which were traditionally

¹³⁰ JPMCH, 14.10b-11a.

¹³¹ Huang Lin 黄霖, *Jin Ping Mei da cidian* 金瓶梅大辭典, Chengdu: Ba Shu, 1991, 764.

¹³² Huang Lin, 1991, 765.

considered very inauspicious. Again, the *Jin Ping Mei* highlights the competitive nature of clothing among the women of the household. Just as the prostitutes struggle to stay one step ahead, constantly reinventing their clothing following the appearance of a rival, so too do the concubines and lovers of Ximen Qing.

Following in the footsteps of Pan Jinlian, Ping'er's period of wearing mourning is short. Ximen Qing would prefer to wait until Li Ping'er has completed her period of wearing mourning (孝服滿 *xiaofu man*) before taking her into his household; however, on the 100th day of mourning for Hua Zixu, Ping'er is keen to arrange for the burning of his tablet. Ximen consults Wu Yueniang who does not agree, saying that she has not filled her mourning obligations (孝服不滿 *xiaofu bu man*)¹³³, and it is not until approximately 165 days of mourning are over that Ping'er eventually burns the tablet and changes into colourful clothes.¹³⁴

The fact that Pan Jinlian and Li Ping'er cast off their mourning garments before the allotted time has been completed is necessitated by their fear that their places in Ximen Qing's affections may soon be replaced by others. However, it may also demonstrate their defiance of traditional male-dominated culture. Pan Jinlian and Li Ping'er show a lack of respect for mourning and thereby notions of Confucian customs and morality. This type of behaviour would have greatly grieved Confucius:

*Li performed without reverence, the forms of mourning performed without grief, how can I bear to look on these things.*¹³⁵

In addition, their behaviour is invariably looked down upon by the other female characters, and the fact that these women are unarguably those held up as negative examples in the novel does little to enhance their stance. In Chapter 18 we get a clear insight into how the female characters perceive the importance of mourning as a sign

¹³³ *JPMCH*, 16.7b.

¹³⁴ *JPMCH*, 16.11a.

¹³⁵ *Lunyu* 論語, by Kongzi 孔子, n.p., n.d., 2.9b.

of respectability. Ximen Qing has just returned in a foul temper having heard that Ping'er had married Dr. Jiang Zhushan 蔣竹山, and the women of the household concur that her behaviour was unacceptable:

'When you think about it,' said Meng Yulou, 'to marry someone like that, before her mourning period for her husband is even over, simply won't do.'

'Nowadays,' continued Wu Yueniang, 'who pays any attention to what will, or what won't do. It's not as though she were the only one who couldn't wait to get married until the mourning period for her husband was over. What kind of chastity and fidelity do you expect from whores like that who spend all day with their lovers "dozing in wine or snoozing in liquor"?'¹³⁶

Yulou and Jinlian are both affected by Yueniang's remarks about those who marry before their mourning period is complete as both of them are guilty of this. A tale from the late Ming *Qing shi* 情史 collection, relates how a formerly virtuous woman (the very same woman who was cited in the previous chapter as saying that conspicuous and ostentatious behaviour was not befitting for a woman) becomes quite licentious and does not even bother to go into mourning for her husband before carrying on with her adulterer.¹³⁷

In the Ming, there was a punishment of 100 strokes if one married when in mourning for parents or husband.¹³⁸ However, this did not seem to be carried out as Zhang Bing 張昺 (1443-1520), whilst district magistrate for Yanshan 鉛山 in Jiangxi in the Chenghua 成化 (1465-1487) period, felt it necessary to try to put a halt to the local practice of women marrying shortly after a husband's demise.¹³⁹ Lü Kun held women such as Jinlian and Ping'er in contempt. In contrast to the virtuous wife of Lu Qianlou 魯黔婁,

other women dress in brocade and embroidery, resplendent in gold and pearls,

¹³⁶ JPMCH, 18.6b-7a.

¹³⁷ "Hejian fu," in "Qinghui," in *Qingshi*, 588.

¹³⁸ "Jusang jiaqu 居喪嫁娶," in "Hulu hunyin 戶律婚姻," in *Ming lu*, 6.11b.

¹³⁹ "Zhang Bing zhuan 張昺傳," in *Ming shi*, 161.4393.

made-up with rouge and powder. Because of their wealth and beauty [*caise* 財色], they regard others with contempt, and to their deaths they never utter so much as a righteous word. How much more is this so of those who seek divorce from a husband whose household is poor.¹⁴⁰

It was clear to some scholars in the late Ming such as Chen Jiru that such an increased amount of attention paid to resplendent dress and ornamentation was very much connected with a lack of virtue and vice versa.¹⁴¹ The Zheng family instructions emphasise the unfilial nature of wearing auspicious dress during one's period of mourning.¹⁴²

One literary source, "Song xiaoguan tuanyuan po zhanli 宋小官團圓破氈笠," highlights the Confucian ideal of female mourning practice. A young girl, Yichun 宜春, "immediately prepared her hair combs and hemp clothing and put on the heaviest mourning" after her husband disappears. After six months her parents ask her to remarry but she is unwilling and replies: "The mourning for a husband should be life-long. How can it be done away with?"¹⁴³ Her husband later turns up (he was abandoned by the girl's parents as they considered him an unsuitable match) and, seeing her in the mourning outfit, knows her to be faithful. They are reunited and she declares her loyalty: "I wore three years of heavy mourning for you."¹⁴⁴

The local gazetteers are also filled with commemorations of women who were prepared to go further than the ritual works prescribed. For example, the wife of Wang Run 王潤 and daughter of an Assistant Minister at the Court of Official Review, Ms Chen 陳, remained in plain white clothing for the rest of her life after the demise of her husband.¹⁴⁵ Pan Shenggu 潘聖姑 from Qiantang 錢唐 in

¹⁴⁰ "Lu Qianlou qi 魯黔婁妻," in *Guifan*, 2.54a-55b.

¹⁴¹ "Shou Xia mu Jin Taijun bashi xu 壽夏母金太君八十叙," in *Wanxiangtang*, 16.291-292.

¹⁴² *Zheng shi guifan*, 14b.

¹⁴³ "Song xiaoguan tuanyuan po zhanli 宋小官團圓破氈笠" in *JSTY*, 22.332-33.

¹⁴⁴ *JSTY*, 22.336.

¹⁴⁵ *Huzhoufu zhi* 湖州府志 (1874), repr. Taipei: Chengwen, 1970, 81.4a. See similar sentiments in

Zhejiang was betrothed to Sun Dengming 孫登名. On his death, she was determined to go to serve as his widow but her parents would not let her so she dirtied her face and wore the white silk of mourning. She refused to eat meat and locked herself in her quarters when the family wanted to marry her off to a wealthy family.¹⁴⁶

Pan Jinlian and Li Ping'er are not the only characters in the *Jin Ping Mei* guilty of transgressing the regulations for mourning. Whilst still in mourning for her husband, Wu Yueniang wears clothes according to her rank in order to celebrate the marriage of Meng Yulou and Li Gongbi 李拱壁. On her head is a full set of pearl and kingfisher feather ornaments, she is clad in a scarlet *tongxiu* gown and skirt decorated with the 'hundred flower motif' with a gilt belt.¹⁴⁷ Later on in the novel, Yueniang resumes her mourning garb described as a five-arch gold head-dress, a smattering of gold and kingfisher feather ornaments, white damask robe on top and kingfisher blue satin skirt on the bottom. This is on the occasion of Chunmei's visit and Yueniang maintains her mourning for the remainder of the novel.¹⁴⁸

Changing out of and back into mourning is a curious slip on the part of Yueniang who, up to this point, has been held up as the most sincere of all the women in her grief. In his commentary on the text, Li Yu 李漁 (1611-1680) notes that her resuming mourning is "just as it should be."¹⁴⁹ In donning mourning, the

biography of Ms Xu 徐 from Huzhou who is praised for her lengthy period of mourning. *Huzhoufu zhi*, 81.3b.

¹⁴⁶ "Lienü ji," *Mingshancang*, 2.14a-14b.

¹⁴⁷ *JPMCH*, 91.10a.

¹⁴⁸ *JPMCH*, 96.2a. The arch head-dress worn by Yueniang is an unusual item of head ornamentation and is only worn by those women of the highest or wealthiest status in the novel. See, for example, *JPMCH*, 91.9a (Meng Yulou on the occasion of her marriage); *JPMCH*, 95.13a (Chunmei). As far as the prescriptive texts are concerned, this type of head-dress was used for men, the number of arches indicating status. However, in Wang Shizhen's biography of Tanyangzi, it is reported that she dreamed of the Supreme Perfect One (上真 *Shangzhen*): "Her beauty was extraordinary. On her head she wore a seven-ridged cap; on her feet were embroidered slippers." This indicates that this head-dress may have been worn by men and women alike as an indication of status. "Tanyangzi dashi zhuan 曇陽子大師傳," in *Yanzhou shanren xugao*, 78.2b.

¹⁴⁹ *Xinke xiuxiang piping Jin Ping Mei* 新刻綉像批評金瓶梅, by Li Yu 李漁, repr. in *Li Yu quanji*

participants in funerary ritual were, according to Confucian canon, making a public expression of their filiality, respect and love for their closest relatives.¹⁵⁰ Those in mourning were to restrict their activities for the entire mourning period. For example, they were to enter into temporary retirement, abstain from meat or wine, they were not to participate in auspicious rituals such as weddings, cappings and ancestral rites, or even engage in sexual relations. These restrictions were gradually lessened over the course of the mourning period.¹⁵¹ Xie Zhaozhe reported that few in Jiangnan were sticking to these restrictions on festivities for the first 100 days of mourning; instead they were going to parties, birthdays and festivals. Xie questioned their motives as they changed out of mourning robes into more auspicious clothing.¹⁵²

Those taking part in such mourning activity were conforming to the accepted mode of behaviour, and therefore, their actions could be considered moral. Evidently, public expressions of Confucian piety were especially pronounced in mourning activities, and, during the imperial period, these public displays were a widely used measure of filial piety with people being acclaimed or denounced according to how they behaved.¹⁵³ The fact that funerals were such public affairs and that people were judged on their behaviour during these times indicates how influential the appropriate behaviour could be. Clothing expectations were supposedly translated into congruent clothing behaviour.¹⁵⁴

Other literature published in the late Ming period often depicted varying

李漁全集, 20 vols., Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji, 1992, 20.458 (hereafter abbreviated to *PPJPM*).

¹⁵⁰ Kutcher, 1994, 8.

¹⁵¹ See, for example, Ebrey, 1991a, 36, 49, 71-72 and 77.

¹⁵² *WZZ*, 14, 265.

¹⁵³ For attitudes on mourning during the Tang see Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Aristocratic Families of Early Imperial China: A Case Study of the Po-ling Ts'ui Family*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, 98-99.

¹⁵⁴ S.F. Nadel, *Foundations of Social Anthropology*, London: Cohen and West, 1951, 262; Horn, 1968, 143-148.

perceptions of mourning as undertaken by women. In the Feng Menglong story “Zhuangzi xiu gupen cheng dadao 莊子休鼓盆成大道,” the views of the mourning worn by both the women in the story highlights some of the issues and moral dilemmas faced by both women and men. Following an encounter with a woman “fully dressed in the white silk of mourning” who is fanning the grave of her deceased husband in an attempt to dry the soil (her husband said she could remarry once the soil on his grave had dried), Zhuangzi expresses his admiration for the woman to his wife, Ms Tian 田. She is furious for this admiration of a woman who wishes to remarry and vows that she herself would never stoop so low as to remarry.¹⁵⁵ When Zhuangzi falls ill and dies, however, Ms Tian soon forgets her vows of chastity and is desperate to marry a handsome visitor to Zhuangzi’s grave. She gives the man 20 taels of silver to buy new clothes, removes her garments of white and replaces them with a set of colourful clothes comprising a brocade robe and embroidered skirt, daubing herself with make-up.¹⁵⁶ Unfortunately for her, Zhuangzi awakes from his “death” and finds her dressed in colourful clothes which give her away despite her protestations of continued mourning. Zhuangzi has tricked her into proving the falsity of her vows of chastity and she hangs herself in shame.¹⁵⁷ In this story a distinction is made between Zhuangzi’s attraction towards the honesty of the first widow and his distaste for the deceit and empty promises of his own wife.

The late Ming seems to have been a time when there was great pressure upon women not to remarry. Histories, local gazetteers and other works are filled with pieces commemorating women who remained widows or even those who committed suicide after the death of their husband or fiancé.¹⁵⁸ Throughout Chinese history

¹⁵⁵ “Zhuangzi xiu gupen cheng dadao 莊子休鼓盆成大道” in *JSTY*, vol.1, 15-17.

¹⁵⁶ *JSTY*, 2.20.

¹⁵⁷ *JSTY*, 2.21-22.

¹⁵⁸ See “Lienü 列女,” in *Ming shi*, *juan* 301-303; *Guifan* biographies; *Kongtong ji*, 40.9a-12b.

women who had exemplified the Confucian ideals of womanhood were praised for their virtue in biographies, official or unofficial histories or even by the erection of monumental arches in their local districts. However, not until the Ming dynasty was there a dramatic increase in the number of these commemorations, the majority for widow chastity, with a total of nearly 36,000 records.¹⁵⁹

The aim of awards in this period, as stated by local magistrate Huang Liuhong was to generate “respect and encouragement for moral norms,” although he criticised the contemporary practice of honouring only women from gentry households.¹⁶⁰ Katherine Carlitz has shown how shrines and commemorations to Confucian worthies, both male and female, were believed to “communicate a model of secular social power,” confucianising the local community’s self-image.¹⁶¹ This was considered particularly important from the mid-Ming due to the growing popularity of lineage consolidation.¹⁶²

The playwright Xu Wei records the fate of one such chaste woman:

Her plain white silk clothes and woven shoes are praised in the neighbourhood,
At over sixty, she has attained a considerable age.
Frosty branches at the side of the courtyard, there is only night,
Cloudy tresses in the mirror have long lost their springtime.
Sobs turn to showers each time she regards her reflection,
She earnestly knits her brows when she considers the honoured gate.¹⁶³
To fly together one hundred years their ambition,
National strife need not be sought for loyal subjects to come to light.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁹ T'ien Ju'ang, *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity: A Comparative Study of Values in Ming-Ch'ing Times*, Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1988, 39; Zheng Peikai 鄭培凱, “Tiandi Zhengyi jin jian yu funü - Ming Qing de qingse yishi yu zhenyin wenti 天地正義僅見於婦女 - 明清的情色意識與貞淫問題”, in Bao Jialin 鮑家麟, ed., *Zhongguo funü shi lunji 3 中國婦女史論集 3*, Taipei: Daoxiang, 1993, 97-119; Katherine Carlitz, “The Social Uses of Female Virtue in Late Ming Editions of *Lienü zhuan*,” *Late Imperial China* 12.2 (1991), 117-152.

¹⁶⁰ Huang Liuhong, 1984, 177, 521-522.

¹⁶¹ Carlitz, 1997a, 630-7.

¹⁶² Carlitz, 1997a, 636; See also Tim Brook, 1989, 2.

¹⁶³ i.e. the fact that she has been honoured as a virtuous widow.

The reasons behind the handing out of awards to such women were diverse. It was done mainly by local notables and officials who wanted to make names for themselves, but it was also carried out by men who felt constrained by the examination system and who were attracted by the spontaneous fidelity of these girls.¹⁶⁵ However, many contemporary scholars such as Lü Kun and Gui Youguang voiced concern over this cult of female chastity which encouraged women to take their own lives.¹⁶⁶

The *Lienü zhuan* states that, on the death of her fiancé Zhou Yingqi 周應祁 from Wujiang, Xiang Zhennü 項貞女 from nearby Xiushui 秀水:

waited until all the maids were sound asleep and got up alone, tying up her hair with white silk. She changed all her inner and outer garments for one of plain white silk and stitched her lower garment. Then she arranged her clothes and ordered the maids to lay them out on the bed. She left a message in large letters on the table: 'I respectfully report to my parents that I have been unable to offer one day's worth of happiness, and it is for Zhou that I die today.' And she hung herself. The parents from both families followed her wishes and they were finally entombed together.¹⁶⁷

Neo-Confucians were against widow remarriage, following the maxim attributed to Zhu Xi: "It is a small matter to starve to death, but a large matter to lose one's virtue".¹⁶⁸ This phenomenon may be an indication of an increase in the oppression of women; however, the new economic climate of the late Ming perhaps enabled more women to avoid remarriage should they so desire.¹⁶⁹ Many widows worked in the

¹⁶⁴ "Jiefu pian 節婦篇" in *Xu Wenzhang sanji*, 4.769.

¹⁶⁵ Carlitz, 1994, 123. See also Mark Elvin, "Female Virtue and the State in China," in *Past and Present* 104 (1984), 111-152.

¹⁶⁶ *Guifan*, 3.31a; "Zhennü lun 貞女論," in *Gui Zhenchuan xiansheng wenji* 歸震川先生文集 (1675), repr. Taipei: Shijiè, 1970, 312-313; Mark Elvin, "Female Virtue and the State in China," in *Past and Present* 104 (1984), 127

¹⁶⁷ Chen Peng, 1990, 159-60.

¹⁶⁸ *Er Cheng ji* 二程集, by Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032-85) and Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033-1107), repr. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1981, 22B.301.

¹⁶⁹ Ann Waltner, "Widows and Remarriage in Ming and Early Qing China," in Guisso and Johannesen,

prospering urban textile industries. For example, the Hejian 河間 gazetteer from the Jiajing period includes the biographies of Ms Liu 劉氏, Ms Jin 金氏, Ms Lu 盧氏 and Ms Sun 孫氏 who are among some of the many women who took up weaving to support themselves, their children and their husband's relatives.¹⁷⁰ Women of greater means could also stay single and independent by relying on their own property for an income. [See following chapter for further discussion on female property.]

Women who were able to resist remarriage may therefore have been perceived both as upholders of the moral tradition and also as women who were more financially secure than most. Those who were unable to complete the mourning period for their husband may have been perceived as both immoral and financially dependent on others. Joanna Handlin suggests that there may be a relation between the increasing importance attached to the fidelity of widows and the rise of a new urban culture:

The writings about women do not reveal the world that prompted the emergence of new attitudes; rather, they reveal idealistic reactions to a changing society (...) Footbinding, the cults of chastity and virginity, and stricter rules against the remarriage of widows are cited as evidence of the growing oppressions of women. They should, however, be interpreted as reactions to the aggressive behaviour of women, as described in the vernacular fiction, and to the expansion of opportunities for women living in cities.¹⁷¹

Some of the female protagonists of the *Jin Ping Mei* appear to be unaffected by any sense of moral shame in their choice to abandon chastity and mourning. This is contrasted by Yueniang's and Aijie's attempts to adhere, in a somewhat unorthodox way, to the Confucian values outlined above. This conflict is channelled

eds., 1981, 142-143.

¹⁷⁰ *Hejianfu zhi* 河間府治 (1540), edn. *Tianyige cang Mingdai fangzhi xuankan* 天一閣藏明代方志選刊, Shanghai: Guji, 1981-1982, 25.5a-6a.

¹⁷¹ Handlin, 1978, 14.

through debates over female chastity in general. From a strict Confucian viewpoint, Yueniang would have been ridiculed for her attempts. However, those of the lower classes were not expected to adhere so strictly to the ritual arrangement. Read in this light, her efforts to aspire to such touchstones of orthodoxy echo the social situation of the Ximen household with its mixture of merchant and official influences.

Summary

Many of the female characters in the *Jin Ping Mei* take advantage of the different types of power inherent in mourning to further their own ends. Many of the garments referred to in the text are not specific to the mourning grades and, more often than not, silk is used instead of coarse hemp for the heavier mourning grades. This could be another indicator of the fact that the fight for and display of wealth and power was overriding. It may simply be that those from a merchant family would not have been expected to adhere as tightly to the prescriptions as a Confucian scholar. However, in the confusion of the late Ming, when even scholars such as Xie Zhaozhe reported that people were laughing at those of even the more genteel classes who took the rituals too seriously, it was likely that people were beginning to make their own choices about the type of funeral to undertake and to what extent they would adhere to the prescriptions.

The extravagant funeral for Li Ping'er, a mere concubine, reveals perceptions of the new atmosphere among the wealthier in Ming society with regard to mourning for those outside the five mourning grades. However, the examples found so far pertaining to the actions of the literati would not have been on such a grand scale and were more an intimate expression of feeling and grief. Although it is clear that Ximen Qing favoured Li Ping'er, the extravagance of the whole affair seems to override the emotional aspects of the event, turning it more into a fantastic display of

power and wealth. Display is an important part of collective ritual and with Chinese mourning ritual this was perhaps particularly true. Mourning ritual was an opportunity for people to acknowledge their differing status in society while publicly showing unity among kin. Power relations were thus inherent in these rituals and the symbolic nature of ritual allows these aspects to be displayed through the use of mourning garments by the female characters in the novel. Wives, concubines, maids and prostitutes are praised or condemned for their moral posturing or greed respectively.

As rituals legitimate and reinforce the social, political and moral structure of society,¹⁷² it follows that the enacting of rituals, as opposed to the written prescriptions, could have been more influential in a practical sense. For the mainly illiterate and semi-illiterate in the sixteenth-century, such as the merchants and women, the way rituals were seen to be performed would have been considerably more significant in affecting their behaviour. If even the gentry class were not conforming wholly to the canons, then this, too, would have had a domino effect on those further down the social ladder.

With the rise of the cult of chastity in the late Ming, women and their periods of mourning became the centre of attention. The debate which raged over widow remarriage cannot fail to have affected how women were perceived and how women perceived themselves. Varying perceptions of mourning emerge from the text of the *Jin Ping Mei*, with examples of those who do attempt to follow Confucian guidelines regarding remarriage and those reject them. A woman's appearance during mourning was often used to determine her character and the numerous examples cited in this

¹⁷² Moore and Myerhoff, eds., 1977, 3-4; Stanley Jeyeraja Tambiah, *Culture, Thought, and Social Action*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985, 123-66; Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretative Anthropology*, New York: Basic Books, 1983, 19-35; Maurice Bloch, *From Blessing to Violence: History and Ideology in the Circumcision Ritual of the Merina of Madagascar*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 1-11.

chapter have shown the importance of such judgements, by peers and outsiders alike, on the lives of the women.¹⁷³

¹⁷³ This appears to be the case in many societies, both traditional and modern. See Rosemary Betterton, "Introduction," in *idem*, ed., *Looking on: Images of Women in the Visual Arts and Media*, London and New York: Pandora, 1987, 7.

CHAPTER FIVE

GIFT-GIVING AND POWER RELATIONS

In Chapter 35 of the *Jin Ping Mei*, Pan Jinlian protests to Ximen Qing that, unlike the other ladies of the household, she has no gifts to take on their visit to the relatives of Wu Yueniang. Yueniang, we are told, will be taking a set of clothes and some money, whilst the others will offer a variety of hairpins and flowers. Rather than go empty-handed, Jinlian feels it would be better if she stayed at home. Ximen Qing offers her the use of a bolt of plain red silk tabby which Jinlian refuses, saying that people will laugh at her due to the poor quality of the gift.¹ In order to placate her, Ximen resorts to asking Li Ping'er if she has anything more suitable. She offers to give Jinlian a set of clothes made of light cloud-patterned silk woven with gold, comprising a scarlet top and blue skirt. They agree to send the present as a joint one.² Jinlian later reports this to Meng Yulou who thinks that Ping'er's actions were very generous. Jinlian, on the other hand, warns that is a demonstration of the fact that the other concubines will have to yield to Ping'er's dominance.³ In this episode Jinlian exposes her low financial status by stating that she has nothing to offer as a gift; furthermore, she herself acknowledges that she has become indebted to her rival, Ping'er, by accepting a gift of clothing from her.

It has been suggested that all of the social relationships in the *Jin Ping Mei* revolve around the transfer of money and wealth, usually in the form of gifts, as the above passage indicates.⁴ In societies without overt market institutions, gift-exchange has been found to both circulate goods and services, and symbolise social relations.

¹ *JPMCH*, 35.4a.

² *JPMCH*, 35.4b

³ *JPMCH*, 35.10a.

⁴ Tian Bing'e, 1992, 54-59.

Marcel Mauss, in his study of primitive societies, discovered that in many cases, gift exchange was a principal method of social communication which could effect friendship, establish connections, and determine status and rank.⁵ Even in societies in the modern, developed world, where there is a traditional tendency for market transactions and gift exchange to be contrasted structurally, materially and morally, there are, in fact, aspects such as reciprocity which are common to both activities.⁶

The term 'gift' in Chinese is signified by the same character as for ritual, *li* 禮. Deriving from ancient times, it refers either to a present or offering, a favour or hospitality rendered.⁷ From earliest times, gift relations have played a significant role in Chinese society. They were seen as essential for the cohesion of the Western Zhou 西周 alliance of tributary states, as the *Shu jing* 書經 states:

The intelligent kings have paid careful attention to their virtue, and the wild tribes on every side have willingly acknowledged subjection to them. The nearer and the more remote have all made offerings of the productions of their countries - clothes, food, and vessels for use.⁸

The gift ceremonies of this period demonstrate Mauss' system of 'prestation' in which display and validation of rank provide the basis for the smooth functioning of the social order.⁹

⁵ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, Ian Cunningstone, tr., London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974. See also See Andrew Strathern, *The Rope of Moka: Big Men and Ceremonial Exchange in Mount Hagen New Guinea*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971.

⁶ Firth, 1973, 368-71; Blau, 1967, 93; C.A.Gregory, *Gifts and Commodities*, London: Academic Press, 1982, 41-70, illustrates how commodity exchange establishes objective quantitative relationships between the objects transacted, while gift exchange establishes personal quantitative relationships between the subjects transacting.

⁷ Hanyu Dazidian Bianji Wei Yuanhui 漢語大字典編輯委員會, *Hanyu dazidian* 漢語大字典, Chengdu: Sichuan cishu, 1993, 1008.

⁸ Legge, 1960b, 346-48.

⁹ Eugene Cooper, "The Potlatch in Ancient China: Parallels in the Sociopolitical Structure of the Ancient Chinese and the American Indians of the North-West Coast," *History of Religions* 22.2 (1982), 111.

The early Confucians applied this political system to everyday life, emphasising not the actual act of gift-giving, but the ritual rules of social conduct implied in the act.¹⁰ Correct social intercourse was paramount to the literati-élite of later imperial China, too, as attested by the numerous writings devoted to this.¹¹ There was much etiquette concerning kinds of gifts appropriate to rank, season, how to present and how to receive depending on relative social positions.¹² Asking for favours, confirming a relationship, seeing a teacher, the birth of sons, birthdays, betrothal, marriage, passing exams, moving house, opening business, cappings, hair-pinnings and funerals would all warrant the presentation of gifts. If the receiver was willing to accept the relationship they would retain the gifts; if they did not accept the gifts then they were rejecting the relationship.¹³

The majority of contemporary texts covering gift-exchange are concerned either with family ritual exchanges or male official exchanges. What, then, can be revealed about the nature of female gift-giving strategies? Were exchanges restricted to the inner quarters or could they be made publicly? Were women bound by the same practices as men or did they carve out particularly female forms of material communication? Using information from the *Jin Ping Mei* and other contemporary sources, this chapter analyses the significance of the gift relationship among women in late sixteenth-century China, demonstrating the essential role dress and ornamentation played in social exchanges. Although similar in many respects to male gift exchange in the way that gifts not only symbolised specific social relationships,

¹⁰ Mayfair Mei-hui Wang, *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets: The Art of Social Relationships in China*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994, 236-7.

¹¹ See, for example, "Jiaoji 交際," in *Yueshi bian*, 8.186-192; "Jiaoji 交際," in *WLYHB*, 10.698-700.

¹² Wang Meng'ou 王夢鷗, *Liji jinzhu jinyi* 禮記今注今譯, Taipei: Taiwan shangwu, 1987, 568-70.

¹³ Du Jiaji 杜家驥, *Zhongguo gudai renji jiaowang lisu* 中國古代人際交往禮俗, Beijing: Shangwu, 1996, 147-155. For examples of Ming etiquette see "Jiaoji," in *Yueshi bian*, 8.190-191.

but could also facilitate both public and private action, the peculiar position of women due to their sequestration and only partial integration into their husband's family meant that other, more personal relationships could be forged and maintained through the practice of gift exchange. The practice also shows how goods circulated in the late Ming, from superior to inferior and vice versa, fuelling disregard for sumptuary regulation.

Female property in China

In order to understand the types of gifts made between women in late imperial China and the motivations that lay behind them, we must first consider the types of property in the possession of women. Financial resources appear to be vital in ensuring the security of women in the *Jin Ping Mei* and these are also one explanation for Ximen's initial interest in the women. Meng Yulou is the widow of a textile merchant, Yang Zongxi 楊宗錫, and the sole inheritor of his fortune. Her wealth includes trunks full of clothing such as *mang* robes, jade belts and hat ornaments, jewellery, objets d'art and more than a thousand taels of silver.¹⁴ Li Ping'er perhaps has the most advantages of all the women. Former concubine of Cai Jing's son-in-law, Privy Councillor Liang Shijie 梁世傑, and ex-wife of Ximen Qing's sworn brother, Hua Zixu, Ping'er is a very wealthy woman. In the course of her adulterous liaison with Ximen, they appropriate Hua's wealth which includes clothing, jewels and objets d'art.¹⁵

Pan Jinlian has no wealth whatsoever, and the only relative we hear of is her poor mother who is, more often than not, treated very badly by Jinlian throughout the novel. We are told that Jinlian simply packs up her meagre belongings and moves

¹⁴ *JPMCH*, 7.1b.

¹⁵ *JPMCH*, 14.3b.

into her new home. She thus has no additional attributes she can use in the household. Sun Xue'e finds herself in a similar situation as she is the poorest of the concubines and has no relatives. Those concubines who were able to bring a large amount of money or material wealth with them were much more likely to be highly respected than those who came empty-handed.

Daughters in traditional China were not usually allowed to inherit property.¹⁶ However, there were recognised occasions which sanctioned female ownership of inherited property. Widows with sons were able to control their husband's share of the family estate until their sons came of age,¹⁷ and through this, they were able to achieve a degree of economic independence and respect.¹⁸ Although the Song philosopher Yuan Cai considered women weak and dependent, to be protected and looked after, he also conceded that an educated woman could manage property, particularly if a husband was dull-witted or unworthy or because he died and left her a widow with young children to raise.¹⁹ He also suggested that some families should entrust a capable daughter with property and other affairs when sons are incapable. These girls would then be able to support their parents and manage their funerals, so "how can people say that daughters are not as good as sons."²⁰

There are numerous examples from the late Ming which show how women were able to control property and to distribute it on their own initiative. In 1562,

¹⁶ Shûzô Shiga, "Family Property and the Law of Inheritance in Traditional China," in Buxbaum, 1978, 110 and 120; Zhao Fengjie 趙鳳喈, *Zhongguo funü zai falu shang de diwei* 中國婦女在法律上的地位, Taipei: Shihuo, 1973, 11-14.

¹⁷ *Shizheng lu*, 3.36b-37b. Lü Kun advocates severe punishment for those who would try to wrest it from her.

¹⁸ G. Jamieson, *Chinese Family and Commercial Law*, Hong Kong: Vetch and Lee, 1970, 25-26; See also A.P. Wolf, "Women, Widowhood and Fertility in pre-modern China," in J. Dupaquier et al., eds., *Marriage and Remarriage in Populations of the Past*, London and New York: Academic Press, 1981, 142.

¹⁹ Ebrey, 1984, 220-221.

²⁰ Ebrey, 1984, 224-5.

Lady Zhu 朱, the wife of scholar-official Wang Xijue, was given some property (產 *chan*) by her stern mother-in-law, Lady Wu 吳, and was told to accompany her husband when he was appointed a compiler at the Hanlin Academy.²¹ A contemporary, Ms Ling 凌 from Huzhou, was widowed in 1558, aged 29. In order to support herself and her two children she had to sell her jewellery and land.²²

A woman was given a dowry on her marriage and this may be considered a form of 'pre-mortem inheritance.'²³ An ample dowry would affirm a woman's status as a bride rather than a concubine.²⁴ Women often became concubines, in fact, because their natal family could not afford to provide them with a dowry.²⁵ The *Neize* states that wives should consider nothing their personal property and even personal gifts should be handed over to their parents-in-law;²⁶ however, the numerous Confucian requests to merge the dowry with the family belongings suggests that a substantial number of women considered it their own personal property.²⁷ The late Ming, however, saw regulations which may have weakened the position of a widow: should she wish to remarry, then the parents-in-law had theoretical control over the dowry and any property brought into the marriage by her.²⁸

²¹ "Gaofeng yipin furen xianmu Zhu shi xingshi 誥封一品夫人先母朱氏行實," in *Goushan xiansheng ji*, 14.31a.

²² *Huzhoufu zhi*, 81.4b.

²³ Chen Chung-min, "Dowry and Inheritance," in Hsieh Jih-chang and Chuang Ying-chang, eds., *The Chinese Family and its Ritual Behavior*, Taipei: Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, 1985, 124-6; Jack Goody and S.J. Tambiah, *Bridewealth and Dowry*, Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1973, 1.

²⁴ Mann, 1991, 204; Jerry Dennerline, "Marriage, Adoption, and Charity in the Development of Lineages in Wu-hsi from Sung to Ch'ing," in Ebrey and, eds., 1986, 177 and 183; Stevan Harrell and Sara A. Dickey, "Dowry Systems in Complex Societies," *Ethnology* 24 (1985), 111-114; Ebrey, 1984, 266.

²⁵ Ebrey, 1993, 233.

²⁶ Legge, 1885a, 458.

²⁷ Bray, 1997, 139; Ebrey, 1984, 200.

²⁸ "Hukou zongshu 戶口總數," in *DMHD*, 19.20b.

The inner quarters included a room (*fang* 房) of a woman's own in which she could keep her own belongings. Bray describes the locked chests in the wife's possession which contained such belongings as "a rejection of patriarchal solidarity."²⁹ Recent studies have, in fact, pointed out that Chinese women were the only *individual* property-holders, as the property of men was absorbed into the family group. Women, on the other hand, were, in practice, the sole owners of their dowry and the contents of their own room.³⁰

Recent studies by Patricia Ebrey, Susan Mann and Francesca Bray have all highlighted the importance in the mid-late imperial period of woman's work and the dowry in providing material goods which could be kept by women as personal property. Perhaps the most important goods in this respect were textiles and jewellery which could last a substantial amount of time.³¹ Late Ming literature often emphasises the independence women could gain from the disposal of such goods on their own terms. In the introduction to one of Feng Menglong's stories, "Lu Dalang huan jin wan gurou 呂大郎還金完骨肉," the wife of a miser from Jiaying in Zhejiang takes her own hairclaspers and combs to put towards an offering at a temple to pray for the birth of a son in defiance of her husband's wishes.³² In another story, "Yu Zhong juti shi yu shanghuang 俞仲舉題詩遇上皇," Wenjun 文君, the daughter of the wealthy Mr Zhuo 卓, gathers up some gold and pearl ornaments when she decides to elope with Scholar Sima 司馬. She later offers to sell these to purchase a shop so the couple can make a living.³³ Elopement is a common theme in

²⁹ Bray, 1997, 172.

³⁰ Shûzô, 1978, 118.

³¹ Ebrey, 1993, esp. 6 and 107-109; Bray, 1997, 175-272; Susan Mann has concentrated on perceptions of 'women's work'. See *idem*, 1997, 141-177.

³² "Lu Dalang huan jin wan gurou 呂大郎還金完骨肉," in *JSTY*, 5.53.

³³ "Yu Zhong juti shi yu shanghuang 俞仲舉題詩遇上皇," in *JSTY*, 6.66-68.

literature and provides situations in which women demonstrate a degree of financial independence.

The importance of dress and ornamentation to the women in the *Jin Ping Mei* is particularly emphasised in Chapters 85 and 86 when Chunmei and Jinlian are expelled from the Ximen household by Yueniang. Jinlian is ordered to leave empty-handed. Yueniang goes to Jinlian's room and gets out "four sets of clothes, several hairpins, combs, hairclasps and hoop earrings, bedding, and the rest of her shoes." Jinlian gets dressed and says goodbye. Yulou secretly gives her a pair of gold cup hairpins, an outfit comprising a robe of turquoise blue satin and a red skirt.³⁴ Even the maid Xiaoyu gives her two gold-topped hairclasps.³⁵

Chunmei, too, is told that she must not take anything with her when she leaves, but Yueniang's maid Xiaoyu 小玉 advises them to give Chunmei two set of her best clothes and let Dame Xue 薛 take them for her as a parting gift without letting Yueniang know about it. Chunmei is given her handkerchiefs and kingfisher feather hairpins and Jinlian gives her two sets of clothes made from top quality silk tabby and satin, and shoes; also hairpins, combs, hairclasps, pendant earrings and rings. Xiaoyu gives her the two hairclasps from her hair. Chunmei's other possessions such as her pearl *yingluo* necklace, her silver cloud chignon fret, and her figured brocade skirts and robes were all given to Yueniang.³⁶ Dame Wang tells Chunmei:

Yueniang has a cruel heart. For such a pretty girl to leave the household without a single item of clothing, a hairclasp or earring, it will be very awkward when you go to a new master's house.³⁷

³⁴ *JPMCH*, 86.11a.

³⁵ *JPMCH*, 86.11b.

³⁶ *JPMCH*, 85.10b.

³⁷ *JPMCH*, 86.2a.

Here the power of dress and ornamentation is acknowledged indirectly. The worst thing that could happen to a disgraced woman leaving a household would be not to have a decent set of clothes and jewellery. Without this she could not hope to find respect in any new household she entered, if she even got that far.

The standing of a new bride in the household could be bolstered by the presence of a substantial dowry. Not only could she demonstrate her suitability to serve as a daughter-in-law through her labour and skill in producing clothing and textile goods, she also provided the family with saleable cloth.³⁸ Both helped to establish her position and were therefore very important in the competition for status in the new household. He Qiaoyuan of the Ming reports the unfortunate tale of the two daughters of a Mr Li 李 who died in famine at the time of their hairpinning in the Chenghua period. A neighbour's wife suggested that they sell the dowries their father had prepared for them in order to survive. The girls were so ashamed that they would enter a new household without a dowry that they hid them and never came out, preferring to starve to death instead.³⁹ This highlights the psychological significance of a good dowry for women in this period.

Property could avert destitution should a woman be widowed or orphaned. Many women and their children were able to live off the proceeds gained from the sale of their clothing and ornamentation, objects which could easily be sold to assist in times of financial difficulty.⁴⁰ Li Xu 李詡 (1505-1593), a scholar from Jiangyin 江陰, reports how a widow in the late Ming was forced to sell her hairpins and earrings for twelve taels of silver in order to survive.⁴¹ Examples of this type of behaviour are portrayed in the literature of the time. In the late Ming novel *Zhaoyang*

³⁸ Ebrey, 1993, 100; Bray, 1997, 188. See Joseph P. McDermott, "The Chinese Domestic Bursar," *Ajia bunka kenkyu* 1990.2, 26. He discusses how dowry could be converted into capital.

³⁹ "Lienü ji," in *Mingshancang*, 2.9a.

⁴⁰ Ebrey, 1993, 111.

⁴¹ "Gujin dun yi pu 古今敦誼僕," in *JALRMB*, 4.156. See also *Shizheng lu*, 2.25a.

qushi, a widow tells her daughters to sell her clothes to provide for her own burial.⁴²

In another of the stories in the Feng Menglong collection, “Fan Qiu’er shuangjing chongyuan 范鰥兒雙鏡重圓,” a women who has been separated from her husband during the turmoil of war, is forced to sell her hairpins and earrings to rent a room.⁴³

The women who are expelled from the Ximen household in the *Jin Ping Mei*, by contrast have no such security and have to rely on the personal generosity of the other women and maids. Bray notes the great importance of gifts between women in creating and maintaining social relationships:

The cloth that women wove also tied the family into the community. The walls around the house separated ‘us’ from ‘others,’ but the cloth made in the inner quarters bound the family to neighbours, kin and marriage partners. Textiles were an essential element in the forging and reinforcing of social bonds.⁴⁴

The woven and embroidered goods which a bride took with her as a dowry were considered very valuable to the women as they formed a material link with their natal families, especially to the mothers who would have undertaken the preparation of their daughter’s dowry.⁴⁵ Bray continues:

As well as a female, nonhegemonic form of property, the quilts and robes and shoes and handkerchiefs also embodied a nonhegemonic network of female kinship that was complementary to the patriline, a bond between female kin that transcended the spatial boundaries imposed by seclusion to link women separated by marriage. The embroidered goods showed the groom’s family how skillfully the bride’s female relatives had trained her. And they were precious mementos linking women who might never meet again.⁴⁶

⁴² ZYQS, 2.40.

⁴³ “Fan Qiu’er shuangjing chongyuan 范鰥兒雙鏡重圓,” in *JSTY*, 12.165.

⁴⁴ Bray, 1997, 187.

⁴⁵ For an example of this activity in late Ming literature see “Song xiaoguan tuanyuan po zhanli 宋小官團圓破戲笠,” in *JSTY*, 22.327.

⁴⁶ Bray, 1997, 265.

Gifts between a bride and her natal family, whether in the form of a dowry or more informal gifts, could reinforce female social bonds. Women defined their own concepts of kinship which were set apart from traditional male patterns, yet at the same time complimented them.

The possession of moveable wealth in the form of dress and ornamentation was advantageous in several respects as it could provide a women with respect, dignity and security. Throughout the *Jin Ping Mei* we see the women exchanging gifts or making things for each other.⁴⁷ In the majority of cases, these gifts include or are solely comprised of clothing and ornaments. One of the main reasons for this, as we have seen, is that dress and ornaments tend to be the most common movable wealth in the possession of the women. The novel reveals three areas in which exchange of such items could enhance female relationships and social standing further, namely in friendship and establishing connections, the demonstration of status and bribery. However, these spheres are by no means distinct or separate.

Intimate friendship and social connections

Li Ping'er is often described as the most generous of all the women in the Ximen household. In Chapter 33, Mrs Pan is sent to stay the night with Li Ping'er as Ximen Qing is to stay with Jinlian. She delights Jinlian's mother with gifts including a scallion-white damask robe and two pairs of satin shoe tops. Jinlian is embarrassed

⁴⁷ Deng Yunxiang 鄧雲鄉 considers the mid-Qing novel *Hongloumeng* an important book for the research into the concept of the gift. He describes how not only the members of the family but even the maids were well aware of the significance of the size and type of the gift depending on the closeness of the family relationship or degree of friendship. Not only did they have to estimate the size and type of gift to present, but they also had to judge the return gift. Deng identifies no less than eight types of gift presentation. These comprise gifts for friendship; an initial meeting; weddings and funerals and other events such as opening a new building, moving house, religious rituals; birthdays; festivals; holiday gifts; gifts between rich and poor relatives; bribes for power and wealth. Deng Yunxiang 鄧雲鄉, *Honglou fengsu tan* 紅樓風俗譚, Beijing: Zhonghua, 1987, 79-80.

and extremely annoyed when she discovers what has happened between them, especially when her mother retorts that she never gives her anything to wear. Jinlian complains, “I have no clothes of my own never mind any to give to you.”⁴⁸ Jinlian’s mother later recalls these gifts fondly after Ping’er’s death and again bemoans Jinlian’s lack of generosity.⁴⁹ Here, Li Ping’er has effectively usurped Jinlian’s place as a filial daughter and at the same time has emphasised her own superior position. As demonstrated in the example cited at the start of this chapter, she is able to hand out gifts whereas Jinlian, the concubine who entered the household without a dowry, is unable to do so and therefore must depend on others for gifts.

In the late Ming novel *Zhaoyang qushi*, the quality and quantity of gifts exchanged between the lascivious empress Zhao Feiyan 趙飛燕 and her equally licentious sister Hede 合德, another of the Emperor’s ladies, are taken to be measures of status and favour. Hede sends gifts to Feiyan to thank her for permitting her to have sexual intercourse with an old lover of theirs. The offering includes the following items of clothing and ornamentation:

A tray of various items including a united heart knot (...) an armlet of dragon fragrance wood, four gold bracelets, three tussore hand cushions patterned with apricots (...) a seven-jewel hairclasp, a pair of jade hooped earrings (...) a mother of pearl fan, a kingfisher feather fan, (...) a set of woven short robes, a set of woven skirts, (...) a pair of variegated embroidery shoes, (...) a veil of variegated open silk ornamented with gold, (...) a pair of coral beads.⁵⁰

The quality and quantity of the gifts are obviously greater than any of the examples exchanged during the course of the *Jin Ping Mei* reflecting the resources of the donor. Feiyan sends return gifts to her sister which are seen by her sister as much better than the gifts she was able to offer. Her status is therefore demonstrably lower than that of

⁴⁸ *JPMCH*, 33.3a-b.

⁴⁹ *JPMCH*, 78.21b.

⁵⁰ *ZYQS*, 4.106.

her sister and she promptly complains to the Emperor who promises to have items made especially for her.⁵¹ The competitive nature of gift exchange is revealed here and echoes sentiments similar to those found in the example cited at the start of this chapter in which Pan Jinlian is not only humiliated at her inability to present suitable gifts, but also by the fact that she has to accept charity from her rival, Li Ping'er.

Another episode where Ping'er's generosity is highlighted comes in Chapter 51 when she pays for all the handkerchiefs ordered by herself, Jinlian and Dajie 大姐.⁵² Ximen Dajie is one of the few characters who appears to be on genuinely friendly terms with Li Ping'er. Although Dajie is frequently classed alongside the maid Chunmei in the allocation of clothing and ornamentation, Ping'er often supplements her lot by giving her needles, thread, shoe tops, damask, thin silk, satin and cotton, and different types of handkerchiefs.⁵³ Charitable actions such as these were frequently praised during the late Ming. Ms Qiu 邱, the second wife of scholar-official Yang Juming 楊車明 (1548-1624), is praised in a local gazetteer for her charitable donations. On one occasion, she gave 100 rolls of cloth which were made into clothes for the poor.⁵⁴

As early as the Zhou period there is evidence that women engaged in gift exchange to express friendship. For example, the Queen of King Cheng 成 (1115-1079 BC) gave jade, horses and fish to her intimate friend the Duchess of Qi 齊.⁵⁵ In late imperial China, however, the objects that women exchanged as tokens of friendship tended to be mostly items of dress or ornamentation. Handkerchiefs, fans

⁵¹ ZYQS, 4.107.

⁵² JPMCH, 51.21b.

⁵³ JPMCH, 51.2b.

⁵⁴ *Yuchengxian zhi* 虞城縣志 (1895), repr. Taipei: Chengwen, 1976, 7.3a-b.

⁵⁵ Chen Mengjia 陳夢家, "Xi Zhou tongqi duandai 西周銅器斷代 5," *Kaogu xuebao* 考古學報 1956.3, 119-121.

and shoes, were even embroidered by the giver.⁵⁶ It has been shown that literate women's societies of the late Ming could perpetuate personal bonds over long distances and over long periods of time; their letters were often accompanied by gifts of paintings, calligraphy and decorated fans. For example, Huang Yuanjie 黄媛介 from Jiaxing passed on her regards to a female artist by sending her a fan embellished with her own calligraphy via Huang Dezhen 黄德贞, the organiser of a poetry society. Huang Dezhen passed the letter and fan onto the woman, suggesting she decorate three more fans to return in exchange.⁵⁷ A contemporary observer, Matteo Ricci, commented on the popularity of this form of present: "The gift most frequently exchanged as a sign of friendship and esteem is a fan."⁵⁸

Gentry woman Mme Ma 馬 composed a poem to thank a friend for the gift of an embroidered pair of shoes. She wrote:

Tiny petals of golden lotus falling into the Jade Pond,
Imagining you, embroidering in the inner chambers.
Your skillful handiwork laboriously sent from afar,
Dare I tread onto balconies wet with dew?⁵⁹

The women of the *Jin Ping Mei* frequently exchange shoes which they have embroidered themselves.⁶⁰ On her arrival in the Ximen household, Pan Jinlian presents Yueniang with shoes and does embroidery for her. This "so delighted Yueniang she didn't know where to put herself." In return, Yueniang gives Jinlian

⁵⁶ Bray, 1997, 269.

⁵⁷ Widmer, 1989, 18.

⁵⁸ Gallagher, 1953, 25.

⁵⁹ *Mingyuan shigui chao* 名媛詩歸鈔. Cited in Ko, 1994, 170.

⁶⁰ There are several moments of comparative harmony in the *Jin Ping Mei* when we see the women embroidering shoes together. In Chapters 29 and 58, the women discuss preferred styles and colours of shoe. However, these intimate moments both lead to Jinlian cursing other women in the household, most prominently Wu Yueniang and Li Ping'er, her main rivals at the time. *JPMCH*, 29.1a and 58.16a. See also episode in Feng Menglong tale "Sanxianshen Bao Longtu duanyuan 三現身包龍圖斷冤," in *JSTY*, 13.177.

her favourite clothes.⁶¹ The way in which Jinlian ceremonially acknowledges the principal wife through gift presentation resembles the way in which a new bride was expected to go to see her mother- and father-in-law in full attire (盛服 *shengfu*) the day following the wedding ceremony. According to the *Jiali yijie* she was to be accompanied by a maid carrying gifts (贄幣 *zhibi*) and a ceremonial handing over of gifts would occur, after which she would wait upon them.⁶² Due to the lack of parents-in-law in the novel this cannot be carried out. Instead, the women pay their respects to the principal wife and hand over similar gifts.

Many of the instances of gift presentation between the women in the *Jin Ping Mei* occur between a mistress and her maids or ‘adopted daughters.’ On Ximen’s birthday Yueniang gives the prostitute Li Guijie a sleeveless overdress of light cloud-patterned silk and handkerchiefs, flower and kingfisher feather ornaments and other such items to thank her for coming to the house.⁶³ This episode is seen as a precursor to Yueniang adopting Guijie when Ximen succeeds to office. Yueniang is establishing her authority as legitimate wife in front of Guijie who has been monopolising Ximen Qing’s attention for a substantial period of time.⁶⁴

Li Ping’er gives clothes to Wu Yin’er, another prostitute favoured by Ximen Qing and adopted by Ping’er shortly after she has given birth to Guan’ge. These gifts include a set of top quality clothes of satin woven with gold and two handkerchiefs washed with gold. Yin’er says:

I do not want these clothes (...) I do not have a white damask robe to wear. Why don’t you keep these satin clothes, mother, and give me one of your old white damask robes instead?⁶⁵

⁶¹ *JPMCH*, 9.3b.

⁶² “Hunli 婚禮,” in *Jiali yijie*, 3.23b-24a.

⁶³ *JPMCH*, 12.11b.

⁶⁴ *DYQS*, 12.194.

⁶⁵ *JPMCH*, 45.9a.

Ping'er says that hers would be too big and so gives her the material to make two instead and offers her the choice of patterned or plain twill. Yin'er replies that plain ones are better for matching with sleeveless overdresses. She is given a bolt of white Songjiang broad loom damask with pointed twill and is made to take the satin clothes also.⁶⁶ This passage not only demonstrates how material objects aided in the bonding between women of different classes, but also shows taste judgements made by prostitutes. Orthodox sources reveal nothing of these actions, yet the *Jin Ping Mei* vocalises perceived choices.

On her deathbed Ping'er ceremonially hands out gifts to those women closest to her. The quality and quantity of the gifts presented reflects the status of the relationship between the women. Her old maid Mother Feng 馮媽媽 receives a white damask robe, a yellow damask skirt and a silver hairgrip. The wet-nurse Ru Yi'er 如意兒 receives a robe of purple pongee, a blue pongee skirt, an old cape, two gold hairpins and a gold and silver head-dress accessory (滿冠 *manguan*). Her personal maids Xiuchun 綉春 and Yingchun 迎春 receive two gold-topped hairpins and two gold flowers.⁶⁷ Behaviour such as this can be found in contemporary reports. The late Ming writer Gui Youguang related how the honoured Mme Cai 蔡, on her deathbed, handed out her hairclasps and clothing to her female relatives by marriage.⁶⁸ The *Jin Ping Mei* accentuates the lack of ideal family relationships in its world and, thereby, Ping'er's isolation at a time when she should have been surrounded by her husband's family.

Despite her close relationship with Ximen Qing, Li Ping'er's relationships with her maids and servants intensify as Jinlian's jealous antics become more extreme. Mann suggests that the alienation of a new bride in her husband's house

⁶⁶ *JPMCH*, 45.9a-b.

⁶⁷ *JPMCH*, 62.11a-12a.

⁶⁸ "Cai ruren zhuan 蔡孺人傳," in *Zhenchuan xiansheng ji*, 27.447.

often led to the development of deep personal relationships with her maids. Although a new bride would have to spend much of her time waiting upon her mother-in-law and the other more established ladies of the household, she may have been treated harshly and become the victim of jealousy.

It is no wonder, then, that married women developed close bonds with female servants. A young servant might accompany a bride from her natal household as part of her dowry; another might nurse her infants. Elite women spent much of their time in servants' company, and young married women especially relied on a servant's confidence to hear out their tales of pain, loneliness and isolation.⁶⁹

Although guidelines on the correct etiquette for gift exchange existed in traditional China, the *Jin Ping Mei* and other sources reveal a more personal use of gift exchange. Not all households were composed of senior and junior generations; therefore certain aspects of etiquette could be adopted to symbolise the different social relationships within the family. As in mourning ritual, the guidelines were not immutable and could be liable to varying interpretation. Polygamous households created complex hierarchies, not all of which are represented in the guidelines. In the *Jin Ping Mei*, in particular, we see how the female characters gain allies and friends through gift presentation to those of inferior status.

It is clear that the major source of clothes for personal maids is from the mistress, and items of clothing and ornamentation make up a great proportion of presents given to maids in the *Jin Ping Mei*. In the late Ming play *Mudan ting*, Chunxiang 春香 fondly remembers her dead mistress Du Liniang by the silk tabby skirt she wears which was a gift from her.⁷⁰ Adshead emphasises the importance of this process in the dissemination of clothing and ornamentation from superior to

⁶⁹ Mann, 1997, 61.

⁷⁰ *Mudan ting*, 25.1921.

inferior in early-modern societies such as China. It was particularly true among women:

Feminization in turn favoured inferiorization. In pre-modern society, women were closer to their servants than men. Female servants were in a better position to observe, learn, imitate, receive cast-offs, give advice even, than the male.⁷¹

As fashion spreads by imitation and emulation, it would be women who played a vital role. The passage of goods from mistresses to maids in the *Jin Ping Mei* demonstrates how the sartorial boundaries between women of different class and status were narrowed. Favoured maids are able to compete in the fashion stakes to the extent that they are able to attract the attention of the master away from the wife and concubines, as will be demonstrated more clearly in the following chapter.

Maids were imitating the clothing styles of their mistresses who themselves were becoming more independent in this area. Both of these factors created a new body of consumers in both China and Europe (though on a smaller scale in China), according to Adshead:

In both, the basic principle was male hypergamy.⁷² Women were the carriers of status and nobility was nubility. Larger dowries, more investment in female education, and greater spending for and by women were means of enhancing female prestige and establishing social distance. Nobility was thus put in a better position to attract, via marriage, power and wealth which, along with land, formed the quadrilateral of family fortune. In both early modern China and Europe, marriage was strengthening its position *vis-à-vis* other factors in family strategy.⁷³

⁷¹ Adshead, 1997, 26. •

⁷² Marriage to a person of same or superior class.

⁷³ Adshead, 1997, 25-6. See also Hilary J. Beattie, *Land and Lineage in China: A Study of T'ung-ch'eng County, Anhwei, in the Ming and Ch'ing Dynasties*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, 92-93. She outlines strategies including advantageous marriage which were employed by various generations of the Zhang 張 family to assist lineage building and consolidation.

As has been shown in this section and the previous chapter, it was advantageous to have the women and servants of a household supplied with copious quantities of dress and ornamentation. Conspicuous consumption such as this demonstrated one's wealth and power over the less well-off in the community and enabled one to compete with those of the same or higher standing.

Not only are gifts presented between women and members of their own household in the *Jin Ping Mei*, but they are also exchanged between women of different families. There are many instances of women from different families sending gifts to establish connections between families. Prior to her entry to the household and even before the rest of the Ximen women know of her affair with Ximen Qing, Li Ping'er begins sending gifts to the women. Her first gift is to Wu Yueniang, a gift which arrives out of the blue whilst the women are all together in the garden. The flower is described as a *xianyu zanhua* 鮮玉簪花, an elegant fresh white pliant lily which would have been inserted into the hair.⁷⁴ The late Ming-early Qing author and all-round aesthete, Li Yu 李漁 (1611-1680),⁷⁵ comments on the beauty of particular colours of flowers: "With regard to seasonal flowers, white is considered superior, next is yellow, and then pale red. The most disliked is scarlet."⁷⁶ It is no wonder then that Yueniang is "absolutely delighted" with this unexpected gift. Ping'er has attempted to impress Yueniang to show that she has qualities that will make association with her rewarding.⁷⁷ Later Li Ping'er invites the ladies of the Ximen household to her house in Lion Street. Here Yueniang takes advantage of the fact that it is her birthday in order to send gifts which include a set of thick silk

⁷⁴ *JPMCH*, 10.6a.

⁷⁵ *ECCP*, 495-497.

⁷⁶ "Shoushi 首飾," in *Xianqing ouji* 閑情偶寄, by Li Yu 李漁, repr. in *Liyu quanji* 李漁全集, 20 vols., Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji, 1992, 3.131.

⁷⁷ Blau, 1967, 34.

clothes woven with gold.⁷⁸ In this way she is able to confirm the desire for social intercourse with Li Ping'er and re-establishes her status with regard to the balance of gift exchange.

Connections with the household of Qiao Hong 喬洪, the wealthy neighbour of Ximen Qing, are reaffirmed by the presentation of gifts from the ladies of the Ximen household for Qiao Zhangjie's 喬長姐 birthday. She is the daughter of the household who was betrothed to Guan'ge when they were children. Wu Yueniang makes Ximen Qing send gifts which include a set of figured seasonal clothes, two square gold-washed handkerchiefs and a box of flower and kingfisher feather ornaments. "Just because our child is no more doesn't mean to say we shouldn't be courteous," she argues.⁷⁹ In this case, it is the preservation of connections that is most important although Wu Yueniang is of a higher status, a point made quite clear when Ximen Qing first hears of the betrothal of Guan'ge to their child: "Since the matter is settled, let's leave it, but there is some inequality in position. Although they now have this family matter, Qiao is merely an ordinary citizen whereas we are now of an official position and I must undertake affairs at the *yamen*."⁸⁰

For Firth, a sociologically striking aspect of gifts of material objects is that they are usually given with some formality or ceremony:

Broadly speaking, the degree of formality in gift is commensurate with the degree of publicity, that is with the degree to which the gift is of general social interest (...) the formality celebrates not so much the gift as the social relationship which the gift symbolizes.⁸¹

⁷⁸ JPMCH, 15.1a.

⁷⁹ JPMCH, 67.15b-16a.

⁸⁰ JPMCH, 41.6a.

⁸¹ Firth, 1973, 376.

In other words, the transfer of the material object is an expression of the importance of the immaterial relationship between the people involved and the ceremonial presentation of the gifts between different families in the *Jin Ping Mei* affirms this.

The Changshu gazetteer of the late Ming recorded that it had become the custom on festival days for all the women to go out in their best clothes to visit each other and present gifts.⁸² Just as the prominence of women in ritual of mourning was increasing, so too was their visibility in other ritual celebrations. Like the female characters in the *Jin Ping Mei*, women were seen to create their own social networks through the employment of gift exchange. Bray suggests that for women in late imperial China:

embroidery or woven patterns conveyed messages of affection and solidarity that otherwise could not have been expressed, and affirmed bonds between related and unrelated women that neo-confucian orthodoxy did not encourage, or at any rate hardly recognized.⁸³

Voices from both the *Jin Ping Mei* and other contemporary sources reflect the importance of exchanging items of clothing and ornamentation in establishing and maintaining social relationships between women. Most significantly, however, is the type of relationship they expressed. Not only did gifts symbolise kinship relations between women, their natal families and their families by marriage, they could also symbolise relations with women other families and even with the more menial women of the household.

⁸² “Fengsu zhi,” in *Changshuxian zhi*, 4.21b.

⁸³ Bray, 1997, 269. There are several moments of comparative harmony in the *Jin Ping Mei* when we see the women embroidering shoes together. In Chapters 29 and 58, the women discuss preferred styles and colours of shoe. However, these intimate moments both lead to Jinlian cursing other women in the household, most prominently Wu Yueniang and Li Ping'er, her main rivals at the time. See *JPMCH*, 29.1a and 58.16a. See also episode in Feng Menglong tale “Sanxianshen Bao Longtu duanyuan 三現身包龍圖斷冤,” in *JSTY*, 13.177.

Demonstration of status

Throughout the *Jin Ping Mei* there are many occasions of gift exchange which depict demonstration and acknowledgement of status and power. The ladies of the Ximen household often hand out presents to those of lower status, and who are usually employed by the family. The daughter of Ben The Fourth 本四 is the fortunate recipient of many items of clothing and ornamentation. On one visit, Pan Jinlian and Meng Yulou thank her for serving them tea with flower ornaments whilst the more wealthy Li Ping'er gives her a handkerchief and some money.⁸⁴ On her betrothal as a concubine to Magistrate Xia 夏, an associate of Ximen Qing, the family make a contribution to her dowry of a set of thick silk clothes and some silver. The other ladies present her with flower and kingfisher feather ornaments, handkerchiefs, makeup and other such things.⁸⁵

The compilation and presentation of dowry and betrothal gifts forms a common theme in the novel. Yueniang also gives a dowry to Song Huilian on her marriage to the servant Lai Wang 來旺. It includes money, "two sets of clothes, four bolts of burgundy cloth, hairpins, hooped earrings and other such items."⁸⁶ When a suitable match is found for Chen Jingji in Chapter 97, Chunmei, as head of her new household, undertakes to send betrothal gifts:

two trays of head ornaments, two trays of pearl and kingfisher ornaments (...) a chignon fret, a complete set of gold and silver jewellery, hairpins, hooped earrings and other such things, two gowns of silk tabby and satin, clothes for the four seasons (...) and silk-weave cotton cloth.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ *JPMCH*, 24.7a.

⁸⁵ *JPMCH*, 65.11b. Later in the novel Yueniang goes alone to the Xia's house and presents Ben The Fourth's daughter with two gold flowers. *JPMCH*, 76.17a.

⁸⁶ *JPMCH*, 22.1b.

⁸⁷ *JPMCH*, 97.10a.

In traditional China, clothes and jewellery from a woman's dowry would often be given to make up the dowries of female relatives on her husband's side when it came for their turn to be married. The dowry, in effect, constituted a matrilineal form of inheritance, in opposition to that property passed down the male line.⁸⁸

The principal wife of a household was to ensure that servants were fed and clothed and, at the appropriate time, prepared with betrothal gifts. Of his mother, the poet and calligrapher, Wu Kuan 吳寬 (1436-1504) from Changzhou 常州 prefecture states: "She was a diligent wife and enlarged the property. Clothes and food were always given out equally to the many hired bondservants."⁸⁹ That the lady in question is praised for her actions seems to suggest that other wives may have been seen to be less than diligent in providing for the needs of their hired bondservants (奴 *nu*), as contemporary scholar-official Zhang Lǔxiang elaborates:

The worst masters do not allow their bondservants to mourn for dead parents by wearing sackcloth and wailing. They act as though it is all right to seduce their bondservant's wives and daughters and take their property without asking them. The very worst ones secretly kill and cremate their bondservants and nobody dares to take them to court.⁹⁰

Although a scholar himself, Wu's father, Wu Yong 吳融, and his grandfather, Wu Shou 吳壽, before him had been gentry engaged in the textile business.⁹¹ Both literary and biographical texts reveal the importance of providing these servants (often called adopted sons/wives) with sufficient food and clothing, medical attention and arranging marriages for them at a suitable age.⁹² That those carrying out these

⁸⁸ Ebrey, 1993, 100.

⁸⁹ *Paoweng jiacang ji* 匏翁家藏集(1449), by Wu Kuan 吳寬, edn. *Sibu congkan chubian jibu* 四部叢刊初編集部, repr. Shanghai: Shangwu, n.d., 57.13a.

⁹⁰ *Yangyuan xiansheng quanji* 楊園先生全集, by Zhang Lǔxiang 張履祥. Cited in Oyama Masaaki 小山正明, "Large Landownership in the Jiangnan Delta Region During the late Ming-Early Qing Period," in Grove and Daniels, eds., 1984, 113.

⁹¹ *DMB*, 1487-1489.

⁹² "Xuxia 恤下," in *Chishan huiyue*, 14; Huang Liuhong, 1984, 609-610.

duties to their servants in the examples above were from the merchant class, what's more wives from the merchant class, is noteworthy. As discussed in Chapter Two, attitudes to merchants were changing. They were seen by some scholars to be participating in activities such as charity acts which were traditionally regarded as the pursuits of the gentry. Their women, as seen in Chapter Three, took a great deal of interest in matters pertaining to household management and business. Therefore, in a similar way to their husbands, merchant women could be held up as exemplars of charitable behaviour. Zhang Lǔxiang's concerns over the worst behaviour of masters reminds us of the treatment of Song Huilian by Ximen Qing in the first half of the novel, but is more indicative of the abuse of *power* than a criticism of merchants *per se*.

The majority of gifts presented by the female characters during the course of the novel are retained by their recipients. However, there are a few occasions when gifts are not accepted. Wu Yueniang sends to Chunmei gifts including a bolt of silk cloth to thank Chunmei for the part she played in solving the court case brought against Wu Yueniang by Wu Dian'en 吳典恩. Dai'an tells Chunmei to "use them as presents for others."⁹³ The reasons Chunmei returns the material are unclear. On the one hand, it may be to express her unworthiness to accept so many gifts for the trifling favour she has done for Yueniang. Another reason may be the fact that Yueniang is no longer the wealthy and powerful lady she once was when Ximen Qing was alive and Chunmei, now a lady of greater status and resources, takes this into consideration. However, it may also be that she is unwilling to enter into a new social relationship with Yueniang.⁹⁴

⁹³ *JPMCH*, 95.13a-b.

⁹⁴ See Blau, 1967, 108; Firth, 1973, 390.

A cautionary tale from the *Guifan* warns of the dangers of ill-gotten gains and the advantages of refusing gifts. Fu Chengzu 符承祖 was favoured by the Empress Dowager Wenming 文明 and received much money from her. His sister-in-law Ms Yang 楊氏, however, refused to have anything to do with their new found riches. Her sister tried to give her clothing but she refused: "My family have been poor for generations and beautiful clothing would not be befitting." Even her servants refused the clothes they were offered. When Fu eventually fell from favour the whole family were punished save Ms Yang, who was spared due to her evident poverty.⁹⁵ However, the majority of sources show that the advantages of accepting gifts outweighed the disadvantages.

In the seventeenth-century novel *Taowu xianping*, the acrobat Hou Yiniang 侯一娘, favourite of the ladies of the influential and wealthy Wang 王 household, is presented with gifts after she stays the night. The gifts from the Great Lady Wang, who is described as a "rival to Guanyin," include "a white damask flowered kerchief containing a silver toothpick, a pair of scarlet flowered trousers, two silk belts, two jade buttons and a bag of Jasmine tea."⁹⁶ By the time Yiniang has to leave the household, they have all become such firm friends that tears are shed and farewell gifts of money, clothing and jewellery are presented to her. As an after-thought the Great Lady Wang also sends a robe of Luzhou pongee trimmed with leather to prevent Yiniang from catching a chill.⁹⁷ Later on in the novel, when her son Chen Sheng 辰生 is betrothed to the daughter of Ms Chen 陳氏 Hou Yiniang is presented with money, clothing and ornaments.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ "Fu Chengzu yi 符承祖姨," in *Guifan*, 3.96b-97a.

⁹⁶ *TWXP*, 4.24.

⁹⁷ *TWXP*, 5.32-33.

⁹⁸ *TWXP*, 7.46.

The ladies of the imperial household in the Ming were also frequently recorded engaging in gift presentation. In 1578, it is reported that Zhang Juzheng and his mother arrived in the capital, and were ordered to go straight to the palace for an audience with the two Empresses Dowager, Cisheng 慈聖 and Rensheng 仁聖, who presented them with gifts including an eight treasure gold riveted Sichuan fan which had been prepared specially.⁹⁹ The Empress Dowager Cisheng had previously presented Zhang with a *mang* robe among other things for services rendered on her behalf.¹⁰⁰ Ms Wang 王, the maternal grandmother of the Wanli Emperor, was often taken to her daughter's palace to be given presents and often stayed there, an act which was forbidden.¹⁰¹ The ability to present others with gifts of dress and jewellery was not simply an act of generosity but a display to the rest of society of their status both within the inner quarter and outside the household. These acts show that the women had authority and financial power and thus the objects, here dress and ornamentation, are a symbol of that power and would have been viewed by recipients of those gifts in the same manner. In the majority of cases the scenes mentioned above show a woman of higher status giving to one of lower status, whether it is the preparation of betrothal presents or the bestowing of gifts on servants.

Even from early times, gifts from the imperial household conferred such prestige on the beneficiary that the event was commemorated in some way. The wife of a feudal lord from the Zhou period cast two bronzes to commemorate the fact that she was given cowry shells, makeup and other gifts by the King during a royal visit to her residence.¹⁰² Mme Fengbao 馮寶夫人, alias Mme Xian 冼夫人, the Duchess

⁹⁹ *Ming shi*, 213.5648; "Zhang Juzheng zhengjuan 張居正傳," by Wang Shizhen, in *Guochao xianzheng lu* 國朝獻徵錄, by Jiao Hong 焦竑, repr. 8 vols., Taipei: Xuesheng, 1965, 17.86a and 88b.

¹⁰⁰ *Ming shi*, 213.5647.

¹⁰¹ Zhang Xiande et al., 1969, 58.

¹⁰² Creel, 1970, 391-395; Chen Mengjia 陳夢家, "Xi Zhou tongqi duandai 西周銅器斷代 3," *Kaogu xuebao* 考古學報 1956.1, 91-93.

of Qiaoguo 譙國夫人 (d.ca. 601AD), advised her husband on military matters and was rewarded by Emperor with rank and titles. The Empress, on the other hand, presented her with jewellery and clothing for everyday wear (宴服 *yanfu*) which she kept in a golden trunk and showed to her descendants stating that they were “the reward for loyal and filial behaviour.”¹⁰³ During the Shaoding 紹定 reign (1228-1233) of the Southern Song, Madame Yan 晏氏 from Ninghua 寧化 in Tingzhou 汀州 was also rewarded for courageous behaviour. On saving her village from pillage, she was given the title *gongren* 恭人 “Respectful Lady” and was presented with the head-dress and *xiapei*.¹⁰⁴ The gifts presented by the imperial household in the Ming were considered so noteworthy they, too, were recorded.¹⁰⁵

The ability to give a gift without the need for material return displays status and acceptance of the gift infers an acknowledgement of subordination, as Mauss argues:

To give is to show one’s superiority, to show that one is something more and higher, that one is *magister*. To accept without returning or repaying more is to face subordination, to become a client and subservient, to become *minister*.¹⁰⁶

The one-way exchange of gifts creates a socially asymmetrical relationship. When gifts are presented to those of lower status in a charitable manner, the status and power of the higher class giver may even be justified by their claim to moral righteousness.¹⁰⁷ This may even lead to competitiveness in demonstrating one’s ability to engage in conspicuous charity.¹⁰⁸ Superordination through the liberal

¹⁰³ *Sui shu* 隋書, by Wei Zheng 魏徵 et al., repr. 6 vols., Beijing: Zhonghua, 1973, 80.1803; *Bei shi* 北史, by Li Yanshou 李延壽, repr. 10 vols., Beijing: Zhonghua, 1974, 91.3006-3007.

¹⁰⁴ “Lu fu shouzhai 魯婦守砦,” in *Guifan*, 3.99b-100b:

¹⁰⁵ *Fengzhou zhibian*, 159.1a-11a.

¹⁰⁶ Mauss, 1974, 72.

¹⁰⁷ Blau, 1967, 260.

¹⁰⁸ Veblen, 1979, 35-101.

presentation of gifts, whether through expected social roles or via charity, formed a significant aspect of gift exchange among women in late sixteenth-century China.

Whether the benefits of accepting gifts outweighed the disadvantages was often dependent on status. In the *Jin Ping Mei*, maids and prostitutes compete to receive favours. Their situation can only be enhanced by obtaining such items. For concubines such as Jinlian, on the other hand, her precarious position in the Ximen household means that she needs valuable gifts to increase her standing in the eyes of the more lowly members of the family and enable her to compete with those who are more wealthy. However, her public acceptance of such items only furthers perception of her lowlier position.

The flow of gifts between different social classes caused many restricted objects to pass into the hands of the unentitled according to sumptuary regulation. In the *Jin Ping Mei* these objects include robes of pongee and damask, satin woven with gold, ornaments decorated with kingfisher flowers and gold hairpins. Conscientious official Hai Rui was so concerned about this that he insisted that there must be regulation of the circulation of goods in society.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, gift exchange, just as much as financial procurement, perpetuated the flouting of sumptuary regulations in the late Ming. The *Jin Ping Mei* reveals literati anxieties that this may have been more true among women for whom the usual male avenues of procurement were off-limits.

Bribery

On the majority of occasions the motives behind gift presentation in the *Jin Ping Mei* seem not so innocent. Buying silence or co-operation appears to be a

¹⁰⁹ “Fu yu gui shi ren zhi suo yu ye zhang 富與貴是人之所欲也章,” in *Hai Rui ji*, 7.494.

common theme. There are also examples of ladies using gifts of clothing and ornamentation to seek benefits, favour or approval. Even during the early stages of Li Ping'er's affair with Ximen Qing, she has to use persuasive tactics to prevent news of their relationship leaking out. Ximen tells her that Pan Jinlian is the only one of his ladies she should be worried about because it is from her apartments that he climbs over the wall into Ping'er's grounds. Ping'er tells Ximen Qing that she will make shoes for Yueniang and Jinlian to express her "humble regards."¹¹⁰ Zhang Zhupo here points out her constantly superficial behaviour.¹¹¹ As expected, Jinlian discovers the affair and confronts her husband, who tries to placate her by telling her that Li Ping'er is going to make her and Yueniang some shoes.¹¹² He also gives her the two gold hairpins recently given to him by Ping'er as discussed in Chapter Three. Naturally, Jinlian is "absolutely delighted" and she says "If that's how it is, I won't say anything more about it. When you go over there I will act as a lookout for you so you can 'bang' away to your heart's content. What do you think?"¹¹³

Ping'er presents similar hairpins to Yueniang, Jiao'er, Yulou and Xue'e. Yueniang thanks her: "I can't allow you to do this, it is such extravagance." Ping'er modestly replies: "They aren't really that rare. I'm just giving them to you so you can give them on to someone else if you like".¹¹⁴ Ping'er also gives Chunmei a gold three-piece girdle ornament (金三事 *sanjinshi*) to thank her for helping with her toilet knowing that Ximen has had sexual relations with her. Chunmei has therefore been elevated to a unofficial position above the other maids and the presentation of a

¹¹⁰ *JPMCH*, 13.8b.

¹¹¹ *DYQS*, 13.211.

¹¹² *JPMCH*, 13.10a.

¹¹³ *JPMCH*, 13.11a.

¹¹⁴ *JPMCH*, 14.14a.

particular gift to her alongside the other gifts acknowledges this.¹¹⁵ Zhang Zhupo comments that this episode is one of the clearest indicators of how the women, especially Wu Yueniang, all covet Ping'er's wealth.¹¹⁶

Contemporary scholar Lu Can 陸粲 from the Suzhou area (1494-1551) relates the strange tale of Ms Lü 呂. The daughter of an eminent family, she suddenly falls down dead but begins to revive a couple of days later. Of her absence, she explains: "I was summoned by the Divine Lord Wusheng 五聖靈公 to attend a feast. He displayed a chest of gold headgear and ornaments, and sixteen chests of fine clothes, which -- though tiny in size -- shone brilliantly and dazzled my eyes. He told me, 'If you consent to live here, all of these treasures will be yours.'" She refused and was returned to life.¹¹⁷ The deity in the story is the god of money and wealth, Wutong 五通, who became popular in the Jiangnan area in the late Ming.¹¹⁸ The deity was renowned for his temptation of women through material riches.

That Ms Lü refused the temptations of dazzling clothing and ornamentation emphasises the didactic nature of the tale. The Governor of Fujian, Nan Juyi 南居益 (1565-1643),¹¹⁹ who forced the Dutch to vacate the Penghu 澎湖 islands in 1624, was similarly dismissive of an attempt at bribery: "The sage kings did not esteem unusual objects and did not value goods from afar. You are quite stupid wretches to dare to come with valuable items to tempt me!"¹²⁰ The female characters in the *Jin*

¹¹⁵ *JPMCH*, 14.13b. Li Ping'er not only has to use her wealth to appease the ladies of Ximen Qing, she also has to appease the brother of her dead husband. At the ceremony to burn the tablet of Hua Zixu, Li Ping'er gives Hua the Elder's 花大 wife ten taels of silver and two sets of clothes. *JPMCH*, 16.10a.

¹¹⁶ *DYQS*, 14.229 and 14.231.

¹¹⁷ "Shuoyao 說妖," in *Gengsibian* 庚巳編 (1617), by Lu Can 陸粲, in Lu Can 陸粲 and Gu Qiyuan 顧起元, *Gengsibian, Kezuo zhuiyu* 庚巳編, 客座贅語, Beijing: Zhonghua, 1987, 5.53.

¹¹⁸ Richard Von Glahn, "The Enchantment of Wealth: The God Wutong in the Social History of Jiangnan," *HJAS* 51.2 (1991), 651-714.

¹¹⁹ *DMB*, 1085-1088.

¹²⁰ "He Fujian dazhongcheng Nan gong dangping hongyi xu 賀福建大中丞南公盪平紅夷序," in *Wanxiangtang*, 14.144-146.

Ping Mei, by contrast, are ridiculed for their desire for material gain, playing on the perceived desire for wealth and riches of the time, as discussed in Chapter Two. As contemporary commentator Xiao Yong 蕭雍 states: “If you practice opulence, then the more you crave. The more you crave, the more you abuse!”¹²¹

The Confucian official Huang Liuhong was a great critic of those who accepted gifts at work and firmly advocated that magistrates should not profit from the local community through bribes and corruption, and should control underlings who practise corruption:

Accepting gifts for performing a public function is malfeasance; and trying to enhance one’s prestige by paying a bribe for an invitation only brings disgrace.¹²²

The early Confucian philosopher Mencius had once had to defend himself against a charge of bribery and responded by emphasising that there had to be justification for accepting gifts otherwise it was indeed tantamount to being bought.¹²³

The line between gift and bribe was a thin one in late imperial China, particularly when the recipient was of higher status. If the fulfilment of an official duty happened to be advantageous to someone, the beneficiary of such an action would be expected to cherish a feeling of indebtedness to the official. It was considered normal, for example, for examiners to expect gifts from fulfilling their duties to candidates.¹²⁴ However, if there was confusion over the actions of even esteemed Confucian philosophers, then it may be assumed that more humble people may have failed to understand the more subtle distinctions between gift and bribe. In

¹²¹ “Jiejian,” in *Chishan huiyue*, 5.

¹²² Huang Liuhong, 1984, 521. See also 108-125, 137-139, 140-142, 203-207.

¹²³ *Mengzi yizhu* 孟子譯注, Yang Baijun 楊伯峻, ann., Beijing: Zhonghua, 1960, 4.92-93.

¹²⁴ Lien-sheng Yang, “The Concept of ‘Bao’ as a Basis for Social Relations in China,” in John K. Fairbank, ed., *Chinese Thought and Institutions*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago, 1957, 303-304.

fact, the two may have been seen as completely interchangeable, due to the inherent sense of reciprocity in both cases.

A concept intimately linked to this gift exchange in China is the term *bao* 報, which can be translated as 'response', 'revenge' or 'return,' and it is this concept which, according to many sinologists, has served as a basis for social relations in China.¹²⁵ Karl Kao explains that *bao*:

may be seen as a code underlying most areas of human conduct, either observed explicitly, as in legal exchanges, or implicitly, as in ethics and family relationships. Not only does it serve as a principle for reward and punishment, promotion and demotion, *bao* is also a code governing the social, political, ethical, and familial conduct and interactions.¹²⁶

The Chinese believed that reciprocity of actions, whether of favour and hatred, reward and punishment, between men and others were obligatory, as certain as cause-and-effect relationships.¹²⁷ The *Li ji* states:

In highest antiquity they prized (simply conferring) good; in the time next to this, giving and repaying was the thing attended to. And what the rules of propriety value is that reciprocity. If I give a gift and nothing comes in return, that is contrary to propriety; if the thing comes to me, and I give nothing in return, that is also contrary to propriety.¹²⁸

The response or return in social relations need not always be immediate, as many social relations in China were long-term commitments.¹²⁹ The principle provided a

¹²⁵ Yang, 1957, 291; Karl S.Y. Kao, "Bao and Baoying: Narrative Causality and External Motivations in Chinese Fiction," in *CLEAR* 11 (1989), 120-1. For works on the importance of the gift and *guanxi* 關係 "social relationships" in modern China see Wang, 1994; Yunxiang Yan, *The Flow of Gifts: Reciprocity and Social Networks in a Chinese Village*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.

¹²⁶ Kao, 1989, 120.

¹²⁷ Yang, 1957, 291.

¹²⁸ Legge, 1885a, 65.

¹²⁹ Yang, 1957, 292.

common ground for both ‘gentlemen’ 君子 *junzi* and ‘small men’ 小人 *xiaoren*, in other words, for the whole of Chinese society.¹³⁰

David Nivison links the concept of *de* 德 ‘virtue’ or ‘power’ with *de* 得 ‘to obtain’, two characters which are semantically and phonetically connected. This is best shown by the expression: “A有德於B,” i.e., “A, from B’s viewpoint, has credit for giving B (enabling B to get) something; and so is due something in return from B.” The compulsion to repay felt by the receiver is psychologically transferred to the giver, and is perceived as a psychic power in the giver to elicit response.¹³¹ Therefore, we can see how power relations are established in these forms of gift-exchange through the compulsion to repay a gift either through a counter-gift, favour or concession.

Through the presentation of gifts in the *Jin Ping Mei*, Li Ping’er manages to buy Jinlian’s silence over her love affair with Ximen Qing and wins over the other ladies of the household. The fact that the gold hairpins have come from the palace impresses the women even more and demonstrates the value put on such objects. Someone who is demonstrably in possession of such goods is automatically respected and admired, and the added ability to give these away as gifts adds greater kudos. However, as Annette B. Weiner argues:

In societies with complex political hierarchies, precious possessions such as gold crowns, jewelry, feathered cloaks or fine silks may accumulate historical significance that make their economic and aesthetic values *absolute* and transcendent above all similar things. Each object differs in value even from other objects of the same class that in some instances may circulate as common currency in exchange. In this way, certain possessions become subjectively unique removing them from ordinary social exchange as they obtain absolute value rather than exchange value.¹³²

¹³⁰ Yang, 1957, 309.

¹³¹ David S. Nivison, “Royal ‘Virtue’ in Shang Oracle Inscriptions,” *Early China* 4 (1978), 53.

¹³² Annette B. Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-while-giving*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992, 37. Original emphasis.

In order to retain status one can engage in gift exchange but keep those articles most valued. The more one can give away without losing inalienable possessions, the greater the increase in status.¹³³ Unfortunately for Li Ping'er, Wu Yueniang is still sitting on the majority of Li Ping'er's most valuable possessions and seems very unlikely to ever return them.¹³⁴ It is Yueniang, therefore, who is temporarily able to dictate the course of events.

Ping'er is eventually installed into the household. The gifts of clothing and ornamentation she has so liberally distributed have effectively given her the power to silence most of the opposition she may have encountered and literally buy her way into the women's quarters. Beginning with the principal wife, then the only concubine who could reveal the relationship, followed by the other concubines and lastly even a maid, she has used her wealth to ensure her acceptance. However, as we have seen, the fact that Yueniang is in possession of a large proportion of Ping'er's resources reduces Ping'er's potential influence with her.

In traditional China, a woman's property provided her with a means of pleasing her husband's family and assisting the family in times of financial difficulty.¹³⁵ In the late Ming, the dowry of the great-grandmother of Fang Yizhi 方以智 (d.1671) (she was the only daughter of an elderly retired official) enabled his great-grandfather Fang Dazhen 方大鎮 (1558-1631) to assist his poor elder brother and to consolidate and expand the wealth of his own family by holding both office and land.¹³⁶ In the early seventeenth century, gentry woman Shen Yixiu sold part of her sizeable dowry for 40 ounces of silver to assist a colleague of her husband.¹³⁷ A story from the *Jingshi tongyan* collection, "Niu Xianggong yinhen banshantang 拗相

¹³³ Weiner, 1992, 62-63.

¹³⁴ *DYQS*, 19.303.

¹³⁵ Ebrey, 1993, 117.

¹³⁶ *Fang Mingshan xingzhuang* 方明善行狀, by Ye Can 葉燦. Cited in Peterson, 1979, 68.

¹³⁷ Ko, 1994, 191.

公飲恨半山堂,” echoes these sentiments of generosity. It tells of the wife of the retired official Wang Anshi 王安石 of the Song, who gives all her jewellery, clothing and other valuable items she had hidden away totalling approximately one thousand pieces of gold to provide a mass for her dead son.¹³⁸ The *Jin Ping Mei* takes an ironic look at this aspect of gift exchange among women, as Li Ping'er has certainly “pleased her husband’s family” with her distribution of gifts among the women already positioned in the household.

The maids in the Ximen household too feel the pressure to fawn upon the ladies in order to secure their positions or to prevent them from revealing compromising information. For example, Song Huilian is forced into carrying out odd jobs and embroidering shoes for Pan Jinlian in order to buy her silence over her affair with Ximen Qing.¹³⁹ Gifts used openly as bribes occur repeatedly during the shuffling for seniority among the singing girls who frequent the household. The first example of this occurs after Ximen Qing’s rise to an official position. The singing girls are invited to a round of parties after which Li Guijie and her mother seize the opportunity to come under the protection and influence of the increasingly powerful household. Li Guijie sneaks off early to Ximen’s house and kow-tows to Yueniang, presenting a pair of shoes as part of a gift [Illustration 18]. Yueniang is “absolutely delighted.”¹⁴⁰ Guijie asks to be accepted as her ward to ensure that there are closer relations between the two households and that she can come more freely. This gift however is not simply one of good will but a bribe to ensure that Yueniang accepts Guijie as her ward. Zhang Zhupo comments: “Thus is Yueniang’s wickedness.”¹⁴¹ In

¹³⁸ “Niu Xianggong yinhen banshantang 拗相公飲恨半山堂,” in *JSTY*, *juan* 4. 41.

¹³⁹ *JPMCH*, 22.4b.

¹⁴⁰ *JPMCH*, 32.3a.

¹⁴¹ *DYQS*, 32.498.

doing so, he lays the blame directly at the feet of the principal wife for accepting the gift, rather than with the prostitute for attempting to ingratiate herself.

Illustration 18: Woodcut from Chapter 32 of the *Jin Ping Mei*



The full extent of Guijie's treachery is only known to the other singing girls when they later arrive and berate her for not waiting for them. Guijie then proceeds to flaunt her new found power and security whilst the other singing girls and Ximen Qing's wives look on in amazement and amusement respectively. Exactly ten chapters later, Li Ping'er has received the honour of having her child Guan'ge 官哥

betrothed to the baby girl of the Qiao family. Wu Yin'er and her mother see this as an excellent opportunity to gain some lost ground in the favour stakes and Yin'er is sent to Ping'er with gifts of shoes and handkerchiefs.¹⁴² Li Guijie realises her advantage has been lost as Ping'er, the new light of Ximen Qing's life whose favour is increased ten-fold by the birth and betrothal of Ximen's first-born son, is the much more influential wife at this time.

It is known that it is also possible for individuals of higher status to influence those beneath them through the presentation of gifts. This is especially so in societies where goods or services in demand are controlled by those of higher status, such as China with its theoretical control over the distribution of material goods through sumptuary regulation. To achieve power over, a person must prevent the other party from choosing any alternative methods of obtaining the restricted goods, thus forcing them to comply with his instructions as a condition for obtaining them.¹⁴³ In this way, the high-status members assist the low-status ones in exchange for their respect and compliance, which can then help the high-status members in the competition for a commanding position in the group.¹⁴⁴ Sociologist Barry Barnes acknowledges:

Access to goods and services *is* access to power. Having property rights, financial rights, 'economic' rights generally, *is* having power.¹⁴⁵

Those with access to clothing and ornamentation demonstrate status by engaging in gift presentation. Those without, whilst acknowledging their own inferior status in accepting gifts, at the same time improve their own positions relative to others of similar status.

¹⁴² *JPMCH*, 42.2a.

¹⁴³ See Blau, 1967, 118-121; Martin, 1977, 50.

¹⁴⁴ Blau, 1967, 127.

¹⁴⁵ Barnes, 1988, 82.

In the *Jin Ping Mei*, Yueniang gives Chunmei to Jinlian as a maid. To gain Ximen's love, Jinlian is willing to give Chunmei to him. Her maid is in no position to refuse and in order to assure her compliance in the future Jinlian makes her a gift of her favourite clothes and binds her feet.¹⁴⁶ As her only source of clothing would be through her mistress, Chunmei has little alternative but to conform.¹⁴⁷

This is not the only occasion on which Jinlian has to offer or promise gifts to Chunmei. Even as late on in the narrative as Chapters 82 and 83 Jinlian is seen to bribe Chunmei with clothing and ornaments. She orders Chunmei to sleep with her own lover Chen Jingji. "There was nothing she could do but obey her and take off her ripple-effect skirt,¹⁴⁸ loosen her trouser belt and lie face up on the bench." As a reward for this demonstration of loyalty Pan Jinlian gives Chunmei her favourite clothes and jewellery.¹⁴⁹ It is obvious that this event is simply a replay of Chapter 10, only with Chen Jingji as the new object of Jinlian's desires and not the now deceased Ximen Qing. However, in this scene the rules have changed somewhat. Previously, Ximen Qing was the legitimate husband of Jinlian and her act of giving Chunmei gifts was to ensure her loyalty, but now Jinlian is bribing Chunmei to keep silent over her illegitimate affair with her son-in-law, an offence punishable by death in traditional China.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ *JPMCH*, 10.8b.

¹⁴⁷ The use of sanctions and rewards as incentives for compliance is a recognised aspect of power relations. So long as a person has a desire for something of value, whether for himself or others, they have an incentive to conform. Barnes, 1988, 129.

¹⁴⁸ Made of 6 panels and named after the Xiang 湘 river in Hunan. Such a skirt was also worn by the late Ming concubine Dong Xiaowan. See *Yingmei'an yiyu*, 2.

¹⁴⁹ *JPMCH*, 82.4b.

¹⁵⁰ Ch'ü T'ung-tsu writes: "A concubine was not considered a spouse nor was she included in the mourning system. Yet since she had sexual relations with one member of the family all other members were forbidden access to her (...) intercourse with a relative's concubine was punished more heavily than an ordinary case of adultery (...) penalty was strangling". See *idem*, 1961, 66.

Perturbed by rumours of a relationship between the two of them Wu Yueniang moves Chen Jingji and Ximen Dajie further away and prevents Jingji from entering the garden. Pan Jinlian is lovesick and becomes so desperate to see him that she promises Chunmei she will make her a pair of “shoes covered in an embroidered pattern,” if she can get Jingji to come and see her.¹⁵¹ The making of this type of shoe embroidery would have taken a lot of time and effort, thus, in offering such a pair to Chunmei, Jinlian is emphasising her gratitude should Chunmei succeed in passing on a message to the out-of-bounds Chen Jingji. The shoes are a powerful symbol of gratitude.

In the late Ming tale “Qu Fengnu qingqian sigai 瞿鳳奴情愆死蓋,” Ms Fang takes a fancy to a passing young man Sun Sanlang 孫三郎 and bribes her maid Chunlai with items of clothing and jewellery to look out for him should he come by. She later bribes her again with a silver ring to guard their love-nest.¹⁵² Her daughter, Qu Fengnu of the title, also finds it necessary to bribe Chunlai with clothing and jewellery so that she gives false evidence in court that she was married to Sun following correct matchmaking procedures. They are up on a charge of illicit behaviour.¹⁵³ The two maids, Chunmei and Chunlai, have little alternative but to accede to the demands of their mistresses. An account from the late Ming *Wanxiangtang* by Chen Jiru also details how a courtesan had to manipulate others through bribes when she pawned her hairpins and earrings to bribe a servant.¹⁵⁴

The examples of bribery from the *Jin Ping Mei* discussed above have all been undertaken by lower-status women of the Ximen household who have to rely on other methods of manipulation due to their lack of officially recognised status. Up

¹⁵¹ *JPMCH*, 83.6a.

¹⁵² *Shi diantou*, 4.96 and 4.98.

¹⁵³ *Shi diantou*, 4.103.

¹⁵⁴ “Yang Youpin biezhuàn 楊幽妍別傳,” in *Wanxiangtang*, 18.330.

until the demise of Ximen Qing, Wu Yueniang is exempt from such behaviour. However, shortly after the death of her husband, Yueniang gives the servant Lai Bao 來保 a bolt of satin to make his wife clothes in thanks for dealing with some merchants and taking charge of the handing over of maids to Zhai in the capital (in all of which Lai Bao has had his own nefarious dealings).¹⁵⁵ At first this seems an innocuous enough event; however, when we look closely, it is obvious she is buying their co-operation. Newly widowed, she is trying to establish direction over a large household and business empire, which, especially the latter had been run solely by men. Inevitably, Yueniang is struggling to take over these duties and relies on male relatives and servants regardless of their reliability. This was common in imperial China and widows were often referred to as ‘crabs without legs,’ a metaphor for ‘useless, dependent and incomplete.’¹⁵⁶

Later on in the closing chapters of the work, Yueniang remains in charge of a severely reduced household. All of the concubines have left for their various fates and, in spite of a successful lawsuit against Chen Jingji, she is still desperately trying to retain control without the help of a male senior member of the household. Yueniang catches both Ru Yi'er and Xiaoyu in compromising positions with servants and decides that the most expedient course of action would be to marry them off to their respective paramours. Ru Yi'er is married to Lai Xing 來興 and Yueniang presents her with “a set of clothes, four hairpins, a silver *shou* pin and a crescent-shaped comb.”¹⁵⁷ Xiaoyu is given to Ximen Qing's manservant Dai'an and Yueniang puts Xiaoyu's hair into a chignon and gives her several gold and silver pieces of jewellery, four gold-topped silver hairpins, hoop and pendant earrings and other such

¹⁵⁵ *JPMCH*, 81.8b.

¹⁵⁶ Waltner, 1981, 133. Waltner discusses many of the trials and problems which may have been encountered by widows in traditional China.

¹⁵⁷ *JPMCH*, 95.1b.

items, and two sets of colourful satin and light silk clothes”.¹⁵⁸ After every one of these items given to Xiaoyu Zhang Zhupo comments: “Such is her doting”.¹⁵⁹ Indeed, it is not just Zhang Zhupo who regards this as favouritism.

Yueniang’s actions incite the jealousy of an older, unmarried servant Ping’an 平安 who steals valuable pawned goods in retaliation and ends up in court, forced into falsely accusing Yueniang of improper sexual relations with Dai’an. This trouble for Yueniang is only cleared up with the help of Chunmei, the now wife of Commander Zhou after some humbling on the part of Yueniang. As far as the act of gift giving is concerned, these incidents are initially what one would expect of a legitimate wife carrying out her duties, arranging the marriages of servants. However, her hurried presentation of betrothal gifts demonstrates the hope that the incidents will be covered up and forgotten, but also that the gifts of clothing and jewellery will ensure total co-operation on the part of the two women and subsequently their partners. Following the loss of her husband, Yueniang, too, must resort to underhand methods to ensure the co-operation of those around her. This accentuates the perceived weakness of widows in the late sixteenth-century.

Thus we can see that dress and ornamentation are perceived as powerful bribes, not only by those who present the gifts but also by those who receive them. Orthodox sources remain silent on issues such as bribery and corruption among women, yet are most vociferous in the battle against these practices in the male official world. Illicit gift-giving was perceived to upset the order of Confucian social relationships, damaging the smooth-running of society. Such disorder, in fact, appears to be an outcome of the employment of bribes in the *Jin Ping Mei*.

¹⁵⁸ JPMCH, 95.2a.

¹⁵⁹ DYQS, 95.1576.

Summary

Gift exchanges are, therefore, obligatory and interested as opposed to voluntary, disinterested and spontaneous, as Mauss states:

The form usually taken is that of the gift generously offered; but the accompanying behaviour is formal pretence and social deception, while the transaction itself is based on obligation and economic self-interest.¹⁶⁰

The fine line between gift exchange and economic exchange in China is highlighted in the *Jin Ping Mei*. Throughout the novel small gifts of textiles, clothing and jewellery are handed out which are obviously for payment of services rendered. Singing girls are the most frequent recipients of such gifts and many of these occasions occur around the funeral of Li Ping'er.¹⁶¹ Other common recipients include the old women, midwives and nuns who frequent the household.¹⁶² These episodes emphasise the commercial value of textiles, clothing and ornamentation: all items were highly resaleable and were accepted as readily as currency. Thus it is clear how important gifts of such commercial value would be to the women who received them. For women who were distanced from the cash economy carried out by men, gift exchange provided a method of transaction for both commercial and social purposes. It was, in fact, a more pronounced form of barter economy, in a society which utilised both systems.

The increased commercialism and wealth meant that more of these items were available and thus the consequences of the circulation of goods were more widespread. The exchange of gifts from superior to inferior, from palace to marketplace, demonstrates the interchange of knowledge on social interaction.

¹⁶⁰ Mauss, 1974, 1. This view has come to be widely accepted, see Blau, 1967, 17.

¹⁶¹ For examples occurring at the time of the funeral see *JPMCH*, 63.9a, 66.6a and 78.2a. Other examples are found on 20.12b and 61.19b.

¹⁶² Examples include *JPMCH*, 8.5a and 79.23b.

Unorthodox sources such as the *Jin Ping Mei* are useful in that more orthodox and prescriptive works, despite elaborating in great detail the intricacies of gift exchange, fail to provide insights into gift-giving strategies. They cannot reveal why certain people are chosen to be recipients of gifts or why certain gifts are refused. Sources such as the *Jin Ping Mei* reveal perceptions about female social relationships as defined by gift exchange, an area which is neglected in more traditional sources which tend to focus solely on male relationships. Gift exchange may be seen as a complex form of social communication which plays an important role in the development and maintenance of social position and power differentials.

CHAPTER SIX

ADORNMENT AND SEXUALITY

The first physical description of Pan Jinlian in the *Jin Ping Mei* comes in Chapter Two when she first encounters Ximen Qing:

On her head she wears a glossy black chignon, the side curls intertwined with gold, setting off the fragrant clouds of her hair, pinned all around with small hairclasps. In the curl at her temple is inserted a double-headed flower, an aromatic comb keeps the hair behind in place. It would be hard to draw her arched willow-leaf eyebrows, and the pair of peach blossoms on her cheeks. Her open-work pendant earrings are quite worthy of praise, a glimpse of her creamy jade-like breast is priceless. A wide-sleeved shirt of dark cotton and short jacket set off the ripple-effect skirt of glossy damask. A figured handkerchief is stuck into the mouth of her sleeve, a fragrance bag hangs low at her side. The rows of buttons on her vest are fastened, her trouser legs are concealed above but revealed below. If you look down you can see the upturned points of her tiny golden lotuses with mountain peaks embroidered on the toes; her high-heeled raven black shoes lined with white damask are just made for tripping the fragrant dust. Her leggings made from red silk tabby are embroidered with orioles and flowers; when she walks and sits the breeze parts her skirt. From her mouth there often wafts the smell of orchid and musk, and when her cherry lips begin to smile her face blooms. Just the sight of her makes your spirits and souls take flight, a beautiful lover showing off her charms.¹

According to the seventeenth-century aesthete and analyst of feminine charms, Li Yu, the author is "portraying a beautiful woman."² Throughout Chinese history, much literary talent has been devoted to the description of women. In the depiction of women as objects of love or desire, particular attention is paid to physical attributes

¹ *JPMCH*, 2.5a-b.

² *PPJPM*, 1992, 2.35.

such as hair and facial features, and often clothing and ornamentation. Natural similes are commonly employed to describe the body or its ornamentation such as the ‘willow-leaf’ and ‘peach blossoms’ in the above passage. The “Shuoren 碩人” poem from the *Shi jing* 詩經 extolling the beauty of the famous daughter of the marquis of Qi 齊 provided the stereotypical epithets of a beautiful woman:

Her fingers were like the blades of the young white-grass;
Her skin was like congealed ointment;
Her neck was like the tree-grub;
Her teeth were like melon seed;
Her forehead cicada-like; her eyebrows like [the antennae of] the silkworm moth;
What dimples, as she artfully smiled!
How lovely her eyes, with the black and white so well defined!³

Later poetry, particularly the *ci* 詞 lyrics, expand and embellish descriptions of the beautiful woman. A poem from the Tang by He Ning 和凝 portrays a divine river goddess and the shaman king who desires her. The goddess is described as an erotic ideal:

Her enveloping cloak, rustling along the ground, is of red palace damask.
Warblers chatter their seasonal warble, making a light sound.
In her little cap of cyan gauze, she steadies rhinoceros hairpins.
Phoenixes in pairs blown by the wind: her ‘stepshakers’⁴ are golden.

Her flesh and bone delicate and even: red jade yielding.
Ripples of expression imperceptibly accompany her spring heart.
Modest and tender, she dares not enter the mandarin-duck quilt.
Inside the radiance of orchid oil, a pair of passions deepen.⁵

³ Legge, 1990c, 94-97. •

⁴ ‘Stepshakers’ (*buyao* 步搖) were a hair ornament designed to move as the wearer walked. Their fragile design restricted vigorous movement and thus exaggerated delicate ‘feminine’ deportment. “Nü shi 女飾,” in KZZY, 4.111; “Xianglian qiwu lei yi 香奩器物類一,” in *Gezhi jingyuan*, 55.6a-b.

⁵ Suzanne Cahill, “Sex and the Supernatural in Medieval China: Cantos on the Transcendent who Presides over the River,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105.2 (1985), 204.

Clothing and ornament are seen to play an integral part in the depiction of the Chinese beauty.

It is argued that the way in which female dress is presented in Western literature eroticises the female form, thereby allowing it to take a central role in the portrayal of seduction and other sexual behaviour.⁶ With sexual activity playing such a pivotal role in the *Jin Ping Mei*,⁷ it is natural that attention be focused on the clothing and ornamentation associated with sexuality. What can sources such as this reveal about what was considered attractive or erotic in that period?⁸ How far was it perceived by those in the sixteenth-century that women utilised dress and ornamentation as part of a conscious effort to attract the attention of men? What was it that women hoped to gain from the employment of devices to increase sexual attractiveness? Were particular classes of women more inclined to manipulate their relationships with men through the use of physical ornamentation?

Late Ming historical and *biji* writings lament the heightened conspicuousness of sexual behaviour, particularly in the large metropolitan areas such as Beijing and the Jiangnan region.⁹ Literature began to reflect this consciousness and the changing character of society with an increased output of erotic and pornographic fiction in China from the mid-sixteenth century.¹⁰ *Jin Ping Mei* aside, other contemporary erotic works include *Zhaoyang qushi*, *Ruyijun zhuan* 如意君傳, *Xiuta yeshi* 綉榻野

⁶ Pierre Fauchery, *La Destinée Féminine dans le Roman Européen du dix-huitième Siècle*, Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1972, 204-210.

⁷ McMahon, 1987, 237-244.

⁸ For an analysis of modern Chinese attitudes towards female adornment and sexuality see Chapter Two, "The Pleasures of Adornment and the Dangers of Sexuality," of Emily Honig and Gail Hershtatter, *Personal Voices: Chinese Women in the 1980's*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988.

⁹ Commentators were particularly concerned about the vogue for homosexuality. See WZZ, 8.304-306; "Nanchang 男娼," in *Liuqing rizha*, 3.14b-15a; "Nanse zhi mi 男色之靡," in *WLYHB*, 24.1642-1643.

¹⁰ McMahon, 1987, 223.

史 and *Chipozi zhuan* 痴婆子傳.¹¹ It was possible that authors were celebrating the sexual excess they perceived in the world around them; however, as Carlitz suggests, it could also reflect a reaction against the restrictions of *Ru* 儒 Confucian conventions and a search for more individual forms of expression.¹² The commercial aspect of these works cannot be ignored, and the production of such literary works was clearly stimulated by market demand.

This final chapter analyses the role of dress and ornamentation in the *Jin Ping Mei* with regard to eroticism and other contemporary discourse on feminine attraction in an attempt to further understanding of perceptions of sexual attraction and behaviour in the late Ming. A dichotomy of fear and desire for women colours much of the discourse, and from many types of sources, conflicting opinions emerge on the nature of the female erotic ideal. In the polygamous Ximen household, lower class women compete with each other and prostitutes using their sexuality to attract the attention of Ximen Qing to thereby attain power and influence in the household. The relationship between sex and money obfuscates boundaries between concubine, maid and prostitute, as does the emulative aspect of fashion. Other women are seen to retire from this sexual battlefield following a symbolic rejection of feminine attire.

Female sexual power in China

The *Guifan* relates the story of the virtuous Su Liu 宿瘤 who is spotted by King Min of Qi 齊閔王 whilst out on his travels. Despite her ordinary attire he considers her a divine girl. She refuses to change her clothing to enter the palace,

¹¹ *Ruyijun zhuan* is written in classical Chinese and was first mentioned in 1561: Wang Liqi 王利器, *Yuan Ming Qing sandai jinhui xiaoshuo xiqu shiliao* 元明清三代禁毀小說戲曲史料, Shanghai: Guji, 1981, 216-217. *Xiuta yeshi* was reputedly composed by Lü Tiancheng 呂天成 and appeared in about 1600: Sun Kaidi 孫楷第, *Zhongguo tongsu xiaoshuo shumu* 中國通俗小說書目, Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 1982, 154. For *Chipozi zhuan*, see Hanan, 1981, 161.

¹² Katherine Carlitz, "Style and Suffering in Two Stories by 'Langxian'," in Hutters et al., 1997, 214.

much to the amusement of the other women of the palace who are dressed in full attire. Lü Kun believed that women like Su Liu were an exception: “Women are solely concerned with *se* 色,” he lamented.¹³ “Women make their destiny through *se*,” his contemporary, Shen Defu, argued along similar lines.¹⁴ The basic meaning for *se* is ‘colour’ from which are derived other meanings such as ‘facial appearance,’ ‘beauty,’ and hence, ‘sex.’¹⁵ By contrast, sex in the modern sense is actually denoted by the character *xing* 性 which has none of the above connotations. Feminine allure and sex were intrinsically linked in traditional China.

Some research suggests that in the Yin 殷 period and/or earlier, woman was considered the more sexually powerful. She was associated with the sexual colour red (赤 *chi*), she was the nourishing mother, the initiator of sex and the repository of sexual lore.¹⁶ As far as *yinyang* 陰陽 cosmology is concerned, the hexagram *jiji* 既濟 “completion” may also reflect an early belief in the sexual superiority of the female element due to the fact that the female trigram is placed above that of the male:¹⁷



With regard to sexual practices, Van Gulik believed that the Daoist bedchamber manuals (房書 *fangshu*) were written not only to increase the possibility of male longevity through the practice of *coitus reservatus*, but also to ensure the erotic

¹³ “Qi Suli nu 齊宿瘤女,” in *Guifan*, 2.38b-40a.

¹⁴ “Guangling ji 廣陵姬,” in *WLYHB*, 23.1574-1575.

¹⁵ Derk Bodde, *Chinese Thought, Society and Science*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1991, 271.

¹⁶ Van Gulik, 1961, 5-9. From Later Han Dynasty (25-220AD) comes the *Sunü jing* 素女經 “The Handbook of Sex of the Plain Girl.” The handbooks of sex also mention two other women who teach the arcana of sex -- *Xuannü* 玄女, the “Dark Girl”, and *Cainü* 采女, the “Elected Girl.” *Shuangmei ying'an congshu* 雙梅景閣叢書, by Ye Dehui 葉德輝, in *Zhongguo guyan xipin congkan* 中國古艷稀品叢刊, Taipei: n.p., 1985?

¹⁷ Van Gulik, 1961, 35-42.

pleasures of women.¹⁸

However, more recently, Derk Bodde points out that, although the Daoist insistence on female sexual satisfaction is admirable, it is the *male* and not the female vital essence that is to be increased.¹⁹ Charlotte Furth, too, disputes Van Gulik's theories and argues that a discrepancy in social power is established because women are in a service role, providing the *yin* essence necessary for the achievement of male longevity. By contrast, she cites the work of Wan Quan 萬全 (1488-1578?),²⁰ a sixteenth-century doctor who advanced female sexual self-mastery, offering the reward of erotic fulfilment *and* social respect through the bearing of children. This, she concludes, overturns the previously accepted notion of Daoism as more egalitarian than the misogynistic patriarchy embodied in Confucianism.²¹

Very often women were equated with evil, danger and power in both literary texts and popular thought. Although it is difficult to know whether many women in consciously undertook the female version of inner alchemy, 'female golden cinnabar' 女金丹 *nüjindan*,²² it was warned that women could deplete a man's strength by draining the male *yang* essence contained in his ejaculate (精 *jing*).²³ Beautiful women were long blamed for the deaths of men and the ruination of states. "I have heard that where there is extreme beauty there is sure to be extreme wickedness," records the *Chunqiu* 春秋 "Spring and Autumn Annals."²⁴ In a similar vein, the

¹⁸ Van Gulik, 1961, 46-7 and 110-11. See for example number 3 of the "Shiji 十機" in "Zisi lei 子嗣類," in *Jingyue quanshu* 景岳全書, by Zhang Jiebin 張介賓, repr. Beijing: Renmin weisheng, 1991, 39.879. See also McMahon, 1987, 219-221.

¹⁹ Bodde, 1991, 72.

²⁰ *Wan shi furenke* 萬氏婦人科 (pref. 1666), by Wan Quan 萬全, repr. Wuhan: Hubei renmin, 1983.

²¹ Charlotte Furth, "Rethinking Van Gulik: Sexuality and Reproduction in Traditional Chinese Medicine," in Gilmartin et al., eds., 1994, 125-146.

²² Furth, 1999, 187-223.

²³ Works included in the *Shuangmei ying'an congshu* assert this.

²⁴ James Legge, tr., *Chinese Classics 5: The Ch'un Ts'ew with the Tso Chuen*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960d, 726 and 347.

Zuozhuan, too, states:

Where there are particularly beautiful women, they are capable of perverting men. Unless men of extreme virtue and righteousness marry them, there will surely be disaster.²⁵

The phrase *qingguose* 傾國色 ‘state-toppling beauty’ was used in conjunction with famous imperial ladies such as Yang Guifei 楊貴妃 (d. 756AD) of the Tang 唐 and Xi Shi 西施 (5th century BC) of the state of Wu 吳 who reportedly caused the downfall of their men due to their infatuating beauty.²⁶

The Ming novel *Shuihuzhuan* is very clear about the dangers of female sexuality.²⁷ This stance is adopted in its successor, too. Before the narrative of the *Jin Ping Mei* even begins we are warned of such women:

Do not become smitten with dark temple-locks and radiant complexions;
Cease to lust after rouge and kingfisher feather ornaments.
What harms a man’s body and cuts short his life is usually an alluring figure;
Yet beauties capable of toppling states and cities are even more enchanting.²⁸

These passages from the *Jin Ping Mei* seem to accord with the already apparent male fear of female power in general, and one would expect the views advocated in the framework to be conventional. A poem by the Ming artist Tang Yin 唐寅 (1470-1524), himself a man of eight wives, also warns us:

Do not go near a keen sword:
Do not go near a pretty woman.
A keen sword can cut your fingers

²⁵ *Zuozhuan yiwen* 左傳譯文, Shen Yucheng 沈玉成, ann., Beijing: Zhonghua, 1981, year 28, 503.

²⁶ For Yang Guifei see “Changhen ge 長恨歌,” by Bai Juyi 白居易, in *Bai Juyi ji*, 12.238-239 and Chen Hong’s 陳鴻 (ca. 829) account of the story 12.235-238. *Qingguo* usually referred to women of higher standing e.g. “Zeng Zhang liren 贈張麗人,” in *Shixiuzhai ji* 石秀齋集 (1605), by Mo Shilong 莫是龍, repr. Taipei: Guoli zhongyang tushuguan, 1968, 9.10b. The lesser term *qingcheng* 傾城 ‘city-toppler’, on the other hand, tended to refer to prostitutes e.g. “Ye yong zhu ji yan Jiangshi yuan 夜擁諸妓宴蔣氏園,” in *Shixiuzhai ji*, 8.23b.

²⁷ Irene Eber, “Weakness and Power: Women in the Water Margin,” in Anna Gerstlacher et al., eds., *Women and Literature in China*, Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1985, 3-28.

²⁸ *JPMCH*, preface, 2b.

A pretty woman can undo you.
A road need not be vast to be dangerous -
Your wheels can be crushed within ten paces
Affairs of the heart need not be numerous -
It takes one night to ruin your health and spirit.²⁹

Female beauty and sex, it appears, were the symbolic equivalent of male strength;³⁰ they were something to be both celebrated and feared.

Erotic ideals

Clothing

In Chapter 67 of the *Jin Ping Mei*, Pan Jinlian awakens Ximen who has been dreaming about the recently deceased Ping'er. The descriptions of the two of them could not be more contrasting. In a light violet top and white thin silk skirt, her black cloudy locks in disarray and her face pale and waxen, Ping'er is no match for Jinlian wearing:

a dark blue brocade top which opened down the middle and was decorated with the *hui* 回 pattern, gold-spangled purple edging, and sewn with 5 rows of gold 'three stream' buttons;³¹ below she wore a silk tabby skirt, lined with a Luzhou silk inner skirt with gold foil edging; at the front hung a belt of mermaid silk decorated with purple ducks with intertwining necks. Beneath, curved and pointed, revealed below her red brocade leggings were a pair of golden lotuses. On her head she wore her cloudy locks in a precious chignon. She was dressed up like a powdered jade carving and on her ears were azurite pendant earrings.

Ximen is unable to resist her advances and, whilst she performs fellatio upon him, he admires the:

golden tiger pin on her head, a tiara in her fragrant cloudy tresses, encircled

²⁹ T.C. Lai, *T'ang Yin, Poet/Painter, 1470-1524*, Hong Kong: Kelly and Walsh, n.d., 91.

³⁰ Nahoum-Grappe, 1993, 96.

³¹ See the similar top excavated from the joint tomb of Zhu Yiyin, King Yixuan and his wives at Nancheng, Jiangxi, which had 7 pairs of gold buttons. See Nanjingshi wenhua baoguan weiyuanhui, 1982, 21.

with flower-shaped hairpins, behind her temple locks were dangling pearl ornaments. He could not restrain his passion.³²

Most sociologists and anthropologists acknowledge the strong sexual element to clothing and adornment.³³ Research suggests that ‘outer beauty’ or physical attractiveness plays an influential role in determining responses for a broad range of social situations.³⁴ Roche goes further and insists that adornment can provoke desire.³⁵ The female characters in the *Jin Ping Mei* often utilise dress and ornamentation in a sexual manner to their advantage.

It is often the case that the most detailed descriptions of female clothing are associated with sexual behaviour shortly afterward. In Chapter 19, Pan Jinlian’s outfit is described in full:

On the top she wore an aloewood-coloured moiré top with variegated crepe purple edging which opened down the middle. Beneath this she wore a white drawnwork skirt in glazed light silk and beside her skirt were shoes of scarlet iridescent satin with high heels in white silk tabby decorated with gold foil cloud tops. She wore her hair up in a silver chignon fret, in front of which was a jade tiara, encased in gold in the shape of the scene ‘plucking the cassia in the cicada palace,’ her cloudy temple-locks were pinned with lots of flower and kingfisher feather ornaments, all the more revealing her fragrant vermilion lips and white creamy powdered face.

On seeing her Ximen’s lecherous desires are aroused. He wants to play with her breasts and so she unfastens her gold neckring [See Illustration 21 for an example of this object] with its three charms and holds it between her teeth while she pulls open her silk tabby top revealing her breasts.³⁶

Ximen’s harem aside, there are other women just as interested in attracting

³² *JPMCH*, 67.17b.

³³ For recent discussions, see Wilson, 1985, 9-92; Lipovetsky, 1994, 52.

³⁴ Knapp, 1972, 64.

³⁵ Roche, 1994, 35-6.

³⁶ *JPMCH*, 19.4b-5a.

Ximen Qing. Wang Liu'er and Lady Lin, the more mature lovers, capture Ximen's affections at first sight. Liu'er dressed in a purple silk tabby robe, black satin sleeveless overdress, jade skirt and crow black satin shoes with cloud tops decorated with gold foil, is quite arresting for Ximen Qing, in spite of her lanky frame, purple melon face and long temple-locks.³⁷ The initial appearance of Lady Lin, however, leaves little doubt that she is out to impress:

On her head she wore a gold fret head-dress decorated with leaves of kingfisher feathers, on her body she wore a white silk tabby wide-sleeved robe, a beige³⁸ coat of figured satin woven with gold and trimmed with cranes down, a scarlet wide-pleated skirt of palace brocade, embroidered crow-black shoes with high heels in white silk tabby. She was, indeed, an exquisite woman of love from the silken rooms, a bodhisattva of sex from the inner chambers.³⁹

Patricia Berger notes that, by the height of the Tang dynasty, bodhisattvas were scarcely dressed but richly ornamented with necklaces, bracelets and armclasps, all part of their design "to make overt appeals to the senses." In a sense, bodhisattvas were indistinguishable from dancing girls.⁴⁰ Lady Lin's association with a bodhisattva is clear in spelling out that she is little more than a higher class of prostitute.

However, there does not seem to be a correlation between extravagance of dress and attractiveness in the *Jin Ping Mei*. For example, Chen Jingji appears quite taken with Jinlian in a head-dress and wearing a simple lilac silk top and kingfisher blue patterned skirt, with 'wave-tripping stockings' on her feet.⁴¹ The first time Jingji

³⁷ JPMCH, 37.3b.

³⁸ The Ming prohibited the use of yellow by all but the imperial household. This beige colour (known as *chense* 沉香 situated between yellow and brown) became a happy medium for commoners. Li Yingqiang 李應強, *Zhongguo fuzhuang secai shilun* 中國服裝色彩史論, Taipei: Nantian, 1993, 136.

³⁹ JPMCH, 69.6a.

⁴⁰ Patricia Berger, "Vanity of Vanities: Adorning the Body in Life and Death," *Orientations* 28.3 (1997), 66.

⁴¹ JPMCH, 82.8b.

sees Jinlian he is simply bowled over by a fresh cactus flower (*xianzhang* 仙掌) which is inserted into the top of her silver chignon fret. Li Yu describes this flower as “extremely seductive.”⁴² When awaiting the arrival of Ximen Qing in an earlier scene, Jinlian changes her head-dress for a snow chignon and the author remarks that “either plainly dressed or heavily made-up she looks good.”⁴³ After philosopher Liu Zi 劉子 who questioned the effect of using rouge and kohl in attracting appreciative glances,⁴⁴ Ming scholar Yuan Hongdao discusses whether adornment truly enhances female beauty:

Now nature can be likened to appearance: if you take something which is plain and adorn it with rouge and powder, then that which is pretty are certain to be made less so and that which is ugly is sure to be made worse.⁴⁵

In contrast to erotic sumptuousness in the form of richly ornamented bodhisattvas, the *Jin Ping Mei* and other sources suggest a link between light, ephemeral clothing and erotic attraction. The swing scene of Chapter 25 of the *Jin Ping Mei* emphasises the sexual nature of an activity which was a favoured recreation of sequestered women in the late imperial period.⁴⁶ In this episode, Chen Jingji is asked by Wu Yueniang to push the ladies on the garden swing which causes their lower garments to be blown about by the wind. Jingji is thereby provided with an opportunity to fondle Jinlian’s skirt, raise Ping’er’s skirt to reveal her scarlet under-trousers, and to witness those of Huilian being exposed to view [See Illustration 19].⁴⁷

⁴² *PPJPM*, 18.223.

⁴³ *JPMCH*, 72.16a.

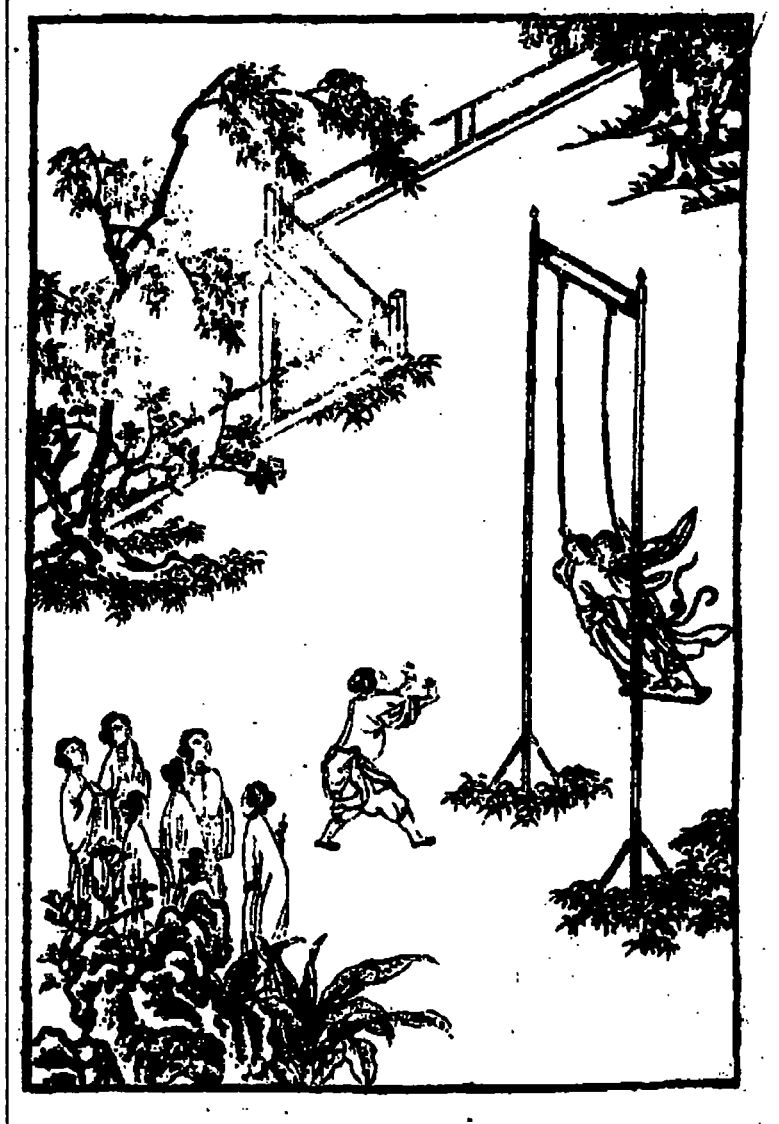
⁴⁴ “Yanyuan 言苑,” in *Liu Zi* 劉子, repr. in *Baizi quanshu* 百子全書, 8 vols., Shanghai: Zhejiang renmin, 1984, *xia* 下.54.15a.

⁴⁵ “Xing suyuan cuncao yin 行素園存稿引,” in *Yuan Zhonglang quanji* 袁中郎全集, by Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道, repr. 2 vols., Taipei: Qingliu, 1976, *xia* 下.20.19-20.

⁴⁶ “Qiuqian 鞦韆,” in *Wanxiangtang*, 6.127.

⁴⁷ *JPMCH*, 25.2a-3a.

Illustration 19: Woodcut from the Chapter 25 of the *Jin Ping Mei*



Light clothing itself appears to facilitate illicit intercourse in the *Jin Ping Mei* and is deliberately worn to that effect. One hot summers day, Song Huilian does not wear trousers, only two skirts so Ximen Qing can part them and begin sexual intercourse without hindrance.⁴⁸ A similar episode appears in the following chapter when Ximen is aroused by Ping'er in the Kingfisher Pavilion wearing "a silk tabby skirt covering a pair of scarlet silk tabby trousers, in the sunlight they were quite see-through, revealing her jade limbs of watery flesh."⁴⁹

⁴⁸ *JPMCH*, 26.7a. See also 23.7a. *DYQS*, 26.408 notes that this is quite "lifelike" (*xiaohua* 俏話).

⁴⁹ *JPMCH*, 27.5a.

A poem from the contemporary *Fanhua lijin* 繁華麗錦 states the erotic nature of the disclosure of limbs under clothing:

I think you are wholly adorable,
The light spring skirt revealing your thighs increases my love pain.
I think that your waist resembles a willow, your flavour that of an orchid, and
your face a flower - not one bit different!
When shall we get drunk together drinking Ambrosia, Ambrosia?
One moment of this spring night is worth thousand gold-pieces!⁵⁰

In the short Ming novel *Zhaoyang qushi*, too, the female protagonist's clothing is blown by the wind and this arouses the emperor to part her trousers to make love to her.⁵¹ According to John Hay, wind-borne garments as depicted in art demonstrate the eroticism of the clothes in response to the body within.⁵² Illustration 20 is a painting of the Goddess of the Luo River 洛神,⁵³ a figure often linked with sexual desire in traditional literature. Her flowing garments symbolise these erotic associations and resemble the way in which the garments float out behind the women on the swing in illustration 19 from the *Jin Ping Mei*.

A most striking aspect here is that the women of higher status, with the exception of Lady Lin, are rarely portrayed as sexually desirable or undertaking sexual acts in the *Jin Ping Mei*. This is particularly so with Wu Yueniang, to which little regular attention is paid in this area, emphasising her feigned disinterest in such affairs and increasing obsession with Buddhism. Instead, as demonstrated in Chapter Three, these women are more usually depicted in clothing of rank. This seems to indicate that it was perceived that women of lower status tended to depend upon their

⁵⁰ Van Gulik, 1951, 196.*

⁵¹ *ZYQS*, 3.81.

⁵² Hay, 1994, 53.

⁵³ From the twelfth-thirteenth century but traditionally attributed to Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之 (ca. 344-ca. 406). Based on the *Luoshen fu* 洛神賦 by Cao Zhi 曹植 (AD129-232), which became the inspiration for many later paintings of goddesses and unattainable beauties.

appearance far more than those of higher status. They lacked the luxury of a legal

Illustration 20: The Goddess of the Luo River



position in relation to the husband and they often lack the financial security too.

In the majority of instances of sexual intercourse in the *Jin Ping Mei*, nakedness only occurs with characters of lower status or where the aim of the narrative is to accentuate the base behaviour of the subjects. Waiting for her first tryst with Ximen Qing, Li Ping'er has taken off her head-dress, let down her black tresses, and is completely naked and heavily made-up.⁵⁴ Most often, however, it is Pan Jinlian who is described as naked both in trysts with Ximen Qing and with Chen Jingji.⁵⁵ In the *Zhaoyang qushi*, a novel which wallows in the depiction of imperial debauchery, Consort Feiyan strips naked to have sex with her lover She Niao'er 射鳥兒 in front of a whole group of naked men in order to stimulate them.⁵⁶ This is reminiscent of

⁵⁴ *JPMCH*, 13.7a.

⁵⁵ *JPMCH*, 52.1a, 27.9a (except for shoes), 82.6b-7a (twirling a white silk fan).

⁵⁶ *ZYQS*, 3.88. See also has three-somes with sister Hede and She Niao'er: *ZYQS*, 2.44 and 49.

contemporary reports that some brothels in Beijing allowed men to peek on naked prostitutes who were reciting poetry and posing in various lewd positions. In this way, the men were unable to resist entering to partake of the pleasures within. The naked girls would emerge and the man could then choose which one he liked and sleep with her for only seven cash.⁵⁷

John Hay makes the distinction between nudity and nakedness with particular reference to the *Jin Ping Mei*. Even when all clothes are removed “it is a matter of nakedness and not of a nude, a nakedness that is somehow, nonchalantly absorbed into the surroundings.”⁵⁸ However, it is usually the case that specific items of clothing remain on the female protagonists. In Chapter 75, Ximen Qing covers Ru Yi’er with a bodice (抹胸 *moxiong*)⁵⁹ so she won’t catch cold and we learn that it was given to her by Li Ping’er.⁶⁰ Erotic woodprints such as illustration 21 which comes from the Ming work *Huaying jinzhen* 花營錦陣 show that the bodice was one of the few items a woman kept on during sex alongside the shoes which covered her bound feet. In the late Ming erotic story *Ruyijun zhuan*, Empress Wu Zetian strips off her clothes and is left only with a short jacket of Lingnan cotton, an item of clothing which serves a similar purpose.⁶¹ The degree of nudity in the *Jin Ping Mei* directly reflects female hierarchies. The women of the highest status such as Yueniang remain fully dressed, those of the lower status such as Pan Jinlian are undressed save their bodices or shoes.

⁵⁷ *Meipu yutan* 梅圃餘談. Cited in Wang Shunu 王書奴, *Zhongguo changji shi* 中國娼妓史, Shanghai: Shenghuo shudian, 1992, 200. See also “Diaowei 釣閣,” in *WLYHB*, 23.1591.

⁵⁸ Hay, 1994, 56.

⁵⁹ “Moziong 抹胸,” in *Liuqing rizha*, 20.9b.

⁶⁰ *JPMCH*, 75.5a.

⁶¹ *RYJZ*, 79. See also Wang Liu’er in *JPMCH*, 79.6b.

Illustration 21: Woodcut from the *Huaying jinzhen*



An important difference between typical Western and Chinese traditions of the depiction of women appears to be the lack of the nude in Chinese art. Mark Elvin has remarked that, to the Westerner, Chinese pictures, of the human body such as the woodcut above, clothed or semi-clothed, are “meager, schematic and inadequate.”⁶² As discussed in the introduction to the thesis, the Chinese body only appears socially definable through ornament and clothing. John Hay elaborates:

The very notion of civilization, which lay at the core of the self-image of China itself, was understood partly as the process of ornamentation in a semiotic

⁶² Elvin, 1989, 267. See also Bodde, 1991, 281.

sense, the articulating of pattern in the substance of humanity. Since the idea of “China” was fundamentally cultural rather than ethnic, one might suspect that the completely uncoded body would have been felt to be not human, and the naked body not, or not yet, Chinese.⁶³

Thus, the naked body in this period held few of the erotic connotations associated with the nude in the West.

However, even without the tradition of the nude, elements of sexual allure are not totally absent from Chinese art.⁶⁴ Traditional Chinese paintings can offer a wealth of information regarding ideals and perceptions of feminine beauty and allure. Clothing and ornamentation are usually depicted in great detail and illustration 22 by Qiu Ying demonstrates the art of the late Ming period. Not only are the demure and ethereal qualities of the woman captured, but so are the details of clothing and ornamentation, from the flowers in her hair, to the styles and distinct patterns on her clothing and the jade pendants hanging at her waist. The description of the beauty in the *Jin Ping Mei* bears a significant resemblance to this painting.

Shan Guoqiang further suggests that although paintings of men were inextricably bound with the issues of the class and status of the subject, other issues affected those of women:

Due to the norms of feudal ethics and morality such as the ‘three followings and four virtues’ and ‘male superior and female inferior,’ this type of portraiture rarely emphasised social position. Instead, importance was attached to appearance, virtue and moral conduct, and the depiction of so-called beautiful looks, gentle manner and chaste nature. These female portraits, although possessing real subjects, for the most part, pursue models of beauty

⁶³ Hay, 1994, 62-3. See also Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes*, New York: Avon, 1980, 84. Hollander notes that even the Western tradition of the nude cannot exist as though beyond clothes: “Above all, Western representational art had to invent a nudity that allowed for a sense of *clothes*.”

⁶⁴ Hay, 1994, 45-6. It is suggested that people are sexually aroused by pictures in both modern and primitive societies. See David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989, 1.

and reflect social aesthetic ideology.⁶⁵

Illustration 22: Painting of a Ming beauty by Qiu Ying

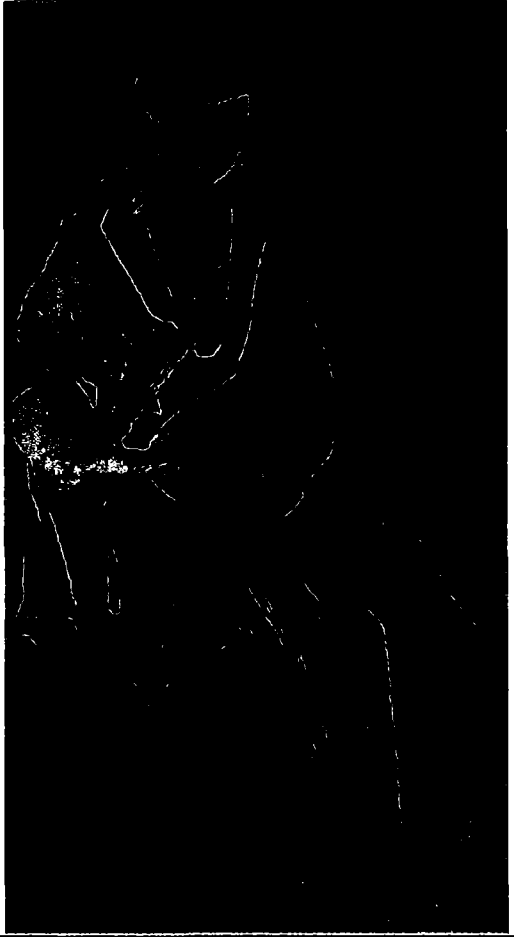


⁶⁵ Shan Guoqiang 單國強, "Xiaoxianghua leixing chuyi 肖像畫類型刂議," *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 故宮博物院院刊 1990.4, 21.

However, some Chinese portraits of women have decidedly erotic connotations. The portrait of He Dongjun 何東君 (1618-1664)⁶⁶ by Wu Zhuo 吳焯

(fl. end of Ming) dated 1643 depicts what Robert Maeda calls a “liberated woman.”⁶⁷ [See illustration 22] Also known as Liu Shi 柳是 or Liu Rushi 柳如是, she was a famous poetess and courtesan who, by the time of her portrait at the age of 25, had become a concubine of scholar-official Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582-1664).⁶⁸ With raised knee and foot barely hidden, this painting could hardly be more different from the stiff, formal postures of the ancestral portraits shown in Chapter Three.

Illustration 22: A portrait of He Dongjun



Bound Feet and Shoe Imagery

The erotic connotation of the barely-concealed foot would not have been missed by those who viewed the above portrait in the late Ming. In the *Jin Ping Mei* there are many episodes where the connection between shoes and sex is highlighted.

⁶⁶ ECCP, 529-530.

⁶⁷ Robert J. Maeda, “The Portrait of a Woman of the Late Ming-Early Qing Period: Madame Hontong,” *Archives of Asian Art* 27 (1973-4), 46.

⁶⁸ ECCP, 148-150.

Shoe eroticism is most associated with Pan Jinlian (hence the name “Golden Lotus”) and it plays a significant role in the sexual activities of her and her lovers. Even during their first encounters, Ximen admires her feet and that Jinlian allows Ximen to touch her shoes indicates her willingness for an affair.⁶⁹ She often changes into specially made bed slippers when she knows Ximen will be coming to her quarters.⁷⁰ The importance of her small feet and their adornments is frequently stressed; her anger when her shoe is dirtied often leads to her smacking the unfortunate maid Qiuju 秋菊 around the face with it.⁷¹ In Chapter 27, Ximen playfully grabs her feet and he later ties her by her foot bindings to the grape arbour when he finds her naked except for her scarlet shoes, provocatively waving a white silk fan to get relief from the heat.⁷² This episode is paralleled in Chapter 79 when Ximen Qing ties Wang Liu’er up by her footbindings and watches her scarlet shoes as they make love.⁷³

It is well documented that bound feet and the shoes that covered them played an important role in sexuality in China. Wolfram Eberhard stresses the value of research into fashions such as bound feet:

Each custom and even each fashion somehow expresses social or psychic values of the whole society, or of that part of society which cherishes the custom; behind each custom there is a whole system of ideas. The study of customs and fashions often opens up insights into aspects which are inaccessible otherwise, either because the topic is taboo or because the psychology behind the custom is unconscious to the person performing it.⁷⁴

Some suggest that footbinding became common as it restricted movement and thereby ensured female fidelity. Others assert that footbinding more clearly defined

⁶⁹ *JPMCH*, 4.1b and 5a. *

⁷⁰ *JPMCH*, 72.16a.

⁷¹ *JPMCH*, 58.13b. See also 21.16b.

⁷² *JPMCH*, 27.8a and 9a.

⁷³ *JPMCH*, 79.6a-7a.

⁷⁴ Wolfram Eberhard, “Introduction,” in Levy, 1966, 17.

visual differences between men and women, at a time when Chinese men were themselves becoming more effeminate in an attempt to distance themselves from the surrounding barbarians.⁷⁵ The sequestration and physical incapacitation of women may have been seen as an indicator of class, as it demonstrated that the family had no financial need of their potential earnings.⁷⁶ Dorothy Ko, on the other hand, asserts that there are no absolute or essential meanings of a practice such as footbinding; the significances are “historical and multiple; they are always constructed, hence always entangled with the politics of seeing.”⁷⁷ The absence of a coherent set of theories on this subject can be seen by the variety of interpretations in early twentieth-century writings which range from scientific observations to pleas for its abolition due to its mutilatory effects.⁷⁸

The popular name “golden lotus” (*jinlian* 金蓮) is said to have derived from the construction of a lotus out of gold in about 500AD. The emperor of Northern Qi 齊, Xiao Baojuan 蕭寶卷 (r. 498-501), had his Favoured Consort Pan 潘 walk on top of it.⁷⁹ Legend has it that Southern Tang ruler Li Yu 李煜 (r. 961-975) constructed a similar lotus out of gold and ordered his favourite concubine Yaoniang 窈娘 to bind her feet to make the tips look like a crescent moon and then dance in

⁷⁵ Levy, 1966, 30-31.

⁷⁶ Veblen, 1925, 35-67.

⁷⁷ Ko, 1997b, 5.

⁷⁸ Ko, 1997a, 8-10.

⁷⁹ *Nan shi* 南史, by Li Yanshou 李延壽, repr. 6 vols., Beijing: Zhonghua, 1975, 5.154. For early discussions on the origin of footbinding see “Chanzu 纏足,” in *Chuogeng lu*, 10.158; *Shaoshi shanfang bicong* 少室山房筆叢, by Hu Yinglin 胡應麟, repr. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1958, *juan* 12; “Yu Nizi jinlian 俞尼子金蓮,” and “Yaoniang xinyue jiao 窈娘新月腳,” in *Liuqing rizha*, 20.5b-6b; *Wenhai pisha zhailu* 文海披沙摘錄, by Xie Zhaozhe, edn. XYCS, 7.2.19b; *Bizhouzhai yutan jielu*, 3.1.1a-b; “Furen gongzu 夫人弓足,” in *WLYHB*, 23.1578-1580; “Hu Yuanrui lun chanzu 胡元瑞論纏足,” in *WLYHB*, 23.1580-1581; “Nuren chanzu chanbin 女人纏足蟬鬢,” in *Qixiu leigao*, 22.335; Li Rongmei 李榮楣, “Zhongguo funüchanzu shi tan 中國婦女纏足史譚,” in Yao Lingxi 姚靈犀, ed., *Caipei lu* 采菲錄, Shanghai: Shudian, 1998, 1-23.

the centre.⁸⁰ By the Song dynasty, bound feet were a key item among the attributes of a beautiful woman, the smaller the feet, the more beautiful she was. Footbinding, therefore, began to send out “powerful statements about femininity.”⁸¹ The bound foot was considered the most intimate part of a woman’s body, despite the fact that the physical appearance of the withered foot and the smell associated with the rotting flesh was often less than savoury.⁸²

Others overlooked these aspects of footbinding to concentrate on the more erotic nature of the bound foot. It was argued that bound feet made the vagina tighter, the buttocks more voluptuous, and forced a tantalising, swaying gait.⁸³ Manipulation of the feet involving kissing, fondling, nibbling, sucking, even washing and trimming toenails was considered by some to be a form of foreplay.⁸⁴ Even the shoes covering the bound foot were used in drinking games in which cups were placed in the shoes.⁸⁵ Fashion scholar Valerie Steele believes that foot-binding could almost be called “a cultural quasi-fetishism.”⁸⁶

Whole works were dedicated to the bound foot. For example, aficionado of the bound foot, Fang Xuan 方绚, in his *Xianglian pinzao* 香蓮品藻 “Classification of the Qualities of Fragrant Lotuses,” identified 58 varieties of the bound foot.⁸⁷

⁸⁰ See Van Gulik, 1961, 216. He states that all literary evidence points to the custom having begun around her time i.e. in the interval of ca. 50 years between the Tang and Song.

⁸¹ Patricia Ebrey, “Women, Marriage, and the Family in Chinese History,” in Paul S. Ropp, ed., *Heritage of China: Contemporary Perspectives on Chinese Civilization*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990, 220.

⁸² “Shuangxingchan 雙行纏,” in *Shaoshi shanfang bicong*, 12.148.

⁸³ Levy, 1966, 34.

⁸⁴ Levy, 1966, 141. Anne Brydon criticises authors such as Levy for their glorification of this aspect of the practice and describes their writings as ‘anthro-porn’ rhetoric. See Anne Brydon, “Sensible Shoes,” in Brydon and Niessen, eds., 1998, 13.

⁸⁵ Fourteenth-century historian Tao Zongyi considered this practice disgusting. See “Jinlian bei 金蓮盃,” in *Chuogeng lu*, 23.333. See also “Jixie xingjiu 妓鞋行酒,” in *WLYHB*, 23.1583.

⁸⁶ Valerie Steele, *Fetish: Fashion, Sex and Power*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, 92.

⁸⁷ *Xianglian pinzao* 香蓮品藻, by Fang Xuan 方绚, edn. XYCS, 8.1.1a-8b.

However, Ko argues that Fang Xuan's delight in the disclosure of the more vulgar details of eroticism associated with the bound foot cannot be found in other works before the nineteenth century. It would have been inconceivable in a time when footbinding was seen as a mark of female respectability.⁸⁸ Footbinding was seen by some as a sign of civility, to the extent that one official of the late Ming, Qu Jiusi 瞿九思, even suggested binding the feet of barbarian women to induce laxity in their military menfolk.⁸⁹

Readings of the *Jin Ping Mei* reveal a perceived female consciousness of the erotic significance of their bound feet.⁹⁰ Jinlian's pride in her small feet is soon challenged by the maid Song Huilian who finds a place in Ximen's affections. Originally a Jinlian herself, her name had to be changed to avoid confusion with Pan Jinlian, yet her smaller feet are emphasised at every opportunity. She requests shoes-tops from Ximen so she can show him how good she is at making them. To his comments that her feet are smaller than Jinlian's, she replies:

"There is no comparison between hers and mine. Yesterday I tried hers on and found I could wear them over my own shoes, but it doesn't matter whether they are large or small so long as the shoes are well-formed."

Unfortunately, this conversation is overheard by Jinlian who curses Huilian the next day when she offers to put away her bedslippers and bindings: "I don't want to dirty your hands with my filthy crooked feet."⁹¹

In return for Jinlian's silence, Huilian promises to do everything she asks. However, during the ladies' walk in Chapter 24, Huilian constantly loses her shoes

⁸⁸ Ko, 1997a, 23, n.3 and 4; C. Fred Blake, "Footbinding in Neo-Confucian China and the Appropriation of Female Labour," *Signs: The Journal of Women and Culture and Society* 19.3 (1994), 708.

⁸⁹ *WLYHB*, 23.1579-1580.

⁹⁰ Ko, 1992, 12-13.

⁹¹ *JPMCH*, 23.7b-9b.

and we learn that she is actually wearing a pair of Jinlian's shoes over her own for fear her own would become dirty.⁹² The significance of this episode is very clear. By wearing a pair of Jinlian's shoes over her own Song Huilian proves that her feet are much smaller and thus more alluring to the opposite sex. She draws attention to her feet, the most erotic part of her body, in order to distract Chen Jingji who happens to be escorting them on this trip out. As a consequence she is able to flirt mercilessly with him in front of Jinlian. She is signalling that she has the upper hand in the battle for attention of both Ximen Qing and Jingji. In addition she is telling Jinlian that she is wise to the developing relationship between Jinlian and Chen Jingji, having seen Jingji surreptitiously touching Jinlian's feet.⁹³

Even after the demise of Huilian, Jinlian is haunted by Huilian's victorious small feet. Having lost a shoe in the grape arbour episode, her maids are sent on a desperate search. Qiuju eventually finds a scarlet flat-heeled shoe wrapped in a packet of incense and fragrant herbs in the study. It was:

an embroidered shoe of scarlet satin decorated with flowers of the four seasons and inset with the eight treasures and with flat heels in white silk tabby. The heel flap was green and the shoe mouth blue. The only difference between them was that one had sand-green thread and one had turquoise blue thread. Unless they were examined closely, it would have been impossible to tell them apart.⁹⁴ ...

When Jinlian tries it on it is a tighter fit and so she realises that it must be Huilian's. Jinlian later confronts Ximen to ask why he was preserving Huilian's "stinking hoof" like a jewel, after he complains about her replacement silk bedslippers which are made of green silk with scarlet heel-flaps. He mollifies her by asking her to make a new pair of shoes: "Don't you know how much delight I get when you wear red

⁹² *JPMCH*, 24.4b-5b.

⁹³ *JPMCH*, 24.2a.

⁹⁴ *JPMCH*, 28.4a.

shoes? I love seeing them.”⁹⁵

According to Xie Zhaozhe, the wife of Fan Sicheng 範寺丞 hanged herself on discovering the shoe of a prostitute in her husband’s bedding.⁹⁶ Thus, Jinlian’s seemingly irrational behaviour does not seem quite so far off the mark when contemporary women would go so far as to commit suicide on the discovery of a rival’s shoe in their husband’s possession. It is later discovered that a serving boy Tiegun 鐵棍 has sold the shoe to Chen Jingji, who demands a handkerchief from Jinlian for its return. Fang Xuan noted that it was prostitutes who tended to ‘lose’ their shoes,⁹⁷ and a similar association is made by Yueniang when she hears of the episode.⁹⁸ This only furthers the association of Jinlian with those who are more liberal with their sexual favours.

The female characters in the novel are often portrayed discussing or making shoes together, a pastime which would have taken up considerable time and effort. Illustrations 23 and 24 attest to the skill and devotion required to produce such items.

Illustration 23: Scarlet sleeping shoe in satin



Not only do we learn of the favoured patterns and styles of the characters, but also how important a pretty or appealing shoe was to them. High-heeled shoes were particularly favoured as they gave the appearance of a smaller foot,⁹⁹ something Pan Jinlian in the *Jin*

⁹⁵ JPMCH, 28.9a.

⁹⁶ WZZ, 8.311-312.

⁹⁷ Jinyuan zazuan 金園雜纂, by Fan Xuan 方絢, edn. XYCS, 8.2.11b.

⁹⁸ JPMCH, 28.3a-b.

⁹⁹ “Xiewa 鞋襪,” in *Xianqing ouji*, 3.137-138.

Ping Mei feels is unnecessary due to the already petite size of her feet. An example of this occurs in Chapter 29.¹⁰⁰ Jinlian decides to make

scarlet iridescent satin shoes with flat heels in white silk tabby decorated with parrots pecking at peaches embroidered on the points.

Li Ping'er will do the same design on red 'ten design' brocade satin with high heels.¹⁰¹ Meng Yulou on the other hand is lining a shoe of black satin and states: "I'm not concerned with flowery designs like you younger ones. This old lady will make cloud tops decorated with gold foil and bound

around the edge by sand-green thread, patterned with mountain peaks, high heels in white silk tabby." With this, she is attempting to set herself apart from the race for male favour, although on a later occasion Ximen Qing praises her embroidered shoes of scarlet silk tabby and declares: "I only love you."¹⁰² The narrative suggests that even overtly non-competitive women like Meng Yulou, may have understood and utilised to their advantage the attraction of some men for a certain type of shoe. However, what opinions were held about women who did not conform to such values regarding attractiveness or sexuality?

Illustration 23: Black high-heeled shoe embroidered with auspicious designs



¹⁰⁰ *JPMCH*, 29.1a-2a.

¹⁰¹ Both 'parrots pecking at peaches' (*yingwu zhaitao* 鸚鵡摘桃) and 'ten design' (*shiyang* 十樣) are traditionally lucky symbols meaning good fortune and longevity. *JSCD*, 782.

¹⁰² *JPMCH*, 75.20a.

Those women who did not have bound feet were derided and ridiculed because their feet were considered ungainly and, therefore, unfeminine.¹⁰³ In his reminiscences of the entertainment quarters of Nanjing in the late Ming, *Banqiao zaji* 板橋雜記, Yu Huai 余懷 (1616-1686)¹⁰⁴ tells of prostitute Gu Xiaoxi 顧小喜 who, despite being attractive, did not have prettily bound feet and as a consequence was nick-named Bigfoot Gu 顧大腳.¹⁰⁵ Xie Zhaozhe, by contrast, makes the surprising comment that: “When women’s feet are not bound, they are actually beautiful,” a view rarely found in this period.¹⁰⁶

Yu Zan’er 玉簪兒, erstwhile maid/lover of Li Gongbi, exemplifies the perceived unfeminine nature of the large-footed woman in the *Jin Ping Mei*:

Yu Zan’er single-mindedly daubed on rouge and applied powder which made her look quite monstrous. On her head she had put her hair into a coiled topknot using a hanky as a cover surrounded by a headband flecked with gold to create the impression of a chignon. She had also stuck in a few brass hairclasps, withered leaves and the remains of flowers. On her ears hung a pair of sweet melon pendant earrings. She wore a set of clothes which revealed her belt at the front and her buttocks at the back in the weirdest green and red. In front of people she looked just like a mouse draped in lotus leaves. On her feet she wore a pair of cut felt shoes in a canoe style with a large opening and four eyelets. They were about two foot in length. All over her face she had daubed face powder, white in the east and red in the west: she looked just like a dark green winter melon.¹⁰⁷

The author makes it clear that Zan’er is the epitome of bad dress sense. Contemporary scholar Li Yu would have been horrified at the inelegance of her brass

¹⁰³ Levy, 1966, 31; “Shuangxingchan 雙行纏,” in *Shaoshi shanfang bicong*, 12.147-148.

¹⁰⁴ *ECCP*, 942.

¹⁰⁵ *Banqiao zaji*, 174.

¹⁰⁶ *XYCS*, 7.2.19b

¹⁰⁷ *JPMCH*, 91.10b-11a.

jewellery.¹⁰⁸ The outfit worn by Zan'er is so bizarre as to constitute fancy dress and, indeed, she is later revealed to be psychologically suspect in her possessive behaviour following Yulou's entrance into the household.¹⁰⁹

Despite the fact that many Chinese literary descriptions of physical beauty tend to be couched in stereotypical epithets, the effect of fashion upon perceptions of

beauty cannot be ignored. An erotic awareness of the body contains an awareness of clothing and thereby necessitates a reference to fashionable norms.¹¹⁰ Changes in dress prudery over the dynasties demonstrate how erotic ideals varied dramatically. In the Tang period, for example, women bared their throats and breast. A Southern Tang painting (ca. 10th century) attributed to Zhou Fang 周昉, "Zanhua shinü tu 簪花仕女圖," portrays a group of ladies dressed in long loose-fitting strapless gowns secured below the bust which revealed

Illustration 24: Detail from "Ladies Wearing Flowers in their Hair"



¹⁰⁸ "Shoushi 首飾," in *Xianqing ouji*, 3.130.

¹⁰⁹ James Laver questions the motives for such women who did not follow the current trends in Euope: "A woman who is not in fashion is either too poor to afford it, too stupid to understand it, or has thrown up the sponge (....) The alternatives are mere dowdiness or 'fancy dress', and the women - or the man - who habitually wears fancy dress is a psychological suspect." See Laver, James, *Clothes*, London: Burke, 1952, xiv.

¹¹⁰ Hollander, 1980, 88-90

the top of the breast.¹¹¹ It has been argued that this freedom of women in Tang, particularly those of the upper merchant classes, enabled them to “flaunt their femininity.”¹¹² During the Song dynasty and after, however, due to the increasing prudery brought on by Neo-Confucianism, the upper rims of the robe and then the high, tight-fitting collar of an under-jacket concealed the breast and neck.¹¹³ From illustration 22 we can see how the beauty of the Ming period would have her breast covered by a blouse underneath her outer top.

Vogues for certain colours changed frequently during the late Ming. Pale colours, such as silver-red or pink (銀紅 *yinhong*) and peach (桃紅 *taohong*) were popular among girls. Moon-white was fashionable among more mature women. These colours, and other light colours such as lilac and beige, are commonly depicted as the chosen colours of the beauties of the *Jin Ping Mei*. By the time of the dynastic transition, however, favoured colours were beginning to get much darker.¹¹⁴ Thus, the “weirdest green and red” chosen by Yu Zan’er would clearly have been considered a fashion *faux-pas*.

Zan’er’s attempt to emulate the chignon using a coiled topknot and handkerchief flecked with gold, would have similarly been derided. Many of the depictions of the beauties in the *Jin Ping Mei* begin with a description of the chignons, hair decorations ranging from hairpins to flowers to sable headbands. Much late Ming discourse focuses on changing female hairstyles. In his description of the seductive beauty in a painting, Xu Wei wrote: “Her palace chignon a foot high,

¹¹¹ Ellen Johnston Laing, “Notes on *Ladies Wearing Flowers in their Hair*,” *Orientalism* 21.2 (1990), 32-39.

¹¹² Shaanxi History Museum, *Women of the Tang Dynasty*, Hong Kong: Pacific Century Publishers, 1995.

¹¹³ Shanghai shi xiqu xuexiao zhongguo fuzhuangshi yanjiuzu 上海市戲曲學校中國服裝史研究組, *Zhongguo lidai fushi* 中國歷代服飾, Shanghai: Xuelin, n.d., 110-111, 139 (Tang), 189-191 (Song).

¹¹⁴ “Yishan 衣衫,” in *Xianqing ouji*, 3.132.

with two pearl hoops (...) Her embroidered clothing sports the new-style collar.”¹¹⁵ Chen Jiru noted that the hair-styles were getting gradually taller and taller,¹¹⁶ as did the author of the *Sangang shilue* 三岡識略:

When I was a *xiucai* degree holder, I saw women with chignons about 3 *cun* high and this was called a new style. Over the years, they have crept up to 6 or 7 *cun*. These are called ‘peony heads’ and are made with false hair wrapped around a frame. They hang down so much that the women cannot raise their heads. Moreover, some women from the gentry households tie their hair up into ‘conch chignons’ and decorate it with all sorts of pearls and gems, with the sable headband popular in the inner quarters. I cannot bear to look at them, yet they consider them fashionable styles (逢時之制 *fengshi zhi zhi*).¹¹⁷

Such concern for aspects of dress and ornamentation suggests why Yu Zan’er’s appearance is held up for derision in the *Jin Ping Mei*. The novel reveals the attention paid to correct fashionable behaviour of the period. As Adshead states, it is possible to see footbinding as “fashion rather than protocol. It was sustained by society rather than imposed by the state.”¹¹⁸

In the *Jin Ping Mei*, many of the women in the novel use their appearance and sexuality to gain other things such as more clothing, social advancement or assistance; beauty is perceived to be a ‘tactical mask.’¹¹⁹ The novel portrays women utilising adornment for their own ends, yet condemns characters such as Yu Zan’er for failing to be fashionable. A plurality of voices emerges from this and other texts, reflecting the late Ming confusion over the role of fashion in the lives of contemporary women. Offerings made by women to the goddess Bixia yuanjun at Taishan included mostly

¹¹⁵ “Baoqin meiren tu 抱琴美人圖,” in *Xu Wenzhang sanji*, 8.309.

¹¹⁶ “Dai zeng Zhang Yaoyu yishi 代贈張瑤宇醫士,” in *Wanxiangtang*, 2.15

¹¹⁷ *Sangang shilue* 三岡識略. Cited in Qu Xuanying 瞿宣穎, *Zhongguo shehui shiliao congchao* 中國社會史料叢抄, 2 vols., Shanghai: Shudian, 1985., 1985, 1.111.

¹¹⁸ Adshead, 1997, 99.

¹¹⁹ Véronique Nahoum-Grappe asserts that female beauty is more social efficacy than sexuality. See Nahoum-Grappe, 1993, 95.

silk, jewellery and shoes, and it is recorded that court women as high as the mother of the Wanli Emperor even gave lavish gifts as offerings to her.¹²⁰ The goddess was very much associated with younger women and these gifts, therefore, underlined the goddess' association with luxury, display, beauty and sexuality.¹²¹ In making their offerings, women were clearly conscious of these, and the concern shown by men in their writings about women visiting temples demonstrates their own awareness of the associations in play. Clothing and ornamentation were intimately connected with perceptions of female sexuality.

Mao Xiang, the author of *Yingmei'an yiyu* 影梅菴憶語, criticised the contemporary trend for exaggerating female beauty which implied that women were out to achieve fame through their looks:

Love is born of intimacy, yet intimacy is always embellished and where love originates from such embellishment there is rarely a case of true love. How much more is it true of those verbose, rambling scholars on whom we rely to reveal those clandestine beauties of the innermost recesses of the boudoir. They describe the women of their imagination such as the mystical Magu 麻姑 and the fabulous Shennü 神女. Meddlers persist in fabricating tales and poems which enthuse about miraculous unions which make one believe that Xishi 西施 and Wenjun 文君 really exist in the inner quarters.¹²²

The author of the *Jin Ping Mei* takes great pains to detail the beauty of his subjects to the point of exaggeration which accords with the views of Mao Xiang that female beauty was being raised to unattainable heights. Such depictions of female beauty may have been one of the factors which furthered female sartorial competition as they attempted to model themselves after fictional beauties.

¹²⁰ Sawada Mizuho 澤田瑞穂, *Chûgoku no minkan shinkô 中國の民間信仰*, Tokyo: Kôsakusha, 1982, 301; Cui Xiuguo and Ji Aiqin, 1987, 116 and 183.

¹²¹ Pomeranz, 1997, 192-197.

¹²² *Yingmei'an yiyu*, 1.

The relationship between sex and money

Male-female gifts

Chapter Five documented various gift-giving strategies employed by women between themselves; however, many of the gifts of clothing and ornamentation given to women throughout the *Jin Ping Mei* are presented by men. A regular recipient is Pan Jinlian. Ximen placates her with gifts of head ornaments, pearls, kingfisher flowers and clothes for not coming to see her due to the death of one of his concubines.¹²³ Later in the novel, after an argument with Sun Xue'e, Pan Jinlian goes back to her room, throws off her head ornaments, washes off her makeup so that her hair is in disarray and her looks dishevelled, and cries until her eyes resemble red peaches. Ximen Qing finds her in this state and tries to mollify her by giving her four pearls to make into a headband.¹²⁴

As early as Chapter 4, Ximen Qing is coerced by Dame Wang into giving Pan Jinlian a gold-topped silver hairpin and in return she gives him a handkerchief as pledges of their love.¹²⁵ Later in the novel, Li Ping'er, too, gives Ximen Qing two gold hairpins and instructs him not to let her husband, Hua Zixu, see them.¹²⁶ Ornaments such as hairpins and rings were often used as gifts to initiate or cement a relationship. From early times it was common practice for favoured palace women to wear rings before a union with the emperor. A ring was also used as a sign of betrothal.¹²⁷ A poem by Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (d. 117 BC), "Meiren fu 美人婦", describes his meeting with a woman who sticks one of her hairpins under his cap to

¹²³ *JPMCH*, 6.5b.

¹²⁴ *JPMCH*, 11.6b-7a.

¹²⁵ *JPMCH*, 4.3a.

¹²⁶ *JPMCH*, 13.8b.

¹²⁷ *Qingbai leichao*, 13.6225.

signify her willingness to a union with him.¹²⁸

Fans are frequently presented as love tokens in the *Jin Ping Mei* to both concubines and prostitutes. They are commonly depicted during scenes of sexual activity, too, such as the example cited earlier from Chapter 27.¹²⁹ The poem “The Fan” inscribed on a painting by Tang Yin of the Ming indicates that the silk fan was an object of seduction:

Autumn¹³⁰ comes and the silk fan should be put away.
Our fine lady - oh why is she so sad?
If one only looks at the world's ways carefully,
Who does not chase after glamour or pleasure?¹³¹

A poem by Chen Jiru describes the appearance of a beauty on a snowy night. The fact that she is masking herself with a white silk fan seems seductive to the onlooker.¹³²

Girdle pendants could also be pledge gifts.¹³³ In the Ming poem “Yingyingci 鶯鶯辭” by Li Xu 李詡, the woman requests “give me your jade girdle pendants as a pact to unite our hearts.”¹³⁴ Another poem by contemporary Mo Shilong 莫是龍 (1552-1587)¹³⁵ tells how a girl presents her girdle to the Moon River Gentleman.¹³⁶ The tinkling of pendants betokens the beauty in the *Jin Ping Mei*.¹³⁷ Belt pendants are also often portrayed as erotic symbols which can arouse the male. In describing a

¹²⁸ “Meiren fu 美人賦,” in *Sima Xiangru ji jiaozhu* 司馬相如集校注, Jin Guoyong 金國永, ann., Shanghai: Guji, 1993, 125.

¹²⁹ *JPMCH*, 82.1a -- exchanged between Chen Jingji and Pan Jinlian; *JPMCH*, 32.8b Li Guijie after her adoption; *JPMCH*, 59.4b -- exchanged between Zheng Aiyue and Ximen Qing.

¹³⁰ i.e. old age.

¹³¹ Lai, n.d., 97.

¹³² “Zhouren niechi bu neng xing, yin liuyin Shi Yuxun zhaitou jishi 舟人嚙齒不能行，因留飲施羽循齋頭即事,” in *Wanxiangtang*, 1.3. See also “Shanzhong chuxia 山中初夏,” in *Wanxiangtang*, 8.159.

¹³³ Cahill, 1985, 208 and 219.

¹³⁴ “Yingyingci 鶯鶯辭,” in *JALRMB*, 6.236.

¹³⁵ *DMB*, 1073.

¹³⁶ “Du kou feng nǚlang 渡口逢女郎,” in *Shixiuzhai ji*, 10.11b.

¹³⁷ *JPMCH*, chapters 78, 89 and 91.

painting of one seductive beauty carrying a zither, Ming scholar Xu Wei imagines the tinkling of exquisite jasper pendants amidst a flurry of girdle sashes and floating fine silks.¹³⁸ Fondling or even removing the belt pendants implies sexual longing and disrobing before sexual intercourse, as a piece by the late Ming poet Guang Lu 鄺露 illustrates:

Yearning for her love, she cradles her jade girdle pendants,
The beauty is sad for he has broken his promise.¹³⁹

In the contemporary erotic novel *Ruyijun zhuan*, the male protagonist, Ruyijun 如意君, is distraught that he will never again hear the sound of girdle-pendants after he is forced to leave the presence of his lover, the Empress Wu Zetian.¹⁴⁰ Literary works all highlight the erotic nature of various items of ornamentation in the minds of both men and women in sixteenth-century China. Hairpins, fans and girdle-pendants, in particular, symbolise male-female union.

Pygmalionism is a prominent theme in the *Jin Ping Mei*. In Chapter 22, Song Huilian enters the Ximen household and dresses much the same as the other serving women. However, she soon begins to copy Meng Yulou and Pan Jinlian, dressing her hair higher on her head with a ringlet on either side. At this point Ximen begins to take an interest in her. He notices her in a red coat and purple skirt, but as the outfit looks quite strange, he instructs the maid Yuxiao to give her a skirt of another colour.¹⁴¹ Ximen Qing also sends her material for clothes comprising a bolt of turquoise blue satin decorated with the 'intertwining flowers of the four season meeting with happiness (the character *xi* 喜)'. He promises her jewellery and

¹³⁸ "Bao qin meiren tu 抱琴美人圖," in *Xu Wenzhang sanji*, 8.309.

¹³⁹ *Qiaoya*, 2.89.

¹⁴⁰ *Ruyijun zhuan* 如意君傳, by Qiandai saoren 前代騷人, repr. Taipei: Shuangdi guoji shiwu, 1994, 84.

¹⁴¹ *JPMCH*, 22.

clothes if she does everything he asks.¹⁴² Later, she asks for a chignon fret costing 8 taels of silver. However, Ximen is worried that his ladies will notice and ask her where she obtained it.¹⁴³

A tale in the *Guifan* echoes that of Song Huilian in some respects. The *Shange furen* 善歌婦人 “Songstress” of the title is desired by a rich and opulent music master but she refuses. He has her husband killed and sets her up in another house, supplying her bountifully with gold, pearls, fine silks and embroidery in an attempt to make her happy. After a year he comes to her room but she attacks him and then kills herself.¹⁴⁴ Unlike Song Huilian who is happy to accept all of the gifts which she is showered with, the *Guifan* exemplar refuses to comply with the desires of the music master.

Roche states that the way in which Casanova would dress up his women was more sexually provocative than actually undressing them:

“Stripping only reveals what is there”, and it made a poorer spectacle (...) than the voluptuous pleasures of a demiurgic prelude which in a way authenticated the power of the gift economy in aristocratic societies.¹⁴⁵

This resembles the way in which Ximen dresses up his women in more attractive or opulent costume to his specifications: he assumes the role of deity in his domestic realm, fully aware of his ability to create and transform those beneath him into something more glamorous and to his liking.

Frequently, in the course of the novel, the connection between money or wealth (*cai* 財) and sex (*se* 色) is made, furthering the links to the “Four Vices of Excess” to the women in the novel.¹⁴⁶ The lucky recipients are often maid servants.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² *JPMCH*, 22.2b and 4b.

¹⁴³ *JPMCH*, 25.11b.

¹⁴⁴ “Shange furen 善歌婦人,” in *Guifan*, 3.48a-b.

¹⁴⁵ Roche, 1994, 414.

¹⁴⁶ Satyendra, 1993, 93-95.

Ben the Fourth's wife, too, receives gifts for sexual favours from Ximen Qing, although he later gives her money in place of clothes as he thinks these items would be remarked upon.¹⁴⁸ Zheng Aiyue exchanges sex for Ximen's purple silk handkerchief as she is jealous that the other prostitutes, Li Guijie and Wu Yin'er, already have them.¹⁴⁹ In the *Zhaoyang qushi*, also, the two sisters Feiyan and Hede receive gifts of cotton tops and trouser and a brocade top from their lover She Niao'er after sexual intercourse.¹⁵⁰

Ximen Qing appears to be quite wise in limiting gifts to certain of the women for fear of provoking the jealousy of his women back home with whom they often come into contact. His gifts to Song Huilian are discovered by her husband, inciting his jealousy and the ultimate suicide of the remorseful Huilian.¹⁵¹ He gives Wang Liu'er a pair of gold hairpins in the shape of the character for long-life (壽 *shou*) for her birthday.¹⁵² Later, Jinlian curses Ximen Qing for having an affair with Liu'er who comes to the house flaunting the hairpins:

I don't know what sort of a mad lanky whore she is, prancing about and putting on airs, with those great long painted temple-locks, her lips daubed bright red. That unbelievable bloody cunt of a woman, that great purple-faced evil whore. I don't know what you like about her."¹⁵³

It is clear that Jinlian is exaggerating her ugliness to slander her, as Li Yu notes.¹⁵⁴ However, this incident is not enough to prevent Ximen giving Liu'er a free rein in

¹⁴⁷ In Western literature, the exchange of clothes between master and servant in the course of amorous intrigues became a stock situation. See Roche, 1994, 41.

¹⁴⁸ *JPMCH*, 77.16b and 78.4b

¹⁴⁹ *JPMCH*, 59.6b and 7b.

¹⁵⁰ *ZYQS*, 2.47-48.

¹⁵¹ *JPMCH*, 24.4a-4b.

¹⁵² *JPMCH*, 50.1a.

¹⁵³ *JPMCH*, 61.8b-9a.

¹⁵⁴ *PPJPM*, 61.401.

one of his textile shops.¹⁵⁵

Pan Jinlian's obsession with clothing and ornamentation is constantly highlighted. During one sexual encounter, she asks Ximen for Li Ping'er's fur coat to wear to Ying Bojue's wife's party as the other women already have them. She refuses a pawned one, suggesting that he give it to Li Jiao'er instead and give hers to Sun Xue'e: "If you give it to me today I'll make two scarlet stork sleeve robes woven with gold and lined with white damask to show that it was worth being your faithful wife all this time." Ximen tells her it is worth 60 taels, wondering whether such a coat would look good on her, to which she retorts: "I am not a maid!" and promptly swallows his ejaculate.¹⁵⁶ Ximen relents, but this only results in a fierce confrontation between Jinlian and Yueniang who feels that Jinlian is manipulating their husband far too much.¹⁵⁷ However, as indicated earlier in the narrative Pan Jinlian is all too willing to take on the role of a maid, one which she is nevertheless desperate to distance herself from. In Chapter 40 the sight of her dressed as one is very arousing for Ximen Qing:

She had taken off her chignon and put her hair up into a coiled topknot,¹⁵⁸ had powdered her face snow-white and rouged her lips bright red. She wore two gold lantern earrings and had stuck on three facial flowers, and wore a purple headband washed with gold. She had found a scarlet gold embroidered robe and beneath a turquoise blue skirt.¹⁵⁹

Ping'er completes Jinlian's outfit by putting a red kerchief on her head. It is interesting to note that before making love, she changes her hairstyle from that of a

¹⁵⁵ *JPMCH*, 79.7b.

¹⁵⁶ *JPMCH*, 74.1b-2a.

¹⁵⁷ *JPMCH*, 75.15a.

¹⁵⁸ This is the same item as worn by Yu Zan'er in Chapter 91 which suggests that it was commonly worn by maids.

¹⁵⁹ *JPMCH*, 40.5a.

maid to that of a Hangzhou bun as if it were improper to do otherwise.¹⁶⁰

Pan Jinlian is often likened to a prostitute for the way in which the majority of her sexual encounters with Ximen Qing involve the transfer of clothing and ornamentation. One session of anal sex with Ximen is so painful he promises her a set of pretty coloured clothing figured with flower patterns. The dissatisfied Jinlian replies “I have clothes like that already. The fine yellow and silver drawnwork tussore skirt embroidered with multicoloured threads wrapped in gold foil worn by Li Guijie is very pretty. She said it was bought in brothel area. They all have one apart from me. I really don’t know how much it would cost but I’d like you to buy me one.”¹⁶¹

From her own insecure position, Pan Jinlian is the first to notice when there is a threat to her manipulation of Ximen Qing. In Chapter 65 Ximen Qing presents Ru Yi’er with four hairpins, and she is soon “dressing differently from previously, prancing about and putting on airs, chatting and laughing with the other maids. It was soon noticed by Pan Jinlian”.¹⁶² However, when Ximen Qing is away, Pan Jinlian herself gets dressed up in order to attract the attentions of Chen Jingji. She was “like a flower or jade, prancing about and putting on airs,” mixing with the maids, playing guess fingers or dominoes, chatting and laughing, not caring whether people saw her.¹⁶³ In the Western Han, Yang Xiong 揚雄 criticises those who emulate the dress of Confucius:

If it has the nature of a sheep yet dresses in a tiger skin, it will be happy to see grass and will tremble when it sees a leopard, forgetful that it is wearing the skin of a tiger.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ *JPMCH*, 40.7b.

¹⁶¹ *JPMCH*, 52.1a-2a.

¹⁶² *JPMCH*, 65.10a-b and 65.16b.

¹⁶³ *JPMCH*, 55.8a.

¹⁶⁴ “Wuzi 吾子,” in *Fayan* 發言, by Yang Xiong 楊雄, repr. in Cheng Rong 程榮, *Han Wei congshu* 漢魏叢書, Changchun: Jilin daxue, 1992, 506.

The rationale here is that the mere donning of an outfit does not and cannot change the nature of the wearer and, therefore, the fact that Ru Yi'er is wearing new and different clothes does not fundamentally alter her position as a wet-nurse. However in Pan Jinlian's eyes she now has the potential to improve that position through monopolisation and manipulation of her master, a tactic frequently employed by Jinlian.

After the death of Li Ping'er it is Ru Yi'er who takes her place in Ximen's affections, much to the chagrin of Jinlian. He constantly visits her and presents her with clothing including a set consisting of kingfisher blue satin robe, a yellow coarse silk skirt, blue Luzhou coarse silk trousers, and a pair of figured leggings.¹⁶⁵ He promises her red satin to make underwear and red satin sleeping shoes to wear when she waits on him in return for being able to urinate in her mouth.¹⁶⁶ For performing fellatio and being able to burn moxa upon her body, he offers her a figured satin sleeveless overdress.¹⁶⁷ The more sexual favours she performs, the more clothing she receives, the more competitive she becomes and the more of a threat she becomes to Jinlian.

Sexual propriety was paramount to contemporary Lady Zhu, matriarch of the family of scholar-official Wang Xijue of the late Ming, as her son reports:

Male and female servants did not rub shoulders. If a female servant dressed in sumptuous clothing then it would be stripped off her. If one wore a tall chignon then she would be beaten. Because of this the decorum in the inner quarters was quite strict and clean and there were few problems with the boys in the family.¹⁶⁸

This is in contrast to the *Jin Ping Mei* where increasing competition and more

¹⁶⁵ JPMCH, 74.3b.

¹⁶⁶ JPMCH, 75.5a-6b.

¹⁶⁷ JPMCH, 78.15a-b.

¹⁶⁸ *Goushan xiansheng ji*, 14.35a.

elaborate attire is linked to increasingly rampant sexual behaviour among the lower status members of the household. As discussed in Chapter Three, opulent costume was regarded by some as the sign of loose virtue in a woman as it could arouse male lust. The blame is laid upon the shoulders of the women who adorn themselves, rather than the men who are shown to be merely following their natures. It can also be seen that, when the women in the household are attaining ever increasing heights of opulence, the expectations of the maids, too, increase, indicating changing norms and values.¹⁶⁹

Prostitutes

The connection between sex and money is most explicitly expressed in the affairs concerning prostitutes. Brothel life plays a great part in the *Jin Ping Mei*. Ximen Qing uses 50 taels of silver to make four sets of clothing to pay for the deflowering of the prostitute Li Guijie.¹⁷⁰ He is so enamoured with her he later presents her with a red top and blue skirt.¹⁷¹ In the late Ming story “Yu Tangchun luonan fengfu,” the male protagonist presents the virgin prostitute of the title with silver and four bolts of silk in exchange for her defloration.¹⁷² It was well-known, at the time, that all the clothing given to a young girl about to be deflowered would be provided by the guest.¹⁷³

The late Ming was a period in which great attention was paid to the activities of courtesans and prostitutes in both literary and non-literary genres. The *xiaxie* 狹邪

¹⁶⁹ Expectations govern satisfaction and these are influenced by both the attainments of others and common which serve as a reference. See Blau, 1967, 165-166.

¹⁷⁰ *JPMCH*, 11.11a.

¹⁷¹ *JPMCH*, 12.2a.

¹⁷² *JSTY*, 24.354. He also presents gifts of clothing and hairpins to the other girls in the brothel despite Tangchun's pleadings to save his money.

¹⁷³ *Banqiao zaji*, 166.

(literally 'sordid') genre, for example, depicting the increased scale and commercialisation of prostitution.¹⁷⁴ Xie Zhaozhe comments on this worrying phenomenon:

Currently singing girls and prostitutes are all over the empire, especially in the metropolises, there are at least hundreds or even thousands.¹⁷⁵

He adds that men from Xin'an in particular "simply married concubines, visited prostitutes and conducted lawsuits, spending their money like dirt."¹⁷⁶ However, sex and prostitutes were an accepted part of the social life of wealthy young Chinese men and became a mode of escape for some from the pressures of home life or the examination system.¹⁷⁷

Historians of many societies emphasise the relevance of sexuality to women's history. In medieval culture women were more closely connected with the body and sexuality, and their sexual behaviour identified and defined them much more than was usually the case with men.¹⁷⁸ Prostitutes, as women defined entirely by their sexuality, provided the extreme case that helped define views of feminine sexuality in general. Here money, power, and sexuality were closely intertwined. The fourteenth-century Chinese historian Tao Zongyi points out:

It is through their sexual demeanour that prostitutes and concubines gain favour. Those who are favoured by their masters also say, "My wealth and standing is simply a reflection of my striking the right chord in him." Should disaster, hardship, poverty or illness strike, then they would certainly try to extricate themselves as quickly as possible.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁴ Liu Jianmei 劉劍梅, "Study on the Xiaxie Genre," *Chinese Culture* 35.1 (1994), 11.

¹⁷⁵ *WZZ*, 8.329.

¹⁷⁶ *WZZ*, 4.154.

¹⁷⁷ Peterson, 1979, 141-145.

¹⁷⁸ Ruth Maro Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, 3.

¹⁷⁹ "Jiqie shoujie 妓妾守節," in *Chuogeng lu*, 15.218.

Prostitution in imperial China was highly organised.¹⁸⁰ The lowest class establishments were the common brothels for poor people and soldiers and these were designated *wazi goulán* 瓦子勾欄 ‘tile districts.’ The next class were *jiulou* 酒樓 or ‘winehouses’ which were either operated by the government and more or less reserved for government personnel, or were managed by private enterprise and frequented by middle-class merchants and lower officials. The highest class were the ‘houses of singing girls’ *geguan* 歌館. These housed the most accomplished courtesans skilled in poetry, dancing and singing and were frequented by high officials, wealthy merchants and writers and artists.¹⁸¹ Here, the courtesan achieved recognition in society through her skill as an entertainer, as opposed to through her physical appeal.¹⁸² Arts such as calligraphy, painting, playing instruments, singing and even performing plays were considered cultured professions.¹⁸³ The contrast between the different classes of prostitutes in Guangling 廣陵 on the banks of the Grand Canal is made clear in the *Tao'an mengyi*. Here famous girls would keep themselves hidden whilst those of lower status would doll themselves up and hang around in alleys in front of teashops waiting to be picked up by a client.¹⁸⁴ Like the women of a traditional household who were separated by the attention they paid to cultural activities or sexuality, prostitutes of higher status were distanced from those of lower status by the same criteria.

Xie Zhaozhe attributes the popularity of buying girls from Yangzhou to the abundant waterways, and says of these beautiful girls:

The people of Yangzhou had long treated them as precious merchandise.

¹⁸⁰ See “Maiyoulang duzhan huagui 賣油郎獨占花鬼,” in *Xingshi hengyan*, 3.35-77, for detailed descriptions regarding life in a brothel.

¹⁸¹ Van Gulik, 1961, 230-33.

¹⁸² Howard Levy, tr., *A Feast of Mist and Flowers: The Gay Quarters of Nanking at the end of the Ming*, Yokohama: n.p., 1966, 9.

¹⁸³ “Guo jianmen 過劍門,” in *TAMY*, 7.69.

¹⁸⁴ “Ershisi qiao fengyue 二十四橋風月,” in *TAMY*, 4.35.

Merchants bought young girls from everywhere. They dressed the girls up and taught them calligraphy, abacus, lute and chess, in the hope of earning a handsome return. The girls were called ‘thin horses’ (瘦馬 *shouma*).¹⁸⁵

Other scholars emphasised the importance of training girls who were destined to become concubines in beautifying themselves and in subordinate skills from the time they were very young.¹⁸⁶ Zhang Dai wrote that customers buying ‘thin horses’ examined their facial features, bound feet and character. If a customer decided to buy then they would insert a golden hairpin in the hair at the temple. The owner of the woman had a clerk write the contract on a piece of red paper on which they would write down the price of the woman and the presents for the bride, including a certain amount of golden ornaments, pieces of colourful silk and clothes. Should he not find someone he could repeat the same procedure at all the other houses:

Nevertheless, after seeing fifty to sixty women, he could no longer distinguish the pretty from the ugly, since all women looked similar with a white face and wearing a red dress.¹⁸⁷

Competition among the women in these areas must have been fierce. The *Qingbai leichao* indicates that it was well-known that the women of Yangzhou possessed the smallest feet.¹⁸⁸ This was probably due to the high concentration of prostitution in the area.

Much attention is paid to the description of the clothing and ornamentation of the highly competitive prostitutes in the *Jin Ping Mei*, emphasising their role as objects of beauty and desire. Li Guijie, Ximen’s first conquest in the brothel, appears:

having changed into her everyday Hangzhou bun, with gold filigree hairclasps, various flower pins, a pearl headband and gold lantern pendant earrings. On top she wore a white damask robe which buttoned down the middle and had purple

¹⁸⁵ WZZ, 8.307.

¹⁸⁶ “Xiji 習技,” in *Xianqing ouji*, 3.141-154; “Guangling ji 廣陵姬,” in *WLYHB*, 23.1575.

¹⁸⁷ *TAMY*, 5.12b-14b.

¹⁸⁸ *Qingbai leichao*, 13.6210.

edging and green sleeve linings woven with gold; beneath it she wore a red silk tabby skirt and was dressed up like powdered jade carving.¹⁸⁹

She monopolises his attentions for some time before having her position usurped by Zheng Aiyue. At the brothel Aiyue emerges:

with her hair in a Hangzhou bun pinned with four flower pins, hairclasps and combs inset with gold, sealskin cap, done up so her hair formed misty cloud tresses, dressed up like a powdered jade carving. Above she wore a white damask top covered with a green sleeveless overdress woven with gold. Beneath she wore a large pleated ripple-effect skirt, high up revealing a pair of tiny golden lotus just like crescent moons, looking just like a fairy from E'mei descending into the mortal realm, a female immortal from Witch Mountain come down into the world.¹⁹⁰

A poem from the Ming by Xu Wei describing the immortal from the Moon Palace echoes this image of sumptuousness:

From the cloud brocade bound around her head fall golden hairclasps,
Her short sleeves and long skirt are tailored from layers of snow.
If it were not for the fact that winter was endless above,
What reason would she have for flying here in the deep of the night?¹⁹¹

Throughout the novel, Zheng Aiyue is likened to Guanyin and other beautiful immortals, as is her sister, Zheng Aixiang.¹⁹² Late Ming scholar Zhang Dafu also likens prostitutes to *deva*.¹⁹³ It appears that a dichotomy existed with regard to the perception of feminine sexuality. On the one hand, we have these descriptions of lavish immortals to whom prostitutes are likened; yet on the other, the same immortals are used to describe women of chastity and virtue, as discussed in Chapter Four. Love, sex and virtue were becoming confused in the minds of the literati, as

¹⁸⁹ JPMCH, 15.8a.

¹⁹⁰ JPMCH, 77.6a-b.

¹⁹¹ "Yuegong xianzi tu san shou 月宮仙子圖三首," in *Xu Wenzhang sanji*, 11.382.

¹⁹² JPMCH, 59.4b and 59.3b.

¹⁹³ "Duyi 賭憶," in *Meihuacaotang ji*, 8.157.

even books of virtue were becoming similar to those of romantic love.¹⁹⁴

In the *Jin Ping Mei*, Pan Jinlian and Meng Yulou are caught by Ximen playing in the garden together. He likens them to expensive prostitutes:

their everyday silver filigree chignons which revealed four temple-locks, with onyx pendant earrings, white silk tabby top, pink sleeveless overdresses and drawnwork skirts, and a pair of narrow small shoes with mandarin ducks adorning the upturned points. Each of them made up like jade carvings.¹⁹⁵

According to Lang Ying 郎瑛 (1487-ca.1566),¹⁹⁶ a connoisseur of literature and art, those girls being sold as concubines at market in the Chunqiu period would have been “separated according to their class with green bandeaux (綠巾裹頭 *lujin guotou*).” This was later reflected in the Ming regulations which stipulated that women of the entertainment class should wear a similar item. The association was so strong that it became a term of abuse to call an adulterous wife a ‘green bandeau.’¹⁹⁷ In many cultures prostitutes were required to wear identifying garments of a particular colour or style or were forbidden to wear particular types of clothing or ornaments. In others the dress of ‘respectable’ women was regulated and whores were exempt. In this way, women who were available for sexual purposes were easily identifiable.¹⁹⁸

Previously it has been noted that many of the fashions spread from the court down. However, here we see the reverse in action. In the late Ming, Yu Huai noted

¹⁹⁴ Katherine Carlitz, “Desire, Danger, and the Body: Stories of Women’s Virtue in Late Ming China,” in Gilmartin, et al., eds., 1994, 120.

¹⁹⁵ *JPMCH*, 11.2a.

¹⁹⁶ *DMB*, 791-793.

¹⁹⁷ “Lu toujin 綠頭巾,” in *Qixiu laigao*, 28.430-431.

¹⁹⁸ James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1987, 46-7 and 68; Jacques Rossiaud, “Prostitution, Youth, and Society in Towns of South Eastern France in the Fifteenth Century,” Elbgorg Forster, tr., Robert Forster and Orest Ranum, eds., *Deviants and the Abandoned in French Society*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978, 4.

that:

People model themselves after the dress and ornament of the Southern gay quarters 南曲 where plain and simple rather than fine and exquisite things are considered elegant. Even the dress of the procuresses changes with the season and is what is known as 'fashion' (時世妝 *shishizhuang*).¹⁹⁹

Contemporary Fan Lian also noted that women were emulating the styles of dress from the entertainment quarters to the extent that those from noble families could not be distinguished.²⁰⁰ Lü Kun was concerned over the sartorial distinctions between women of ill-repute and women from genteel households:

Prostitutes are not allowed to dress the same as women from respectable households. As for those who wear figured clothing emblazoned with symbols of rank embroidered with gold and head ornaments of gold, pearls and kingfisher feathers, they will be taken to court.²⁰¹

This suggests that there were general concerns over the failure to regulate the clothing and ornamentation of prostitutes who were beginning to dress like women from the inner quarters. However, the episodes involving Pan Jinlian suggest that it may have been the case that men were just as much concerned with the threat of their women dressing like prostitutes.

After her maltreatment at the hands of Chunmei, Sun Xue'e is taken to a room where she finds a maid with her hair coiled up, daubed in powder and rouge, with red lips and wearing a soft thin silk outfit. Immediately she realises she has been tricked into entering a brothel.²⁰² Forced entry into prostitution appears to have been quite common in the Ming. Some women were confiscated from criminal families and sent to work in the Department of Entertainment (*Jiaofangsi* 教坊司) in the

¹⁹⁹ *Banqiao zaji*, 166.

²⁰⁰ *Yunjian jumu chao*, 2.2a.

²⁰¹ *Shizheng lu*, 4.88a.

²⁰² *JPMCH*, 94.11a.

Inner Palace and had to work as prostitutes for the Emperor and his guests. Mei Chun 梅純 of the Ming records the laments of two sisters, supposedly the daughters of the Administrative Commissioner for Shandong, Tie Xian 鐵玄 (b.1398), sent to work there. The younger sister writes:

My family was broken and its property gone,
How could I bear to become a courtesan for the rest of my life.
As I left our official residence, tears streamed from my eyes,
On 'golden lotuses' I walked into the Department of Entertainment.
I pity myself when I see my state-toppling beauty in the mirror,
I was ashamed to learn the way to adorn myself as one who leans in
doorways.²⁰³
Spring comes and the rain is abundant as in the sea,
It is better to marry scholar Liu than scholar Ruan.

Her elder sister laments:

After washing off the cosmetics used in the Department of Entertainment,
I spend some time looking at the flowers falling to the ground.
I listen to old songs which seem to express my hateful life,
When I returned to my old home, my family had gone.
In the mirror my cloudy tresses are loosely wound,
And rainy tears have wetted my silk clothing.
Today I was happy to meet with military commander Bai,
I once again imparted my sad story of the *pipa* lute.²⁰⁴

It was noted by Shen Defu that beautiful women from criminal families were very popular prizes and many nobles and officials fought to get hold of them. In the reign of Shenzong, this was the destiny of Ms Tian 田, the daughter-in-law of the rebel Yang Yinglong 楊應龍 (d.1600).²⁰⁵ Other lower class women also lamented their

²⁰³ i.e. a low-class prostitute.

²⁰⁴ *Sunzhai beiwang lu* 損齋備忘錄, by Mei Chun 梅純, edn. *Gujin shuohai* 古今說海, repr. Taipei: Yiwen, 1966, 17a-b. It is argued by Mei Chun that after presenting a poem each to emperor Chengzu he was so impressed that they were released and married young scholars. See also "Shang xing guan shi 上刑官詩," in *Guifan*, 2.52a-53b.

²⁰⁵ "Panchen qintu moguan 叛臣妻女沒官," in *WLYHB* 18.1214; *DMB*, 1553-1556.

fate using images of clothing as a symbol of their position or state of mind. One such girl from Hangzhou, Su'e 素娥, was taken by a Huizhou merchant. When someone wished to visit her they found outside her door a scornful banner:

A pale red top, a pale red skirt,
Lightly applied makeup, lightly touched up lips.
They simply make my whole body pale,
In the future it will be given to a vendor of salt.²⁰⁶

Such women attempted to distance themselves from the trade into which they had been thrown. It is ironic in the *Jin Ping Mei* that, however hard the women try to distinguish themselves from the singing girls who frequent the household, the more they are linked through their clothing and behaviour. The world of the *Jin Ping Mei* and other sources reveal the anxieties of observers over a perplexing disorder among female hierarchies. Sartorial boundaries between wife, concubine, maid and prostitute were blurring.

Lack of adornment

The above analyses suggest women both inside and outside the Chinese household were could be intensely concerned with their appearance. Besides orthodox 'household instructions' (*jiaxun* 家訓), householders also sometimes drew up secret documents containing their ideas on the sexual life of the family. One such document reportedly proposed that beautification, games and sex were the predominant leisure activities of women in the inner quarters:

[Wives and concubines are daily occupied with] the control of all trifling household chores. Except for attending to their hairdress and their face-powder and rouge, and engaging in music and card-games, they really have nothing to gladden their hearts but sexual intercourse.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ *Beichuang suoyu*, 4.52.

²⁰⁷ Van Gulik, 1961, 269.

The *Li ji* also stresses the importance of the beautification of women:

Hence though a concubine was old, until she had completed her fiftieth year, it was the rule that she should be with her husband (once) in five days. When she was to do so, she purified herself, rinsed her mouth and washed, carefully adjusted her dress, combed her hair, drew over it the covering of silk, fixed her hair-pins, tied up the hair in the shape of a horn, brushed the dust from the rest of her hair, put on the necklace, and adjusted her shoe-strings.²⁰⁸

Here is a ritual text making an implicit connection between regular sexual contact and female appearance. Despite this emphasis on female adornment there are many examples of women in the Ming who rejected it.

Rejection of sexuality

The final chapter of the *Jin Ping Mei* sees the virtuous prostitute Han Aijie on her way south to find her parents after the death of her lover Chen Jingji. Once she finds her mother, she refuses to remarry, cuts off her hair, injures her eyes and becomes a nun. Before long, she is dead.²⁰⁹ The significance of her actions would not have been missed by contemporary readers if we bear in mind the late Ming context in which widow chastity had become something of a cult. There is an abundance of records from this period which relate the stories of virtuous women who symbolically reject any forms of sexuality through physical mutilation or the use of unprovocative or nondescript clothing.

When Xu Miaojin 徐妙錦, daughter of Xu Da 徐達 the prince of Zhongshan 中山, was 28, Emperor Chengzu 成祖 (r. 1403-1424) was keen to set her up as Empress after death of Empress Renxiao 仁孝. When confronted by a palace woman bearing the imperial pronouncement she points to her face:

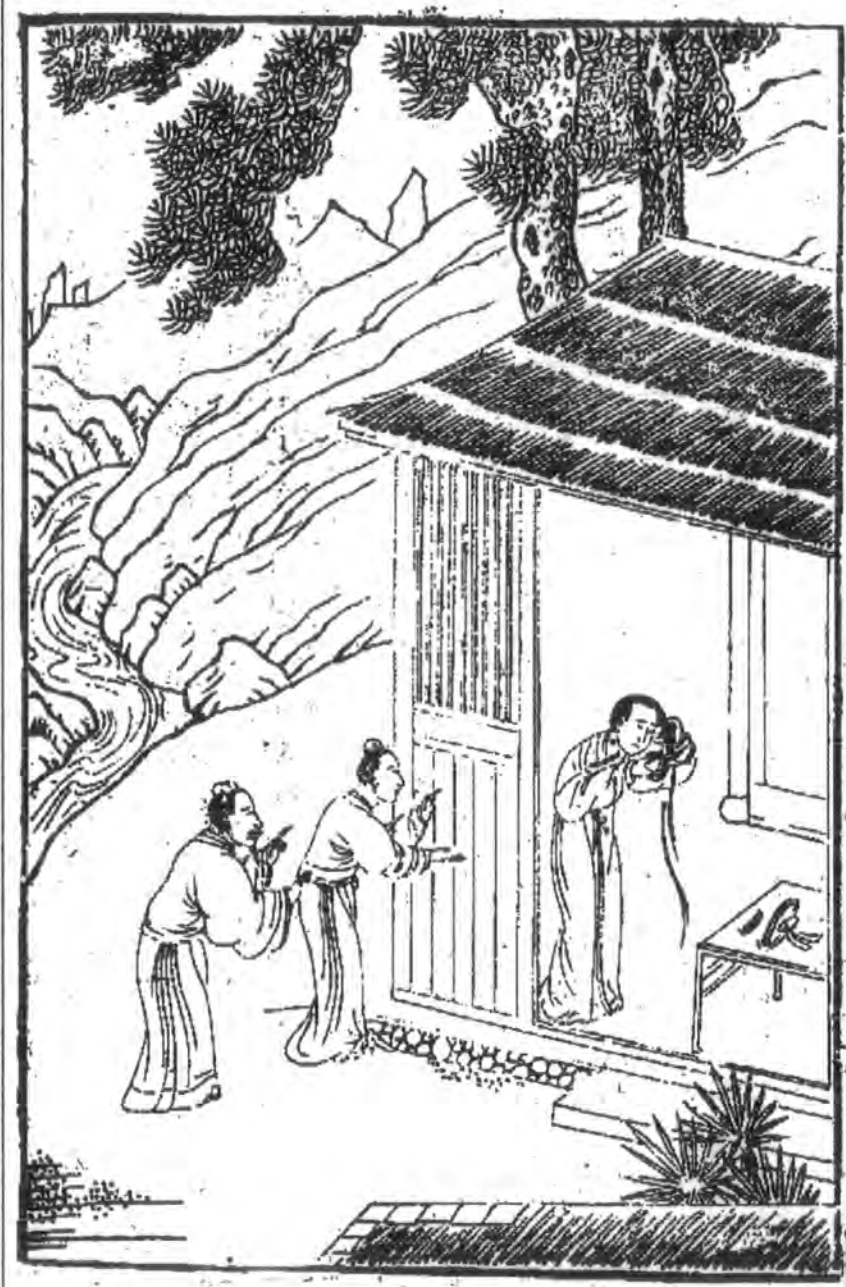
“My face has blemishes which are not fit for Heaven or Emperor.” The palace

²⁰⁸ Legge, 1885a, 471.

²⁰⁹ *JPMCH*, 100.9a.

woman raised her head and inspected her, "But your face is as clear and lustrous as jade. Where are there blemishes?" "It's quite mottled!" Miaojin exaggerated. When the palace woman left, she cut off her hair and enrolled as a nun in the Confucian temple. So, she never did become the Empress, and only at the beginning of the Hongxi reign did she regrow her hair.²¹⁰

Illustration 24: Woodcut from the *Guifan* tale "Lingnü huixing"



²¹⁰ "Lienü ji," *Mingshancang*, 1.1b-2a.

Many other examples of this renunciation of adornment by the physical removal of hair exist in the records of virtuous women. In the Hongwu 洪武 reign (1368-1398), Shi Xiaohua 侍小花 from Haizhou 海州 was betrothed at around 16 *sui* but her future husband died and so she went to live at his house in mourning to look after her mother-in-law. After the mother-in-law passed away, she cut her hair, swearing to remain chaste and never remarry.²¹¹ Gui Youguang praises similar actions by Ms Shen 沈 of Anji 安吉 in Huzhou. After the death of her husband Wu Xiangjiu 吳祥九, she cut off her hair and swore to remain chaste despite the pleadings of her family.²¹² From the *Guifan* too we hear a similar tale of girls who cut off her hair after the death of her husband.²¹³ [See Illustration 24].

Xu Wei commemorates in verse a prostitute who rejects her sexual life to become a nun:

She gave away all her flowers and diadems to her neighbours,
Cut off her cloudy tresses and detested any trace of springtime.²¹⁴
Suddenly startled, a candle before the wind finds it difficult to survive,
It is always the case that lotus flowers remain unsullied.
She wanted to peruse religious works, to be enraptured by elegant words,
She began to study Buddhist recitation, her talent was wasted.
Yet, from now on, her seductive beauty will be banished to the void,
And Xiangpu is now without a lover.²¹⁵

In another poem in similar vein Ms Chen 陳 becomes a nun and the abandonment of make-up and adornment symbolises a rejection of sexual/social maturity:

In the spring of youth, the time for hair pinning approaches,

²¹¹ "Lientü ji," *Mingshancang*, 2.4a. See similar actions by Ms Chen 陳 of Kunshan 昆山 who cut off her hair when her husband, *shengyuan* scholar Zhao Yifeng 趙一鳳, died -- *Mingshancang*, 2.12a; and Ms Liu 劉, wife of the Judge of the Right Guard in Guangxi 廣西 -- *Mingshancang*, 2.14a.

²¹² "Shen jiefu zhuan 沈節婦傳," *Zhenchuan xiansheng ji*, 27.446.

²¹³ "Lingnü huixing 令女毀形," in *Guifan*, 3.53b-54b

²¹⁴ i.e. sexual allure.

²¹⁵ "Song jinü rudao 送妓女入道" in *Xu Wenzhang yigao*, 3.774. See also "Song ji wei ni 送妓爲尼," in *Shixiuzhai ji*, 9.23b. The lover is described as a 解佩人 *jiepei ren*, literally "one who loosens the girdle pendants."

Yet she shaves off her locks and becomes a nun,
Parting from her mother, she leaves behind her makeup,
Visiting her teacher, she ceases to paint her eyebrows.²¹⁶

“A poem for the virtuous mother of Chen” by Chen Jiru, however, paints a less romantic picture than these of women who abandon adornment as a demonstration of their virtue. Ms Chen 陳 is forced to weave, night and day, to support herself after the death of her husband. Her hardship and suffering means there is little time for applying make-up, let alone any point in doing so.²¹⁷

There appears to be a conscious decision made by women to alter their appearance in order to look sexually unattractive or unavailable. As was seen in the chapter on mourning ritual, unprovocative clothing was worn to impress upon the viewer that the woman in question was sexually unavailable. Both natal parents were dead by the time Ms Hu of Jiaying was 34 *sui*, so she gave away all her property, clothes and jewellery despite dissuasion by her in-laws and moved into a small chapel near her parent’s graves. She eventually became the renowned religious leader Zhiyuan Xinggang.²¹⁸ In a story from the *Jingshi tongyan*, a woman gives away all her jewellery when she joins a nunnery to symbolise her renunciation of worldly goods.²¹⁹

In the closing chapters of the *Zhaoyang qushi*, the repentant women empresses turn their backs upon licentious behaviour and dress in Daoist clothing to become disciples of a priest in order to cultivate themselves.²²⁰ The fifth daughter of the late Ming scholar Wang Heng married a certain Huang Ziyu 黃子羽. They were known to go wandering in the hills together dressed in Daoist robes “resembling

²¹⁶ “Chen shi du ni 陳氏度尼” in *Xu Wenzhang sanji*, 6.174.

²¹⁷ “Zeng Chen zhenmu 贈陳貞母,” in *Wanxiangtang*, 1.4.

²¹⁸ Grant, 1996, 57.

²¹⁹ “Su zhixian luoshan zaihe 蘇知縣羅衫再合,” in *JSTY*, 11.146.

²²⁰ *ZYQS*, 4.131.

immortals.”²²¹ However, contemporary observer Yu Yonglin 余永麟 laments this vogue for religious garb among women:

Butterflies flutter,
Beneath feet, drifting clouds arise,
Ladies don Daoist robes (*daoyi* 道衣),
People really have lost all propriety.²²²

The popularity of such behaviour had become a fashion. Both official commentators and literary authors praise the actions of those who set aside adornment in their vow to a life of chastity, yet at the same time, were concerned over the increasing vogue for adopting certain kinds of dress which led to an interest in traditionally non-feminine, or more importantly, non-Confucian pursuits.

Usurpation of male roles

The late Ming appears to have been a time when there was increasing unease over the definition of gender boundaries.²²³ It is recorded that Liu Rushi, the talented concubine of Qian Qianyi, was known to attend his classes dressed in the robes of a scholar.²²⁴ Xiao Yong laments a two-way exchange of clothing:

There are even women wearing men's hats and men wearing women's skirts!
Yin and yang are topsy-turvy. It is extremely inauspicious.²²⁵

Other scholars praise women for dressing in male garb, but this is usually only for expediency's sake. Two of the daughters of a certain Mr Liu 劉 of the Jiajing period, abandoned their feminine attire for short robes, to till the fields in

²²¹ *Taicangzhou zhi* 太倉州志 (1919), repr. 6 vols., Taipei: Chengwen, 1975, 27.25a.

²²² *Beichuang suoyu*, 4.40.

²²³ Charlotte Furth, "Androgynous Males and Deficient Females: Biology and Gender Boundaries in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century China," *Late Imperial China* 9.2 (1988), 1-31.

²²⁴ *Yiyunlou junyu* 繹雲樓俊遇 (1670), by Qian Qianyi 錢謙益, edn. XYCS, 2.2.3b.

²²⁵ "Jiejian 節儉," in *Chishan huiyue*, 6.

place of the sons their father never had.²²⁶ In “The Biography of the Mother of Mr Bai” Xu Wei relates the heroic actions of a woman of Shanyin 山陰 district, who, in the Chinghua period, takes the initiative to dress in her husband’s clothes to see off a group of invading bandits. In order to appease them, she hands over to them all her hidden hairclaspers, earrings and clothes, thereby saving not only her husband’s life but his property too.²²⁷ Ms Han 韓 from Baoding 保定 was forced to dress as a man when she was 17 *sui* to avoid being raped during the turmoil at the beginning of the Ming. She was so successful in her disguise that she was conscripted for seven years without anyone realising she was a woman.²²⁸

Chivalrous ladies or warrior women are more examples of exemplary women and descriptions of them abound in both fact and fiction.²²⁹ The legendary figure Hua Mulan 花木蘭, who supposedly lived during the sixth or seventh centuries, disguised herself as a man to lead her elderly father’s army [Illustration 25].²³⁰ In the Ming, the widow Tang Sai’er 唐塞兒 (fl.1420) from Putai 蒲臺 in Shandong rose to religious and military power. She called herself “Fomu 佛母” and led an uprising in 1420.²³¹ Ms Su 蘇 led wives of soldiers and dressed up in armour to defend a city

²²⁶ “Lienü er 列女二,” in *Mingshi*, 302.7725.

²²⁷ “Baimu zhuan 白母傳,” in “Xu Wenzhang sanji,” in *Xu Wei ji*, 25.626-627.

²²⁸ “Lienü ji,” in *Mingshancang*, 1.5b-6b.

²²⁹ James J.Y. Liu, *The Chinese Knight-Errant*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967. Early historical examples include Fu Hao 婦好 and Fu Pin 婦嬭, concubines of King Wu Ding 武丁 of the Shang 商 (BC1766-1122), who served as commanders of his armies. See Li Yanong 李亞農, *Li Yanong shilunji 李亞農史論集*, Shanghai: Renmin, 1962, 441-443; Kwang-chih Chang, *Shang Civilization*, New Haven and London: Yale University, 1980, 87-90 and 195-96. Princess Pingyang 平陽 contributed to the founding of the Tang by leading armed forces, *Xin Tang shu*, 83.3642-43. Liang Hongyu 梁紅玉 (c. 1130), wife of famous Southern Song general Han Shizhong 韓世忠 (1089-1151), is another prominent example. See *Zhongguo lidai shi renwu cidian 中國歷代史人物辭典*, Harbin: Heilongjiang renmin, 1983, 326-7.

²³⁰ See “The Ballad of Mulan,” in Arthur Waley tr., *Chinese Poems*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1946, 113-115; “Mulan daishu 木蘭代戍,” in *Guifan*, 2.31a-32b.

²³¹ *DMB*, 1251-1252; “Yao furen 妖婦人,” in *WLYHB*, 30.1975-1976.

from pirates during the Zhengtong 正統 reign (1436-1449),²³² The widow and female general (女將 *nǚjiāng*) Qin Liangyu 秦良玉 (ca.1574-1648), a native of Zhongzhou 忠州 in Sichuan, led her husband's army after his death (ca.1615) and



even received rank and titles normally reserved for men.²³³

However, it was often the case in the above examples that the women

²³² "Lienü ji," *Mingshancang*, 1.7a-7b.

²³³ *ECCP*, 168-169;

returned to their roles as virtuous mother, wife or daughter after their heroic exploits. Therefore, any threat to gender definition was eliminated.²³⁴ That heroic models are absent from the *Jin Ping Mei* too suggests that the novel's attentions accentuate the less idealistic side of late Ming society, a society in which model women have more or less disappeared. However, it also demonstrates the clear gender definition in the novel, according with the *Neize* prohibition on men and women wearing the same garments,²³⁵ but which contrasted with the blurring sartorial boundaries expressed in other works. The preoccupation of many women in the *Jin Ping Mei* with dress and jewellery only serves to accentuate that the perceived route to social success and power was intimately connected with attracting the attention of Ximen Qing.

Summary

In late sixteenth-century China, several conflicting views appear to have existed in the minds of the literati. Women were perceived to be both beautiful and sexually powerful which engendered both desire and fear. In the *Jin Ping Mei* goddesses are the ideal, yet confusion exists over whether they are to be ethereal and demure, or sumptuous and brazen. Metaphors which traditionally described women of higher status are used to refer to prostitutes and vice versa. This is associated with the presentation of clothing and ornamentation to favoured sexual partners, which facilitates the passage of higher quality goods down the social ladder. Maids and prostitutes are able to become more competitive in the race for sexual favour. And, vice versa, women of higher status emulate the styles of the prostitutes, who were traditionally viewed as sexual objects, in the hope of becoming more sexually

²³⁴ For a recent analysis of the Mulan tale in this respect, see Joseph R. Allen, "Dressing and Undressing the Chinese Woman Warrior," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critiques* 4.2 (1996), 343-379.

²³⁵ Legge, 1885a, 455.

desirable.

Anthropologists and sociologists studying other societies have emphasised the importance sex and sexuality play in the development and maintenance of power relations. In his history of sexuality, Michel Foucault observes:

Sexuality (...) appears rather as an especially dense transfer point for relations of power: between men and women, young people and old people, parents and offspring, teachers and students, priests and laity, and administration and populations. Sexuality is not the most intractable element in power relations, but rather one of those endowed with the greatest instrumentality: useful for the greatest number of maneuvers and capable of serving as a point of support, as linchpin, for the most varied strategies.²³⁶

In China, as elsewhere, sex and sexuality played a significant role in power relations, between the sexes and members of the same sex. From the *Jin Ping Mei* it can be seen that fashionable clothing and ornamentation are perceived by to be essential in the battle for sexual power in a polygamous household. Those characters who possess such items stand a greater chance of success in terms of winning affection from the husband or master. Therefore, women of lower status appear to be constantly engaged in the pursuit of the best clothing and jewellery they can obtain by whatever means possible. The voluntary abandonment of feminine attire marks a desire to retire from the sexual battlefield.

Such strategies are echoed in contemporary sources; however, unlike the world of the *Jin Ping Mei* in which distinctions between the sexes are clearly defined, other texts reveal concerns over boundary-crossing women, identified not only by their partaking in traditionally male pursuits, but also by their adoption of male clothing. Its absence from the novel accentuates the sexual power-play enacted by the women of the Ximen household.

²³⁶ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1 An Introduction*, Robert Hurley, tr., London: Penguin, 1990, 103.

CONCLUSIONS

A study of a wide variety of contemporary material can reveal the concerns of the authors and their social classes, and perceptions of their 'reality' as it is refracted and filtered through their minds. That much of the information is prescriptive or descriptive, exaggerated or ironic, only serves to spotlight these concerns. As a source traditionally regarded as unorthodox, the *Jin Ping Mei* reveals perceptions of female clothing systems absent from other contemporary orthodox material. Novels such as this, not only expose notions held by their class and gender biased authors of more extreme behavioural tendencies, but also highlights more mundane aspects, those traditionally considered peripheral or marginal to official or orthodox concerns. The novel provides a coherent authorial exposé of the breakdown of traditional morality fostered by the corrupt inefficiencies of the court and officialdom on the one hand, compounded by the rise of the uncultured merchant bourgeoisie on the other. With its emphasis on the merchant-official household of Ximen Qing, the novel combines the two worlds in a setting dominated by women.

The behaviour of the wives, concubines, maids and prostitutes of this world epitomise literati fears that the increasingly competitive nature of the outside world was pervading the inner quarters. The donning of official apparel and mourning garb symbolise official and social power both in the household and in the local community. Both public and private gift-giving provide opportunities to demonstrate wealth and status, to maintain friendships and gain allies. Competition also reveals itself in the more intimate realm of sexual power and display. The female characters are fully aware of the consequences, beneficial or otherwise, of the use or rejection of particular modes of dress. Clothing and power are inextricably linked.

The above study has generally concentrated on the positive aspects to the

possession and employment of certain items of clothing and ornamentation. However, an examination of the opposite situation can provide even more dramatic proof of the importance of such items to women. In the *Jin Ping Mei* the physical removal of clothes from the woman is often a prerequisite to physical punishment or a punishment in itself. Ximen Qing is the usual instigator of this form of discipline, as Pan Jinlian and Li Ping'er find out to their cost after their respective affairs with the servant Qintong and the doctor Jiang Zhushan. Illustration 26 depicts the humiliation of Pan Jinlian by Ximen Qing in front of her maid Chunmei. Pan Jinlian also uses this form of castigation on her maid Qiuju to vent her frustrations after the betrothal of Guan'ge and after she steps in dog dirt.¹ Stripping women for punishment is a common theme in literature. In the late Ming play *Mudan ting*, the protagonist Du Liniang describes the fate of a woman in the underworld who was "stripped of her phoenix head-dress and *xiapei* till she stood stark naked."² In another source, the novel *Taowu xianping*, the female relatives of the corrupt official Huang Xiangguan 黃鄉官 are stripped of their clothing following Huang's arrest for stealing gold from the mines.³

¹ *JPMCH*, 41.9b and 58.14b.

² *Mudan ting*, 55.2074.

³ *TWXP*, 8.61.

Illustration 26: Woodcut from Chapter 12 of the *Jin Ping Mei*



Often the removal of clothing, whether physically from the body or from a person's possession, implies a loss of status, as the above examples demonstrate. In the *Jin Ping Mei*, Sun Xue'e is the most common victim of this treatment. As early as Chapter 25 Pan Jinlian incites Ximen Qing to send Xue'e to work in the kitchen, and she later stirs up trouble between Xue'e and her rival Song Huilian by telling Xue'e

that it was Huilian's fault she had lost her clothes and status.⁴ Towards the end of the novel, Chunmei buys Sun Xue'e to work in the kitchens. To emphasise her new lowly status, Chunmei orders her to take off her elegant clothes and later she is stripped and beaten for failing to make soup correctly.⁵

The early Ming short story "Ji yafan jinman chanhua 計押番金鰻產禍" contained in a Feng Menglong collection relates the tale of Qingnu 慶奴, who is taken as a concubine by an official only to be sent to work in the scullery by a jealous wife:

"Take the head-dress off that good-for-nothing, strip off her clothes and have her put on some coarse linen clothing. Remove the bindings from her feet and let her hair hang loose. We'll punish her by sending her to the kitchen to draw water and to cook."⁶

The similarities of Qingnu to Sun Xue'e are striking as Qingnu also later becomes a singsong girl, although willingly, and dies.⁷ A similar event occurs in the *Ruyijun zhuan*: when the serving girl Wan'er 婉兒 takes a fancy to one of Wu Zetian's boys, her folly is rewarded with her chignon being chopped off by her mistress. She is forced, therefore, to wear a flower diadem to cover the scar on her forehead.⁸

Examples from non-literary sources reveal similar uses of stripping women as a form of punishment. The late Ming historian Fan Lian wrote of the saga of Saleswoman Wu 吳賣婆, initially a peddler of jewellery who was admitted to all the great households, but who soon diversified into female aphrodisiacs and sex toys. Her business prospered so much that she accumulated several thousand taels,

⁴ *JPMCH*, 25.10b and 26.15a.

⁵ *JPMCH*, 90.12a and 94.9a.

⁶ "Ji yafan jinman chanhua 計押番金鰻產禍," in *JSTY*, 20.287.

⁷ Several of the stories from the Feng Menglong collections bear noticeable similarities to episodes from the *Jin Ping Mei*. It is known that Feng Menglong had some hand in the initial publication of the novel. This provides further evidence that he may also have had a hand in the editing or even the writing of the novel itself.

⁸ *RYJZ*, 98.

enabling her to ride in a sedan chair, dressing and eating like someone from a wealthy household. An investigating censor turned her over to the local magistrate who punished her with great zeal, having her stripped and beaten and her wealth taken away, much to the delight of the local community.⁹

Contemporary scholar Li Xu reports the tale of Li Yuying 李玉英, daughter of Li Xiong 李雄, Battalion Commander of the Imperial Bodyguard. After the death of her father in 1519, she and her siblings were subject to the cruel treatment of their stepmother who wanted her own son to inherit. She murdered Yuying's brother, sold one sister to a powerful family, and had Yuying imprisoned whilst her other sister was sent to beg in the streets having had her clothes taken away from her.¹⁰ Even from the palace we hear of tales of similar humiliation. The Ning Consort Wang 王寧嬪 was replaced in the Jiajing Emperor's favour by the Duan Consort Cao 曹端妃. Unable to hide her bitterness, her comments about Cao were overheard. The Emperor ordered her stripped, beaten and sent to work collecting the dew for his longevity quest.¹¹

Voices from both literature and more orthodox sources reveal that the removal of clothing was one of the most severe punishments for women, despite the fact that it is not an official punishment in the legal codes. Although the private incidents in literature carry sadistic overtones, the majority of cases, particularly those of public humiliation, lack any erotic connotation. This practice appears to have been non-existent among men, and thereby emphasises the fact that female identities in late sixteenth-century China were constructed, to a greater extent, around the use of clothing and ornamentation, than male identities. Due to the Confucian concept of

⁹ *Yunjian jumu chao*, 2.4a.

¹⁰ "Nu bian jimu wuxianshu 女辯繼母誣陷疏," in *JALRMB*, 3.120-122.

¹¹ Chen Dongyuan 陳東原, *Zhongguo gudai funü shi* 中國古代婦女史, Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1984, 333.

the civilising nature of clothing, public stripping as punishment would have been a shameful experience for both sexes; however, the humiliation for women would have been much more intense due to their supposed segregation.

The distance between Confucian ideals of female conduct and praxis was perceived to be on the increase. This accounts for the more vehement attitude found in the didactic and prescriptive texts of the period. However, even in contemporary Confucian discourse, the relationship between women and dress was fraught with ambiguities. This was furthered by the confusion among scholars over the roles for women in the changing sixteenth-century environment combined with literati anxieties over their own status in an increasingly competitive world.

A growth in consumption fuelled by a more fluid social hierarchy and the increasing visibility of women during this period, all led to a more competitive female sartorial system. Factory-based production of materials provided a more widespread distribution and the opportunity for greater variations in quality, patterns, styles and colours. This study concentrated on the activities of women from a merchant household and it was these people who were most able to take advantage of the opportunities these advances provided. Many scholars have argued that the partial exclusion of women as buyers and sellers was a major factor in limiting the development of full-blown ephemeral fashion in China;¹² however, a burgeoning fashion consciousness was highly evident in the sixteenth century and affected female sartorial strategies at many levels of society. Although not the main focus of this study, the production of clothing and ornamentation at this time, from design to manufacture, deserves further research. A particularly fascinating area is the role of women as designers.

¹² Fashion in Europe was not only principally *for* women, but also increasingly *by* women as designers, entrepreneurs, journalists and boutique operators. Adshead, 1997, 75.

The perceived public breakdown of sumptuary regulation combined with the unregulated circulation of goods in the domestic realm demonstrates how cultural concepts and norms were transmitted between women of different classes. This was a two-way exchange of values with emulation of the upper classes by the lower classes and adoption of lower class customs by the upper classes. The majority of women in the sixteenth century were illiterate, and because of this, the power of clothing as a form of communication was more significant for them. This study demonstrates how the boundaries between popular culture and literati-élite culture were far more intricate and complex than generally assumed. It was particularly true in the area of dress and ornamentation, due to the very nature of material culture: one did not have to be literate to comprehend the cultural values embedded within it.

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APPENDIX 1

Symbols of Badges of Rank

Imperial Household

Emperor	龍	<i>long</i>	5-clawed dragon
Princes	蟒	<i>mang</i>	4-clawed dragon
Empress/ Consorts/ Wife of Heir-apparent/Imperial Princesses	鸞鳳	<i>luanfeng</i>	phoenix
Wives of Imperial Nobles	翟	<i>di</i>	tartar pheasant
Duke / Marquis / Earl / Imperial	麒麟 or	<i>qilin</i> or <i>baize</i>	<i>qilin</i> or fabulous
Son-in-law	白澤		two-horned lion

Civil Officials

1st grade	仙鶴	<i>xianhe</i>	crane
2nd grade	錦雞	<i>jinji</i>	golden pheasant
3rd grade	孔雀	<i>kongque</i>	peacock
4th grade	雲雁	<i>yunyan</i>	wild goose
5th grade	白鷺	<i>baixian</i>	silver pheasant
6th grade	鷺鷥	<i>lusi</i>	egret
7th grade	鸚鵡	<i>xichi</i>	mandarin duck
8th grade	黃鸝	<i>huangli</i>	oriole
9th grade	鶉鴉	<i>anchun</i>	quail
Unclassed officials	練鵲	<i>lianqiao</i>	paradise flycatcher
Officials of the Censorate	獬豸	<i>xiezhai</i>	fabulous one-horned white lion-like creature

Military Officials

1st and 2nd grade	獅子	<i>shizi</i>	lion
3rd and 4th grade	虎 & 豹	<i>hu</i> and <i>bao</i>	tiger and leopard
5th grade	熊羆	<i>xiongpi</i>	bear
6th and 7th grade	彪	<i>biao</i>	tiger-cat
8th and 9th grade	犀牛 or 海馬	<i>xiniu</i> or <i>haima</i>	fabulous rhinoceros or sea horse

APPENDIX 2

Belt Types

1st grade	玉	<i>yu</i>	jade
2nd grade	犀	<i>xi</i>	rhinoceros horn
3rd grade	金銀花	<i>jinsahua</i>	engraved gold
4th grade	素金	<i>sujin</i>	plain gold
5th grade	銀銀花	<i>yinsahua</i>	engraved gold
6th and 7th grade	素銀	<i>suyin</i>	plain silver
8th and 9th grade	烏角	<i>wujiao</i>	black bone

Changes from the Jiajing

Wang Shizhen records that ornamentation on the belts had become more varied, although in the Wanli period, belts became plainer again.¹

3rd grade	金鑲雕花...	<i>jinxiang diaohua...</i>	gold-set carved...
	銀母	<i>yinmu</i>	mother of pearl
	象牙	<i>xiangya</i>	ivory
	明角	<i>mingjiao</i>	white horn
	沉檀	<i>chentian</i>	fragranced wood
4th grade	金鑲	<i>jinxiang...</i>	gold-set
	玳瑁	<i>daimao</i>	tortoiseshell
	鶴丁	<i>heding</i>	crane crest
	銀母	<i>yinmu</i>	mother of pearl
	明角	<i>mingjiao</i>	white horn
	伽檀沉速	<i>jiatan chensu</i>	fragranced wood
5th grade	雕花	<i>diaohua...</i>	carved...
	象牙	<i>xiangya</i>	ivory
	明角	<i>mingjiao</i>	white horn
	銀母	<i>yinmu</i>	mother of pearl
6th and 7th grade	素	<i>su</i>	plain

¹ *Gu bu gu lu*, 13.

APPENDIX 3

Xiapei decoration

Generally speaking, the *xiapei* take the following patterns. Those of the 7th grade and above are combined with a rosy clouds pattern.

1st and 2nd grade	翟	<i>di</i>	tartar pheasant
3rd and 4th grade	孔雀	<i>kongque</i>	peacock
5th grade	鴛鴦	<i>yuanyang</i>	mandarin duck
6th and 7th grade	練鵲	<i>lianqiao</i>	paradise flycatcher
8th and 9th grade	纏枝花	<i>chan zhi hua</i>	flowers with entwined branches

