ENGENDERING HEROISM: MING-QING WOMEN’S SONG
LYRICS TO THE TUNE MAN JIANG HONG*

BY

LI XIAORONG
(McGill University)

Abstract

The heroic lyric had long been a masculine symbolic space linked with the male social world of career and achievement. However, the participation of a critical mass of Ming-Qing women lyricists, whose gendered consciousness played a role in their textual production, complicated the issue. This paper examines how women crossed gender boundaries to appropriate masculine poetics, particularly within the dimension of the heroic lyric to the tune Man jiang hong, to voice their reflections on larger historical circumstances as well as women’s gender roles in their society.

The song lyric (ci 詞), along with shi 詩 poetry, was one of the dominant genres in which late imperial Chinese women writers were active.¹ The two conceptual categories in the aesthetics and poetics of the song lyric—“masculine” (haofang 豪放) and “feminine” (wanyue 婉約)—may have primarily referred to the textual performance of male authors in the tradition. However, the participation of a critical mass of Ming-Qing women lyricists, whose gendered consciousness played a role in

* This paper was originally presented in the Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, New York, March 27-30, 2003. I am deeply grateful to my supervisor Grace S. Fong for her guidance and encouragement in the course of writing this paper. I would like to also express my sincere thanks to Professors Robin Yates, Robert Hegel, Daniel Bryant, Beata Grant, and Harriet Zurndorfer and to two anonymous readers for their valuable comments and suggestions that led me to think further on some critical issues in this paper. My thanks also go to Sara Neswald for refining some of my poem translations.

¹ Recently Deng Hongmei 鄧紅梅 has provided a comprehensive study of the history of women’s ci, in which she takes the Ming-Qing era as the peak of development. See Deng Hongmei, Nüxing ci shi 女性詞史 (Jinan: Shandong jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000), esp. Chs. 5-13. For a general evaluation of the achievements of Qing women’s ci, see Zhang Hongsheng 張宏生, Qingdai cixue de jiangou 清代詞學的建構 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1999), 164-84.
their textual production, complicated the issue. In their writings, the forceful expression of ambition and the resentment of gender inequality are especially striking. These emotions are voiced in such well-known lines as: “Why must women yield to men? Heaven should forbid this!” (算縞綦, 何必讓男兒? 天應忌!) and, “I cannot get into the ranks of men, but my heart burns more fiercely than a man’s!” (身不得男兒列, 心却比男兒烈!).

Scholars have frequently quoted these particular lines to demonstrate the powerful voices and unusual way of thinking of these women writers. However, these lines are not exceptional; many women poets, such as Wu Shangxi (1808–?) and Wang Yun 王筠 (1749–1819), similarly expressed strong reactions to tragic historical events, and profound reflections on their personal fate as women.

It is particularly interesting that these forceful women’s expressions are primarily written to the tune Man jiang hong (Red fills the river). It is important to ask whether this form was a random choice or whether it was, in fact, a conscious textual strategy. Scholars have begun to notice these women’s writings, but attention has yet to be paid to the significance of their appropriation of the form. Through tracing the history of the tune pattern evolving with the haofang (literally “heroic abandon”) lyrical mode and examining relevant Man jiang hong lyrics by Ming-Qing women, I argue that these female lyricists’ employment of the form is a strong gesture of intervention into the lyrical tradition from their gendered perspectives and orientations. It is in this literary context that the authors mentioned earlier voice their frustrations over gender inequality. Before its appropriation by women, the heroic lyric had long been a masculine symbolic space linked with the male social roles of warrior and scholar.”

2 The two lines are quoted respectively from Gu Zhenli 顧貞立 (ca. 1637-ca. 1714) and Qiu Jin’s 秋瑾 (1879-1907) writings. For Gu’s line, see Gu Zhenli, Qixiangge ci 棲香閣詞, in Xu Naichang 徐乃昌 (1862-1936), comp. Xiaotanluanshi huike guixiu ci 小檀欒室彙刻閨秀詞 (hereafter Xiaotanluanshi) (Nanling Xushi keben 南陵徐氏刻本, 1896; copy in Harvard-Yenching Library), 7b. For Qiu Jin’s lines, see Qiu Jin, Qiu Jin ji 秋瑾集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1991), 105.


5 All translations of tune patterns in this paper follow Eileen Cheng-yin Chow’s in Kang-i Sun Chang and Haun Saussy, eds., Women Writers of Traditional China (Stanford: Stanford University, 1999), Appendix A, 812-24.
world of career and achievement. How did women cross boundaries to employ such an apparently masculine poetic mode in their lyrics? What were the implications of the traditional heroic mode for women authors? How did they negotiate with the traditional mode in a way that would allow them to insert their gender identity? As Maureen Robertson has asked, “Could they present, through specific forms of negotiation, their own socially gendered consciousness in a linguistic and literary medium already constituted as masculine?”

Taking these questions into account, this paper examines Ming-Qing women’s textual strategies in their attempts to write ci in the haofang lyrical mode to the tune Man jiang hong, a mode that seems at first glance to offer no allowance for female subjectivity. Feminist scholars such as Robertson and Grace S. Fong have offered important theoretical and critical studies on women writers’ negotiation of literati conventions in the shi and ci genres. But their studies concentrate more on women’s rewriting of the literati-feminine voice. By focusing on women’s appropriation of the masculine lyrical mode, I hope my paper will enrich our understanding of this vibrant source for women’s poetic production.

It is necessary to clarify a few assumptions regarding my critical stance and mode of reading adopted in this paper. First of all, I take women’s writing as a separate category of analysis not merely because of the sex of the authors, but because women are a socially and ideologically constructed category. I believe that the women poets in my study shared common social and cultural experiences and that their socially gendered consciousness to varying degrees affected the ways in which they participated in meaning production. Therefore, their gendered position(s) as reflected in their texts can be viewed as both singular and plural depending on different levels. While they are aware of women as a unified social group vis-à-vis men, they also react differently to normative womanhood in their writings. Second, I read the text as a record of the author’s historical experiences and an expression of the author’s intent as presumed in the generic convention. This does not mean

7 See Robertson, “Voicing the Feminine”; Fong, “Engendering the Lyric.”
8 For a discussion of the nonfictional nature of traditional Chinese poetry in its own context of reception, see Stephen Owen, Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), Ch. 2. The evolution of the ci as vehicle of self-
that I simply take the text as a transparent documentary of the author’s actual experiences and emotions, but that I read the text as a self-account under the signature of an individual author as it was perceived in its own historical context of production and reception. Third, while I am aware of the constructed nature of any text as put forth in certain postmodernist arguments, I do not view women’s writing as merely discourse or enunciation without their role as historical subjects. My paper acknowledges the literary agency of the writing subject.

Women’s entry into literary practice as a socially and culturally determined group is complicated, but the dimension intersected by the \textit{ci} form \textit{Man jiang hong} and the symbolic space of heroism provides a specific perspective from which to examine this issue. In the corpus of Ming-Qing women’s lyrics, I have delineated four groups of \textit{Man jiang hong} poems to show the different ways in which women authors negotiated the conventional lyrical form and language in order to voice their own concerns and emotions. My classifications are far from sufficient to exhaustively cover the complexity of this negotiation, but do provide a necessary schema with which to illustrate women’s appropriation of literary conventions for their self-expression. Importantly, these four groups of women’s lyrics to the tune \textit{Man jiang hong} constitute a range of nuances of the authors’ perceptions about their particular circumstances and the roles of women in their society.

\textbf{Man Jiang Hong and the Heroic Mode}

It is generally recognized that \textit{ci} were originally written to musical scores, and only later became an independent poetic form. A \textit{ci} tune title is expression was complicated, but it is safe to say that the heroic lyric is a recognized form for the poet’s self-expression.

\footnote{My theoretical stance here is a response to debates on critical notions of women, female subjectivity, and the (female) author in textual analysis. For a comprehensive review of these debates in relation to feminist literary criticism, see Mary Eagleton, “The Death of the Woman Author?,” in Mary Eagleton, ed., \textit{Working with Feminist Criticism} (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 65-76.}

\footnote{Women also used other tune patterns such as \textit{Jin lü qu} 金縷曲 (Ballad of the golden threads) and \textit{Yong yu le} 永遇樂 (Joy of eternal union), to write historical commentaries and express their forceful emotions. However, the tune \textit{Man jiang hong} was most commonly used, especially in articulating sentiments against gender inequality. Within the limited scope of this paper, I would like to focus on the dimension represented by the salient examples of \textit{Man jiang hong} lyrics.}

expression was complicated, but it is safe to say that the heroic lyric is a recognized form for the poet’s self-expression.
the vestige of this musical origin, and the tune continues to function as a formal pattern with structural and tonal regulations to which a *ci* writer must adhere. *Man jiang hong*, a long tune of two stanzas, is a commonly used tune pattern. According to the comprehensive catalogue of tune titles, *Cipai huishi* 詞牌匯釋 (which includes several sources of interpretations of *Man jiang hong*), the pattern has many variations in terms of the number of characters, but can be divided into two main subtypes in terms of the tone of the rhyme: the oblique-tone rhymed and the level-tone rhymed.\(^{11}\) However, the former type is more commonly used.\(^{12}\)

None of the prosodic sources indicate that there was any association of the tune pattern with specific themes. When browsing through the numerous examples of *ci* written to *Man jiang hong* in the *Quan Song ci* 全宋詞 and *ci* anthologies of later periods such as the *Quan Qing ci* 全清詞, we see that they cover a variety of subjects and styles.\(^{13}\) Ci writers appear to have felt free to write on any subject to this tune pattern. Nonetheless, a general tendency can be observed: ci writers tend to use level-tone rhymes in the *wanyue* lyrics, oblique-tone rhymes in the *haofang* style.\(^{14}\) Many scholars have noted that the tune *Man jiang hong*, among others, has the widest appeal in the *haofang* lyrics, although they do not pay attention to the two variants in terms of the rhyme.\(^{15}\) Long Yusheng’s note on the auditory properties of the oblique-tone rhymed *Man jiang hong* is helpful in understanding ci writers’ affinity for the form in attempting the *haofang* mode: it is vigorous in sound and suitable for the construction of masculine qualities.\(^{16}\) Due to the fact that *ci* melodies have been lost, his claim is presumably based on the special musical qualities of the

---

\(^{11}\) Wen Ruxian 閻如賢, comp., *Cipai huishi* (Taipei: Taibei [s.n.], 1963), 609-10.

\(^{12}\) The *Jiang Baishi ci zhu* 姜白石詞注 cited in the *Cipai huishi* suggests that originally only the oblique-tone rhymed *Man jiang hong* existed. It was Jiang Kui 姜夔 (ca.1155-ca.1221) who for the first time used the level-tone rhyme when composing a new *ci*, for he thought that the old-style tune was not euphonious. However, Jiang’s use of the level-tone seems to have been rather unusual. In his study on the tune-patterns and formal regulations of *ci*, Long Yusheng 龍榆生 affirms that the oblique-tone rhyme was more commonly used; Long Yusheng, *Tang Song ci ge lü* 唐宋詞格律 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1978), 106.

\(^{13}\) *Quan Song ci* (hereafter *QSC*) (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1977); *Quan Qing ci* (hereafter *QQC*), *Shunkang juan* 順康卷 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002).

\(^{14}\) All the *Man jiang hong* poems quoted in this paper fall into the category of the oblique-tone rhymed.

\(^{15}\) See, for example, Kang-i Sun Chang and Haun Saussy, eds., *Women Writers of Traditional China* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1999), 816.

\(^{16}\) Long Yusheng, *Tang Song ci ge lü*, 106.
entering tone (rusheng 入聲) of the rhymes, the pronunciation of which is abrupt, intense, and forceful.17

The Northern Song poet Su Shi’s composition Chibi huai gu (Recalling the past at red cliff) to the tune Ni-annu jiao 念奴嬌 (Charms of Niannu) has generally been considered the path-breaking work in the haofang style, but it was in the hands of Southern Song poets, such as Yue Fei 岳飛 (1103–42) and Xin Qiji 辛棄疾 (1140–1207), that the haofang lyric became a widely recognized literary phenomenon. The emergence of the haofang mode was very much a product of historical circumstances of the Southern Song. After the fall of the Northern Song dynasty to the Jin invasion in 1127, Song patriots were determined to resist the enemy, although the peace faction in the court, represented by the Emperor Gaozong 高宗 (r. 1127–62) and his minister Qin Hui 秦檜 (1090–1155), continued in their attempts to make peace with the Jin through offers of compromise.18 Yue Fei, the resistance leader at the time, devoted most of his life to his military career, but was eventually executed by the emperor as a result of what is generally believed to be Qin Hui’s conspiracy.19 Following his death, Yue Fei came to be considered an exemplary hero, and is even today a widely acknowledged source of patriotic inspiration. The following Man jiang hong lyric, which is believed to be his work, has been widely circulated:20

17 In traditional Chinese phonology, the category of oblique-tone includes three subcategories: the entering tone, the falling-rising tone (shangsheng 上聲), and the falling tone (qusheng 去聲). However, Man jiang hong poems in the typical haofang style are more often rhymed with entering-tone characters.

18 For a general study on the historical changes and political conflicts at the Southern Song court, see Frederic W. Mote, Imperial China 900-1800 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 193-322. Western scholars such as Mote tend to refer to Qin Hui as Qin Gui, but the character 檜, by convention, should read “hui” when used in people’s names.


20 Scholars’ opinions differ regarding the authorship of this ci. While Chinese readers as well as many scholars genuinely believe this to be Yue Fei’s writing, Mote, for example, suspects it to be a later construction. See Mote, Imperial China 900-1800, 305. What is important for this paper is not the authenticity of the authorship, but the legacy of Yue’s image and writing.
Hair bristling with anger, bursting from its cap,
at the railing where I lean the beating rain has come to a stop.
I raise my eyes, gazing up, and howl long at heaven,
A stout heart fiercely rent.
At thirty my deeds and name are merely dust and dirt,
an eight-thousand-li route under moon and clouds.
Don’t idle around—
when youthful heads have turned to gray,
we will mourn in vain.

The Jingkang reign’s disgrace has not yet been wiped out.
The anguish of officers—when will it be dispelled?
Driving a war chariot, I will trample
the pass at Mount Helan.
Manly ambition will feast hungrily on barbarian flesh,
amidst talk and laughter we will quench our thirst with Tartars’ blood.
Let us begin again by recovering our former land
and paying our respects to the court.  

This *Man jiang hong* has ninety-three characters. The first stanza uses
stanza five oblique-tone rhymes: *xue* 雪, *mie* 滅, *que* 缺, *xie* 切, and *que* 閘.
All of these characters fall into the category of the entering tone, which
is considered to have forceful sound qualities. With its stirring language,
powerful imagery, and forceful tone, this *ci* provides a striking expression
of the complexities of a hero’s emotional state: he is angry, sorrowful,
and full of hatred for the enemy and shame for his unfulfilled ambi-
tions, yet he is also determined, valorous, and confident in his ability
to take back the lost land. This typical martial heroic image is imbued
with these ideal masculine traits. As Fong notes, “The sustained drive,
the barely contained anger and frustration, and the persistent intent
(here, revanchism) are sentiments traditionally perceived as typically
masculine.” In this sense, Yue Fei’s lyric piece provides “a paradigmatic
version” of the heroic song lyric. “It made ‘Man jiang hong’ the most

\[21\] *QSC*, 2.1246. Translated by Fong in “Engendering the Lyric,” 139-40. The Wade-
Giles spellings in the translation are changed into pinyin. Translations of the poems
cited in this paper, except where specifically noted, are mine.
\[22\] Fong, “Engendering the Lyric,” 140.
\[23\] Fong, “Engendering the Lyric,” 140.
popular tune pattern for [haofang] lyrics, particularly those expressing loyalist or patriotic sentiments.”

Yue Fei’s lyric is a voice emerging from a specific historical context. Both the mention of the year Jingkang (1127) when the two last emperors Huizong 徽宗 (r.1101–25) and Qinzong 欽宗 (r.1126–27) were captured and the naming of the enemy as the northern “barbarian” explicitly inform the reader of the historical circumstances, and unambiguously reveal the loyalty of the author to the Song court. Yue Fei’s writing is representative of the patriotic sentiments of his time. His contemporary Zhao Ding 趙鼎 (1085–1147), for instance, expressed similar intent and emotions in his ci to the tune Man jiang hong. Poets of later generations also wrote lyrics that echoed Yue Fei’s. In his study of the Southern Song poet Xin Qiji, Irving Yucheng Lo observes that Xin not only adopted exactly the same formal pattern as Yue Fei, but also harmonized to the same rhyme. Other poets such as Liu Kezhuang 劉克莊 (1187–1269) and Huang Ji 黃機 (twelfth to thirteenth centuries) also left behind more than one Man jiang hong, all of which adhere to the same formal pattern and express the same persistent thematic concerns: loyalty to the Song dynasty, determination to resist alien invasions, and frustration over the disappointing political reality. These examples illustrate both Southern Song patriotic poets’ preference of Man jiang hong as a tune with which to demonstrate their intent and ambition, and the further reinforcement of the cultural meaning of this form.

The heroic ideal embodied by Yue Fei continued to inspire later ages. The Yuan period began to see the rise of the cult of Yue Fei. During the Ming dynasty state shrines to him were commonly established, especially after the Mongol invasions of the Ming in 1449. As a military hero loyal to the Chinese dynasty, Yue Fei’s image has considerable symbolic significance for Chinese people in times of peril. There is evidence that Yue Fei’s literary legacy was also well recognized, and was creatively adapted to new historical contexts in Late Imperial China. The case of Tian Xingshu 田興恕 (fl.1862), a Qing official, deserves our special attention. Tian was the Provincial Commander-in-chief (titu 提督) of

---

24 Fong, “Engendering the Lyric,” 140.
25 For a discussion of the early development of the Southern Song patriotic lyric, see Tao Erfu and Liu Jingqi, Nan Song ci shi, 1-34. For Zhao Ding’s Man jiang hong, see QSC, 2. 944.
27 For Liu’s ci, see QSC, 4.2612; 4.2614. For Huang’s ci, see QSC, 4.2532.
28 Mote, Imperial China 900-1800, 304-5.
Guizhou in the late Qing period, but was dismissed from office and exiled to the Xinjiang frontier in 1862. His exile was punishment for his killing a French missionary priest. Apparently, Tian composed his *Man jiāng hóng* during his exile in Xinjiang. In the preface to this song lyric, he begins with an autobiographical narrative. Here he claims that his mother tattooed the four characters “jing zhōng bào guó” 精忠報國 (Requite the state to the limits of loyalty) on his arm, just as Yue Fei’s mother did in one popular story. Tian highlights the similarity between his political stance and Yue Fei’s: “We both started as soldiers, morally established from youth; we both suffered persecution because we were against making peace” (qi ān xiè wèi nián zhǎn jìng tuō; gěng hé yì ér huò lì tóng 起行伍而少年建節同; 梁和議而獲戾同).  

This was the time of the Second Opium War: presumably “making peace” (hé yì 和議) refers to the Qing foreign policy of compromise with the European invaders. Finally, he claims, “I therefore imitate Yue Fei’s *Man jiāng hóng* in order to indicate my intent” (yuán shì zàn ni zhōng wǔ *Man jiāng hóng* cí yī què xiàn zhī 緣是僭擬忠武 <滿江紅> 詞一闋以見志).  

From a rainbow sheath shoots forth a dragon sword,  
The cold frontier moon  
Looks at me in silence.  
I ask the Heaven: how many layers above  
Is the place from which humans come?  
Battle-axes have challenged the brave knight’s courage;  
After retirement, the hero idles like an immortal.  
My heart grieves for the many favors I’ve left unrequited—  
It is difficult to let go.  

Fresh blood splashing,  
Clouds at the battlefield rage.  
Startled from a lingering dream,  
Crows cry at the dawn.  
I shed tears —stains hot and wet,  
To the icy trees at Mount Yin.  
On eagles’ wings I arise from the desert;  
On leviathans' backs, I cross the sea.  
I will tie up the captive king,  
Returning to the court I will take off my war robe then,  
And disappear into the dusk in a boat.  

---

29 You Zhenzhong 尤振中 and You Yiding 尤以丁, eds., *Qingci jishi huiping* 清詞紀事會評 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 1995), 871; hereafter abridged as *Qingci*.  
30 *Qingci*, 871.  
31 *Qingci*, 871.
Tian’s lyric expresses a torrent of moods similar to Yue Fei’s. He complains that his ambition has not been fulfilled, but wishes to demonstrate his loyalty to the court through his military merits. The difference is Tian’s desire to withdraw from political life after his achievement, alluded to in the final line. This expression appears to derive from Tian’s experience as an exile and criminal. Tian appeals to the reader to see his actions as motivated by patriotism. It is impossible to determine how genuine this was, but Tian’s identification with Yue Fei and his adoption of the Man jiang hong poetic mode reveal the continued influence of Yue Fei as a national hero to new generations of Chinese males. Yue Fei’s Man jiang hong, together with its cultural meanings, had assumed an important place in Chinese history.

In constructing ideal masculine qualities such as valor, ambition, determination, loyalty and so on, male poets proudly employ explicitly gendered terms: “Heroic deeds—the rivalry between Cao and Liu” (yingxiong ye, Cao Liu di 英雄業，曹劉敵), “The robust soldiers in the camp” (zhang xia jian’er 帳下健兒), and “men’s hot blood is still not exhausted” (nan’er re xue, yi qiang nan liao 男兒熱血，一腔難了). This is a masculinized space in the song lyric that is intimately connected with the military pursuits and political ambitions of men. As Lo summarizes in his discussion of the concept of the hero in the Chinese literary tradition, “[A] Chinese hero must be a man of outstanding sensibility, character, and talent; a man of great courage as well as wisdom; and he is, more likely than not, conscious of his own worth” (emphasis mine). The conception of hero varied in different sociocultural contexts in Chinese history, but Lo’s observation represents the mainstream poetic expression.

---

32 The three lines quoted here are respectively Xin Qiji, QSC, 3.1956; Liu Ke-zhuang, QSC, 4.2612; and Jiang Dunfu 蔣敦復 (fl. 1860s), Qingci, 690.
33 Lo, Hsin Ch’i-chi, 58.
Women Writers and the Lyrical Tradition

Although the *haofang* style can simply be a textual performance, not necessarily related to the male gender in particular, the authors of this mode of lyrics in earlier periods were almost exclusively male. There was almost no voice of heroism coming from the women’s quarters. The most well-known women lyricist of the Song period, Li Qingzhao 李清照 (1081–1155?) did write some lyrics that can be characterized as the *haofang* style, but she only touched on the subject of patriotism in her *shi* poetry.\(^{35}\) Another widely recognized Song woman poet Zhu Shuzhen 朱淑真 (twelfth century) wrote within the traditional “feminine” style.\(^{36}\) Nonetheless, there is a *Man jiang hong* lyric which bears the signature of a female author, the Song palace woman Wang Qinghui’s 王清惠 (fl. 1270) piece titled “Inscribed on the Wall of an Inn” (*Ti yi bi* 题驛壁):\(^{37}\)

> The lotus of Taiyi Pond
> Has nothing of the color it displayed in the past.
> Still I remember
> The imperial favor that fell like rain and dew.
> In jade towers and golden pavilions
> My fame spread, an orchid hairpin among the imperial consorts,
> A radiant blush suffused my lotus face as I accompanied the emperor.
> Suddenly one day

---

\(^{35}\) In her “Ci lun” 詞論 (On the lyric), Li Qingzhao insists on the orthodox *wanyue* feminine quality of the *ci* genre. For an English translation and discussion of Li Qingzhao’s essay and lyrics, see Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), 234-41. On Li Qingzhao and her *ci* theory, see also Shuen-fu Lin, “The Formation of a Generic Identity,” in Yu, ed., *Voices of the Song Lyric in China*, 26-29.

\(^{36}\) There is a debate in recent scholarship on the historicity of Zhu Shuzhen as a female author. For an analysis of the sources regarding Zhu Shuzhen’s life and writing, see Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush*, 244-56. For further information on Zhu Shuzhen as a female author, see Wilt Idema, “Male Fantasies and Female Realities: Chu Shuchen and Chang Yu-niang and their Biographers,” in Harriet T. Zurndorfer, ed., *Chinese Women in the Imperial Past: New Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1999), 19-52. My naming of her here is very much out of a concern for the wide recognition of Zhu Shuzhen as a Song woman poet by general audiences.

War drums approached across the heavens,
Splendor came to an end.

Dragons and tigers are dispersed,
Winds and clouds have vanished.
A thousand years of sorrows—
To whom can I tell them?
Facing this vast land of mountains and rivers,
Tears stain my sleeves with blood.
At an inn I am startled one night: a dream of the dusty world,
Palace carriages roll at dawn, moon over the mountain pass.
I pray to Chang E, Goddess of the Moon,
To be my guardian and allow me
To follow, be she full or waning. 38

Wang Qinghui was a concubine of the Emperor Duzong 度宗 (r. 1265–74), the last emperor of the Southern Song. After the fall of the dynasty, she was taken to Beijing (the Mongol capital). It is believed that this, her only surviving 词, was originally written on the wall of an inn on the way to the north. 39 In order to convey her experience as a palace woman caught in the dynastic tragedy, Wang’s writing incorporates many lines from the famous “Song of Everlasting Sorrow” by the Tang poet Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846), a poem about the imperial concubine Yang Guifei 杨贵妃 (719–56). By contrasting two different scenarios, the good times of the past and the desolate situation of the present, the lyrical piece reveals how a woman personally feels about the fall of a dynasty. Her voice can be clearly heard in the end, expressing her wish to be a female immortal like Chang E, beyond the vicissitudes of the human world.

Unlike the writings of Yue Fei and other male poets, the 词 written by Wang Qinghui is more expressive of emotional trauma than heroic ambition. This single case is far from adequate for us to explore how women engaged with the masculine poetic form 《满江红》. But it

38 There are two slightly different versions of Wang Qinghui’s 词. Here I cite Hu Yunyi’s 胡云翼 version. See Hu Yunyi, comp., Song ci xuan 宋词选 (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 403. For another version, see QSC, 5.3344.
ENGENDERING HEROISM: MING-QING WOMEN’S SONG

does begin to show a female perspective on historical change, a perspective that can finally be explored in detail with the emergence of the critical mass of women writers in late imperial China and the concurrent growth of available sources of women’s writing.

The late imperial period, especially the Qing, saw the great development of women’s song lyrics, not only in terms of the unprecedented volume of textual production, but also the expansion of subject matter and the variety of styles. The horizon of women’s song lyrics was remarkably expanded in the hands of Ming-Qing lyricists. Significantly, their writings were no longer confined to the theme of boudoir life. Living in times of tremendous historical changes and crises such as the Ming-Qing transition, the Taiping Rebellion, and the Opium War that deeply affected their lives, women began to use the *ci* as a vehicle to reflect on their broader social and political concerns.\(^4^0\)

To enter into new topical territories, women authors had to negotiate the poetic modes developed by male poets. They tend to use tune patterns like *Man jiang hong* to present contemplative themes and forceful sentiments. Before proceeding with more examples of women’s writing, I would like to begin with Wu Zao’s 吳藻 (1799–1862) writing to illustrate a woman’s recognition of the lyrical tradition. Wu composed a series of ten lyric pieces to *Man jiang hong*, each of which is written about a different historical figure.\(^4^1\) Particularly, one of the lyrics is devoted to Yue Fei, subtitled “The Tomb of Yue the Military and August King at the Mount of Rosy Clouds” *Qixia ling Yue Wumu wang* 棲霞嶺岳武穆王.

It reads:

Bloody battles in Central Plains,
I mourn deeply
The loyal soul for his hardship.
In confusion, he saw that,

---

\(^{40}\) Women of this period also wrote historical and political commentaries in other genres and forms. See examples in Paul S. Ropp, “Love, Literacy and Laments: Themes of Women Writers in Late Imperial China,” *Women’s History Review* 2.1 (1993), 107-41.

\(^{41}\) Wu Zao, *Xiang nan xue bei ci* 香南雪北詞, in Xu Naichang, comp., *Xiaotanluanshi*, 26a-29a. In addition to the series of ten lyrics, Wu Zao composed seven *Man jiang hong* poems, among which three are historical commentary; see Wu Zao, *Hualian ci* 花簾詞, in *Xiaotanluanshi*, 38a-b, 2a-b. The themes of the other four pieces are not related to the concerns of this paper. See Wu Zao, *Hualian ci* 1a-b; *Xiang nan xue bei ci*, 2b-3a; 4b-5a. For an English translation of some of these poems, see Chang and Sauvy, eds., *Women Writers of Traditional China*, 602-3, 614-15.
While banners and flags were heading northward,  
The court ferried over to the south.  
The half.partitioned empire amidst orioles and flowers has disappeared between 
the azure sky and water.  
Huge pines and cypresses have grown ancient in the cloudy mountains.  
Most heartbreaking:  
He could not redeem his pledge with wine  
At the Yellow-Dragon Prefecture.  

Golden dispatches were sent out urgently,  
Nobody stopped them.  
The golden goblet was broken,  
Who could mend it?  
Just squandering gold at the West Lake,  
The court was afraid to command battle drums to advance.  
At the wall corner I read the stele; the setting sun is chilly,  
The iron statues in front of the tomb are defiled by spring mud.  
Burning precious incense,  
Every year I visit the shrine  
On the road of the Rosy Clouds.

血戰中原，弔不盡，忠魂辛苦。紛紛見，旌旗北指，衣冠南渡。半壁鶯花天水碧，
十圍松柏雲山古。最傷心，酒未能酬，黃龍府。金牌急，無人阻。金甌缺，何人補？
但銷金鍋裏，怕傳金鼓。牆角讀碑斜照冷，墓門鎖鐵春泥污。爇名香，歲歲拜靈祠，棲霞路。

In this entering-tone rhymed *Man jiang hong* lyric, the woman author

42. Orioles and flowers (*yinghua 鶯花*) refer to courtesans and singing girls, by which the author means the decadent lifestyle of the Southern Song court after the loss of the north to the Jin.  
43. This line describes the scene at Yue Fei’s tomb. The images of pines and cypresses by convention symbolize an unyielding spirit.  
44. The Yellow-Dragon Prefecture (Huanglong fu 黃龍府) refers to the Jin capital, present-day Liaoyang 遼陽, Liaoning 辽宁 province. Yue Fei is believed to be determined to run his military campaign to the Jin capital.  
45. These two lines refer to the emperor’s abrupt order that Yue Fei withdraw from his military campaigns in Jin territories. On this detail, see Mote, *Imperial China*, 303.  
46. The golden goblet, an allusion from the biography of Hou Jing 侯景 in the *Li-angshu 梁書*, symbolizes the undivided wholeness of the country. See Yao Silian 姚思廉, comp., *Liangshu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 56.862.  
47. The original term *xiaojin guo 銷金鍋*, literally “gold-melting pot,” was the nickname of the West Lake (Xi hu 西湖) in Hangzhou, the capital of the Southern Song. The term implies the extravagant lifestyle of the Southern Song high classes represented by the emperor and his courtiers. Many examples of poems using this allusion can be found in Wang Rongchu 王榮初, ed., *Xihu shi ci xuan 西湖詩詞選* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 1979).  
48. The two iron statues in front of Yue Fei’s tomb symbolize Qin Hui and his wife. They were built in kneeling posture to show their guilt because it is generally believed that Qin Hui was directly responsible for Yue Fei’s death.
reflects on Yue Fei and his historical circumstances when visiting his tomb, a famous historical spot in Hangzhou. Her imagination of the history is stated through a series of contrasts between the positive image of the loyalist hero and the disappointing political reality he encountered. The author offers both her sympathy for his tragic fate and admiration for his heroic qualities. By Wu Zao’s time, Yue Fei as a loyalist icon had been well established. As noted, many details of her account of the hero are drawn from popular stories. In addition, Wu Zao also composed “Man jiang hong: Two Poems on a Lute Formerly in the Possession of Mr. Xie Dieshan” Xie Dieshan yi qin er shou, in which she mourns another Southern Song loyalist Xie Fangde (1226-89, style name Dieshan). 49 In all these lyrics, the woman poet does not directly address her own historical circumstances nor express her own heroic sentiments, but comments on what took place in the past ages. Through composing Man jiang hong lyrics on historical subjects the author finds a connection to both history and literary past. Wu Zao’s use of the form suggests a woman poet’s awareness of the literary convention and her attempt to reflect on the historical events in the male-dominant political domain. 50

However, Ming-Qing women poets not only recognized the association of the form with heroic poetics; they also went further to inscribe into their lyrics their political concerns and heroic sentiments from their gendered perspectives and orientations. Concentrating on the writings of several representative lyricists, the following sections will explore nuances in women’s attempt to represent the subject of heroism and related concerns in lyrics.

Loyalist Lyrics: Witnessing Chaos from Her Boudoir

The writings of the late Ming and early Qing poet Xu Can 徐燦 (ca. 1610–after 1677) represents an early expression of “loyalist lyrics”

49 Wu Zao, Huilianci, in Xiaotanluanshi, 2a-b. For an English translation of these two lyrics as well as biographical note on Xie Fangde, see Chang and Saussy, eds., Women Writers of Traditional China, 614-15.

50 For another example of women employing the Man jiang hong convention to represent male heroism, see Gu Si’s piece subtitled “Comforting My Husband on Our Boat Tied Down for the Night on the Huai” (Bo Huai shi fuzi 沛陽示夫子) in Du Xun 杜珣, ed., Zhongguo lidai funü wenxue zuozi jing xuan 中國歷代婦女文學作家精選 (Beijing: Zhongguo heping chubanshe, 2000), 380-81. For an English translation of this lyric, see Idema and Grant, The Red Brush, 488-89.
These writings provide the first indication that women authors were beginning to represent their political sentiments in the genre of *ci*. Xu Can, regarded by her contemporary critics as “the greatest gentry woman poet since the Southern Song,” deliberately chose tunes traditionally associated with patriotism, such as *Man jiang hong*, to express her political loyalty. Her *ci* collection *Zhuozhengyuan shiyu* (hereafter *Zhuozhengyuan*) includes a set of six *Man jiang hong* lyrics. As a woman living through the Ming-Qing transition, Xu was deeply concerned with the dynastic fall and repeatedly used terms such as “my former country” (*guguo* 原国) and “my homeland” (*xiang-guan* 鄉關) to show her strong emotional attachment to the fallen Ming. The following, one of her several *Man jiang hong* lyrics, is representative of such a loyalist mood:

Stirred by Events (*Gan shi* 感事)
Fleeting is the splendor of Nature—
Desolate again is
The cool season of autumn.
Listening here: the sound of pounding clothes so hurried;
The wild geese crying out sadly.
I lament the affairs of the past—hearing *The Jade Tree*,
The song of picking lotus is far away—the cuckoo weeps blood.
Sighing over those years now gone—
Wealth and nobility have flowed away.
The golden goblet is broken.

The wind and rain—
Have they ever stopped?

---

51 This term is borrowed from Kang-i Sun Chang’s discussion of Xu Can’s lyrics. See “Liu Shih and Hsü Ts’an: Feminine or Feminist?,” in Yu, ed., *Voices of the Song Lyric in China*, 169-87. But I use it in a broader sense. While Chang refers to Xu’s writings expressing loyalty to the Ming, I expand the term to also cover other women poets’ loyalty to and concern about their present dynasty. For a biography of Xu Can and a sample of mainly her *shi* poems translated into English, see Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush*, 431-37. For English translations of many of her lyrics, see Chang and Saussy, eds., *Women Writers of Traditional China*, 338-50.

52 Chang, “Liu Shih and Hsü Ts’an,” 183.

53 *Zhuozhengyuan*, in Xiaotanluanshi. Among the six *Man jiang hong* Xu Can wrote, there is one written to harmonize with Wang Qinghui’s lyric, in which Xu does not touch on the topic of the dynastic fall, but expresses her opinion about Wang’s personal fate as an unfortunate woman. See *Zhuozhengyuan*, 3.3a. For English translations of some of these poems, see Chang and Saussy, eds., *Women Writers of Traditional China*, 346-47; Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush*, 433-34.

54 *The Jade Tree*, whose complete name is *Yu shu hou ting hua* 玉樹後庭花 (The jade tree and flower in the backyard), was the title of a tune created by the last emperor of the Chen dynasty. It became a convention referring to the music of a fallen dynasty.
Raising my head, I gaze afar—
The moon of my homeland.
I see steel halberds everywhere,
Among a myriad mountains clouds pile up.
Beside axes and halberds sorrows still remain,
Warships are scattered, gone with the tide.
And now today,
There are only heartbreaking steles—
To record heroic deeds!  

The tune pattern of this \textit{ci} is ninety-three characters, the same variant that Yue Fei adopted, and the rhymes use almost the same characters as those in Yue’s piece. Like Yue, the female poet is also writing about her passion for the country. She begins with some allusive images, but goes on to reveal the theme more and more directly. “The song of picking lotus,” the folksong of her homeland, has left with the beautiful summer and the times of peace. The music that she hears now is the \textit{The Jade Tree}, the music of people of a fallen state (\textit{wangguo zhiyin} 亡國之音), and “the sound of pounding clothes,” which reminds her not only of the season but also of an unusual time: women are preparing winter clothes for their male family members who are away at war. “The golden goblet,” symbolizing the integrity of the national territory, is “broken.” What remains everywhere are scars caused by war: deserted weapons, bloody execution places, and unattended warships. All the glory and splendor have gone; only her heart, transformed into the cuckoo, continues to sing about her constant longing for the good days of the past. This song expresses a loyalist’s deep sorrow and nostalgia for the past dynasty.

In contrast to the vigorous attitude and determination conveyed by Yue Fei, Xu’s lyric seems strikingly melancholic: the mourning of the lost golden days and the grief over the warring and chaos. She does not claim heroism for herself, but reports the grievous losses caused by the political disaster. She may be wishing for heroes who could rescue her country, but only the steles that record the “heroic deeds” of the
olden days survive to cause her sorrow. She is talking about heroism, not as a participant, but rather as an observer. Although her life was affected by the historical tragedy, all she can do is to offer her sympathetic reflection.

As many scholars have noted, another distinctive feature of Xu Can’s loyalist lyrics lies in the mixture of her political passion and personal love, which, though not evident in the ci cited above, can be observed in several other pieces. After the fall of the Ming, Xu Can’s husband the Ming minister Chen Zhilin (陳之遴) surrendered to the Qing and served in high positions. Xu Can was troubled by her husband’s political choice. Some scholars believe that around the time when the dynasty fell, her husband took a concubine. The evidence these scholars provide are Xu Can’s lines “Forlorn, my heart seems to ache, / Crying and choking, /Crying and choking. /Old love, new favor, / In this moment morning clouds are crossing over the moon” (qiqi si tong huan ru ye, huan ru ye, jiu en xin chong, xiaoyun liu yue). Chen Zhilin’s poem, entitled “Sending Away a Singing Girl” (Qian ji shi), suggests that he had lived with other women in Beijing before his career ended in the Ming, but there is no other evidence to support the suggestion that Chen had formally taken a concubine. Elsewhere my research shows that Xu Can and Chen Zhilin enjoyed a companionate and loving relationship throughout their long marriage. Their problem, if they had one, lay more in their different political stances. Although it is difficult to relate the emotions expressed in Xu Can’s lyrics to what was happening in her marital life with Chen Zhilin, many of her lyrics indeed reveal a complicated mood troubled by both historical and personal crises.

---

56 Chang, “Liu Shih and Hsü Ts’an,” 182; Deng Hongmei, Nüxing ci shi, 278-79.
57 Chang, for example, says so. See “Liu Shih and Hsü Ts’an,” 179.
58 Zhuozhengyuan, 1.9a-b.
60 While enjoying a companionate marriage, Xu Can, through their conjugal poetic exchange, repeatedly articulated her different political stance and urged Chen to withdraw from ofﬁcialsdom. See my paper, “‘Singing in Dis/Harmony’ in Times of Chaos: Xu Can’s Poetic Exchange with Her Husband Chen Zhilin During the Ming-Qing Transition,” Paper for Workshop “Of Trauma, Agency, and Texts: Discourses on Disorder in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-century China,” McGill University, April 23-25, 2004.
In a *Man jiang hong* lyric subtitled “Stirred by Feelings” (*You gan* 有感), she writes:

> My homeland after chaos—
> The sorrows fill my mind, more than I can express.
> Spring is leaving, the mugwort has just begun to grow;
> The lichen overlap one another.
> The incense has turned into ashes in the burner, but still I am too tired to rise;
> My small window vaguely reflects the clouds and moon.
> Ah, this life—
> We struggle to be like the lotus in the water,
> Wishing hearts entwined.

> Tears of parting,
> Full of blood.
> Flowing endlessly,
> Waves add to my sobbing.
> Seeing flocks of wild geese returning
> How much more they make me grieved!
> My kohl-lined brows in the mirror pale over time,
> The golden moon wanes at my bedside again and again.
> I ask about this spring: did you dream of our hometown,
> Startled by the cuckoos? 61

Beginning with “My homeland after chaos,” this *ci* informs us that it was written soon after the fall of the Ming. Xu Can did not follow Chen when he went to present himself to the Qing court in 1646. She moved to Beijing with her family a year or two after Chen took up his office. 62 The motif of long separation depicted in the second part of this *ci* indicates that it was written during the period while Chen was in Beijing. The poem does not depict the typical separation caused by a husband’s official post; this separation occurred in a difficult time when the author had not yet recovered from her emotional trauma brought

61 *Zhaozhengyuan*, 3.5b. For another English translation of this lyric by Charles Kwong, see Chang and Saussy, eds., *Women Writers of Traditional China*, 346–47. There is a significant difference between my understanding of the last two lines and Kwong’s rendition. He translates them into “This spring, did I dream of visiting my hometown /And startling the cuckoos?”

on by the national tragedy. When Chen departed for Beijing, he not only physically left her behind but also abandoned the ethical principles she valued. The depression and listlessness depicted in the following lines are thus due to this sorrow characterized by her as “more than I can express.” Her wish to entwine her heart with her love seems to have deeper meaning as well.

In the end of the lyric, the author poses a question to her absent husband: Did you dream of our hometown this spring? I believe that the mention of their hometown also points to their native dynasty, as home and country are often inseparable as the term “homeland” (jiashan 家山) in the first line suggests. One could argue that this is also an indirect way of asking if the husband is missing her and the family who live in the hometown, but the image of “the cuckoos” unmistakably confirms the political meaning the author intended to suggest. The cuckoo is a recurrent image in Xu Can’s lyrics. According to legend, the cuckoo is the incarnation of Emperor Wang of the Shu Kingdom, who abandoned his throne and disappeared because of lovesickness. The bird is believed to often spit blood while singing. In earlier Chinese poetic convention, the cuckoo is more often used as a symbol of one’s ceaseless longing for a lover, but Ming loyalist poets tend to use the image to illustrate their everlasting sorrow for the past dynasty. Xu Can is asking how her husband feels not just about his old love but also his former country.

What Xu Can constructs in her loyalist lyrics is a woman’s individual perspective guided by personal experience. Comparing her line “My small window vaguely reflects the clouds and moon” with Yue Fei’s “an eight-thousand-li route under clouds and moon”, the structural parallel and the thematic echoing of these two lines demonstrate the woman poet’s conscious rewriting of her model. While Yue Fei describes his journey to military campaigns, Xu tells us what she experiences in her boudoir life and what she views from her “small window.” What she sings about is not only her suffering as a Ming loyalist, but also her plight as an individual woman.

In acting as a witness to historic upheavals, other women echo Xu

---

63 See, for example, the Ming loyalist and poet Chen Zilong’s 陈子龍 lines: “In a dream I remember / The exile’s old home. / No one’s in charge of spring: / Where the cuckoo cries / Tears stain the rouged rain.” Quoted from Yeh Chia-ying, “Ch’en Tzu-lung and the Renascence of the Song Lyric,” in James R. Hightower and Yeh Chia-Ying, eds., Studies in Chinese Poetry (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 1998), 433. For more examples of women using this allusion, see below.
Can’s voice. In one Man jiang hong poem “In the Summer of Dingyou [1657] I Read Mme. Chen Su’an’s Song Lyrics. Moved, I Harmonized with her Rhyme” (Dingyou zhongxia du Chen Su’an furen ciyu gan he 丁酉仲夏讀陳素庵夫人詞頌感和), Zhu Zhongmei 朱中楣 (1621-61) writes, “Shifting eyes towards the passes and rivers, I wipe my tears in vain, / Heart-broken, with a cup of wine I invite the moon to drink” (jumu guanhe kong shi lei, shangxin bei jiu kong yao yue 舉目關河空拭淚, 伤心杯酒空邀月). Writing after Xu Can (Mme. Chen Su’an), Zhu’s lyric is also full of melancholy over the misfortune of her country. Another woman, Gu Daoxi 顧道喜 (fl. 1644), writes in her Man jiang hong lyric, “Looking back: the scene is obscured; gone is the splendor” (huishou chu yixi fengjing, fanhua xie 回首處依稀風景, 繁華歇), and, “The royal dream—the cuckoo weeping blood” (wangsun meng, juan ti xue 王孫夢, 蝦啼血). Once again, using the allusive image of cuckoo, the woman poet is lamenting the loss of a kingdom.

In addition to the above Ming loyalist authors, women of later periods also recorded in their song lyrics what they had experienced in times of disorder. Whether having lived through the tragic historical transition or domestic chaos, Ming-Qing women writers began to express their concerns about political situations and related personal loss to a degree that had never been so fully encountered by readers of women’s song lyrics of earlier periods. These later lyricists were aware of literary conventions established by males, and consciously employed them, replaying these conventions with their own perspectives. In her discussion of Xu Can’s song lyrics, Chang suggests that Xu achieves “a balance between masculinity and femininity” by adding “feminine sentiment” in all of her experiments with the theme of Ming loyalty. It is not always easy to determine which sentiments are feminine, but the sentiments expressed in this group of women’s lyrics to the tune Man jiang hong are more troubled than heroic.

This is not to say that women authors never broached the topic of heroism. However, when they sought heroic action, it was usually not from themselves. For instance, much later Lu Rongpei 陸蓉佩 (1840?–1863?) wrote a song lyric to the tune Man jiang hong when she was forced to leave her hometown Nanjing during the Taiping rebellion. In it, she

---

64 Jing ge xin sheng 鏡閣新聲, in Xiaotanluanshi, 6a-b.
65 Xu Naichang, comp. Guixiu cichao 閨秀詞鈔 (Xiaotanluanshi kanben 小檀欒室刊 本, 1906), 3.18b.
66 Chang, “Liu Shih and Hsü Ts’an,” 183.
gives the context in a short preface: “In the Winter of Renshu [1862], I took shelter in Chongchuan. I was touched by the situation, so wrote about it” (Renshu zhi dong bi ju Chongchuan gan er fu ci 壬戌之冬避居崇川感而賦此). In the second stanza, she describes the situation:

\begin{quote}
At this enormous calamity, I have only tears—
Shed in the wind, as I gaze towards my homeland.
I ask the general:
When can recovery be complete,
Cleansed of soldiers and cavalry?
\end{quote}

Looking at her homeland being trampled, the poor woman can do nothing but shed tears. She only wishes the general is able to restore peace. This is in sharp contrast to the ending lines of Yue Fei’s piece.

From Xu Can to Lu Rongpei, including the earlier writer Wang Qinghui, we do not see the great determination to reclaim the lost homeland that characterizes Yue Fei’s writing. Indeed, the expression of this sort of sentiment would be considered improper from the orthodox point of view, for women were supposed to mind only domestic business according to Confucian gender norms. Recent historical studies have convincingly shown the fluidity of gender boundaries in reality, especially in the socioeconomic dynamics of late Ming period.\(^{68}\) However, we should not underestimate the prevalent influence of normative gender ideology on social practice and women’s self-perception.\(^{69}\) There were indeed a few exceptional women such as Liu Shu 劉淑 (1620–?) who stepped out of their boudoirs to participate in loyalist resistance, but socially and symbolically associated with the inner chambers, women in general were denied access to the political world.\(^{70}\) Having a supportive family enabled Liu Shu to briefly act as a hero under perilous circumstances, but she lived an unhappy hermitic life in later years.

\(^{67}\) Guangjilou ci 光霽樓詞, in Xiatianhuanshi, 12a.

\(^{68}\) See, for example, Dorothy Ko’s Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

\(^{69}\) William Rowe’s study of the Qing official Chen Hongmou’s 陳宏謀 (1696-1771) thought and practice provides a salient case of the elite’s persistent insistence on gender distinctions and the profound implications of gender ideology in everyday practice. See William Rowe, Saving the World: Chen Hongmou and Elite Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century China (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

\(^{70}\) Other famous examples of women warriors are Qin Liangyu 秦良玉 (d. 1668) and Shen Yunying 沈雲英 (1624-61).
due to the impossibility of fulfilling her ambition. As the texts in this section show, these elite women were cut off from the wider social sphere, able only to witness the chaotic world from their boudoirs or on fugitive journeys. They chose the form associated with the heroic mode to accommodate their concerns and emotions that were otherwise incommunicable. It is hard to categorize the style of their lyrics in terms of “feminine” or “masculine.” They transcended the boundaries of the genre by appropriating the language of both traditions in order to create their own visions of the world beyond the boudoir.

Martyrs of Female Virtue: Women’s Own Heroes?

If women like Xu Can indeed addressed the issue of heroism in some places, they were talking about the heroism associated with men’s social and political world. They did not place women in the role of hero, at least not themselves. However, a few significant examples that I find in reading Ming-Qing women’s lyrics show that some women attempted to use the form of Man jiang hong to record what they consider to be a woman’s heroism within the bounds of female propriety. In these cases, what the poet records is not her own experience, but another woman’s (in most cases women from the vicinity where the poet lived) extraordinary performance of female virtues such as chastity and filial purity that often resulted in her violent death. The following lyric by Yuan Hanhuang (seventeenth to eighteenth centuries) is written about a woman née Lu, who committed suicide upon her husband’s death:

Uprightness always exists,
It lies in loyalty, filial purity, and chaste martyrdom.
Let my poem record Lady Lu from the Zhong family,
A unique hero from the women’s quarters.
Following her husband as a companion,
She only wished to grow old together,
Why did this early death separate them in youth?

---

71 For an introduction to Liu Shu’s life and lyrics, see Deng Hongmei, Nüxing ci shi, 214-19.
72 Men also played active roles in celebrating women’s virtue, although I have not found examples of such writing in the Man jiang hong form. For examples of male authors’ writing on similar subject matter, see Paul S. Ropp, “A Confucian View of Women in the Ch’ing Period—Literati Laments for Women in the Ch’ing shih tuo,” Chinese Studies (Taipei) 10.2 (1992), 399-435.
Alas! The lonely phoenix swore to follow him to death, 
Steeling her heart.

The red silk was cut, her heart broken. 
The mirror was shattered, thousands of lines of blood. 
Only sacrificing herself to the nether world 
Could settle her mind. 
After finishing the seven-day ritual, she fulfilled her intent, 
She ended her life instantly by hanging from a beam. 
Let’s look forward to an imperial edict praising her, 
Recording her fragrant name. 

As the third line suggests, Yuan wrote this lyric as a response to a call (presumably from Ms. Lu’s family or local authorities) for poems to celebrate the widow’s virtuous deed. To this devoted young widow, Yuan extends tremendous respect and sympathy. Although her lyric focuses on the widow’s extreme devotion to her husband, she begins by listing other categories of upright qualities valued in her society: loyalty and filial piety in addition to chastity. For her, they are equally important. Having named the widow martyr as “a unique hero” from the camp of women, the poet goes on to employ powerful images to express both her sorrow over the loss of young lives and her admiration of Ms. Lu’s determined fulfillment of her intent. Honorific dictions such as xunshen (sacrificing one’s life) and juangu (donating one’s body) reveal the poet’s view of the widow’s suicide as honorable and heroic. The final line anticipates that the heroine’s deed could be recognized in the imperial history, in which the term fangming (fragrant name) emphasizes both the gender and lasting fame of the heroine.

In addition to the young widow who exemplified wifely virtue, another case of a virtuous and courageous daughter is recorded in Cai Jie’s (fl. late seventeenth century) Man jiang hong, “Mourning for The Filial Daughter Shen from Renhe, Who Lost Her Life because of Gego” (Diao Renhe Shen xiaonü kuigu yun ming 弔仁和沈孝女刲股殞命). Gego 割股 (or more formally kuigu) is the ultimate act of filial piety. Often performed by a daughter or a daughter-in-law, the practice involves cutting a piece of flesh from one’s own body to feed ailing parents or parents-in-law.

---

73 QQC, 20.11728.
Cai Jie’s lyric offers a detailed account of how a daughter died from *gegu* in order to save her mother’s life:

Waiting on her mother, she neither slept nor ate,
She only wished her mother to recover.
Suddenly, she heard the doctor’s whisper—
Death comes tonight.
Making sacrifices to the earth,
She swore to replace this death with her life.
Secretly burning incense, she prayed to Heaven.
Taking a steel knife to her arm,
She sought the magic remedy of her own flesh,
And cooked it by herself.

Unbearable, the lesion opened,
Unstoppable, the blood gushed.
To her old father who came to hold her,
She could not voice a word.
Although spring youth has returned to the gray-haired,
A nightmare haunts the parents:
The daughter’s soul followed the midnight moon.
She must have implored her husband
Not to resent that her short visit home
Brought them eternal separation.74

Compared with Yuan Hanhuang’s writing, this lyric does not use explicit terms to define the filial daughter as a female hero, but lets the striking details of *gegu* characterize the subject’s unusual courage and determination. The choice of the oblique-rhymed *Man jiang hong* (in the same rhyme as Yue Fei’s piece) with abrupt sound effects aptly conveys the daughter’s extraordinary decision, act, and its unexpected tragic consequence. In concluding the lyric, the poet points to the conflict between the heroine’s self-sacrifice for her parent and her role as wife.

The subjects in Yuan and Cai’s lyrics remind us of the paradigms of female virtues in Confucian moral classics such as Liu Xiang’s *Lienü zhuan* (ca. 77–ca. 6BC) *Lienü zhuan* (Biographies of exemplary women).75

Women poets were familiar with the images of female martyrs to Con-

74 *Guixiu cichao*, 8.4b.

75 For a study of the various editions and popularity of the *Lienü zhuan* in the late imperial period, see Katherine Carlitz, “The Social Uses of Female Virtue in Late Ming Editions of *Lienü Zhuan*,” *Late Imperial China*, 12.2 (1991), 117-48.
Li Xiaorong

Confucian virtues. For example, in writing about a filial daughter who decided to remain celibate in order to take care of her father, Pang Huixiang’s 廖蕙祥 (seventeenth to eighteenth centuries) Man jiang hong 朦胧 names of such martyrs: “The sorrow of Cao E still darkens the river. / The aspiration of Tao Ying hovers in the azure sky” (Cao E 恨，江猶黑。Tao Ying 志，環空碧). Cao E, a paragon of filial piety, is a female figure recorded in the Hou Hanshu 後漢書 (The history of the later Han). She drowned searching for her father’s body in a river. Tao Ying is a young widow who supported herself and her son by weaving. In naming these iconic women, the poet recognized the tradition of exemplary women, and attempted to elevate her heroine to that status in history. The records of martyrs exemplifying female virtues are a familiar sight to us, but using the form of Man jiang hong to represent such heroism was a new phenomenon in the Late Imperial period. Celebrating women’s heroic deeds in performing female virtue is not an exclusively female-authored territory. However, the Man jiang hong lyrics by women of this group particularly show their own view of women’s heroic performance of their gender roles as being equally significant as men’s achievements in the sociopolitical sphere.

“Since Ancient Times, How Many Heroes Can We Count among Women?”:
Voicing Frustration as Women

Women like Xu Can and Yuan Hanhuang both spoke as women in their traditional positions. No matter whether they talked about men’s or women’s heroism, they did not question the separation of women’s domestic world from men’s social world. Some women, however, did not settle for the social prescription of gender separation; they wondered why there was no place for women in the realm of heroism in the public (or more precisely, the political) sphere. For example, Shen Shanbao 沈善寶 (1808–62) sought an answer by historical contemplation in her “Written While Crossing the Yangzi River” (Du Yangzi jiang gan cheng

76 Guixiu cichao, 8.5b.
77 Fan Ye 范曆, comp., Hou Hanshu (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1971), juan 84, 2794.
78 Liu Xiang, Lienü zhuan (Tokyo: Tu ben cong kan hui, 1923-1926), juan 5, 41b-42a.
渡揚子江感成), which leads us to another major motif in the *Man jiang hong* written by women:79

Rolling on and on, the silvery waves
Cannot write out all of that hot blood in my heart.
I ask about that year with those battle drums at Gold Mountain—it was the achievement of a woman.
From my elbow Su Qin’s seals of office will not be hung,
and in my bag there remains only Jiang Yan’s brush.
Since ancient times, how many heroes can we count among women?
Too grieved to speak.

I look toward Mount Beigu in emerald autumn haze,
point to Mount Fuyu, where the autumn sun rises.
I’ve been leaning by the boat’s window,
Beating time until the jug breaks.
A downpour of tears soak into the wanderer’s robes,
while frost alights on my mother’s thinning hair.
I ask heaven on high, in giving me life, what did you want me to do?
Just to suffer ordeals?

This *ci* adopts the same formal pattern and rhyme as Yue Fei’s *Man jiang hong*, and employs a common *haofang* lyric vocabulary, such as “hot blood” and “deeds of valor.” But this lyric is explicitly gendered as a result of the author’s perspective as a woman. The first stanza reminds

---


80 In some versions of this lyric (the one cited by Fong, for example), the character for the verb of this line in the Chinese text is *xié* (to write), but the source I use indicates another character *xiè* (to release; to rush). Considering the context, I prefer to interpret it as the meaning of the latter character. In addition, *xié* could be used as a replacement character for *xiè* in classical Chinese.

81 Su Qin 蘇秦 was a political advisor of the Warring States period, Jiang Yan (444-505) was famous for his emotive writing, yet his literary wit was once exhausted because of the loss of his magic brush.

82 This line alludes to the story of Wang Dun 王敦, who once beat time on a spittoon, chipping the rim chip away. See Liu Yiqing 劉義慶, comp., *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993), 597.

83 Ye Gongchuo 叶恭绰, comp., *Quan Qing ci chao* 全清詞鈔 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 2.1730. Here I cite Grace Fong’s translation of the *ci* with minor modifications. See Fong, “Engendering the Lyric,” 141-2. For another version of this *ci* with minor differences in lines 2-4, see *Hongxuelou ci* 鴻雪樓詞, in *Xiaotanluanshi*, 7b.
us of that of Su Shi’s well-known “Niannu jiao: Recalling Antiquity at Red Cliff”:

The great river flowing east,
Has swept away
Charming figures of ages,
At the west of the old fort, it is said,
The Red Cliff famous for Master Zhou of the Three Kingdoms.
Craggy rocks pierce the sky;
Angry waves lash the banks,
Churning up thousands of piles of frost.
River and mountain as if painted,
At that time how many heroes were here!

When crossing the Yangzi, the river that has witnessed countless historical events and provided a rich source for poetic imagination for ages, Shen must have been touched and inspired by those famous writings, including Su Shi’s Niannu jiao. However, while viewing the same river and dealing with the same subject (the contemplation of history), the two authors’ reflections are distinctive: whereas Su sighs that the rushing river has swept away the heroic deeds of all ages, Shen states that even the endless rolling waves cannot sweep away all of her sustained sentiments. Whereas Su sings about the young hero of the Three Kingdoms Zhou Yu 周瑜 (175–210), Shen recalls a martial heroine, Liang Hongyu 梁紅玉 of the Southern Song period, highlighting the heroic deed of an exceptional woman. Whereas Su “is overcome with sentiment for the vanished heroes of a glorious past,” Shen is bursting with emotion as she considers the virtual impossibility of a woman establishing her reputation for heroism. And she asks, “Since ancient times, how many heroes can we count among women?”

She writes, “From my elbow Su Qin’s seals of office will not be hung, / and in my bag there remains only Jiang Yan’s brush.” As a woman there is no way to pursue a political career; what she can count on is only her “exhausted” literary talent. The emotional reaction in the second stanza is rendered potent by Shen’s realization of the social fetters restricting her as a woman: “beating time until the jug breaks” (tuohu qiaoque 嘩壺敲缺). This phrase is often used by male poets as a vehement expression of frustration, but Shen utilizes it as a way of expressing her

84 QSC 1.282.
extreme feelings about her suffering. Finally, her frustration culminates in an angry interrogation of heaven in the last two lines: What is the purpose of my life?

Shen Shanbao’s contemporary, Chen Jingying 陈靜英 (fl. 1840) was perplexed by the same question, as she writes in her Man jiang hong subtitled “Touched by Thoughts” (Gan huai 感懷) with surprisingly similar expressions:

A long listless day,
Sitting deep in the boudoir,
All morning I jeer at myself.
Once again it is early—dew chills the silvery bed,\(^{86}\)
Wind rushes urgently from the Jade Pass.
My best years leak away like water through my fingers,
When will it wane, this fierce ambition in my chest?
I ask Heaven: for what purpose was I born?
Just to be wasted?

Only the long flute can dispel my sorrow,
Only books can relieve my boredom.
When in high spirits, I beat time until the jug shatters,
And my jade hair pin breaks into pieces.
When can I fulfill my ambition,
Now that I’m put at the bottom rank?
Laughable—these mediocreat people around me,
Which one of them could know me?\(^{87}\)

As a woman frustrated by the lack of opportunity to fulfill her ambition, Chen Jingying develops a sense of self-satire and cynicism in this lyric. She begins with a self-portrait as a woman confined in the boudoir sneering at the “uselessness” of her self. The irony is that she has never given up her ambitious pursuit in her heart, although it is impossible to fulfill it in the hostile environment around her. She does not specify what kind of ambition she holds, but definitely by “fierce ambition” (zhuangzhi 壯志) she means to achieve a goal that enables her to transcend the boundaries of the inner chambers. Like Shen Shanbao, she has no other way but to blame Heaven for her fate as a woman. Once again, although she does not touch on the topic of heroism, by using the haofang mode and the tune Man jiang hong, Chen Jingying speaks out her frustration over the impossibility of women being recognized for their talent.

\(^{86}\) The “silvery bed” (yinchuang 銀床) is a poetic term for the platform of a well.
\(^{87}\) Guixiu cichao, juan 12, 25a-b.
Echoing Shen Shanbao and Chen Jingying in yet more explicitly gendered terms, Gu Zhenli voices her opinion about gender inequality in a *Man jiāng hóng* lyric subtitled “Hearing an Alarm in the Government Office at Chuhuang” (*Chuhuang shu zhong wen jing* 楚黃署中聞警) even during the Ming-Qing transition:

I am at root a sorrowful person,
How could I stand the sad air of autumn?
Just then, the moment to return home—a farewell,
I climb the mountain facing the river.
The sounds of a horn—beyond the mist,
Reflected in the shimmering waves, a few lines of wild geese.
Trying to stand higher, I look towards my old boudoir,
Yet, who will be my companion?

My native place distant as a dream,
And letters remote.
For half a year now,
I have been away from home.
I sigh that between the far ends of Wu and Chu,
Suddenly I am a lone sojourner.

Gu Zhenli, a native of present day Wuxi 無錫, Jiangsu 江蘇, was a Ming loyalist who lived through the Ming-Qing transition. She took the style name Bi Qin 人 (one who shuns the Qin; Qin stands for Qing), which implies her political stance against the Qing. She left behind a collection of lyrics entitled *Qixiangge ci* 棲香閣詞, which contains quite a few *ci* expressing her feelings and attitude towards affairs of state.

---

88 "The melody of singing girls" borrows from the Tang poet Du Mu’s lines, “Singing girls do not have the sorrow for the fall of the state, / They are still singing the ‘Flowers of the back yard!’” (shangnü bu zhi wang guo hen, ge jiang you chang Hou ting hua 商女不知亡國恨, 隔江猶唱後庭花). See *Quan Tangshi* 全唐詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 35. 1245.
89 Gu Zhenli, *Qixiangge ci*, in *Xiaotanluanshi*, 7a-b.
90 Hu Wenkai’s 胡文楷 catalogue has a brief introduction to Gu Zhenli’s biographical information and her collections. See Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao*歷代婦女著作考 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1983), 808. For an introduction to her life and lyrics, see Deng Hongmei, *Nüxing ci shi*, 257-70.
91 Chang and Saussy, eds., *Women Writers of Traditional China*, 426.
For example, in a lyric to the tune *Yu meiren* (虞美人) she openly asserts her political loyalty: “Mourning the fall of the state, I silently shed tears. / This night how can I sleep” (*an shang wang guo tou tan lei, ci ye ru he shui* 暗傷亡國偷彈淚, 此夜如何睡)?

In her discussion of Gu Zhenli, Deng Hongmei claims that Gu’s *Man jiang hong* lyric, cited above, was composed when she was eighteen years old, half a year after she married her husband Hou Jin 侯晉. At that time Hou worked as a petty officer in Chuhuang. If Deng’s claim is correct, what the author states in the *ci*, “Just then, the moment to return home—a farewell,” and “For half a year, I have been away from home” means that, for the first time since her marriage, she is leaving Chuhuang to visit her natal home. She seems unhappy about her new conjugal life, for instead of any expression of joy, we see only the sad feelings about separating from her natal family. Elsewhere, she indeed suggests that she dislikes her mediocre husband, but the longing for her natal home has a double meaning here. The mention of “the sounds of horn” in line 7, which echoes the subtitle of this *ci*, “Hearing an Alarm in the Government Office at Chuhuang,” indicates the disorder of the times, as an “alarm” usually meant warning about a bandit attack or some other emergency. In these chaotic times, she was not only separated from her natal family, but also losing her country.

The lines “On the river, I pity in vain the melody of singing girls, / In the boudoir, I shed useless tears for the country” reveal this deeper layer of meaning. In the phrase, “the melody of singing girls” (*Shangnü qu* 商女曲), she alludes to “the music of people who have lost their country,” a loyalist expression. In contrast to those (presumably men) who are still entertaining themselves in the pleasure quarters after the loss of the state, only she, a woman dwelling “in the boudoir,” is concerned about the country. The mention of “the boudoir” emphasizes her gender and strengthens the contrast between her gender identity and her political concern. Filled with sorrow and anger, she ends the lyric with a rejection of women’s subordinate role: “Why must women yield to men? / Heaven should forbid this!”

---

92 *Qixiangge ci*, 1.10b. This is an example of women expressing political concerns in other forms.


In a lyric written to the tune Man jiang hong, subtitled “Stirred in the Autumn Night” (Qiuyiyougan 秋夜有感) by Wu Shangxi 吳尚熹 (1808–?), we find a sympathetic resonance with Gu Zhenli’s lyric examined above:

My native place distant as a dream,
It is hard to rely on.
My zither and books all discarded.
I only kill time on this long journey,
A stout heart discontented.
A glory of a lifetime gone in a snap of the fingers,
Wild geese come and swallows go: I float aimlessly.
If you ask: my aspirations
Originally are not at all inferior to men’s,
Heaven has given me the wrong birth95

In the above lines, Wu Shangxi explicitly talks about her frustration over her drifting life and unfulfilled ambition. She also uses the term “a stout heart” (zhuanghuai 壯懷) as Yue Fei does, but her heart is “discontented” rather than “fiercely rent” due to the frustrations she feels. Wu was born two centuries after Gu Zhenli. Although we do not know if she had read Gu’s writing when she composed this ci, she echoes Gu’s sentiments in her Man jiang hong. The stanza cited here is the second of the ci, which begins with “My native place distant as a dream,” the same as that of Gu’s ci. What is important here is the claim made by Wu in the last three lines, which affirms Gu’s questioning in a firmer tone: in terms of lofty sentiment and aspiration, she claims, we are not inferior to men; it is the fault of Heaven that we are made to suffer as women. Whether Wu read Gu’s work or not, they are both not only aware of the limitations imposed on women’s lives, but also speaking out against gender inequality.

While they lived at different times over the span of three centuries, in voicing their frustration and anger over restrictive gender roles, the four women poets Gu Zhenli, Shen Shanbao, Chen Jingying, and Wu Shangxi all negotiate the haofang lyrical mode to the tune Man jiang hong and insert an explicitly gendered voice. Whether in terms of language and emotional tone, women’s Man jiang hong examined in this group are comparable with the heroic sentiments expressed in traditional

95 Xieyunlou ci 寫雲樓詞, in Xiaotanluanshi, 7a.
masculine lyrics. However, for these women writers, the conventions of the heroic lyric became primarily a means through which to voice their resentment about gender restrictions. What strikes us in these writings is that the authors all call their fate as women into question by scolding Heaven for not allowing them to be born as men. This seems to be a typical reaction of women poets against the unfair treatment by their society. When stirred by social and personal circumstances, these women are eager to pursue ambitious and heroic goals as their male counterparts are free to do. They are confident in both their ability and sensibility to do so, but simultaneously they realize that they are not only physically excluded from the male-dominant social sphere, but are also excluded from the symbolic dimension of heroism. That which is recorded in the history of heroes and expressed in the heroic lyric is all his deeds and voices.

Wai-yee Li’s study of early Qing fiction shows that heroic women characters were often used as literary tropes to articulate literati sensibilities about the traumatic Ming-Qing transition. However, it seems that the female poets examined in this section completely ignored this dimension when composing their Man jiāng hóng lyrics. For these ambitious women, the existence of legendary heroines and a few exceptional women who took up manly heroic tasks is far from enough to justify the social restrictions they face. In a lyric to the tune 鷓鴣天 (Partridge sky), which reads very similar to Chen Jingying’s piece discussed earlier, Wang Yun indeed mentions popular heroines such as Mulan, but only in order to contrast her difficult situation: “The achievements of Mulan and Chonggu are not in my lot” (Mulan Chonggu shì wúyuán). The reason is explicitly stated in her opening lines: “Buried deep in the boudoir for more than a decade, / I can earn neither honor nor immortality” (guīgé chénmái shí shuò nián, bùnéng shēn guī bùnéng xiān). There may be a few exceptions, such as the figure of Liang Hongyu invoked in Shen Shanbao’s writing, but these women authors find generally no

---

96 For another example that also expresses a similar mood and in a similar manner, see Wang Yun discussed by Ropp, in “Now Cease Painting Eyebrows,” 90.
97 Li, “Heroic Transformations,” 364.
99 Chang and Saussy, eds., Women Writers of Traditional China, 532.
space for women. Therefore, what they produce in the writings is not simply emotional identification with models of male heroes, but a barely contained anger and bitterness resulting from the gap that they find between their heroic sentiments and women’s traditional role. Men also express in their \textit{Man jiang hong} lyrics their extreme frustration and sorrow over the difficulties in pursuing their ambitions, but self-expressively protesting gender inequality seems to come exclusively from the voices of the women’s quarters.

\textit{Coda: A Modern Heroine’s Declaration}

Deep frustrations over restrictions placed on the female gender, expressed in the writing of women such as Shen Shanbao and Gu Zhenli, found its most explicit development in an open critique and attack on the patriarchal gender ideology by the late Qing revolutionary martyr and feminist Qiu Jin. As Qiu Jin’s time saw the Qing dynasty coming to the end as a result of both external and internal crises, her life and writing also marked a turning point in Chinese women’s history. The rise of various modernist reforms and nationalist movements provided unprecedented ideas and opportunities to encourage women to go beyond conventional gender boundaries. Benefiting from an unusual upbringing and later exposure to a reform-minded social milieu, Qiu Jin matured into an exceptionally talented and aspiring woman who

---

100 Liang Hongyu is recorded in the \textit{Songshi} because she helped her husband Han Shizhong win the Jinshan battle by beating the drums. However, there is no independent entry on her; referred to as Mme. Liang, she appears in her husband’s biography. See Tuo Tuo, \textit{Songshi} (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 364-365. For a study of another woman warrior recorded in the \textit{Songshi}, see Pei-yi Wu, “Yang Miaozhen: A Woman Warrior in Thirteenth Century China,” \textit{Nan Nü: Men, Women and Gender in China} 4.2 (2002): 137-69.

devoted her life to nationalist and feminist activities. Ultimately, her great devotion to these causes led her to participate in a failed antidynastic uprising, for which she was beheaded by the Qing government. In her case, she was no longer a passive outsider to the political world, but an active participant, going much further in her pursuit of revolution than most men. She was not only a revolutionary activist in her life, but also brought about a textual revolution in the genre of the lyric. In her lyrics, we see a woman for the first time affirmatively asserting her own heroism.

Though famous as the “new woman,” Qiu Jin received an excellent traditional education. She was well versed in traditional poetic forms such as shi and ci. Writing poetry was her chief occupation before she devoted herself to modern learning and revolutionary movements. Later on she continued to write poetry, transforming it into a vehement expression of her aspirations and political opinions. The building of a modern and independent China and the liberation of Chinese women from patriarchal domination were her two major objectives, and these became recurrent themes in her writing as well. A versatile writer, Qiu Jin attempted many other genres such as the essay and tanci 弹词. However, as an unconventional young woman who pursued the heroic ideal, Man jiang hong was her favorite vehicle for constructing her self-image as a female hero and for expressing her heroic sentiments. As Fong points out when discussing Qiu’s lyrical voice, “The masculine [haofang] mode offers literary cross-dressing as a means to reject the conventional poetic ‘feminine.’” Qiu not only rejected the traditional womanhood conventions, but also attempted to construct a female heroic tradition. In the following ci, she provides encouragement for other women:

In this filthy world,
How many men are heroic and wise?
I reckon only among women
Are there paragons.
Liangyu’s loyal services drench my lapel in tears.
Yunying’s lifelong achievements make blood rush to my heart.
When drunk, I stroke my sword and hum like a dragon:
My voice chokes with grief.

102 Rankin, “The Emergence of Women,” 46-47.
103 Rankin, “The Emergence of Women,” 47.
104 Fong, “Engendering the Lyric,” 143.
Incessantly I’ve longed to ignite
The incense of freedom.
When, when can we avenge
Our country’s humiliation?
My peers, let us
Exert ourselves as of today.
Peace and security for our race is our goal.
The prosperity we seek should exceed our own showy jewelry and clothes.
Above all, the three-inch bow-slippers have been all too disabling.
They must go.\textsuperscript{105}

Liangyu and Yunying were two exceptionally valiant women, Qin Liangyu and Shen Yunying. Qin Liangyu was a Ming loyalist, who provided military aid for the dynasty. Shen Yunying successfully commanded her dead father’s troops against bandits and took back her father’s body from the enemy.\textsuperscript{106} Like Shen Shanbao in her “Man jiang hong: Crossing the Yangzi River,” Qiu Jin also names military heroines rather than those paragons of traditional female virtue appearing in Yuan Hanhuang’s and Cai Jie’s lyrics. This choice indicates Qiu Jin’s gender and career orientations in choosing role models. Her line, “When, when can we avenge/Our country’s humiliation?” is exactly the same question asked by Yue Fei, “The anguish of officers—when will it be dispelled?,“ but her question was raised for her female peers. Although her voice still “chokes with grief” for the difficulties experienced during her ambitious pursuit, she is absolutely positive and confident not only in women’s capacity for heroic action, but also in their ability to break out of the trap of gendered constraints.

The outlet for Qiu Jin lies in the political insistence that she expresses in the second stanza. The advocacy of gender equality was an important constituent of nationalist discourse: women both were made the object of liberation and were called on to involve themselves in state-building.\textsuperscript{107}

\textsuperscript{105} Qiu Jin ji, 114. Trans. by Li-li Ch’\en in Chang and Saussy, eds., Women Writers of Traditional China, 653-54.
\textsuperscript{106} For biographical entries of these two women in English, see Arthur W. Hummel, ed., Eminent Chinese of the Ch’ing Period (New York: Paragon, 1943), 168-69.
She condemned footbinding, considered to be one of the most visible signs of women’s victimization by traditional Chinese society. Qiu Jin’s nationalist and feminist concerns were very much the product of her time. As Rankin states, “Nationalism permeated her feminist views. She argued that equal education and rights would kindle women’s patriotic desire to contribute to national strength, and would elicit contributions toward the new civilization that might be less tainted with traditional aspirations than men’s.”\textsuperscript{108} She brings this spirit of the new age into her \textit{ci} writing, investing a new meaning into the concept of heroism that is specifically applicable to women.

What most distinguishes Qiu Jin’s way of dealing with the heroic subject from that of earlier women writers is the fact that while she has trouble conforming to traditional women’s domestic and sexual roles, she smoothly fits herself into the heroic model:

\textit{(...)}

\begin{itemize}
\item How cruel to have been forced to be a lady,
\item Really, never a shred of mercy!
\end{itemize}

\begin{itemize}
\item I cannot get into
\item The ranks of men.
\item But my heart burns
\item More fiercely than a man’s.
\item Let me say that in my life
\item My spleen has often been roused to fury for others’ sake.
\item What vulgar man could ever know me?
\item Heroes confront ordeals at the end of the road.
\item In this dirty world of red dust,
\item Where can I seek an understanding friend?
\item My green robe is soaked with tears.\textsuperscript{109}
\end{itemize}

In this \textit{ci}, speaking in a manner typical of \textit{haofang} lyrics, Qiu self-assertively claims to be a woman who is more heroic than men. Unlike women such as Shen Shanbao and Gu Zhenli, who find themselves caught in the physical and social constraints of their gender, Qiu uses “the heroic idea to open up new possibilities for herself as a woman.”\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{108} Rankin, “The Emergence of Women,” 48-49.
\textsuperscript{109} Qiu Jin ji, 105. Trans. by Grace S. Fong in Chang and Saussy, eds., \textit{Women Writers of Traditional China}, 651. For another English translation and discussion of this lyric, see Idema and Grant, \textit{The Red Brush}, 776-77.
\textsuperscript{110} Rankin, “The Emergence of Women,” 53.
She accepts ordeals as necessary to the experience of a hero. And, finally, this self-conscious concept of heroism led her to “climax a heroic life with a heroic death.”\textsuperscript{111} It is because she was able to transcend the normative role assigned to women that she felt no gap between her heroic sentiments and the conventional heroic mode. But this does not mean that she simply identifies with the male tradition. As Yue Fei claims “a fiercely stout heart,” she responds with the assertion that “my heart burns more fiercely than a man’s.” Paradoxically, Qiu adopts a “masculine” rhetoric yet speaks as woman, a “new woman” who has rejected the traditional concept of womanhood. By remaking the already gendered literary convention as a female hero’s mode for self-expression, she accomplishes a feminist revolution through her lyrics.

After Qiu Jin’s death, her friend Xu Zihua 徐自華 (1873–1935) wrote a Man jiang hong lyric to mourn her passing. It has the subtitle “Being Stirred and Using Yue E Wang’s [Yue Fei] rhyme, Written after Qiu Jin’s Martyrdom” (Ganhuai yong Yue E wang yun, zuo yu Qiu Jin juyi hou 感懷用岳鄂王韻, 作於秋瑾就義後). The \textit{ci} begins with the lines, “Time flows fast, / Autumn has also gone, / Yet my stout heart goes on” (suìyue rú liú, qiū yòu qu, zhuàngxīn wèi xiè 岁月如流，秋又去，壯心未歇).\textsuperscript{112} “E Wang” is Yue Fei’s posthumous title, and the word “autumn” refers to Qiu Jin (Qiu’s surname is the same character as the character for autumn). Linking the conventional heroic mode, Qiu Jin’s martyrdom, and her own aspiration to continue their unfulfilled ambition, Xu’s writing reveals in a significant way that women not only carried forward the literary tradition in their own gendered sense, but also attempted to realize the heroic ideal by their actions.

From Xu Can’s loyalist’s voice as a traditional woman, to Shen Shanbao and Gu Zhenli’s utterance of discontent as women, to Qiu Jin’s self-assured, heroic, gender-critical voice, there appears to be a sequence of increasingly forceful gendered heroic poems. Chang notes that the loyalist sentiments expressed in Xu Can and other seventeenth-century women’s lyrics later came to influence the patriotic writing of Qiu Jin.\textsuperscript{113} Certainly, there was some degree of historical continuity in the evolution of women’s gendered consciousness, and intertextual influences between these women’s writings especially in the way they echo each other in protesting gender inequality. As Rankin observes,

\textsuperscript{111} Rankin, “The Emergence of Women,” 60.
\textsuperscript{112} Zhang Hongsheng, \textit{Qingdai cixue de jiangou}, 169.
\textsuperscript{113} Chang, “Liu Shih and Hsü Ts’an,” 184-85.
“the evolution of attitudes toward women within the Confucian tradition” from the late Ming on, along with “other factors generated by outside Western influence and internal political decline” after the 1830s, offered women much wider opportunities and shaped women’s new gendered consciousness. However, the array of different perspectives of heroism in relation to gender that I have shown in previous sections is not in straightforward historical progress. The contemporaries Xu Can and Gu Zhenli, for example, adopt distinctively different gender positions in articulating their political concerns. Through examining the varying degrees and different perspectives in women writers’ re-inscribing the recognized heroic mode in the specific form of Manjiang hong, I hope to show that women’s engagement with literary forms is a complex practice that involved both their changing social conditions and different individual perceptions.

114 Rankin, “The Emergence of Women,” 40-45.