Voicing the Feminine: Constructions of the Gendered Subject in Lyric Poetry by Women of Medieval and Late Imperial China

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“Granted that pen and ink are definitely not the business of women, what are we to make of it when they do employ them?” Xin Wenfang, editorial comment in his Biographies of Literary Geniuses of the Tang (Tang caizi zhuan), 1304.

“Although wandering the five sacred mountains of Shenzhou [China] and sailing to the three mountain-islands of the immortals in the middle of the mysterious sea is not the business of women, still when I look into the distance at mists and clouds or gaze at the sun and moon, they do not seem so far away to me. The beauty of the natural world, the romance of private life—a day, a night, a smile, a word—all remains vividly in my mind without being lost or forgotten, and thus I have written about it, composing two sections of verses. Human beings are not peach and pear trees; they cannot remain 'speechless'.” Wu Xiao, from the preface to her collection, Poems from Whispering Snow Retreat, First Collection (Xiao xue an shiji, chuji), seventeenth century.1

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1The reference to silent peach and pear trees is an allusion to a statement by Han Dynasty historian Sima Qian, in the appended remarks to the biography of General Li Guang in his Historical Records, (Shi ji, “Lie zhuan” 49). Praising Li as a man of modesty and noble character who was not only unversed in the self-promoting rhetoric of the ambitious but actually quite inarticulate (kou bu neng dao ce), Sima says, “The peach and the pear are without speech, yet paths naturally form beneath them.” The flowering trees represent the man of integrity who attracts admiration simply for the beauty of his character. Wu Xiao contests this model—one which identifies virtue with silence and which thus might easily be enlisted to encourage the “virtue” of silence, of reticent speech (or writing) in women—by disallowing the analogy which makes trees and human beings comparable with respect to speech. Wu’s preface is reprinted in Hu 1985:105.
In the 1,355 page edition of his history of premodern Chinese literature, a history that spans over 2,500 years, Liu Dajie mentions only five women who produced literary texts, none of them from periods later than the Song Dynasty. Although we can safely assume that these women have not strayed into literary history because they were mistaken for men, it is clear that, given the extraordinary disproportion between the numbers of men and of women represented, these five have been included as honorary men. They have, for literary and social reasons, been considered to have met criteria derived from and sustained by men’s literary culture. One might say that the rule excluding unnumbered women writers from a major modern history of traditional Chinese literature is simply the traditional rule of “separate spheres” of activity, extrapolated into twentieth century literary historiography, requiring that distinct histories be written for men and for women. Certainly in the past few centuries women’s writings have been treated separately from men’s, and there have indeed been attempts to write women’s literary history as a separate narrative, though these works are useful mainly as compilations of biographical data and specimens of writing. While the concept of separate spheres is relevant, the better explanation would be more complex.

To account for the absence of women in standard Chinese literary histories, one must consider the naturalization and institutionalization of women’s exclusion from all intellectual and literary activity, with rationales based upon a purported “natural order” that defines sexual difference in such a way as to empower patriarchy and allocate written language to the masculine, public sphere. Further, the consequent informality of women’s literary education; the narrow construction by male writers of a feminine literary voice; and most of all the absence of mechanisms for the preservation of women’s writings for most of the imperial period meant that until very late in this period no women’s literary culture was visible, socially approved, and capable of giving rise to the concept of a tradition of women writing. For an understanding of women with intellectual and literary aspirations in China prior to the twentieth century, and an appreciation of how these aspirations were reconciled with and integrated with the performance of women’s roles, especially in the governing class, it would have been necessary for the literary historian to find answers to a number of questions that it did not seem important for him to ask. How were women, depending upon their social status, educated in the literary tradition? What did they read or learn to recite? Did they have literary models who were women, and did they imagine these models

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2Liu 1982.
3Tan 1930 and Liang 1926.
Voicing the Feminine: Constructions of the Gendered Subject

as constituting a kind of lineage or a sequence that was rationalized? Could they present, through specific forms of negotiation, their own socially gendered consciousness in a linguistic and literary medium already constituted as masculine? Or were they, by virtue of the illicitness of women's writing, its marginality, obliged to learn the roles and voices of a speaking subject already created for literature, especially for poetry, by male writers and fashioned wholly by male desire? Did they have to speak a feminine acceptable to a readership which was for most of the period under examination exclusively or overwhelmingly male? What social and historical changes brought about

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4 The concept of negotiation, used in contemporary cultural studies to explain relationships between a dominant or "hegemonic" social group and those that are subordinated, has been derived from the writings of Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci (Gramsci 1971) and adapted for use in the analysis of institutions, texts, and audiences in cultural studies that focus on class, race, and gender. "Negotiation" refers to a process of "contestatory responses" to normative or dominant signifying practices, responses which, after the Gramscian model, can result in compromises on the part of the dominant culture or ideology; such compromises make it possible for an existing system to avoid a fatal instability and for the hegemonic group to maintain its power, while subordinated groups effect their own local logics of power. In explaining how the concept is used in cultural and feminist criticism, Gledhill 1988:67-68 says, "Negotiation" implies the holding together of opposite sides in an ongoing process of give and take ... in which overlapping but non-matching determinations operate. Meaning is neither imposed, nor passively imbibed, but arises out of a struggle or negotiation between competing frames of reference, motivation and experience." In the reception of cultural texts by a subordinated group such as women readers and writers, "a 'negotiated' viewer [or reading] position is one that accepts the dominant ideology encoded into a text but particularizes and transforms it in the service of a different group." Jones 1990:4. Thus the negotiated position for women readers of the Chinese literati texts is one in which the dominant (masculine) codes are recognized and accepted, but interpretation of these codes and reinscription of them in women's writings may be characterized by adjustments and adaptations, "contestatory" usages, which indicate that these modes of representation and signification are now marked with the expressivity of an "other." Such a framework may be used to rethink relationships between Chinese women readers and writers and the gendered literary traditions they write within. Examples of some of the ways in which Chinese women writers questioned/negotiated a reading and rewriting of the literati discourses in lyric poetry will be discussed later in this essay.

5 This question raises the issue of the "ownership" of writing by men and its implications (e.g., that texts have embodied male consciousness and male experience, but represent themselves as speaking for women's experience under the cover "man"). Regarding the difficulty women have in entering into the gendered language of tradition, Ann Rosalind Jones's observations, in her work on women's love poetry in seventeenth-century Europe, make it clear that this general problem is not a culturally specific one. "The amorous discourses available to them (Roman elegy, pastoral, Neo-Platonism, Petrarchism) had been constructed by male writers, who represented women as the silent objects of love rather than its active, articulate pursuers. This doubly constrained relation to high literary culture, which silenced women while praising copious speech in men and which provided insistently masculine perspectives as the only legitimate frameworks for composition, imposed particular rhetorical demands on a woman love poet." Jones 1990:1. Jones discusses Renaissance love lyrics written by women and their relationship to the masculine literary
the apparent increase in women's literary activity and greater public recognition for women writers in the late Ming and Qing dynasties, and how did a readership of women in these times affect the production and preservation of women's works? In the absence of stable mechanisms for the preservation of women's writings for so much of the imperial period, can the arbitrary and fragmented literary remains for earlier periods be considered representative of women's literary culture in those times? Can literary practices that are specific to women be identified? These are only some of the questions it will be important to ask in a reevaluation of literary culture as a whole in traditional China in preparation for a revision of the canon-based narrative of the history of literati literature.

The discourse that enabled an exclusive form of traditional literary history was authorized by a patriarchal proprietorship of written language. The allocation of language/writing to men guaranteed the perpetuation of systems of representation conforming to gender arrangements as defined by the dominant (primarily Confucian) ideology. Writers from groups subordinated in this ideology, such as women or monks, could articulate their "otherness" within the accepted discourse (that is, avoid simply utilizing the repertory of available representations and thus "being spoken" by the accepted discourse) only through a "mixed process of acceptance and resistance." To understand how gender ideologies inform and even dictate language and systems of representation it is necessary to subject traditional Chinese literary texts by both men and women to a form of re-reading that brings established compositional and reading codes into clear relief and breaks the closed author-reader circuit operating within that ideological framework to make gender ideology transparent. Some recent models and concepts derived from cultural, feminist, and film theory outside the Chinese context can suggest alternative modes of reading and useful explanatory models for studying pre-modern poetries.

6For evidence of women's literary culture in late Ming and Qing China, see Widmer's "The Epistolary World of Female Talent in Seventeenth-Century China" (1989). Widmer describes how a group of gentry women in the Jiangnan area "formed a loose literary network, exchanged correspondence and encouraged one another's endeavors." Communication by means of letters, says Widmer, made possible associations among women that extended beyond the family and created relationships relatively free of direct mediation by men. "As teachers and disciples, as audience and critics for each other's work, these women reached out to each other across geographical and social barriers, linking domestic circles with literati salons, and the world of secluded wives with those of courtesans, merchants, and professional artists," p. 3.

7Gledhill 1991: 68.

8Concepts and topics central to the present discussion include the notion of gendered language; the social construction of gendered consciousness; specular pleasure and the gaze; negotiation; discourse; subjectivity and the establishment of subject positions in texts; and
While their application will be by no means exhaustive here, it can provide a beginning for what seems important, if we are to treat women's writing as socially, intellectually, and artistically significant: a questioning and problematizing of representation and a gender-sensitive reading of texts by women writers. To the objection that critical concepts not derived from the Chinese tradition are in this context inappropriate, the answer must be that patriarchy and the gender arrangements that lead to a problematic relationship between women and their representation in language, and between women and writing, are not unique to the "West."

The question I wish to address is how various versions of a feminine voice are produced in Chinese classical-language lyric poetry, shi, with special attention to how women writers have constructed feminine voices in the process of entering into a masculinized written language and a tradition of lyric verse in which images of women and feminine voices have been authoritatively constructed by men. I shall be concerned with exploring ways in which feminine voices are produced, rather than with what "women's writing" is. I use the words "feminine" and "masculine" here to refer not to the biological reality of sex, but to the binary patterns of socially constructed gender, behavioral and attitudinal differences which are culturally given at the individual's birth and which become integral to both social personhood and existential selfhood. These specific patterns of difference are ideologically founded and are actualized and sustained in social behavior, including speaking, writing, and

voice. I have drawn upon models of reading and writing suggested by cultural studies (Hall 1980, Gledhill 1988); feminist film criticism that analyzes the representation of women, the coding of images, and the reception of these images from masculine and feminine viewing positions; and studies of gendered language. Freud's reference to a "scopophilic instinct" in his discussion of childhood sexuality in Three Essays on Sexuality has been one source for theoretical development and criticism concerning viewing positions and the gaze. Recent film criticism, with its concern for representation, the image, and subjectivity has largely eclipsed current theorizing on lyric poetry (formerly regarded as the domain of the image) with regard to these issues; it thus offers resources worth exploring for their explanatory value in the study of lyric verse. For a series of articles showing the basis of this aspect of film criticism in semiotic, psychoanalytic, and feminist theory, see Metz 1975, Mulvey 1975, Flitterman 1978, and Gledhill 1988. For "negotiation," see footnote two above. For men's representation of women as the "other" that affirms their masculinity, see Irigaray 1985. On subjectivity, see Silverman 1983, 1988; and Paul Smith 1988. The concept of discourse/voice is derived largely from the earlier work of Michel Foucault, which presents the concept of a discourse as a cognitive field, a knowledge, producing a subject positioned in a set of power relations. On gender and language, see Culler 1982 and Kamuf 1988. For an exemplary study of sixteenth and seventeenth century European poetry by women which shows how certain women writers used established (masculine) literary voices to create distinctive voices of their own, see Jones 1990. Jones treats eight Renaissance women poets from different social and class backgrounds who "shared the problem of writing in social and literary circuits dominated by men as models, mentors, readers, and critics" (p. 1).
reading. Thus, no matter who speaks or writes, the voice one hears, or “hears,” from the speaking subject in a poem is in some sense an acquired voice. I shall use the word “voice” to refer to discursivity, with discursive difference consisting of differences in the “position” of speaking subjects in texts vis-à-vis the use of representational codes, address, interest, or relationship to a dominant political or gender ideology.9

The specifically literary versions of the culturally gendered voice may be acquired through a process of conscious learning, as when a man of the educated class learned how to write literary works which conformed to the discursive and rhetorical conventions governing, for instance, the formal, thematic, and topical subgenres of lyric poetry in the Chinese literati tradition. He might use such versions as the voice of the courtier, the exile, the devoted Confucian, the politically disengaged gentlemen in retirement (chu shi), or others. The juncture between his masculine socialization and the masculinized writing of the literati tradition was, if not entirely seamless, one which did not require a change in his socially gendered position. In another act of conscious learning, a woman could learn to write well in the masculine voices of tradition and even to represent her women-image from a masculinized perspective. This clearly entailed a shift in her gendered position, an internalization of the masculine position. The alternative, for a woman writer, would have been to attempt to use the masculinized language to construct voices which accommodated the experiential resources and themes of her culturally feminine social and psychological position, a voice to some degree capable of articulating her own desires. The matter of address, the relationship between the speaking subject and the one(s) to whom speech is directed, or the implied reader, will be seen to complicate voicing for women, and this topic must be included in discussions of women’s writing in China before the twentieth century. Traditional literati poetry assumes address to the male reader; with what available voice could a woman writer address women readers? The issue of address raises also the question of how women read— their own and men’s writing. This aspect of women’s literary culture is only now beginning to be explored, with attention to commentaries by women to such works as Tang Xianzu’s Peony Pavilion (Mudan ting) and the anthology by Wang Duan, Thirty Poets of the Ming Dynasty (Ming sanshijia shixuan).

Feminine Voices and Literary Women in the Medieval Period

In reading medieval Chinese literature, one may note the ways in which modes of “subjectivity” are conventionally coded into poetic texts which have

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9A specific discourse constructs a subject position in the text and serves the interests, in a general or particular way, of that subject.
been understood in much of traditional Chinese literary theory as transparent and full representations of an author's consciousness. These forms of socially and linguistically constructed subjectivity involve strategies of adherence to and departure from culturally determined views of self and world, and a similarly given set of literary conventions and norms. In imperial China, the norms of poetic discourse (and after the fifth century, lyric poetry is the premier form elite letters takes) have represented the masculinized consciousness, and though one hears women speaking frequently in Chinese poems, in fact women's subjectivity is most often being represented by poets who were men. In such poetry, the dramatized speaking voice is marked as a form of feminine voice, but the source of this speech and the actual subject position is easily disclosed by the poems themselves. They indicate the eye of the voyeur in their presentation of passive, narcissistic women, romanticized suffering, and displays and inventories of boudoir furnishings and clothing. These versions of a feminine voice and image, spoken by men and presented to a readership of men, satisfy what has been identified by Freud as a "scopophilic instinct," a desire for specular pleasure (the pleasure of looking); they feature a non-referential, iconic image and projected voice, an empty signifier, into which the male author/reader may project his desire. The sixth century anthology edited by Xu Ling, *New Songs from the Jade Terrace* (Yutai xinyong), is the richest early source for this version of the feminine voice, though such poems continued to be written in great quantity into the twentieth century.\(^\text{10}\) I would like to call this the "literati-feminine" voice.

The following three poems by pre-Tang literati writers, anthologized in *New Songs from the Jade Terrace*, epitomize features of the literati-feminine voice and the ways in which it articulates an object for the fantasies of its readers, creating an iconic image of woman which does not depend upon its referentiality to actual women. The dramatized speaking subject is alone; there are no competing presences. In fact the poems specifically delineate an absence within the scene, an empty space which awaits a lover. She occupies a private space unnaturally free from the interruptions of normal household life and freely available to the gaze of the author and reader alone. This space, an effect of the particular representational code, is located in the women's rooms of the household, to which access is strictly supervised; it is a forbidden, eroticized zone. It is night, and as she speaks, details of her person, clothing, and the room are subjected to the gaze. The erotic referentiality of the image-codes for this scenario are particularly evident in the following sixth century

\(^{10}\)Xu Ling, ed., sixth century, *Jianzhu yutai xinyong*, Shanghai reprint of Song edition, 1937. For an English translation of this anthology see Birrell 1986. In her introduction, Birrell comments on the voyeurism in many of these poems.
Maureen Robertson

poem by Liu Huan.\textsuperscript{11}

\textit{Cold Bedroom}

After you left, the spring pond
was not the same; lotus gone,
on the verge of freezing over.
In my workbox, scissors feel icy,
by the mirror, creams congeal.
My slender waist is now so weak
I fear it will give way
under this cold dress.

The “spring pond” (bed), “lotus” (he, a pun for he, “union”), and imagery of scissors, creams, waist, and what is “under the dress” combine with the speaker’s complaints about the “cold” and her “fear” to allow the poem to send the double message of helpless suffering and sexuality.

In the next poem, “Winter Night,” also by Liu Huan, fetishized accessories are reviewed by the speaking subject, whose romanticized suffering is offered as a source of aesthetic pleasure for the author/reader.\textsuperscript{12}

\begin{verbatim}
I cannot endure the endlessness
of cold nights, night after night
as keeper of this empty bed.
My skirt is pressed in folds
from sitting; the hairpin’s shadow
grows as I lean toward the lamp.
He cares not for my beautiful deep quilts.
What use is incense
in an atmosphere like this?
\end{verbatim}

The speaker is frozen in the attitude of waiting; lacking “spring feelings” or warmth of her own which can be spoken, she is utterly dependent upon the arrival of the lover, and she despairs. In this scene, as in the previous poem, the double message of chaste waiting and the implicit offer of sexual passion addresses both the fears and the hopes of a male readership, providing an image of woman upon which that readership can project its fantasies and desires.

\textsuperscript{11}YTXY:8:12a-b.
\textsuperscript{12}YTXY:8:12b.
The following poem by Xiao Gang\textsuperscript{13} shows how fantasies of access provided for by the literati-feminine voice are easily modeled for the reader through displacements into elements of the physical setting. The dramatized voice seems to figure her own desire for the arrival of the lover in images of the moon looking down through the window and insects on the stair, and her fears of age and passing time in the images of leaf and firefly. Yet it is apparent that the male author/reader has designed a self-iconizing voice which invites the gaze and fantasies of a hidden voyeur who is the actual source of the desire (as well as the anxiety) presented in the poem.\textsuperscript{14}

\textit{Night Longings in an Autumn Bedroom}

It’s not that I’ve been sequestered like an ancient consort, nor has my love gone off to war, but suddenly I don’t meet him within my gates and courtyard. Ten thousand feelings rise to fill my heart. Doors at evening locked with fish-shaped keys, bed at midnight saddened behind painted screens. Far off the moon looks down through my window, droning insects cry around the stair. Early frost discards the fragile leaf, autumn winds set upon the confused firefly. My makeup is days old, I don’t care; a new dress lies there unfinished still. Would you like to know why I can’t sleep? The sound of pounding clothes outside the city wall.

If this version of a feminine voice is constructed by men to serve the interest and pleasure of their same-sex readership, what happened when women wrote? Could they represent their own gendered consciousness in a medium already scripted? And at a deeper level, would it not be true that their gendered consciousness itself was to a considerable extent shaped by male desire as expressed through Confucian, patriarchal social formations? Yet, within this framework, we can discover that women singers and writers have

\textsuperscript{13}Xiao Gang (504-552) became heir apparent and succeeded to the Liang throne after the death of his brother Xiao Tong, editor of the great sixth century \textit{Wen xuan} (Anthology of Literature). He is known to history as the Jianwen emperor (re. 549-551).

\textsuperscript{14}YTXY:7:14a-b.
established some distinctive feminine voices themselves, going beyond the acquisition of the literati-feminine by implicitly questioning literati language and image-coding, by controlling or neutralizing the gaze that structures the literati-produced feminine voice, and by opening new topical territory for lyric poetry and, in some instances, re-writing conventional topical genres of the literati tradition. They have also certainly learned to use the established masculine voices, sometimes as whole cloth, sometimes in poems which effect a synthesis of shifting literary voices and identities.\(^\text{15}\) Reinscription of literati codes and topics by women writers is a phenomenon which can only begin to be suggested within the limits of this paper. Such features in women’s poetry are particularly evident in the material from the Ming and Qing dynasties, when women’s literary culture emerges more fully into the text record, and when women themselves assume responsibility for the important tasks of collecting, editing, anthologizing, and critiquing the work of other women. The existence of a readership of women and mechanisms for the preservation of women’s writings provide essential conditions for a genuine “tradition” of women’s writing in late imperial China. Evidence of women’s literary culture is present in the textual record long before the Ming dynasty, however.

During the Tang dynasty, there are occasional textual references praising women for a passion for learning or literature; one of these is found in the funeral inscription written for the wife of Xi Gong by Li Hua in the eighth century. Li writes, “The Book of Rites [Li ji] and the Zuo Commentary [Zuo zhuan] were her hairpins and earrings; the Book of Odes [Shi jing] and the Book of History [Shu jing] were her jade sash-pendants.”\(^\text{16}\) Her love of learning, he suggests approvingly, was as great as the love most women seem to have for ornaments and jewelry. More typical, however, is the tomb inscription for the wife (nee Zheng) of a Mr. Yuan of Henan, whom Bo Juyi lauds by recording that after her husband died, when the family was too poor to hire tutors, Zheng herself taught her sons the classics and poetry. As a result, in a matter of four or five years, they succeeded in becoming officials.\(^\text{17}\) Similarly, in late Ming, the widowed Gu Ruopu, an intellectual, poet, and mentor to several women writers, explains her failure to commit suicide and her devotion to study in terms of her duty to her sons.\(^\text{18}\)

\(^\text{15}\)For a discussion of the issue of the instability of women’s literary voices, their identifications and positions within a single text, and their mixing of discourses, see Gardiner 1980.
\(^\text{17}\)Yao Xuan 1929:70/1a-b.
\(^\text{18}\)Hu 1985:208. Gu Ruopu, courtesy name Hezhi, was born in 1592. She was widowed in 1619 at the age of twenty-eight and applied herself seriously to the study of history and literature while helping her sons with their education, tutoring them after their for-
Only in death is it easy to sustain one's virtue and integrity; preserving them while alive is nearly impossible. But the poor orphaned children remained. I had no choice but to study the entire range of the glorious writings of the past in order to help them to future success.

The pursuit of Buddhist and Daoist studies could be undertaken by women in two principal ways: as a “leisure time” hobby to be pursued only after family duties had been fulfilled, with the time spent increasing with age and release from many of these duties; or as something more integral to daily life, a result of family teachings which emphasized religious values or texts. Numerous examples of the former pattern are found in Tang compilations of tomb inscriptions and funeral eulogies. These texts, often highly formulaic, are important sources of information about normative patriarchal expectations in any given period. They provide evidence for the extremely modest degree to which women’s literary and intellectual activities could be publicly recognized as a legitimate part of their lives as daughters, wives, and mothers. An inscription (also written by Bo Juyi) for a woman of the Li family, wife of the prefect of Haizhou, says that “beyond” fulfilling her wifely duties, she recited both Buddhist scriptures and Daoist texts, thereby becoming a very devout woman, serene in her life as a wife and at the last when she faced death.19

Medieval writers of the Tang period can be identified with several social stations: they were the daughters, wives, and concubines of literati men, palace ladies, courtesans and entertainers, Daoist and Buddhist women and servants.20 Those whose literary remains amount to more than a handful of poems, however, are all courtesans, entertainers, and Daoist women, people living outside the family context and thus having opportunities, at the cost of their social “respectability,” to form literary friendships with men, to circulate their writing and acquire literary reputations, and to join in mixed groups or literary circles in which poetry writing was a preferred source of amusement. The social circulation of these women was analogous to the free circulation of their writings; both were transgressive and were equated with sexual promiscuity. Nonetheless, their association with well-known literary

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19 Tong Gao 1814:680/7a-b.
20 Cao Yin 1707: 798-805.
figures did result in the preservation of some of their poetry. The three “major” Tang women poets, Li Jilan, Yu Xuanji, and Xue Tao, were not, then, family women. They addressed poems explicitly to unrelated men of their acquaintance, frequently wrote about love, and wrote for an almost exclusively male readership in the course of their professional or social lives. In the following poem, Yu Xuanji displays a command of the conventionalized literati-feminine elements—willow (courtesan), grottoes and fishes (sexual desire), the invitation to the traveler, sleeplessness, and longing.22

*Riverside Willows*

Their emerald color lines a secluded riverbank,
their hazy ambience moves into distant houses.
Their image is spread on the surface of autumn waters,
their blossoms drop on the heads of fishermen.
In aged roots are grottoes where fishes hide,
Branches, dangling, entangle the traveller’s boat.
When they sigh and sigh in the winds of a stormy night,
I start from my dreams with a heartache deeper than ever.

The three Tang women whose fragmentary collections survive, mentioned above, were sufficiently well-recognized to have been included in important Tang anthologies: *Collected Poetry of the Restoration Era* (*Zhongxingjian qi ji*, late eighth century, edited by Gao Zhongwu); *The Still More Subtle Poetry Collection* (*You xuan ji*, preface date 900, editing attributed to Wei Zhuang); and *A Medley of Masterpieces* (*Caidiao ji*, late Tang, edited by Wei Hu).23 Xue Tao served as a hostess for several successive governors in the Sichuan region, and in the case of Li Jilan, a Daoist woman, there was a summons, accepted, to the imperial court. Li’s recognition came as a result of reports carried back from the post-rebellion literary center in the Zhejiang locale of

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21 Li Ye, known by her courtesy name, Jilan, flourished in the mid-eighth century. For her poetry and biographical information, see Cao Yin 1707: 805; Xin Wenfeng 1304: 2/26; Ji Yougong 1224: 78/1154; and Hu (1985:36). Sixteen of her poems remain. Yu Xuanji, courtesy name Youwei, has suggested dates of 842-872. For her poetry and biographical entries, see Cao Yin 1707: 804; 1960: 11/9074; Xin Wenfeng 1304: 8/136; Ji Yougong 1224: 78/1156; and Walls 1972 and Wimsatt 1936. Forty-seven poems attributed to Yu are extant. Xue Tao, courtesy name Hongdu, has the speculative dates 768-831. For her poetry, see Cao Yin 1707: 803; 1960: 11/8035-46. Biographical notices and editions are given in Ji Yougong 1224: 79 and Hu 1985:33-37. See also Larsen 1983 and 1987. About ninety poems attributed to Xue Tao are extant.


23 These anthologies were collected by the Song bibliophile Mao Jin 1958, together with the fragmentary manuscript of an anthology recovered from Dunhuang, are reprinted in *Tang ren xuan Tang shi*, Shanghai 1958.
Wuxing, where Li lived and belonged to the circle of the well-known monk-poet Jiaoran.24 Her poem in response to the imperial summons is typical of her preference for performing literati-masculine voices. In the poem below, using the literati topoi of friendship and of modesty in the face of honors bestowed, she speaks in a voice indistinguishable from that of the male poet. References to her appearance fall within the modesty topos, but might also be read to suggest that she is measuring her age and unprepossessing appearance against the expectations and norms for women in court society. She assures her friends in the south that she remains devoted to them and does not expect to make much of an impression in the capital.25

Parting from old friends in Guangling on the occasion of my being inducted into palace ranks by gracious imperial command.

Without talent, often ill,
Worn out and useless,
I am amazed to find unfounded praise has reached imperial gates.
Ashamed before Heaven, I brush my hat
put up the grey-streaked hair;
deeply chagrined, I wipe the mirror
arrange this wasted face.
The heart rushes swiftly toward northern towers but it does not outrun the sweet spring grass;
the eye loses southern mountains in distance but still looks back toward familiar hills.
Just as the cassia cannot for long remain a country guest,
So the gull that leaves the shore will offend whomever it meets.

The following parting poem by Li Jilan employs the scene of lovers’ parting customarily treated in the literati-feminine with emphasis on the sorrow of the speaker. In this piece, however, Li neutralizes the speaking voice by generalizing the emotion to all people (ren) who part.26

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24 Jiaoran was the literary friend of numerous literati of the mid- and later eighth century, both in and out of office, figures such as Lu You, Liu Yuxi, Yuan Zhenqing, and several of the Ten Masters of the Dali period, with whom he enjoyed writing linked verse. One poem addressed to Li Jilan remains, “Da Li Jilan” (Reply to Li Jilan), in Cao Yin 1707: 804; 1960:12/9268. Jiaoran’s poetry is preserved in Cao Yin 1707: 85 and 821.


Parting on a Moonlit Night

At the moment of parting
they cannot speak;
like them, the moon is silent.
But it does have its light
as people have their love.
After they part, love’s longing reaches out
(people are like the moon)
through the clouds, over the waters
clear to the ramparts of the Wall.

Though the voice in this poem is not explicitly gender-marked and the poet has generalized the emotions of love and sorrow, the trajectory of “love’s longing,” moving from a point geographically “within” toward the “outside” of the frontier, indicates that the speaking subject is positioned spatially as feminine.

Poems by prominent Tang courtesans inherit the candid and often teasing tone of the Six Dynasties popular singers, usually with a considerable increase in sophistication of expression. The “Midnight” (Ziye) song lyrics of the Jin, Song and Qi dynasties, unattributed lyrics which some consider to be the textualized oral compositions of popular entertainers (and which were imitated by literati writers, though often these slide off into the literati-feminine and few capture the insouciant quality of many of the anonymous pieces) distinguish themselves by their initiation of and manipulation of the male desire which the professional singer tried to provoke; in these poems the speaking subject can often be seen to control the gaze. The following two examples show that whether individual lyrics can be proven to have been written by women or by men, the feminine voice may differ markedly from that of the literati-feminine discussed above.27

Ziye song: Summer

I toss and turn on my pretty mat,
it’s too hot to draw the curtain.
My dear man, don’t come a step closer
until I’ve made myself decent.

Ziye song: Summer

I’m bored with the plainness of light clothes
even a “rainstorm” won’t cool things down.

27 Guo Maoqian 1340: 44/66, 7b.
When will the summer season be over
so I can put on make-up again?

The open curtain in the first song invites the gaze, only to have the speaker forbid, momentarily, her lover's look, a move which would clearly have the effect of increasing the desire to look. The speaker of the second piece is restless, bored, preoccupied with her own discomfort, seemingly indifferent to male desire (the "rainstorm" is a conventional allusion to love-making); she seems to regard make-up as a source of her own amusement instead of a means of attracting the gaze of a man. This degree of indifference, presented in the song of an entertainer, is yet another form of playfully manipulating the male listener's or reader's interest. The Tang dynasty courtesan Zhao Luanluan (eighth century), offers a more elegant and dramatic form of seduction through language. In her play with concealment and disclosure, there is something reminiscent of the more mildly suggestive double messages of the literati-feminine. However, there is no mistaking the way in which this speaker is directing the gaze, first drawing it to something she hides, then displaying the hidden in a way that promises passion.28

_Slender Fingers_

Long and delicate, soft white jades,
freshly peeled spring onions.
I always hide them
in green sleeves of perfumed silk.
Yesterday, moving over the lutestrings
all their nails were painted blood-red.

The, literally, "gibbon's blood red" (xing hong) color of the fingernails as a signal of a passionate nature is all the more effective in conjunction with the fragility and modesty implied in the description of the hidden hands. Both "gibbon's blood" and "lutestrings" have erotic resonance in Chinese love poetry.29

Court patronage and recognition of some intellectual and literary women was a feature of Tang culture, as we have seen. Shangguan Waner, a widely

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29 In modern Chinese xingxing is the name of the orangutang, but Schafer 1963:209-10 and van Gulik 1967:29 both conclude that xing was used in earlier times to refer to the gibbon. Schafer describes "gibbon's blood red" as a "rich scarlet" that was regarded an an exotic dye in medieval China. That the strings of the lute signify a wife or female sexual partner is clear from several expressions in common use in literary texts: duan zuan, "to break the lutestring," meaning also "to lose a wife"; zu zuan "to reconnect or repair the lutestring," meaning "to take a second wife"; and qin se bu tiao, "lute and zither are out of tune with each other" meaning also "husband and wife are not getting along."
praised poet and a granddaughter of the prominent seventh-century statesman Shangguan Yi, became a favorite of Empress Wu (684-705 c.e.), joined the ranks of palace women, and eventually was appointed a titled consort. From this position she used her influence to promote talented people and literary activity at court. At the request of the emperor Zhongzong (684-710), she would judge the quality of poems composed at palace banquets. In the eighth century, the emperor Dezong (779-804) summoned the five daughters of Song Tingfen (a descendant of the major seventh-century Tang poet Song Zhiwen) to court to verify that they were as learned as reported. He kept them in the ranks of palace women, and they joined in poetry events presided over by the emperor. The eldest, Song Ruohua, known for her poetry and prose—a conduct book, *The Women’s Analects (Nü lunyu)*, is attributed to her—was given an official position in palace ranks and was called *xueshi*, “scholar.” When she died in 820, the next eldest sister, Song Ruozhao, took her place, acquiring the title *xiansheng*, “elder master.” She retained her position under three emperors. Another woman whose literary talent received court support was “Lady Flower Pistil” (*Huarui furen*), of the Xu family, a favorite of the ninth-century king of the state of Shu, Meng Chang, and prolific writer of palace-style (*gongti*) verse.

Conditions under which the writings of early medieval women of literati families may to some extent have circulated, been collected, or anthologized but subsequently lost remain unclear. In the bibliographical sections of the Tang and Song dynastic histories, and in independent Song bibliographies, at least seven anthologies of women’s writings are listed, all but one titled simply *Collected Writing by Women (Furen ji)*: two from the southern (Liu) Song, two each from Liang and Sui, one from the later Wei, and one from Tang. These collections have not survived. The word *furen* in titles of these lost anthologies may indicate that the poets anthologized included literati women, as well as courtesans and Daoist women. Mixed collections of writings, such as the Song dynasty *Chanted by the Window: A Poetic Miscellany (Yin chuang za lu)*, which contains both literary criticism and an anthology of poems, preserve some writing by earlier women and were important sources for the compilation in the late Ming and early Qing of the thin sections devoted to extant poetry by women in the *Complete Tang Poems (Quan Tang shi)*.

The lack of adequate archival sources for medieval women’s writings raises

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32 Hu 1985:875.
33 Copies of a Ming edition of the Song Dynasty *Yin chuang za lu*, edited by Chen Yingxing, are held in the library of Beijing University and in the Diet Library, Tokyo. The University of Chicago has a microfilm copy of the Beijing text.
a serious doubt about our ability to generalize concerning women’s literary culture in earlier China. Even the works of prominent and prolific women writers associated with the imperial court have been lost, except for a small number of pieces. The tiny amount of extant poetry by literati women that survives makes the study of their literary culture and the affinities of their poetry with both the Six Dynasties models and Tang literati poetry particularly difficult, while the slightly better preservation of the works of courtesans, entertainers, and Daoist women may create a misleading profile for this period. Zhang Xuecheng’s claim, in his seventeenth century essay, “Women’s Learning,” that women’s poetry reached its fulfillment with the poetry of the Tang courtesan, and that the literary women of his day should not regard themselves as participants in a new era of women’s literature, ties women’s poetry to the myth of decline that was so destructive to men’s poetry and appears to depend on an unproven assumption that courtesans were the only women who wrote acceptable poetry during the Tang.34 It may be noted that the section in the Complete Tang Poems devoted to poetry by women of literati families contains more individual poets than does the section devoted to courtesans. In any case, we should note that individual poems by women of literati families do contain evidence that medieval women wrote in literati topical genres such as landscape appreciation and social protest, and they also wrote occasional verse addressed to other women, as well as to husbands and brothers.

Literary Voices of Women in the Ming and Qing

By the late Ming and Qing dynasties, a large percentage of the extant collections of women’s poetry was, in contrast to the situation for Tang, by women of literati families. And by this time, many women who were engaged in literary activity were prepared not only to make a case for the legitimacy of women writing, but also to establish retrospectively the outline of a history of women’s writings, one which had its beginnings in the opening sections (the important “Zhou nan” and “Shao nan” sections) of the Book of Odes (Shi jing), the canon of poetry and official fountainhead of all Chinese poetry. In the following passage from a preface by Gu Ruopu, dated 1626, the venerable rhetorical strategies of argument employing the “testimony of nature” and the “testimony of history” are used briefly and pointedly in support of the case for women’s writing.

...I am aware of the proposition that a woman’s work is to be limited strictly to matters of wine and food. Could we dare,

34See Susan Mann’s essay on Zhang and his “Fuxue” in this issue.
by taking up brush and ink, create a pointless competition with the lettered gentlemen? And yet, any creature when it is distressed will cry out. From ancient times, when virtuous women such as Ban Zhao and Zuo Fen wrote literary pieces to satisfy their feelings, the result was that both celebration and satire were displayed in their works. So this is perhaps not something that is beyond the province of women.35

And in a later preface she places women at the origin of Chinese poetry.36

Many of the poems in the Book of Odes were composed by women and girls. Once they began to use bi and xing [poetic tropes of comparison and association], the centuries were subsequently filled with poetry. Shall we assume that they produced all those early poems by merely opening their mouths and mindlessly reciting the words? The fact is that by nature women have a gift for it. Ouyang Xiu said, “Only when you are suffering in extremity will the poetry you write be any good.” Thus, we find that important officials and scholars will engrave their very flesh and carve into bone, turning white-haired and using up their lives contriving to produce dark and melancholy lines. Though in form and spirit they may be quite correct, yet if one seeks the natural music of life for poetry in such a way, one will be further from it than ever. Poetry of that sort will never be like the voices of seasonal insects, spontaneously calling out and spontaneously falling still.

This latter preface, written for her granddaughter’s collected poems in 1680 with all the authority of her eighty-nine years, offers a clear suggestion that Gu Ruopu saw herself as a teacher and transmitter of literary knowledge and skill, with a responsibility to oversee the continuity of a line of poets in her family, both men and women—a line that began in her grandfather’s generation.37

37 Hu 1985: 757. Gu Zhiqiong, whose literary name was Lady Yurui (“Jade Flower Pistil”), was a founder and sponsor of the Banana Garden Poetry Club, originally a group of five related or acquainted women writers living in the mid-seventeenth century in the Hangzhou/Qiantang area of Zhejiang: Xu Can, Chai Jingyi, Zhu Rouze, Lin Yining, and Qian Fenglun. Shi Shuyi 1074: 2/23b-24a. The Banana Garden Club was later reorganized to include seven poets. Lady Yurui, the niece of Gu Ruopu, was the mother of Qian Fenglun. The role of Lady Yurui as founder and sponsor of the club and mentor to the younger poets
My family is originally from Xihe; my grandfather, the Duke of Cangjiang, and the generations following him had a reputation for poetry, and *Refined Writings from the Inner Rooms* (*Guizhong ya ji*) [a poetry collection by family women] has its share of outstanding poems. My younger brother's wife, Lady Jizhao, and I wrote poems to each other, and thus the two collections, *Nightsongs of the Inner Chambers* (*Gui wan yin*) and *Poems from Sleeping in Moonlight Gallery* (*Wo yue xuan gao*), came to be printed. As for my niece, Lady Yurui, her talent and reputation have soared like a bird; her elegant compositions are greatly accomplished. As a result, she has benefitted those who are younger. My grandson's wife, Qian Fenglun, is the second daughter of Lady Yurui; from the time she was a small child, she dabbled in the ink-painting of birds and flowers, and she was early judged to have the strong artistic talent of a Xie.

... 

I hope that this young woman ... will do her best to make the schools of Liu Zongyuan and Tao Qian her teachers and guides. What one has an aptitude for by nature, one can develop even further; in whatever respects her learning is still not complete, she should accumulate more until she has achieved a positive transformation. In expressive energy, I want her to be full and rich, and in diction she should be lucid and generous. Practicing these, as time goes on she will realize a spontaneous achievement in them, and she will thus create a latterday path for the Xihe heritage.

The protocols of preface writing demanded a contextualizing, both historical and personal, of the women's writings being collected. This in itself encouraged women to articulate a place for women's poetry in the history of literature. But such efforts went much further than adherence to the conventions of the preface form. Many writers of prefaces of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries spoke of the lack of recognition of women writers and seems similar to that of Li Wan as the convener and sponsor of the Crab Flower Poetry Club in *Hong lou meng* (*Dream of the Red Chamber*); neither Gu nor Li are counted as active poetry-writing members in their respective clubs. Li, however, is not represented as a model poet or mentor as Lady Yurui is in Gu Ruopu's preface. The formation of poetry circles, clubs, or associations by women was one of the ways in which governing class women writers emulated the practices of literati writers in the late Ming and Qing dynasties, creating their own networks of readers and critics but not becoming openly a part of the public literary culture of men.
the inadequacy of women's literary education. Less usual, but also worthy of note is the preface of one Gu Jingwan, who seems to feel no need to explain or defend her writing, explicitly denying that the motive is "distress" (as in Gu Ruopu's argument). Because her husband is often away, she says, she has nothing to do and writes to relieve her boredom.

I now return to the issue of voice with reference to late Ming and Qing poetry. The discussion will be restricted to the four topics mentioned earlier as means by which women writers might engage in a process of negotiation with the masculinized language and voices of literati poetry, producing feminine voices expressive of their own concerns and gaining alternatives to simple interpolation within the narrow scope of the literati-feminine. These topics, or forms of negotiation, are: 1) the questioning of literati language through the re-writing of image codes; 2) the neutralizing of the gaze in performances of the boudoir scenario; 3) the marking of new topical territory; 4) the use of a shifting voice or ambiguity in voicing in friendship poetry addressed to women.

The re-writing of image codes does not, of course, take place in any programmatic way in poems by women. In some poems by women during the late Ming and Qing, however, established codes are employed from discursive positions which differ from those in the literati models. The plum blossom, for instance, is represented in literati poetry as an image of delicate, ethereal, almost virginal beauty. Feminine beauty is idealized in this image of the flower which is the first to bloom at a time when snow may still be on the ground. The juxtaposition of feminized beauty with coldness, suggesting

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38 For examples of prefaces in which women make claims about women's contributions to the literary heritage and/or point out inequities in the educational opportunities and recognition for women writers, see Zou Yi, early Qing compiler of the The Red Banana Collection (Hong jiao ji), an anthology of 380 poems by sixty-six poets. She refers in her preface to women as poets in the Book of Odes, to the loss of women's writings or the loss of their names (turning extant works into anonymous pieces); she complains that the few anthologized pieces are limited in topic to parting, suffering, and love, and regrets that the more interesting pieces from Tang and Song are all by poets who were courtesans and entertainers (Hu 1985:897-98). Wu Xiao, in her preface to her own collected poems, refers to the history of women's writings and to important women writers as models (Hu 1985:106). Shen Shanbao, editor of an informal collection of critical observations on women poets and their poetry, Notes on the Poetry of Renowned Ladies (Ming yuan shihua), speaks in her preface of the poor representation of women in anthologies, of the differences in men's and women's literary educations, and of women's lack of good teachers and stimulating intellectual associations (Hu 1985:953). Chen Yun, in her 1911 work containing over two hundred of her own "poems on poetry," (lun shi shi), in which she critiques over a thousand women writers, refers to the origin of women's poetry in the Book of Odes and details the ways in which she believes anthologists of the past have doomed women writers to obscurity (Hu 1985:581-83).

purity and chastity, creates an ideal removed too far from life itself, and this the plum blossom confirms in time by duly "falling" into the mud where its "skirt" is ruined. The image thus implies a privileging of the youthful and virginal woman; it suggests that a fall into marriage or adult life is loss, a condition that no longer evokes romantic interest. This image coding is predicated on the assumption of a male readership and what that readership finds interesting. The following lines, excerpted from literati poet Xiao Gang's sixth-century poem "The Flowering Plum," illustrates the identification of woman and flower.40

The plum breaks into blossom before other trees,
She alone has the gift of recognizing spring.
Now receiving yang, she brings forth gold,
Now mingling with snow, she wears a cloak of silver.
She exhales beauty and lights up the grove on all four sides,

... Thereupon, in the many-cloistered ladies' quarters, an exquisite beauty,
Her appearance delicate and her mind refined,
Loves the early blossoms that spur in the season
And welcomes glorious spring's putting the cold to flight.

... She opens wide the spring windows, she rolls up the curtains on all four sides.
"The spring wind blows plum-petals—I'm afraid they'll all fall,
So I knit my moth eyebrows.
Blossoms and beauties are all alike,
We always worry that time will pass us by."

The next poem, "Things Whispered at the Window, number one," shows how eighteenth-century poet Pang Wan acknowledges the convention but recuperates the image in the voice of the married woman.41

Spring rain and spring cold—
plum blossoms fall,
for several nights defenceless
against the urgings of spring breeze.
In the quiet garden
I gather up petals

from broken blossoms—
I'll use them
to wash the faces of my children.

Pang accommodates the figuration of the plum blossom as a woman giving in to the urgings of love or a lover, but resists coding that makes the "fall" her story, or the end of the story. Negotiation, in which she further develops this scenario, introduces a new frame of reference for the image of the plum petals, allowing for the expression of a different kind of gendered interest in this image.

In the following pair of poems, written by Gu Ruopu after the death of her husband, there is a re-writing in the second poem of conventional literati coding in the first. While the first accepts and uses the code, in the second the images of plum and moon are blank; they "refuse" to represent the speaker's subjectivity, which cannot be exhausted by them. The speaking subject, alienated, emphasizes the indifference, the non-signifying character, of this literati code for her expressive need.42

Going out to see plum blossoms in the moonlight,
I imagine my husband might come riding back on a cloud.

I. The blossoms, just to enchant the moon,
give even more scent, more fresh beauty.
Deep in shadow, lover gone
I'm awake in the night.
Alone, I lift the goblet, sing
"Whiter than snow."
My silk lutestings invite the moon:
We'll keep vigil here
for the immortal spirit of the plum blossom.

II. How easy for beauty in the world to deepen sorrow
but hard for this new poem to figure forth the pain.
I confront flowers, and the flowers say nothing;
I invoke the moon, the moon radiates coldness.

The next adaptive strategy to be illustrated, neutralizing or controlling the gaze, has already been mentioned with reference to the medieval poet Li Jilan. First, the following poem illustrates how the later women poets were still learning and performing the literati-feminine voice, with its themes

42Gu Ruopu 1637: 2/3a, collected in Wulin wangzhe yizhu, Ding Bing, ed., 1897.
of seclusion, longing, and the intimation of the lover's entry into the inner rooms, an internalization of the gaze of the masculine subject.43

_Sent to a Young Lady of the Household_

A fair woman sits through the long night
by the vacant window, her silk-stringed lute
lies crossways, lingering chords drift away,
cool dew comes to dampen her dress.
She rises to look at the moon in climbing vines
that cast their shadow on the courtyard stair.

The following quatrain by Chen Huanyong is, in contrast, structured by the pleasure of the woman's gaze. The lowered blinds, incense, and moon identify the boudoir scene of the literati-feminine voice, but from the first the feminine voice in this poem retains the gaze, the viewing position of the subject/reader who announces in the title that it is she who is "watching." The gaze, controlled by her, moves from the inside (upward, with the incense), exits to outside (downward, with the snowflakes), and in this circular movement the scene expands from the confinement of the room to the larger sphere of the natural world with sky and earth.44

_Sitting Alone and Watching the Snow_

Blinds lowered, I sit deep within, my whole body at ease;
quietly I watch aloeswood smoke rise from the _boshan_ censer.
Up in the sky, who has set a hand to tidying up the moon?
A sifting of jade flakes fills the human world.

Ming and Qing women opened up new topical territory for _shi_ poetry by extending its range of emotions to include those associated with family relationships, especially parent-child relationships. A poet may write of missing her mother or father (feelings especially pertinent to the situation of a woman raised entirely within family walls who then enters a completely new set of family relationships within the household of her husband) or she may speak of her own siblings or her children. New topics in poetry reflect those experiences women regarded as important in their own lives, experiences not necessarily shared with men. In the addition of new codes of valuation to the language of poetry, evidence in this poetry of relationships between women—based on bonds of kinship or friendship—is marked, and immediately strikes one as new and important in the literature of record. It is interesting to recall

43The poet is Shen Huiyu, whose poems are collected in _Cai Dianqi_ 1844: 4.7/3b.
44_Cai Dianqi_ 1844: 1.6/5a.
here that while in the collections of male poets friendship is one of the most important topics (as one of the five Confucian relationships) and while there are even a small number of poems written by men about their children (of which those by Bo Juyi are probably the best known), the poetry by women preserved by medieval male anthologists is almost entirely devoid of reference to children or to relationships with other women. Preferences of the anthologists based upon the tastes of the male readership and assumptions about the "appropriate" range of subjects for women's poetic voices are important determinants here. The following two poems illustrate the voice of the mother, first in meditative grief and next in playful address to her son.45

Waiting for the tide to rise at Iris Banks
I think of my daughter who died.
Aground in shallow water
sun halfway in decline
I fasten the line,
free to enjoy the view
that seems to reach to the horizon.
Mist thickens in bamboo on the shore
where doves croon for rain,
low tide exposes roots of rushes
as small crabs cluster on the sand.
Sad thoughts start to unreel,
snare me like tangled vines.
When time-bound beauty fades and falls,
heart grieves for the broken blossom.
Deeply I loved my little daughter—

45The first poem is by Wang Hui, 18th c., in Shen Deqian 1760: 13/10b-lla. Gu Ruopu wrote the second to her eldest son; it is collected in Cai Dianqi 1844: 1.3/4a. Gu jokingly refers to Yang Zhu, the "hedonist" thinker mentioned in the Zhuangzi and the Mengzi and represented by passages in the later Liezi, as a negative model whose "self-indulgent" (from the Confucian point of view) example might appeal to her son. The model she recommends is Mi Fei (1051-1107), Song dynasty scholar, painter, and connoisseur whose large library of books and paintings was said to have been installed on a barge so that he would never have to be without them, wherever he went. In the opening lines, Gu alludes to the exemplary figures of the lie nü tradition, such as the mother of Mengzi, whose tireless efforts to mould the character and guide the studies of their sons set a standard for women in the performance of their duties as mothers. Gu's tongue-in-cheek treatment of her effort to measure up to model motherhood is a welcome relief from the endless straight-faced accounts of lie nü in historical archives. Nevertheless, in mentioning the blue coverlets, which signify a family heritage of learning handed down from generation to generation, Gu reveals her underlying seriousness in preparing a study for her son. I am indebted to Anthony Yu for my understanding of this image.
often we would moor our boat to sit
together at the rushmat cabin window
counting blackbirds in the evening sky.

Refurbishing a boat for my son Can
to use as a study.
I was always conscience-stricken
before the zeal of those ancient mothers
until I found it, at a scenic spot
beside a bridge where in other days
it used to skirt the woods
following the chaste moon (not like
those craft that cruise the mist
in search of frivolous ladies).
You have long hoped to study
in Yang Zhu’s school, but now
passers-by will see the scholar Mi Fei’s barge.
Don’t mistake it for a pleasure boat
the way I’ve fixed it up
with all those old coverlets
woven of blue silk.

The special thematics of women’s poetry also includes a re-writing of certain topical genres of literati verse. Travel poetry, for instance, in the literati tradition is replete with melancholy nights, homesickness, lonely moorings on the river, and a generally world-weary or elegaic feeling. Although during the Ming and after, literati diaries established travel as one of the ways in which the refined gentleman exercised his capacity for aesthetic appreciation and his interest in history, still the normative shi lyric on travel does not feature a speaking subject who relishes the open road. Women writers on travel themes, on the contrary, may regard travel in a far more positive way. In the following poem by Wang Hui, one of a set of three, a woman’s experience of travel as liberating, as freedom from confinement in space, is figured in the opening lines, where the speaker loses her sense of “near and far,” and then becomes intensely aware of the openness and endlessness of the road. It is interesting to note that the mountains, coded masculine in China, draw apart as she approaches to pass through, while the stream, coded yin or feminine, finds its way secretly under the cover of thick foliage.46

46Shen Deqian 1760: 31/9a.
On the Shanyin Road

When I exit the city
from the watchtower gate
I lose completely
all sense of spatial limits,
passing ten miles through
the cool shade of the hills.
Water and land rise to view
by turns and sink away;
my course lengthens out
open and endless.
Hills and mountaintops draw apart,
each contour like no other;
bamboo and trees interlace
making dense forest.
Who would know
under this impenetrable growth
a stream is gliding through?
On the stone bridge
the road is obvious,
then I round a bend
and confuse east and west.
No one else in sight
here in the mist
hushed, alone
mountain flowers so red.

The sense of discovery expressed in Wang’s description extends to the final lines, which evoke a feeling of privacy in which the epiphanic discovery of the red wildflowers on the mountain provides a correlative image for the speaker at this moment.

Another example of the re-writing of a conventional literati topical genre involves the dao wang, or elegy for a deceased wife. This topical genre has well-established topoi which individual poets arrange to suite their own needs. These include: imagining the deceased as a xian, an immortal who could not stay long in the human world; referring to the burial and to the springs underground where the dead mysteriously go; figuring the absence of the deceased in the domestic setting; figuring the “presence” of the absent deceased in objects and elements of the natural world; references to the past, memories; images of the sorrowing, bereaved husband or children; allusions to Pan Yue, third century writer of model dao wang poems; and a universalizing, reconcil-
ing closure. In creating their own emphases, individual writers might include unusually long “memories” sections (as in Tang poet Yuan Zhen’s elegy for his wife)\textsuperscript{47} or turn “memories” into confessional expressions of guilt, or describe desperate feelings of grief at the site of burial.\textsuperscript{48} The formulaic nature of these poems made it possible for poets to write them on behalf of bereaved friends, and we have such poems by both men and women. The three \textit{dao wang} poems by Tang courtesan/Daoist Yu Xuanji require her to assume the position of the grieving husband as she writes on behalf of men.\textsuperscript{49} Gu Ruopu, widowed in 1619 at the age of twenty-eight (\textit{sui}), waited for twenty years before she wrote an elegy for her husband in seven stanzas (\textit{shou}). Comparing her treatment to the literati models, it is relatively easy to see where she has departed from the conventional topoi, and to what effect. First, let us look at examples of literati versions of the \textit{dao wang} by Pan Yue and Bo Juyi.\textsuperscript{50}

\textit{Lament for my Dead Wife}

Winter and spring gradually slipped away,
And cold and summer’s heat went suddenly by.
This lady has gone home to the Lonely Springs,
The heavy earth’s eternal dark divides us.
Who is there who can know the grief I feel?
What does it profit me to linger here?
I did my best to respect the court’s commands,
To busy my mind I went back to my old routine.
But I look at my house and think of her again,
I walk through its rooms and the past comes back to me.
No sign of her through the curtains of my bed,
Yet her brush and ink have left their traces still.
Her ambient fragrance lingers in the air,

\textsuperscript{47}For Yuan Zhen’s elegies, see Cao Yin 1707: 404; 1960: 6/4509 ("Qian bei san shou"), 6/5411 ("Meng jing"), 6/4515 ("Gan shi"), and 6/4511-12 ("Jiangling san meng"). Though Yuan Zhen does not use titles containing the phrase \textit{dao wang}, his poems make use of the topoi for the elegy. "Meng jing" (Dream of the Well) is unusual, however, in developing an allegory in which a pitcher in the dream well (wells are associated with wifely devotion and faithfulness) represents his wife, appearing to the lost and thirsty dreamer but then disappearing back into the well before the dreamer, who is set upon by wild dogs, can drink.

\textsuperscript{48}See the \textit{dao wang} by Qiao Chunglie, a Qing Hanlin scholar, in Shen Deqian 1760: 22/10a, where the author clearly struggles with a sense of guilt over his absence when first his son died, then his wife.

\textsuperscript{49}Yu Xuanji’s three \textit{dao wang} pieces are in Cao Yin 1707: 804; 1960: 11/9050, 9053.

Some things of hers are hanging on the walls.
Sometimes I forget and think she is still alive,
Then it all comes back; I am shocked into grief again.

The remainder of the poem continues with memories and the image of the sorrowing bereaved husband. Here is Bo Juyi's shorter piece:

\textit{Elegy for a deceased wife}
\textit{(written on behalf of Xue Tai)}

A \textit{wutong} tree half dead,
his body old and sick,
every thought of her
in the Springs under heavy earth
is a wound to his spirit.
He takes the little ones by the hand
and leads them home in the night.
The moon shines coldly in empty rooms
where he does not see her.

Pan's poem series makes use of most of the topoi; Bo's emphasizes the figure of the bereaved, his friend, returning from the burial ground. The absence of the wife is figured in the empty rooms, the objectless gaze of the husband, and in the image of his leading the children home, since normally they would be in the charge of their mother. The next poem is by the Qing woman poet Dai Lanying, who writes of her deceased husband. She too figures absence, in the image of the children waiting. Dai does not depart from literati conventions for this topic.\textsuperscript{51}

\textit{Elegy for my deceased husband}

Departing orioles in evening sunlight
sing their melodious song;
our destiny together, a brief dream
in which the dust weighed lightly,
is cancelled. My heart aches for
the children, uncomprehending in their grief,
still wearing hempen clothing
waiting for father to come home.

Translations of all seven poems in Gu Ruopu's \textit{dao wang} are given here, since they are structured as a series, and her particular way of negotiating with the

\textsuperscript{51}Hongmeige zhuren and Qinghuilou zhuren 1922: 1/206.
literati conventions for this subgenre may be seen in that context.52

_Elegy for my deceased husband_

I. Shadows of the plane tree
   attenuate, the moon still low.
   Whose jade flute plays on
   its song making free with
   currents of early autumn cold?
   It calls me from my bed in this dark wing
   and takes me to your study
   where books and lute are cold.
   Blowing long into the night
   it breaks the crystals of autumn frost.

II. Day after day, toward the mountains
    straining eyes to see—
    where beyond the clouds
    can I discover the immortal ones?
    For all I know, my love
    lives there at the fountainhead
    in their hidden world,
    forgetting how he came
    on his fragile, leaf-like boat.

III. For twenty years your books and sword—
     spidersilks and dust,
     but the fine trees you planted before the hall
     have new leaves.
     I sketch your likeness and then,
     foolish as ever,
     softly whisper to the person in the picture.

IV. Flowerlike lamps with orchid-scented oil
    attend the pursuit of learning and letters.
    In early autumn pistils of cassia bloom
    are utterly, brilliantly beautiful.
    What remains to me are the pleasures
    of lute, books, and “the three paths.”
    What need to search for bright clouds
    of pink blossom reflected in a stream?

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52Gu 1637:3/1b-2a.
V. Like piles of snow, layers of ice they were impenetrable, then as we returned, the undercurrents began to flow and ripple. The clear tones of emerald lutestrings are no different from those of long ago; beautiful as ever, the landscape still waits for the old friend’s return.

VI. I remember when with your own hands you planted and nurtured these banana trees, and I write a new poem, trying to outdo the “Summons to the Soul” of Chu. As I chant the poem til the moon falls and the water-clock runs out, tears mix with cold dew soaking my thin silk dress.

VII. Lithe and slender branches of the willow—an autumn wind sends their green through the window curtain. When I was young, my brushtip had the finest point; now it’s worn. Today what use are fine words except to let this idled heart cling tight, as willow floss clings to mud.

Gu’s series has a double agenda. It incorporates many of the subgeneric conventions of the dao wang, such as immortalizing the deceased, figuring absence, and the image of the bereaved, but at the same time it complicates these with an insistent image of the bereaved that links her grief, faithfulness, and love for her husband with her literariness. Gu’s self-presentation as a widow who is a writer represents not only a personal re-working of the conventions for the elegy, it also dramatizes Gu’s revision, during her long life as an intellectual and writer, of the role of wife to include xue and wen, learning and literature. In the first poem of the series, the flutesong the speaker hears signifies the unarticulated thoughts and emotions, or memory, objectified. Emotions stirred by the flute bring her from bed to study, where all night memories of her husband are revived, and she begins to write this series of poems. The flutesong/memories infused with emotions break or destroy (temporarily) the “autumn frost”—a phrase in which “autumn” conventionally refers to middle age, and “frost” (shuang) evokes her widowhood (also
pronounced shuang). Poem two immortalizes the deceased and presents the speaker as still “looking” for him (with a suggestion that she would join him in death?). Her husband, she says, may have strayed away to the Peach Blossom Spring community, Tao Qian’s rural utopia hidden deep in the mountains. In the centuries since Tao’s “Record of Peach Blossom Spring,” treatments of this theme in painting and literature, including that by Tang poet Wang Wei, have gradually transformed the village into a community of immortals. Poem three figures the absence of the deceased by association: the tree he planted flourishes, though he himself is gone. She draws a sketch of him and converses with it, in his physical absence, an inventive variation on the topos of absence which implicates one of the artistic skills taught to daughters in gentry families.

Poem four stands at the center of the series as a significant departure. It presents the bereaved as quietly accepting, even content, living her life with the satisfactions of books, music, and garden, not seeking perfection or an ideal, nor any further “utopia”—in the image of the reflection of pink blossoms on a stream she again invokes the Peach Blossom Spring. Rather, in the reference to the “three paths” she chooses another of Tao Qian’s scenarios, the this-worldly but rustic dwelling-place of the reclusive Mr. Five Willows, in whom she seems to find a model she can adapt to her own circumstances. In his autobiographical essay, Tao describes himself as living at leisure, pursuing the pleasures of reading and often forgetting everything else in his delight, without any regard for recognition by the world. This poem might be read as expressing reconciliation with her solitude as a widow. Earlier in the series she had placed her husband in Peach Blossom Spring; now she has moved well beyond “looking toward the mountains,” and no longer considers death as a way to join her husband, finding perhaps that although having suffered a crucial loss, she has nonetheless found her consolations. (“What need to search for bright clouds of pink blossom . . . ”). The serenity of this poem seems to speak for itself, with its suggestion of the woman at her desk under the lamplight.

As if to counter the composure and ease at the center of this series, the author in the next piece invokes the memory of an excursion with her husband. There is here an echo of a poem by Li Qingzhao, major Song dynasty poet, describing an excursion by boat with her husband on a lotus pond (a poem in which some readers have read a hidden reference to love-making). Gu does not linger on the memory, but returns to the present, affirming that the lutestrings (here, again, a signifier of the feminine in an intimate relationship) and the landscape have not changed and are still there awaiting the absent

one who used to enjoy intimacy with them.

Poem six is again remembrance, with reference to the trees her husband planted, linked closely with the image of the bereaved figured doubly as a writer and as the idealized lonely woman of literati poetry. Grief is expressed in the image of the speaker chanting all night a poem she has written to call back the soul of her husband. Writing, she tries to “outdo” the soul-summons poems of the canonical Songs of Chu (Chu ci). Closing, she speaks in the conventional voice of the literati-feminine longing woman; frozen (almost literally) in an attitude of faithful waiting and unfulfilled desire which has had countless literary antecedents, she stands alone outdoors long into the night while dew and tears soak her clothes. It is difficult not to read this piece as a mixture of somewhat contradictory attitudes: on the one hand, a confidence which leads Gu to claim she might outdo a traditional “masterwork,” and on the other a willingness to inhabit a system of signification which conventionally narrows and limits the feminine image to the status of specular object. The conjunction of these two modes here points interestingly to the problematics of self-representation for women and again raises the question of how women writers negotiated the realities of their literary marginality and their highly determined social roles with their personal intellectual and literary identities. Individual responses cannot be expected to resolve themselves neatly into positions such as “resistance” or “conformity.” We can expect, rather, to find a range of differing and often internally shifting or inconsistent positions among women writers, as they continually encountered opportunities within the constraints of their local environments to exercise their abilities and to satisfy their aspirations and needs.

The final poem in Gu’s series foregrounds, again, her writing. In this image of the bereaved, she denies that her writing has any use except in poems such as this, which help her to cling to the memory of her husband. Without seeking to diminish the sincerity of Gu’s feelings, we can yet see that this is a very politic statement for a gentry class woman whose identity is so distinctly invested in writing. Her status as a virtuous wife can, strictly speaking, be threatened if she appears to place a very great importance on something which does not pertain to family and husband, and is in fact an activity not included at all as a part of women’s traditional roles. Despite the tacit approval granted to the literary activities of some gentry women by late Ming and early Qing, Gu must still give an appearance of understanding the priorities and proprieties of her life as a wife, mother, and widow. This is

54The “Zhao hun” (Summons of the Soul) and “Da zhao” (Great Summons) were probably based on shaman songs of the third century B.C.E., though the precise dating for these pieces is in dispute. See Hawkes 1985: 221-23.
achieved in the final poem. Throughout the series, however, as she links her writing to her conjugal faithfulness and love, the reader might seriously ask which is the real subject of these poems—her husband or her writing? The writer here establishes a voice and identity that asserts itself as one able to control self-representation and language, moving flexibly in and beyond topoi and back again. The topos is her means; her subjectivity is not an effect of the topos.

In another topical genre, one devoted to the Double Seven Festival on the seventh night (qi xi) of the seventh lunar month, an example of a departure from literati voicing and convention in a poem written by a woman may be briefly noted here. The Festival is a family occasion; members gather outdoors under the moonlight, eat fruits and sweets, and look at the stars while they imagine that two personified stars, the Weaver Girl and the Herdboy (Vega and Altair, respectively) are meeting as lovers on this one night, after having been separated for an entire year by the Sky River (Milky Way). The lovers are helped by blackbirds that form a bridge over the river. This festival is not only a lover's night, it also is an occasion when women petition the Weaver Girl to bestow upon them skill at needlework. Seventh Night poems constitute a topical subgenre in shi poetry, and such poems conventionally represent the familiar literati-feminine woman alone watching the heavens and longing for the absent lover. Women, too, may perform the topic in this way (see a version by Ming poet Wu Xiao).\(^5\) The literati-feminine voice and image, while they suggest the woman's frustrated desire, contain and aestheticize the element of complaint, preserving it as an object for the appreciation of the literati readership. Qing poet Xu Quan, however, has found a very different voice for this topic, one which makes use of the occasion of the Festival to express her bitterness at the fact that "cleverness" (qiao, here possibly used to refer both to skill with the needle and ability or intelligence generally) cannot give her any control over the things important to her in her life.\(^6\)

*Seventh Night*

In the seventh month, on the seventh night in household after household, they gaze up to see the Weaver Girl and the Herdboy. Though the spiritual beings are not visible, a chilly breeze whistles and sighs. I suspect that the Weaver Girl's cleverness has turned to something like stupidity,

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\(^5\)Hongmeige zhuren and Qinghuilou zhuren 1922: 2/4b.
\(^6\)Shen Deqian 1760: 31/36a-b.
since the barrier between east and west 
is too difficult for her to fly over. 
Each year one crossing, one separation—
and down through the ages, Sky River waters moan. 
No need to beg for skill from the Weaver Girl, 
as if the gift of cleverness will put an end to sorrow. 
Haven’t you seen the wife in the east neighbor’s family, 
the family that labors in the fields? 
He plows, she brings food, always they are together; 
morning and evening they share pain and delight, 
ever parting until their hair grows white. 
And have you not seen the west neighbor’s gifted girl 
whose husband presents himself in halls of jade? 
The whole year long they do not see each other; 
anxiously she waits and watches, 
grieving on the bridge over the river. 
Drops of jadewhite dew gather soundlessly, 
the night is clear and still, 
her gaze fixes hopelessly on the tray 
where a spider weaves its silks. 
I don’t know whose house cleverness will descend upon, 
I’m only afraid that a person too clever 
will grow old before her time. 
So I send this message to all the foolish daughters in the world: 
You are better off clumsy and simple— 
Don’t make an effort to be clever!

Xu re-contextualizes the topos of the woman grieving in the night for the 
absent lover/husband, from the point of view of a woman’s experience. The 
iconicity of the image is mocked or destroyed as a result, and in her version the 
message that the preciosity of daughters bodes ill for their future happiness (a 
cliche found in biographies of literary women from at least the Tang through 
the Qing) is re-presented by a woman, with bitterness and grim significance. 
Xu herself committed suicide by hanging because of difficulties with members 
of her husband’s family.57

57I am indebted to Paul Ropp for calling to my attention a custom associated with 
Seventh Night celebrations which bears on the interpretation of the image of the spider 
in this poem. It appears that in some regional celebrations of this festival, women placed 
a spider in a bowl or tray, and if the spider spun an unbroken web it was considered 
auspicious, a sign that the sought-for skill in needlework would be granted by the Weaving 
Girl to the petitioner. In this poem, though the speaker is fortunate to possess skill,
Voicing the Feminine: Constructions of the Gendered Subject

Finally, an illustration will be given of the phenomenon of the shifting voice, a feature sometimes characterizing voice in friendship poems by women addressed to other women. The “instability” of women’s voices in literature by women has been discussed in critical contexts outside China; the positions implicated in the shifting of voices have been defined variously, depending on the concerns of the critic. However there has been some agreement that shifting identifications of the narrative voice with respect to characters in fiction or the shifting of discursive positions, or rhetorical roles, within texts by women writers tell us something about both the way in which women experience identity and the ways in which it may be necessary for them to reform masculinized language and literary structures in order to produce voices which are capable of articulating difference. What one finds in many of the late Ming and Qing poems written by women and addressed to women is admixtures of the literati-feminine and the literati-masculine voices from both friendship poetry and love poetry, with shifts that can make the voice of the speaking subject seem strangely ambiguous to modern readers. It may be that, in the absence of a traditional model for the feminine voice in address to women, speakers employ elements of a variety of voices—the literati voice of friendship to convey sympathy and common interests, the literati lover’s voice to convey admiration, and the literati-feminine to express loneliness and a longing for the company of the absent friend. The impression of shifting identities can perhaps best be understood as a result of the unstable voicing symptomatic of the search for a feminine voice of friendship by women, at a stage in which the dominant models are still those of the literati tradition. The use by women writers of the literati-lover’s voice as an instrument to

the loneliness of her own life belies the common belief that such skill or cleverness will guarantee success and happiness in her role as wife. In the biographical notice to Xu’s anthologized poems (Cai Dianqi 1844, quoted in Hu:1985:570) one reads, “she was skilled at embroidery and especially good at ‘outline’ (baimiao) technique.” According to the Qing shi qao yiwenzhi, “She was a daughter of the scholar Xu Zhenhuang and wife of the jinshi Cui Mo. Unsuccessful in her relationship with her father- and mother-in-law, she hanged herself.” (Hu 1985:570) Ironically, Xu’s biographical notice in Shi Shuyi 1074: 4/9a carries the same common trope about a father’s anxiety over the inauspiciousness of his daughter’s literary precocity that Xu herself may be playing upon in this poem. When she wrote a surprisingly good poem at the age of seven, her father is supposed to have said, “This child is pure and noble-minded. I just feel pity that she will undoubtedly enjoy little happiness in life.” Whether apochryphal or not, this episode and the information that Xu was a skilled embroiderer makes her poem appear strongly autobiographical and portentous. Far from the stylized feminine of conventional qi xi poems, this is a voice of anguished protest that turns against its owner.

58 Jones 1990 illustrates how seventeenth-century women in Europe sought to construct their textual subjects by creating “hybrid” voices out of various literary voices already gendered as masculine. See also Gardiner 1980.
express admiration for a same-sex addressee indicates that women could appropriate the idealized representations of women in literati poetry and expect that their same-sex readers would read this discourse to signify the love and admiration of a friend rather than that of a lover. The context of reading determines that sexual interest is “read out” and friendship is read in; the coding is reinterpreted. In some cases, the use of the literati lover’s voice by a woman in address to another woman can signal a more intimate, possibly sexual, love relationship, as with the poet Wu Zao (fl. 1825), who speaks to other women as a lover. The presence of a lover’s voice and the tropes of literati love poetry, however, cannot invariably be taken to indicate more than close friendship in poems by women.

The following poem by early Qing writer Chai Jingyi uses the lover’s voice to express friendship, while also employing conventional literati friendship voicing in the last lines. This poem also illustrates another characteristic of women’s friendship exchanges during the Ming and Qing: the frequent inclusion of references to literary interests and poetry writing.59

Sent to Gu Qiji

My fair one’s home is set on Westlake’s brow where a thousand lotus lean in heavy dew. I have a vision of your graceful ways, but you are so remote, beyond my reach and sighs keep coming, heart so sad. If only I could move, become your neighbor— morning and evening we’d spend all our time together— but we’re far apart.

When unexpectedly I hold your beautiful letter, one page I’m happy as all the Ying people madly singing “White Clouds,” my inch of heart in tune with yours, two different places, one longing deep.

The antique lute above my bed is silent, out of tune

59 Cai Dianqi 1844: 1.8/4a. Chai Jingyi and her sister Zhenyi were also known as painters. See Weidner, Laing, et al. 1989:108-09 for discussion and a plate showing a section of a collaborative painting by the two women.
but on stormy days I hear it
moaning like a dragon.
And now that autumn's here
we brew chrysanthemum wine, but
when I pour a cup to drink alone
it isn't sweet to my taste.
Besides, it is so depressing
to see the willows dying here.
I want to ask an understanding friend
to come talk literature with me.
Could your perfumed carriage stop
at my bramble gate, perchance?

Conclusion
The feminine subjects constructed for Chinese lyric poetry by literati writers were largely products of Confucian gender ideology, with its equation of chastity and silence and its separate spheres for women. Literati poets fashioned representations which answered to their desire for pleasure or consolation. The feminine voices of entertainers and courtesans were more expressive of forms of feminine subjectivity, but their thematic range and their self-presentation remained linked to the identification of women with the body and sexuality, consistent with their address to the expectations of a male audience and readership. By the seventeenth century, historically and socially a period ripe for the crossing of boundaries, including class and gender boundaries, new feminine textual subjects were taking shape, new feminine voices were becoming audible. These voices were being produced by women writers who occupied a range of social stations as entertainers, maidservants, merchants' daughters, women of local gentry families, and the wives, daughters, or concubines of prominent officials and literary figures. Some were daughters who were given good literary educations prior to marriage, some were partners in companionate marriages, some were widows surviving in their husbands' households. Often women writers studied and wrote as members of a community of related and/or acquainted women who mentored and fostered literary activities leading in many cases to recognition within families, localities, and occasionally beyond. Less often, women writers whose works remain were trained courtesans or gifted women from the mercantile or service sectors of society. Perhaps, in contrast to the case for the Tang, processes of text preservation in this period favored literati-class women and those of other classes who were closely associated with them. The formation of networks of women with literary interests, the anthologizing of women's
poetry, the editing and publishing of collected writings, the production of critical writings referring to this poetry, and the collaboration of men and women on literary projects were all aspects of women's literary culture in the late imperial period for which there are no known counterparts on anything like the same scale for earlier periods. Likewise, the appearance of this new feminine textual subjectivity and its voices attests to, if not an alteration in the official view of women's proper roles, at least a change in practices, and particularly it suggests that there was in some educated families an alteration in the profile of the ideal wife and in the way in which young women were prepared for marriage.60

The appearance of new feminine voices is certainly related in some respects to the full emergence in the Ming of a literati lifestyle emphasizing refined taste, romantic companionship between men and women (including, notably, husbands and wives), and other values and practices which in their most extreme form Patrick Hanan and Charlotte Furth have referred to as the libertine life of late Ming, epitomized by the multitalented Li Yu.61 Furth observes that the aestheticized or artistic lifestyle in a somewhat less extravagant form is still well represented in the romantic memoir during the Qing, works such as Mao Xiang's seventeenth-century Recollections from Shadows of Flowering Plum Lodge (Yingmeian yiyu) and Shen Fu's early nineteenth-century Six Records of a Floating Life (Fu sheng liu ji). Mao's account of the literary and aesthetic activities shared with his concubine Dong Xiaowan, and Shen's description of his wife Yun and their shared literary interests provide further insights, even if at one remove, into the identity formations and aspirations of literate and literary women in what Furth describes as an "artistic and hedonistic counterculture among wealthy residents of major urban centers" in the Qing dynasty.62 The new feminine voices show the reader that many women in the late imperial period had a strong desire to participate in

60Mann 1991 discusses the training of women for marriage in mid-Qing, suggesting a tension between the increased interest of literati men in matters of women's virtue and the increasing literacy and social freedom of governing class women. Mann proposes that through their discourse on women and women's virtue, literati men were able to channel their anxieties over challenges to the integrity of class boundaries in a social structure increasingly shaped by commercial wealth. With women as staunchly moral guardians of the family and teachers of the succeeding generations, the family would be secure against the erosion of class arrangements. Ironically, many women contributed to perceptions of a changing order through behavior that departed from the idealized models, such as writing and being recognized even beyond the family sphere for literary gifts. And it may be that some literati families unwittingly encouraged these departures in preparing daughters for a marriage market in which the refined pleasures and practical advantages of a companionate marriage had come to seem attractive.


62See Furth 1990: 202-06.
the literary culture which occupied such a prestigious place in governing class life. Self-presentation in women's writings characteristically includes prominent references to reading, writing, and literary activities shared with other women and men. Perhaps the most striking evidence of this desire is the degree to which women exploited opportunities within their extended families and circles of acquaintance to pursue literary and intellectual activity, to form clubs, associations, and networks comprised of women with a common interest in study and writing. These supportive linkages provided mentors and critics, a readership, well-disposed editors and preface writers for editions of collected works. They perpetuated an array of common practices which gave this activity by women the status of a literary culture, one parallel to that of the literati, while at the same time it remained, for governing class women, almost entirely within the domestic setting. Publication and limited circulation of women's writings were possible only with the support and assistance of a man of authority in the household.

For women with strong intellectual and literary aspirations, the old rules of conduct and the new demands and opportunities, potentially in conflict, required rationalization and negotiation. Many women were obviously willing to live with this complexity, for such a situation could bring also personal satisfaction, a valued dimension in their relationships with other women and men, praise, and a share in that particular form of immortality conferred through the writing of literature in China.

Glossary

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Poetry by women of the mercantile class, such as Wu Zao, does not seem to be better preserved than poetry by women in literati families, though their lives were, in some cases, characterized by greater freedom of association. Poetry by courtesans and entertainers not associated with prominent literati seems to be least well preserved; the new levels of literary activity centered upon the works of literati women, and class bias often worked to keep poetry by "public" women out of anthologies of women's shi poetry.
Chai Jingyi 陈景仪
Chai Zhenyi 陈甄仪
Chen Huanyong 陈晓永
Chen Yingxing 陈应行
Chen Yun 陈芸
Chu ci 蕭辞
chu shi 歙士
Cui Mo 岐模
“Da Li Jilan” 答李季蘭
“Da zhao” 大招
Dai Lanying 戴蘭英
Dali 大麗
dao wang 悼亡
Dezong 德宗
Ding Bing 丁丙
Dong Gao 董诰
Dong Xiaowan 董小婉
duan xuan 断絃
Dunhuang 敦煌
Furen ji 婦人记
“Fuxue” 婦學
“Gan shi” 感逝
gongti 宫體
Gu Jingwan 魏靜婉
Gu Qiji 妻敬姬
Gu Ruopu 妻若璞
Gu Zhiqiong 妻之瓊
Guangling 廣陵
Gui wan yin 閣婉吟
Guizhong ya ji 閣中雅集
Guo Maoqian 郭茂倩
Guochao guige shichao 國朝詞閣詩钞
Haizhou 海洲
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<td>清代閤秀詩抄</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qinghuilou zhuren</td>
<td>清慧樓主人</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quan Tang shi</td>
<td>金唐詩</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ren 人</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shangguan Waner</td>
<td>上官婉兒</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shangguan Yi</td>
<td>上官儀</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Wu 吳
Wu Xiao 吳紹
Wu Zao 吳藻
Wulin wangzhe yizhu
武林往哲遺著
wutong 楸桐
Xi Gong 西公
xian 仙
xiansheng 先生
Xiao Gang 蕭綱
Xiao Tong 蕭統
Xiao xue an shiji chuji 傳富(act)詩集初集
Xie 謝
Xihe 西河
Xin Tang shu 新唐書
Xin Wenfang 辛文坊
xing 興
xing hong 犧紅
xingxing 犧犧
Xu 徐
Xu Can 徐燦
Xu Ling 徐陵
Xu Quan 許權
xu xuan 縄絃
Xu Zhenghuang 許震皇
xue 學
Xue Tai 禧台
Xue Tao 禧瑤
xueshi 學士
Yan Zhenqing 颜真卿
yang 陽
Yang Zhu 楊朱
Yao Xuan 姚鉉
Yin chuang za lu 玲瓏難錄
Ying 郭
Yingmeian yiyu 影梅庵憶語
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