

## Washington University in St. Louis Washington University Open Scholarship

---

Arts & Sciences Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Arts & Sciences

---

Summer 8-2018

# From the Inner Chamber to to the Marketplace: The Reception and Re-Creation of the Woman Writer Ye Xiaoluan

Tian Ding

*Washington University in St. Louis*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/art\\_sci\\_etds](https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/art_sci_etds)

 Part of the [Chinese Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Ding, Tian, "From the Inner Chamber to to the Marketplace: The Reception and Re-Creation of the Woman Writer Ye Xiaoluan" (2018). *Arts & Sciences Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 1669.  
[https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/art\\_sci\\_etds/1669](https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/art_sci_etds/1669)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Arts & Sciences at Washington University Open Scholarship. It has been accepted for inclusion in Arts & Sciences Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Washington University Open Scholarship. For more information, please contact [digital@wumail.wustl.edu](mailto:digital@wumail.wustl.edu).

WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS  
Department of East Asian Languages & Cultures

From the Inner Chamber to to the Marketplace:  
The Reception and Re-Creation of the Woman Writer Ye Xiaoluan

by  
Tian Ding

A thesis presented to  
The Graduate School  
of Washington University in  
partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree  
of Master of Arts

August 2018  
St. Louis, Missouri

© 2018, Tian Ding

# **Table of Contents**

Table of Contents .....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
Abstract.....	v
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: The Formation of Ye Xiaoluan’s Literary Image .....	9
1.1 Ye Xiaoluan the Poetess and Recluse .....	9
1.2 Literary Resurrection.....	12
1.3 New Persona.....	19
1.4 Becoming an Icon.....	23
Chapter 2: The Deconstruction and Consumption of Ye Xiaoluan in Qing Dynasty .....	28
2.1 Ideal Companion .....	30
2.2 Role Model of Women Writers.....	33
2.3 Revived Daughter.....	37
Chapter 3: The Collective Connoisseurship of Ye Xiaoluan’s Inkstone in the Early Modern Period.....	42
3.1 About the Inkstone .....	43
3.2 Inkstone Serendipity: A Case Study of Wang Foyun and His “Yanyuan ji”.....	47
3.3 Paratext: A Public Zone of Interpretation .....	49
Bibliography .....	56
Appendix.....	62

# Acknowledgments

This thesis is not a work of a lone scholar, but a person who is warmly supported by her mentors, friends, and family. I would like to express my very great appreciation to my thesis committee members. Professor Grant has always been an amiable, gracious and caring advisor. She not only shepherded me towards my own research in Chinese women's literature but also sharpened my critical thinking in general through her classes, comments and guidance. Professor Hegel gave me much insightful advice in terms of both my academic and my social life. I greatly benefitted from his rigorous scholarship as much as from his fine personality and unfailing kindness. Professor Newhard offered me a number of very valuable and creative suggestions and ideas and pieces. I am particularly grateful to her for helping me adapt to the new environment during my first year in St. Louis and WashU.

In addition to my committee, thanks should also go to all the professors and staff members who have tutored or helped me. Professor Watt and Professor Copeland offered me precious opportunities to improve my scholarly abilities. Dr. Tobias Zürn was a cordial friend and teacher and I had a lot of fun in his classes. Professor Ma, Professor Miles, and Professor Kleutghen demonstrated various research approaches that I found useful for my own projects. Krystel Mowery kindly navigated me through administrative issues, and our East Asian librarians, Tony Chang and Zhu Wanqiu, were always ready to assist me with finding necessary materials and using library sources.

I am also grateful for having my friends as sources of support. Dou Miao and Zoe Pan, as senior students, provided me lots of good advice regarding all aspects of my scholarly and personal life. Yu Xin and Chelsea Luo selflessly shared many ideas with me from their

historians' perspective, which helped me to shape this thesis from an interdisciplinary view.

Yang Qianran was incredibly helpful and provided much needed moral support.

Finally, I am deeply indebted to my family and my boyfriend for all they have done for me during my life and study. My sincere thanks first go to my great grandmother, Sun Yifan, a brave woman who valiantly endured much much hardship but never gave up. It was she who raised me to be a woman with both aspirations for life and affection for people. My heartfelt thanks also go to my parents. My mother, Yan Hongmin, instructed me with all her knowledge as a professional scholar. My father, Ding Yatao, was a great comfort through all of the frustrations and struggles of my writing. But most importantly, they have always provided me with their steadfast love, care and any possible support. My thanks also go to Luo Chao, who has always been there for me, with all his love and understanding. He is the one who has made my journey especially meaningful and wonderful.

Ding Tian

*Washington University in St. Louis*

*August 2018*

## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

From Inner Chamber to Market:  
Reception and Re-Creation History of the Woman Writer Ye Xiaoluan

by

Tian Ding

Master of Arts in Chinese

Washington University in St. Louis, 2018

Professor Beata Grant, Chair

This thesis focuses on the reception and re-created history of the woman writer Ye Xiaoluan. Emphasis is on the changing literary images and related cultural products created and circulated by members of the literati class from the late Ming Dynasty to the early modern period. I argue the process can mainly be divided into three stages: 1) the formation and iconization of her image among the cultural elite in the late Ming period; 2) the deconstruction and consumption of her images in Qing dynasty; and 3) the substitution and fade-out of her images in early modern period. In the course of the investigation, I am particularly concerned with the subject of the receptive and re-creative activities. Different from previous studies, I find that the subject cannot be simply defined as a collection of single individuals (especially the male individuals who seek to project their desires on women), but more and more presents a trend of collectivism and generalizing. In the concluding part I attempt to explain this phenomenon. I suggest that Ye Xiaoluan in her cultural construction showed a “non-sexual” trait that could not be accommodated in the cultural order of the time, and that the subsequent acts of collective reception and re-creation may have stemmed from the desire to define her in a way that was less transgressive.

# Introduction

Since the mid-Ming Dynasty, due to the development of urban culture, the prosperity of the commercial publishing and the loosening of gender segregation, women's literacy and education began to be popularized and valued, women's living sphere of activity was expanded, and their experience and knowledge were greatly widened.<sup>1</sup> Writing became one of the ways for mid- and late-Ming intellectual women to come out of their enclosed boudoirs and embark upon their artistic and creative pursuits. Also, because the ideology of a so-called “cult of *qing*” was immensely popular during this period, the contemporary male literati in general showed a tolerant and supportive attitude towards women's writing, especially towards the writings that, in their estimation, spontaneously expressed their true emotions and genuine feelings.<sup>2</sup> As a result, seventeenth-century China, especially its economic and cultural center, the Jiangnan region, witnessed a sudden flourish of women's literature.

This thesis focuses on the precocious female writer Ye Xiaoluan 葉小鸞 (styled Qiongzhang 瓊章, 1616-1632), who was the most prominent poetess of the most famous literary family from the Wujiang area of Jiangnan region.<sup>3</sup> Her father was Ye Shaoyuan 葉

---

<sup>1</sup> See Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 29.

<sup>2</sup> The cult of *qing* has been attracting increasing attention from scholars of Chinese literature and culture since 1980s. A partial list of studies that discuss the cult of *qing* includes: Kang-i Sun Chang, *The Late-Ming Poet Ch'en Tzu-lung: Crises in Love and Loyalty*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983. Wai-ye Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment: Love and Illusion in Chinese Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993): 83-256. Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 68-114. Martin W. Huang, “Sentiments of Desire: Thoughts on the Cult of Qing in Ming-Qing Literature,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, Vol. 20 (Dec., 1998):153-184. Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004): 349-350.

<sup>3</sup> On the popularity of the Ye family, see Ji Le 冀勤, “Foreword,” in *Wumengtang Ji* 午夢堂集 vol.1, comp. Ye Shaoyuan 葉紹袁 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju: 2015):1.



紹袁 (styled Zhongshao 仲韶, 1589-1648), an offspring of the distinguished Ye clan of Fenhu who obtained his *jinshi* degree in 1625. He rose to the position of the Secretary of Ministry of Works before retiring. Ye Xiaoluan's mother was Shen Yixiu 沈宜修 (styled Wanjun 婉君, 1590-1635), who was the daughter of a high official named Shen Chong 沈琬 (styled Jiyu 季玉, 1562-1622). One of her uncles was the famous Suzhou dramatist Shen Jing 沈璟 (styled Boying 伯英, 1553-1610). The couple had three daughters and eight sons. The eldest daughter was Ye Wanwan 葉納納 (styled Zhaoqi 昭齊, 1610-1632), the second daughter was Ye Xiaowan 葉小紈 (styled Huichou 惠綢, 1613-1657), and the youngest was Ye Xiaoluan. Compared to the daughters, their sons were much less prominent in Chinese literary history. The most famous one among them was the sixth and youngest son Ye Xie 葉燮 (styled Xingqi 星期, originally Shiguan 世倌, 1627-1703). His book *Yuanshi* 原詩 was considered as one of the major theoretical works on poetry in the early Qing. The close relatives of the family were also highly literate. For example, Shen Yixiu's younger brother Shen Zizheng 沈自征 (styled Junyong 君庸, 1591-1641) was a dramatist. His wife Zhang Qianqian 張倩倩 (1594-1627), who happened to be Shen Yixiu's cousin and best friend, was also a poetess. Because all of their four children died young, Ye Xiaoluan was sent to them as a foster daughter.

Although both the men and women in the Ye family were good at literary creation, the family's literary fame mostly rested on the female members. Their outstanding literary talents became well-known on account of the compilation, publication, and circulation of a family anthology edited by Ye Shaoyuan and titled *Wumengtang Ji* (午夢堂集, *Noon Dream Hall Collections*). As a local gazetteer records:

[Ye] Shaoyuan's official career was unsuccessful, so he resigned and entertained himself with literature and history. His wife Shen Yixiu and three daughters Zhaoqi, Huichou, and Qiongzhang exchanged poems with one another, and everyone had their own literary collections. The family received great praise from around the country.

紹袁仕不遂，歸以文史自娛。妻沈宜修，與三女昭齊、蕙綢、瓊章互相倡和，人人有集，海內艷稱之。<sup>4</sup>

Thanks to the groundbreaking work of such scholars as Kang-i Sun Chang, Charlotte Furth, Ellen Widmer, Patricia Ebrey, Dorothy Ko and Paul S. Ropp, much attention within the field of Chinese studies have been directed to women and to gendered-related issues of the late imperial period since the 1980s.<sup>5</sup> The Ye family, as one of the most representative literary groups of female writers, and Ye Xiaoluan, as one of the most important writing women of the time, have unsurprisingly received the most eager attention from scholars writing in both English and Chinese. In recent decades, there has been a significant increase in dissertations, journal articles, book chapters and monographs dedicated to the research on Ye Xiaoluan. These studies can be roughly divided into two categories. The first examines Ye Xiaoluan as a member of the Ye's women writer group or of the distinguished Ye literary family. These studies investigate the familial background that shaped Ye Xiaoluan's

---

<sup>4</sup> Li Mingwan 李銘皖 et al., comp. *Suzhou fuzhi* 蘇州府志, (Jiangsu shuju: 1883) : 48. 28b-29a.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Kang-i Sun Chang, *The Late-Ming Poet Ch'en Tzu-lung: Crises in Love And Loyalism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983; Charlotte Furth, "Androgynous Males and Deficient Females: Biology and Gender Boundaries in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century China," in *Late Imperial China*, 9 (1988): 1-31; Ellen Widmer, "The Epistolary World of Female Talent in Seventeenth-Century China," *Late Imperial China* 10, no. 2 (1989): 1-43; Patricia Ebrey, "Women, Marriage and the Family in Chinese history," in Paul S. Ropp ed. *Heritage of China: Contemporary Perspectives on Chinese Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990): 197-223; Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994; Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang, ed. *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997; Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997; Ropp, Paul S. "Love, Literacy, and Laments: Themes of Women Writers in Late Imperial China," in *Women's History Review*, 2 (1993): 107-141.

experiences, thoughts and writings, as well as her unique position in this specific living sphere and the female-dominated literary network.<sup>6</sup> The other research focus is the reception history of Ye Xiaoluan, particularly the evolution of her image in later literary works. As Anne Gerritsen insightfully points out, it was her exaggerated fictional image as an ideal woman writer that was firmly preserved in literary history; the poetess' writing itself was not indispensable to her legacy.<sup>7</sup> Scholars who study this topic generally approach this issue from the perspective of feminism and gender study. They emphasize that the reason why Ye Xiaoluan the poetess was overshadowed by Ye Xiaoluan the "phantom" is because her image was largely shaped by the ideals and desires of male literati in transmission.<sup>8</sup> In discussing the construction and transmission of Ye Xiaoluan's literary images, these scholars have

---

<sup>6</sup> See Deng Hongmei 鄧紅梅, *Nüxing cishi* 女性詞史 (Jinan: Shangdong jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000): 182-195; Cai Jingping 蔡靜平, "The Study on the Ye Literary Family of Wujiang in Ming-Qing Transition," 明清之際汾湖葉氏文學世家研究 PhD Diss., Fudan University, 2003; Chen Yujun 陳宇俊, "Wumeng Tang and Its Composition by Feminie," 午夢堂及其女性創作 MA diss., Suzhou University, 2004; Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004): 381-414; Qu Xianghong 曲向紅, "The Study on Women's Poems and Ci-Poems of the Ye's Family in Wujiang," 吳江葉氏女性詩詞研究 MA diss., Shangdong Normal University, 2004; Zhang Qinghe 張清河, "Study on Women Literature of Ye Family in Late Ming Dynasty Wujiang City," 晚明吳江葉氏女性文學研究 MA diss., Wuhan University, 2005; Wu Bili 吳碧麗, "The Cultural Life and Literature of the Late-Ming and Early-Qing Ye Family of Wujiang" 明末清初吳江葉氏家族的文化生活與文學 MA diss., Nanjing Normal University, 2005; Zhao Xuepei 趙雪沛, *Mingmo Qingchu nüciren yanjiu* 明末清初女詞人研究 (Beijing: Capital Normal University Press, 2008): 197-213; Xiaoquan Raphael Zhang, "Marginal Writing in Seventeenth-Century China: Ye Shaoyuan and His Literary Family," PhD diss., Washington University in St. Louis, 2010; Wang Nini 王昵昵, "The Study on Ci-Poems of Ye Xiaoluan in Late Ming Dynasty," 明末女詞人葉小鸞研究 MA diss., Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics, 2013; Chen Yibei 陳怡貝, "The Study on the Poetess of *Wumengtang* Family: A Discussion Centered on Their Responsory Ci-Poems," 午夢堂家族女詞人研究——以酬唱詞為討論中心 MA diss., National Chengchi University, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Anne Gerritsen, "The Many Guises of Xiaoluan: The Legacy of a Girl Poet in Late Imperial China," *Journal of Women's History* 17, no.2 (Summer 2005): 41.

<sup>8</sup> See Anne Gerritsen, "The Many Guises of Xiaoluan: The Legacy of a Girl Poet in Late Imperial China," *Journal of Women's History* 17, no.2 (Summer 2005): 38-61; Lin Jinyu 林津羽, "The Phantom of A Talented Woman: Gendered Writing in the Late-Ming Ye Xiaoluan's *Fanshengxiang*," 才女魅影:晚明葉小鸞《返生香》的性別書寫 in *Zhongji xuekan*. no.4 (2004): 75-97; Meng Yuzhong 孟羽中, "The Study on the Relationship Between the Life and Literature Form of Wujiang Ye Family in the Late Ming and Early Qing Dynasties," 明清之際吳江葉氏家族的生活意態與文體書寫 MA diss., Nanjing University, 2008; Du Guiping 杜桂萍, "The Reach of Poetic Construction and Literary Imagination: On the Literary History Significance of Formation and Evolution of Ye Xiaoluan's Literary Image" 詩性建構與文學想象的達成——論葉小鸞文學形象生成演變的文學史意義, *Wenxue pinglun* no.3 (2008): 56-63.

focused primarily on a reading public whose aesthetics and taste influenced the formation and dissemination of Ye Xiaoluan's story. For example, Anne Gerritsen states: "The mourning father must have been aware of the wider appeal of his daughter's story and was probably largely responsible for the way in which her story became known to later admirers."<sup>9</sup> Lin Jinyu also points out:

Ye Shaoyuan knew well about what people (or, perhaps, the consumers) would love...As a cultural product, women's writing had its own advantage. It satisfied the beautiful imagination of the wistful literati, and at the same time also gave them a feeling of freshness. It was different from the stylized literature before Ming dynasty. Therefore, to some extent, women's literature took a larger market share [than that of the obscure male writers]. As the old saying goes, when the fruit is scarcest, its taste is sweetest.<sup>10</sup>

But unfortunately, apart from these kinds of succinct observations, this market-oriented advocacy—or say, commodification—has not been more fully discussed. This paper aims to provide a more in-depth investigation of this issue.

Indeed, the reception history of Ye Xiaoluan indicates that this poetess did present some features of a cultural commodity. But unlike previous studies, in this essay, I will shift my research focus from presenting each particular reader's reception and interpretation of her to the examination of the larger literary and cultural context in which reader carried out his/her own re-creations of Ye Xiaoluan. I argue that the "commodification" of Ye Xiaoluan not only resulted from male literati's consciously or unconsciously ambiguous attitudes towards female writers, but also was an inevitable consequence of a highly-developed cultural market. This interpretation helps explain why it was the anecdotes and fantasies of

---

<sup>9</sup> Anne Gerritsen, "The Many Guises of Xiaoluan: The Legacy of a Girl Poet in Late Imperial China," *Journal of Women's History* 17, no.2 (Summer 2005): 43-44.

<sup>10</sup> Lin Jinyu 林津羽, "The Phantom of A Talented Woman: Gendered Writing in the Late-Ming Ye Xiaoluan's *Fanshengxiang*," 才女魅影:晚明葉小鸞《返生香》的性別書寫 in *Zhongji xuekan*. no.4 (2004): 90.

Ye Xiaoluan—instead of her actual writings—that received the most enthusiastic attention. It was because in this reading public and consumer group mainly consisting of male cultural elites that what was traded was not the specific literary works (or, its material carrier, books), but something Jean Baudrillard calls “sign value.”<sup>11</sup> Compared with reading Ye Xiaoluan’s work, discussing anecdotes and fantasies about her could obviously provide more evidence of a literati’s erudition, liberalness, and other mental experiences.

In terms of methodology, I will pay more attention to the readership of re-constructions of Ye Xiaoluan’s image by her readers and admirers (the overwhelming majority of whom were (primarily male) members of the cultural elite) and examine how these secondary reader groups influenced and shaped the reader-writers’ attitude towards Ye Xiaoluan. For this purpose, this paper will not only review Ye Xiaoluan’s images in literary history, but also approach this topic from the perspective of art history and antique collection, so as to comprehensively sort out the reception and creation of Ye Xiaoluan as an ideal woman writer from an interdisciplinary perspective.

The structure of this thesis is as follows. Following the introduction to Ye Xiaoluan’s familial background and reception history, Chapter One deals with the primary formation of her literary images. There are four sections in this chapter in total. The first section gives a detailed introduction of Ye Xiaoluan’s life and writing, in which her precociousness, penchant for religion, and early death will be highlighted. The following section shows how

---

<sup>11</sup> “Sign value,” to put in simple terms, denotes and describes the value accorded to an object because of its expression and mark of style, taste, prestige, power and so on. According to Jean Baudrillard, a consumer society is formed when sign value—rather than the functional value and utility—of a certain object becomes the most important part of the commodity and consumption. See Douglas Kellner, “Jean Baudrillard,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/ baudrillard/>>.

her close family dealt with the tragic loss of their beloved daughter and younger sister. Driven by anguish and desperation, the Ye's family built a consensus that was next to a hallucination—that is, they started to believe, at least to eagerly embrace the possibility, that Ye Xiaoluan has become an immortal after death. In the section on the dramatization and concretization of Ye Xiaoluan's divinity, a Master Lezi 泐子 and his planchette session offered specific details about the life of Ye Xiaoluan the immortal in her celestial residence, and thus provided sources for the later re-constructions of Ye Xiaoluan. The section treating Ye Xiaoluan's establishment as a local cultural icon of the time shows how the extended circle of her family was instrumental in the process of responding to the public appeal to an ideal woman writer.

Chapter Two, also focused on Ye Xiaoluan's literary images, turns to the re-creation and de-construction of Ye Xiaoluan in the Qing dynasty. The chapter argues that, thanks to the advocacy of Ye Shaoyuan, Master Lezi, and literary critics such as Qian Qianyi, Ye Xiaoluan has gone beyond being a local icon, entered a pan-Chinese "cultural repertoire" or "toolkit," and become a commonly available image, topos and theme of literature.<sup>12</sup> Correspondingly, an author's use of the image Ye Xiaoluan in his or her writing suggests his or her accessibility to this particular cultural repertoire, which in return indicates the person's social status and cultural prestige. The chapter consists of three sections, which focus on the three primary literary facets of Ye Xiaoluan's image— youthful immortal, beloved daughter, and

---

<sup>12</sup> The toolkit metaphor for culture was developed by Jerome Bruner. See Jerome Bruner, "The Narrative Construction of Reality," *Critical Inquiry* no.1 (Autumn, 1991): 1-21. Ann Swidler richly fleshed how this metaphor reflects people's actual behavior. See Ann Swidler, "Culture in action: symbols and strategies," *American Sociological Review* 51 (1986): 273–286 and Ann Swidler, *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2001. Robert Ford Company first introduced it into Chinese studies. See Robert Ford Company, *Making Transcendents: Ascetics and Social Memory in Early Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009): 40-61.

talented woman—respectively.

An introduction to Ye Xiaoluan's eyebrow-shaped inkstone opens Chapter Three, which investigates the transmission and connoisseurship of material objects (the inkstone and its rubbings) related with Ye Xiaoluan. The chapter analyzes the objects' dual attributes. On the one hand, they were carriers of the sign value of Ye Xiaoluan: examining the transmission of the inkstone provide a means of spreading the image of Ye Xiaoluan. On the other hand, the inkstone and its rubbings were themselves collectible antiques, a special kind of commodity. By observing these issues of consumption and connoisseurship, we can see how the cultural elite circle, not just a single literatus, responded to a cultural commodity in the public sphere. Poems on the inkstone and an album of the rubbings are examined in the first two sections. Other similar objects, such as the portrait of Ye Xiaoluan, are mentioned in section three.

## **Chapter 1: The Formation of Ye Xiaoluan's Literary Image**

In the mid-seventeenth century, Ye Xiaoluan, the famous short-lived female literary prodigy, was often presented as an epitome of ideal womanhood and sometimes valorized as an immortal in both her past life and her afterlife. This may be traced both in biographies and eulogies by her immediate family and in literary reconstructions by contemporary literati. It is true that Ye Xiaoluan had a strong penchant for referring to immortals, dreams and the otherworld in her own writings. But the context in which her works were situated and received must have accounted in part for the formation of her imagined divinity. It is within this larger context that I propose to examine the formation of her literary images. Drawing from the literature by and on Ye Xiaoluan, I consider questions of how she was fashioned as a cultural ideal and why this ideal was necessarily connected with immortality. I focus on two overlapping issues: 1) the potential equivalence between author and work in the context of Chinese traditional literary criticism; 2) the contradiction between female autonomy promised by authorship and heteronomy of their works when it came to compilation, publication and circulation.

### **1.1 Ye Xiaoluan the Poetess and Recluse**

In the official biography of Ye Xiaoluan, every stage of her short life is marked by her extraordinary literary and artistic skills:

Ye Xiaoluan is styled Qiongzhang; another of her style names was Yaoqi. At the age of four, she was able to recite "Encountering Sorrow." At the age of ten, on a cold night, she sat with her mother. The mother said: "The osmanthus so cold, soaked by the clear dew," and she immediately responded with the line: "The maple feels the chill when its red leaves fall." Later, she became well versed in poetry and wrote many beautiful lines. She was also good at playing zither. Her



landscape paintings were of fine resemblance, and her flower-and-butterfly paintings were delicate. She died right before her marriage, at the age of seventeen.

葉小鸞字瓊章，一字瑤期。四歲能誦《楚辭》。十歲侍母宜修初寒夜坐，母云：「桂寒清露濕」，即應對云：「楓冷亂紅凋」。后遂工詩，多佳句，兼善琴。能模山水，寫落花飛蝶皆有致，將婚而歿，年十七。<sup>13</sup>

Although emphasizing precociousness has long become a part of the formula of the biographies of women writers, in this short entry, the detailed description of Ye Xiaoluan's quick-witted response is still highlighted in a rather distinct manner. For the biography writer, literary talent is not only one of the many instruments in Ye Xiaoluan's toolbox, but a supernatural talent endowed to her by her congenital quality. This idea can be traced back to the Song Dynasty. The poet Xie Ximeng 謝希孟 (1156 - 1227) once commented: "The spirit of heaven and earth is not concentrated in men, but in women" 天地英靈之氣，不鐘於世之男子，而鐘於婦人。<sup>14</sup> In the Ming Dynasty, due to the popularity of the cult of *qing* and its impact on literary criticism, female writers' literary talent was often attributed to their inborn sensibility (assuming it was almost impossible to obtain such ability through education and exercise). In this way, literary talents and the spirituality represented by literary talents became the most essential impression of Ye Xiaoluan.

Ye Xiaoluan also shows a strong interest in religion in her writing. This tendency is not manifested so much in her daily life, but in her writings that explore the heavenly land, dreams, and spiritual world. She has many works that describe the liminal state between illusion and reality. One example would suffice. Ye Xiaoluan has a short essay titled "Record

---

<sup>13</sup> Chen Xunxiang 陳[上荀下大]纘 et al., comp. *Wujiang Xianzhi* 吳江縣志 (1747): 37. 56a. The translation refers to Wilt Idema and Beata Grant's translation of "A Biography of My Youngest Daughter Qiongzhang." See Idema, *Red Brush*, 400-406.

<sup>14</sup> Pan Yongyin 潘永因, *Songbai leichao* 宋稗類鈔 in *wenyuange siku quanshu* 文淵閣四庫全書 (Shanghai: Shanghai gujichubanshe, 2003): 17.41a-41b.

of a Night at the Banana Window” 蕉窗夜記. This little piece creates an ambiguous atmosphere from the very beginning. In terms of style, although it appears to be a description of an actual occurrence, it lacks the necessary information such as time and place. The identity of the narrator is even more peculiar. She (in fact, because the subject is often omitted in Chinese traditional writing, we do not even know whether it is “she” or “he”) refers to herself as “Master of the Cooking Dream” 煮夢子. The sobriquet is an obvious allusion to the Tang dynasty tale of the “yellow millet dream.” Idema and Grant summarize the tale as follow: “This famous tale recounts how a young and ambitious scholar stops at a roadside inn and, weary from his journey, falls asleep while waiting for his meal of millet porridge to finish cooking. In his dream he experiences an entire lifetime, including a long and distinguished career and its inevitable end. The student wakes up and, finding that his meal is still not ready, realizes the vanity of all worldly ambition.”<sup>15</sup> Here “yellow millet” functions as a guidepost, which clearly signifies the coming in and out of a dream. The reference to the “yellow millet dream” adds even more ambiguity to the sobriquet “Master of the Cooking Dream.” On the one hand, it can be literally understood as “a man in the cooking dream.” On the other hand, the verb “cook” gives it a trace of self-autonomy, suggesting the author is “the divinity who processes the yellow millet porridge/dream.” It is in this trance-like stage that the story begins. The Master of the Cooking Dream hides herself in a solitary room, devoting herself to poems and wine. When she is about to fall into a drunken sleep, she hears two beautiful girls singing outside her window, whose songs are ethereal and wistful. She decides to strike up a conversation with them, but when she walks into the

---

<sup>15</sup> Idema and Grant, *Red Brush*, 392.

garden, the girls disappear into the banana trees. The Master of the Cooking Dream, being left in a complete bewilderment, asks herself: “Alas, could they possibly have been the numinous spirits of the banana trees?” “Record of a Night at the Banana Window” is representative of Ye Xiaoluan’s writing style. Her language is simple and natural, and the content is novel and spiritual. Literary critics of the Qing dynasty felt the same way about her other works, including her song lyrics:

Qiongzhong does not intend to write grandiose words, so her song lyrics are solid and unsophisticated, without any girly coyness.

瓊章不欲作艷語，故詞格堅渾，無香奩氣。<sup>16</sup>

Some lines are easier to say in vernacular than to write in song lyrics. If one manages to do it, his or her lines can be fresh and beautiful, expressing the richness of meanings with the lightness of efforts. Its taste lingers, making people savor them for a long time. Why it is that only the song lyrics of Su [Shi], Liu [Yuxi], Qin [Guan], Liu [Yong] are considered first-rate?

詞家口頭語，正寫不出在筆尖頭。寫得出便輕鬆流麗，淡處見濃。閒處耐想，足以供人咀味。何必蘇劉秦柳始稱上品？<sup>17</sup>

In short, the penchant for religion, dreams and spirit become a second feature of the poetess Ye Xiaoluan. In the second section we will see what kind of image this literary spirituality will transform into when it is catalyzed by death.

## 1.2 Literary Resurrection

Ye Xiaoluan died on November 22, 1632. After a short but prolific life, at the age of seventeen, the talented young woman passed away in her own bed only five days before her wedding ceremony. Two weeks later, the fifth son of her parents, Shidan 世儋, dreamed that

---

<sup>16</sup> Feng Jinbo 馮金伯, comp. *Ciyuan cuibian* 詞苑萃編 (1805): 7.13a

<sup>17</sup> Wang Duanshu 王端淑, *Mingyuan shiwei chubian* 名媛詩緯初編 (Qingyin tang, 1667): p35. 8b

he saw her in a thatched hermitage between lush pines and flourishing cypress trees. Dressed like a male scholar, Ye Xiaoluan was leaning on a table reading a book, and with cheerful expression on her face. A few days after, the eldest son Shiquan 世佺 also dreamed about his deceased sister. She gave him some cups of pine seeds.<sup>18</sup> The dreams were understood by Ye Xiaoluan's heartbroken mother as evidence of her daughter having become an immortal in paradise.

It was not uncommon for a person with extraordinary talent to transform into a divinity or to be invited to immortal paradise after death in the context of Chinese literature. For example, in *Liuyi Shihua* 六一詩話, Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072) wrote in an anecdotal tone about the story that his contemporary, poet Shi Manqing 石曼卿 (994-1041), had become an immortal:

An old friend of Manqing saw him after his death. He told me it was like falling into a dream, in which Manqing told him that he became a ghost-immortal, a lord who was in charge of Hibiscus City. Manqing invited the friend to pay a visit to his city, but when his friend declined, he left in anger, riding astride on a white mule that ran quickly as if flying. I have heard that Manqing also descended to a scholar's home in Haozhou. Again he invited him, and again his friend declined. Manqing then left him a poem as a memento.

曼卿卒後，其故人有見之者，云恍惚如夢中，言我今為鬼仙也，所主芙蓉城，欲呼故人往游，不得，忿然騎一素驃去如飛。其後又云，降于亳州一舉子家，又呼舉子去，不得，因留詩一篇與之。<sup>19</sup>

In a similar vein, a folk-tale from the Han dynasty describes the scholar-official Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 (c. 160 BCE - c. 93 BCE) as the “Spirit of Venus” who has incarnated as a

---

<sup>18</sup> Shen Yixiu 沈宜修, “A Biography of My Youngest Daughter Qiongzhang,” 季女瓊章傳 in *Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China*, ed. and trans. Wilt Idema and Beata Grant (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), 405.

<sup>19</sup> Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修, *Liuyi Shihua* 六一詩話, in *Wenyuange siku quanshu [dianzi ban]* 文淵閣四庫全書 [电子版] Hong Kong: Digital Heritage Publishing Ltd, 2006.

series of ancient government ministers. The earliest record of this immortality can probably be traced back to a Warring States period work, *Zuo's Commentary on the "Spring and Autumn Annals"* 左氏春秋傳 (*Zuo Tradition* 左傳), in which two ministers discuss the meaning of a proverb "to die but not perish" (*si er buxiu* 死而不朽). Flaunting his prestigious lineage in successive dynasties, the minister named Fan Gai contends that the proverb surely refers to the status of a clan being able to "preside over the covenant of the central domains." But his statement is refuted by the other minister, Shusun Bao, who argues:

From what I have heard, this is called hereditary office and emolument; those do not signify "never perishing." Lu has a former high officer called Zang Wenzhong. He died, but his words have been established among us. Surely this is what is meant! According to what I have heard, "the highest of all is to establish virtue; next to that is to establish achievements; next to that is to establish words." Even with the passage of time these glories are not cast aside. This is what is called "never perishing." As for keeping one's clan name and receiving lineage status, so as to guard one's Ancestral Temple and to maintain sacrifices for generations, there is no domain without such things. Hereditary office and emolument, even at their greatest, cannot be called "never perishing."

以豹所聞，此之謂世祿，非不朽也。魯有先大夫曰臧文仲，既沒，其言立。其是之謂乎！豹聞之，大上有立德，其次有立功，其次有立言，雖久不廢，此之謂不朽。若夫保姓受氏，以守宗祊，世不絕祀，無國無之，祿之大者，不可謂不朽。<sup>20</sup>

In the story, two kinds of "cultural imperishability"—one the sacrificial system built on the action of reproduction, and the other the literary system based on the process of creation and reception—are compared and ranked. The commentary's author also suggests that a man of letters is, arguably, more durable in memory.

The notion of "to die but not perish," however, does not emphasize conserving or

---

<sup>20</sup> Stephen Durrant, Li Wai-yee and David Schaberg, trans., *Zuo Traditions / Zuo Zhuan: Commentary on the "Spring and Autumn Annals"* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016): 1124-1125.

non-vanishing. Rather, it stresses the possibility continually and repeatedly bringing back the dead to the present through the imagination. This process is very similar to the process of literary creation: A writer writes, and at the very moment his thoughts and soul are crystallized; at a certain point in the future it will be received by a reader, through whom the writer's words are revived, activated and related with the present world. Perhaps this explains why many literati are portrayed as immortals in tales and myths. In those stories, their spirits reside in an ethereal paradise forever and happily, and occasionally they would, on their own initiative or not, connect with this world and communicate with people of the current time (It is noteworthy that these contacts usually happen in a liminal space between consciousness and unconsciousness, such as in dreams or during séances). To the extent that these tales and myths capture the narrative elements making up the nature of "cultural imperishability," one may say the stories are themselves a topos in Chinese literary history.

In a word, in the eyes of Chinese, literature and immortality are two sides of the same coin. Emphasizing a person's literary talent is equivalent to emphasizing his or her innate aura, and vice versa. Retaining someone's work is equivalent to continuing life for him or her, and vice versa. In this regard, Ye Xiaoluan's grieving parents engaged in a series of efforts to collect, preserve, and advocate her works, just as they desperately tried to retain the life from which she has departed. Ye Shaoyuan's compilation of *Noon Dream Hall Collection* was inspired primarily by the sudden death of Ye Xiaoluan.<sup>21</sup> In the opening he writes that one of his aims is to include women who exemplify "the three imperishables":

Men have three imperishable feats to accomplish, to establish achievement, virtue, and words. Women also have their own three goals to pursue, which are virtue,

---

<sup>21</sup> Idema and Grant, *Red Brush*, 390.

talent and beauty.

丈夫有三不朽，立功、立德、立言，而婦人亦有三焉，德也，才與色也。<sup>22</sup>

As if responding to this statement, at the end of the preface, Ye Shaoyuan mentions the death of his two daughters: “My eldest daughter Zhaoqi died in her early twenties, due to her melancholy; my youngest daughter Qiongzhang died at the age of sixteen, due to her immortality.”<sup>23</sup> This echo suggests that when Ye Shaoyuan wrote down the first words of *Noon Dream Hall Collection*, when he strived to create this possibility of immortality after death, what he had in mind was not an abstract concept of all gentry women as a whole, but the image of his two deceased daughters.

The title that Ye Shaoyuan gave Ye Xiaoluan’s posthumous anthology, as well as his commentary is also significant. The anthology is titled *Fansheng xiang* 返生香, literally *Perfume that Restores Life*. Shen Zibing 沈自炳, the preface writer, clearly points out the provenance of the image to which Ye Shaoyuan alludes:

It is recorded in *Shizhou ji* that in the Middle Land of the Western Sea, there was a giant tree, whose fragrance could drift hundreds of *li* away. The tree’s name is Restore Soul, also known as Perfume that Restores Life. For the reason that the numinous spirit of the written word does not perish and so, too, bestows life after death, the anthology is titled after this tree.

《十洲記》曰：西海中洲上有大樹，芳華香數百里，名為返魂，亦名返生香。筆墨精靈，庶幾不朽，亦死之后生也，故取以名集。<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Ye Shaoyuan 葉紹袁, “Preface,” in *Noon Dream Hall Collection* 午夢堂集 vol.1, Ji Lei 冀勒 ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2015): 1.

<sup>23</sup> Ye Shaoyuan, “Preface,” in *Noon Dream Hall Collection* vol.1, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Shen Zibing 沈自炳, “Preface,” *Noon Dream Hall Collection* 午夢堂集 vol.2, Ji Lei 冀勒 ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2015): 362. A part the translation is taken from Judith T. Zeitlin’s translation. See Judith T. Zeitlin, “Spirit Writing and Performance in the Work of You Tong 尤侗 (1618-1704),” *T’oung Pao* 84 no.2 (1998): 102-135. *Shizhou ji* 十洲記, also known as *Hainei shizhouji* 海內十洲記 is a compilation of mythic geography. The exact author(s) of the book and the time it was written are still undetermined. It was originally

Ye Shaoyuan's hopes for Ye Xiaoluan's immortality after death are also pinned on his criticism of her work. Again, he regards the expression of Ye Xiaoluan's literary talent as evidence of her innate intelligence and as a manifestation of her divinity. We can see this, for example, in his editorial notes on her "Record of a Night at the Banana Window":

It is indeed unusual that a gentle and graceful beauty from the women's quarters should adopt the name of Master of the Cooking Dream! The significance of the two words "Cooking Dream" is even more novel. How could they signify nothing more than that her dream had already transported her, even before the yellow millet had finished cooking, to the realm of Huaxu. These manifestations of the immortals are too many to all be described in full—and even if you did, people would probably not believe you.<sup>25</sup>

閨中婉孌，自托名煮夢子，固奇。煮夢二字造意尤新，豈黃梁猶未熟一夢到華胥之意歟？種種仙蹤有不可盡述者，述亦人未必信。<sup>26</sup>

His criticism is clearly based on an assumption of a deliberate identification between the implied author and the real author. In this case, the former happens to be an immortal or an unvarying literary image, and the latter his deceased daughter. This kind of identification might be seen as an embodiment of the saying "the numinous spirit of the written word does not perish and so, too, bestows life after death."

Then there is Shen Yixiu's "A Biography of My Youngest Daughter Qiongzhang" 季女瓊章傳. This is the longest, most detailed, and most touching biographical account of Ye Xiaoluan. Shen's piece has three primary aims. One is to review the life of Ye Xiaoluan, listing the various literary and artistic talents she had acquired by each age. The second is the description of her innate spontaneity and purity, which is expressed in the unity of her

---

thought that it was written by the half-real-half-mythical figure Dongfang Shuo of the Han dynasty.

<sup>25</sup> Idema and Grant, *Red Brush*, 394.

<sup>26</sup> Ye Shaoyuan, *Noon Dream Hall Collection* vol.2, 426. Hua Xu 華胥 is said to be an ancient country which only appeared in historical records. Here it refers to the imaginary world where the Tang scholar visits in his "yellow millet dream."



disposition, appearance, literary style, and manner. The third shows a series of strange things that happened to Ye Xiaoluan, which her mother regards as signs that her daughter was actually an immortal.

Yet another effort to immortalize Ye Xiaoluan is Shen Yixiu's compilation of *Yiren si* 伊人思. In the postscript of *Perfume that Restores Life*, Ye Shaoyuan mentions his wife's desire to compile a women writers' anthology:

My wife Wanjun [Shen Yixiu's style name] once told me: "Although our daughter died, she was lucky. She was just one of the myriad women writers in history. Most of their works have been forgotten, and only a few recorded. The number is so small, Alas!...How many beauties have been buried in wild weeds! How many words have been burned into cold ashes! The number is uncountable, Alas! I hope you can help me collect unpublished works [of women writers] all over the country, so that I can gather and compile them in my leisure time. After one or two decades, if I haven't died yet, we can publish an anthology. I think it would be a favorable and happy thing to do.

女雖亡，幸矣。天下奩香彤管獨我女哉，古今湮沒不傳，寂寥罕記者，蓋亦何限，甚可嘆也……埋紅顏於荒草，燼綠字於寒煙，可勝道哉。君當為我博蒐海內未行者，暇時手裒輯之，庶幾未死，積之一二十年之後，總為表章，亦一美譚快事。<sup>27</sup>

Although Shen Yixiu died before she could fulfill her aspiration, from these words, especially the parallel phrases "How many beauties have been buried in cold weeds! How many words have been burned into cold ashes," we can see that, like her husband, she believed that literature has a transcending power to resist the erosion of time.

In a word, it was largely these efforts on the part of her parents to fuse reality and imagination that Ye Xiaoluan acquired the reputation of being an "imperishable poetess." These two sides of her image are so closely intertwined with each other that forged the very

---

<sup>27</sup> Ye Shaoyuan, *Noon Dream Hall Collection* vol.2, 430.

core of the impressions of later generations about her.

### 1.3 New Persona

In the previous section, I discussed the mutually reinforcing relationship between literature and immortality. In this section, I will show how this attribution of immortality develops from an implicit quality to a concrete literary image. In other words, how Ye Xiaoluan transforms from an imperishable poetess to a tangible immortal.

For the creation of the image of Ye Xiaoluan the immortal, the earliest and most important textual source is Ye Shaoyuan's "Xu yaowen" (續窈聞, Sequel to Distant Messages). This piece provides a detailed record of a *fujū* (扶乩, planchette spirit writing) séance hosted by a Master Lezi, in which Ye Xiaoluan's soul was summoned to the scene and put in touch with her family. *Fujū*, or the practice of "wielding the planchette," is an old form of divination in China. In a *fujū* séance, the diviner utters oracles through observing the trace of the moving planchette usually on a plate covered with sand.<sup>28</sup> Later it developed into an "automatic" or "passive" writing, through which otherworldly beings—ghosts, gods, immortals and various combinations thereof—were thought to communicate with this world.<sup>29</sup> Similar to the imperishability promised by literature, as Judith Zeitlin insightfully points out, spirit writing also has the feature of "making the past part of continuous present," so that its "infinite repeatability of authorship becomes proof of immortality."<sup>30</sup> To the extent that the bereft Ye family were intent on immortalizing Ye Xiaoluan, it was not surprising that they drew comfort from holding a planchette spirit writing séance for her.

It is also noteworthy that Master Lezi, the medium who hosted the séance for the Ye

---

<sup>28</sup> Xu Dishan 許地山, *Fujū mixín de yanjiu* 扶箕迷信底研究 (Beijing: Shangwu yishuguan, 1999): 7.

<sup>29</sup> Zeitlin, "Spirit Writing and Performance," *T'oung Pao* 84 no.2 (1998): 102.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

family, was none other than the famous writer and critic Jin Shengtān 金聖歎 (1610 - 1661).<sup>31</sup> As a member of the Jiangnan literati community, Jin Shengtān was clearly familiar with the Ye family's expectation of immortalizing a poetess through preserving her works. Before the actual planchette spirit writing, he asked for the anthologies of Ye Xiaoluan and her deceased sister and offered a consecration ceremony for the books.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, although the séance took the form of an occult practice, it was essentially a part of the integrated literary creation of Ye Xiaoluan.

Jin Shengtān's further shaping of Ye Xiaoluan is mainly manifested in two aspects. The first was to confirm her identity as an immortal, clearly pointing out that she in her previous life was a goddess named Hanhuang 寒簧, the Book Maid of the Moon Mansion 月府侍書女. The second involved the fabrication of an episode of Ye Xiaoluan the immortal being interrogated by Master Lezi before her ordination:

My daughter said: "I wish I could become one of your disciples. I will not go back to my celestial residence anymore."

The Master said: "Whoever wishes to become my disciple must be ordained. Whoever receives my ordination must first go through my interrogation. Let me ask you—Have you ever committed the crime of killing?"<sup>33</sup>

My daughter replied: "Yes, I have."

The Master asked: "How?"

My daughter said: "Once I asked Xiaoyu [a maidservant] to have flower bugs removed; I also damaged a butterfly's wings with my gauze."

---

<sup>31</sup> See Lu Lin 陸林, "Wumengtāng ji zhong Le Dashi qi ren: Jin Shengtān yu wan Ming Wujiang Ye shi jiaoyou kao" 《午夢堂集》中泐大師其人:金聖嘆與晚明吳江葉氏交遊考, *Xibei shida xuebao* 西北師大學報, Vol. 41, No. 4 (July 2004): 22-25.

<sup>32</sup> Ye Shaoyuan, "Xu yaowen," in *Noon Dream Hall Collection* vol.2, 625.

<sup>33</sup> The Master interrogates Ye Xiaoluan regarding her commission of the "Ten Evil Acts" in Buddhism, which are mentioned in *Lotus Sūtra*.

“Have you ever committed the crime of stealing?”

My daughter said: “Yes, I have. My eyes savored the verdancy from someone else’s tree; My ears captured the melody from someone else’s bamboo flute.”

“Have you ever committed the crime of lust?”

My daughter said: “Yes, I have. Indulging in self-admiration of my curved eyebrows, I peeped in the mirror in night; Embroidering my dress with a pair of birds, I had a fetish of spring.”

The Master then interrogated about the four evils of mouth. He asked: “Have you ever lied?”

My daughter said: “Yes, I have. I said I had attained the stage of Very Joyous in my last life; I claimed I was with Saraswati in this life.”<sup>34</sup>

“Have you ever engaged in flattery?”

My daughter said: “Yes, I have. I said a madam’s calligraphies were [as if] made of incense; I said a lady’s words were [as if] carved out of snow.”

“Have you ever been double-tongued?”

My daughter said: “Yes, I have. I gossiped with the moon with cheerful and sorrowful sentences; I commented on flowers with short and long lines.”

“Have you ever said something harsh?”

My daughter said: “Yes, I have. I satirized a swallow in fear that it would draw up my curtain; I cursed the east wind because of my sympathy for a withering flower.”

The Master then interrogated about three poisons of being: “Have you ever felt greed?”

My daughter said: “Yes, I have. I hoarded a thousand volumes of albums; I filled up a garden with all kinds of flowers.”

“Have you ever felt hatred?”

My daughter said: “Yes, I have. I blamed Daoyun for making me knock on my

---

<sup>34</sup> “Very Joyous” is a Buddhist term. It refers to the first stage on the Mahayana bodhisattva’s path of awakening, in which one rejoices at realizing a partial aspect of the truth. Saraswati is a Buddhist goddess.

shriveled inkstone; I envied Cui Hui for letting me take off my jade hairpin.”<sup>35</sup>

“Have you ever felt attached?”

My daughter said: “Yes, I have. I abandoned my jewelry for loving a jade of Han dynasty; I donated my power box to make a coffin for flowers’ spirit.”

The Master was full of praise for [my daughter’s] answers: “From the Six Dynasties up to now, what people like Mister Wen and Mister Li have been pursuing so hard is nothing but a beautiful line. They may even have exhausted their blood and had their beards turn grey for it; once they finally found one, they would be delighted and jealous of their creation for days. You, however, can improvise on beautiful lines in your ordination. If these old men were to hear about this, would they not die of weeping? The only sin you have committed is flattery.”<sup>36</sup>

女云：“願從大師授記，今不往仙府去矣。”師云：“既願皈依，必須受戒。凡受戒者，必先審戒。我當一一審汝，汝仙子曾犯殺否？”女對云：“曾犯。”師問：“如何？”女云：“曾呼小玉除花虱，也遣輕紈壞蝶衣。”“曾犯盜否？”女云：“曾犯。不知新綠誰家樹，怪底清蕭何處聲。”“曾犯淫否？”女云：“曾犯。晚鏡偷窺眉曲曲，春裙親繡鳥雙雙。”

師又審四口惡業，問：“曾妄言否？”女曰：“曾犯。自謂前生歡喜地，詭雲今坐辯才天。”“曾綺語否？”女云：“曾犯。團香制就夫人字，鏤雪裝成幼婦辭。”“曾兩舌否？”女云：“曾犯。對月意添愁喜句，拈花評出短長謠。”“曾惡口否？”女云：“曾犯。生怕簾開譏燕子，為憐花謝罵東風。”

師又審意三惡業：“曾犯貪否？”女云：“曾犯。經營綳帙成千軸，辛苦鸞花滿一庭。”“曾犯嗔否？”女云：“曾犯。怪他道蘊敲枯硯，薄彼崔徽撲玉釵。”“曾犯癡否？”女云：“曾犯。勉棄珠環收漢玉，戲捐粉盒葬花魂。”

師大贊云：“此六朝以下，溫李諸公，血竭髯枯，矜詫累日者，子於受戒一刻，隨口而答，那得不哭殺阿翁也。然子固只一綺語罪耳。”<sup>37</sup>

It is this witty dialogue that creates the new persona of Ye Xiaoluan the immortal. Facing the

---

<sup>35</sup> “Daoyun” refers to Xie Daoyun 謝道韞 (c.340 - c.399), one of the most famous talented women in Chinese history. The line is meant to say Xie Daoyun’s literary talent is so extraordinary that when the writer tries to compose a poem she would feel anxious. Cui Hui 崔徽 was a courtesan of Tang dynasty. Famous for her beauty, Cui Hui has been eulogized by male literati for centuries. The Song scholar-official Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101) portrayed her as follow: “When jade hairpin slides over, her hair falls to ear; She is like a graceful lotus swaying on the autumn water.” Here “take off my jade hairpin” means the writer feels ashamed of her appearance in comparison with Cui Hui.

<sup>36</sup> “Mister Li and Mister Wen” here refers to Wen Tingyun 溫庭筠 (812-870) and Li He 李賀 (790-816), two poets who are famous for their meticulous choice of words.

<sup>37</sup> Ye Shaoyuan, “Xu Yaowen,” in *Noon Dream Hall Collection* vol.2, 629-630.

interrogation, she can not only respond cleverly, but also improvise her answers in verse. Her talent, unworldliness, and aloofness are for the first time revealed in a direct and powerful way.

Moreover, because of Jin Shengtan's understanding of the Ye family's expectations and his familiarity with the idea of "imperishable literature bestowing life," the immortal Ye Xiaoluan created by him is perfectly compatible with her previous images. It can be said that his creation of the new persona of Ye Xiaoluan the immortal is not so much an invention, but rather a purification, condensation and dramatization of her earlier literary images.

#### **1.4 Becoming an Icon**

Thanks to Ye Shaoyuan's promotion of Ye Xiaoluan, she soon became widely regarded as an immortal.<sup>38</sup> In this section, I discuss how Ye Xiaoluan was received by her contemporaries, including the reactions of leading male critics and elegies composed by women writers from other elite families. I argue that, because Jin Shengtan provided a more "readable" account of her life to the reading public, Ye Xiaoluan the immortal became more and more popular, gradually obscuring or even replacing the image of Ye Xiaoluan the poetess. In this way, she eventually became a popular and well-known cultural icon in the Jiangnan region.

There were two groups of male literati who were involved in Ye Xiaoluan's apotheosis. One group had a supportive attitude towards religious and spiritual activities, and therefore was willing to believe in the immortalization of Ye Xiaoluan. The other group who did not

---

<sup>38</sup> Ye Shaoyuan's promotion was not only based on his compilation and publication of the family anthology, but also dependent on his personal social network. Examining the elegy collection titled *Tonglian xu xie* 彤畚續些, Lin Jinyu argues that some women writers' elegies were written at the request of Ye Shaoyuan; the women writers themselves may not know Ye Xiaoluan in person. See Lin Jinyu, "The Phantom of A Talented Woman," 91.

have religious inclinations, however, were more skeptical. Supportive or not, their debate made Ye Xiaoluan's immortalization a public issue, thus undoubtedly increasing the popularity of the impression that she had become an immortal after death.

One of the most important records of her apotheosis can be found in Qian Qianyi's *Leichao shiji* (列朝詩集, Collection of Poems of All Centuries) and *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* (列朝詩集小傳, The Biographies of Poets of All Centuries). Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582–1664) was one of the most famous scholars, writers and literary critics of the late Ming period. As a religious enthusiast, Qian Qianyi had a long-standing friendship with his fellow townsman Jin Shengtān.<sup>39</sup> He even wrote a passage entitled “Tiantai Le fashi lingyi ji” (天台泐法師靈異記, Records on the Spirituality of Master Le of Mt. Tiantai) to endorse Jin Shengtān's religious activities in the name of Master Lezi. Qian Qianyi obviously believed in Ye Xiaoluan's immortality. In his anthology, he includes not only works written in her lifetime, but also the two poems composed by her ghost at the spirit writing session, which happened to be dedicated to Master Lezi; in his biographical account, he spends more than half of the length paraphrasing the part relevant to Ye Xiaoluan in “Sequel to Distant Messages”—her past life as an immortal named Hanhuang, her witty responses, and her ordination by Master Lezi. At the end of this account, he comments:

I once wrote a passage on the spirituality of Master Lezi. Many Confucian scholars attacked it, suspecting it was a rumor. Having read “Distant Messages” written by Zhongshao [Ye Shaoyuan], now they should be convinced of the existence of immortals whose divinity will not be worn out even being questioned for a hundred

---

<sup>39</sup> Qian Qianyi 錢謙益, “Tiantai Le fashi lingyi ji” 天台泐法師靈異記, in *Muzhai chuxue ji* 牧齋初學集, in *Sibu congshu* 四部叢書 vol.1647. Shanghai: Hanfenlou, 1643:12a-16b. For further discussion on his religious thoughts, see Wu Zhenglan 吳正嵐, “Jin Shengtān yu Qian Qianyi de sixiang yuanyuan” 金聖嘆與錢謙益的思想淵源, in *Journal of Fuzhou University (Philosophy and Social Science)* no.78 (2007): 66-73.

million times. The bridges and ferries to the celestial paradise are not hard to find, one can see it in a snap of the fingers.

余往撰泐子靈異記，頗受儒者謠詠，今讀仲韶窈聞之書，故知靈真位業，億劫長新。<sup>40</sup>

Comparing with Qian Qianyi's unwavering belief, the literatus Zhou Lianggong 周亮工 (1612 - 1672) showed a bit more skepticism. Zhou was a writer, scholar and collector, author of *Yinshuwu shuying* 因樹屋書影, a collection of his miscellaneous reading notes and commentaries. His accounts of Ye Xiaoluan were very similar to those in Qian Qianyi's biography, including a short review of her life story and a detailed record of the planchette spirit writing ceremony. The only significant difference is his own commentary:

This is ridiculous; I dare not to believe it. But I am especially fond of her beautiful lines, which is why I preserve these records here.

此事甚荒唐，予不敢信；特愛其句之縝麗，附存於此。<sup>41</sup>

Zhou Lianggong's attitude is worth pondering. On the one hand, he apparently did not believe in the authenticity of the matter; on the other hand, he was so deeply touched by her personality and her poems that he was even willing to deepen this "ridiculous" impression instead of dismissing it outright. It can be seen that, although the credibility of the immortalization of Ye Xiaoluan was enthusiastically debated in Jiangnan literati circles, their true purpose was not to determine the facticity of things. It was more like idle gossip than a serious ideological dispute. Therefore, we should regard this discussion as a manifestation of Ye Xiaoluan's popularization.

Compared with male writers, we know much less about the views of women's writers on

---

<sup>40</sup> Qian Qianyi 錢謙益, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 列朝詩集小傳 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1983): 755-756.

<sup>41</sup> Zhou Lianggong 周亮工, *Yinshuwu shuying* 因樹屋書影 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981): 165.



the topic of Ye Xiaoluan. The only extant type of the writing about Ye Xiaoluan by them is in the form of elegies, so we have no idea about whether or not they also argued about the authenticity of Ye Xiaoluan's transformation. By comparing two sets of poems, one respectively written by relatives of Ye Xiaoluan and the other by women writers outside the Ye family, we can see how different Ye Xiaoluan's publicly-accepted image had become.

### Group 1

#### **Crying for My Sister Qiongzhang (by Ye Xiaowan)**

The toilet table stands quietly in the morning,  
The shelves with books and zithers every day are covered with more dust.  
Since the person who lived in Shuxiang Tower has left,  
The poor flowers and birds lose their sense of spring.

#### **哭瓊章妹(葉小紈)**

妝臺靜鎖向清晨，滿架琴書日覆塵。  
一自疏香人去後，可憐花鳥不知春。<sup>42</sup>

#### **Elegy for My Niece Ye Qiongzhang (by Shen Qianjun)**

Your jade-like body no longer appears in front of the toilet table,  
Why should the spring breeze still come to the flower branch?  
In the embroidered cage your parrot still  
warbles the poem you have taught it before.

#### **悼甥女葉瓊章 (沈倩君)**

不見妝臺佇玉姿，春風何必到花枝。  
繡籠鸚鵡啾啾語，猶是兒家舊教詩。<sup>43</sup>

### Group 2

#### **Elegy for Ye Qiongzhang (by Wang Hui)**

You spent seventeen springs in your golden mortuary,  
You were born with the bones of an immortal.  
Your aspiration is written in a thousand volumes of heavenly books,  
Your brush draws out the full moon of an autumn night.

---

<sup>42</sup> Ye Xiaowan 葉小紈, "Ku Qiongzhang mei" 哭瓊章妹, in *Mingyuan shiwei chubian* 名媛詩緯初編, comp. Wang Shuzhen 王端淑, (qingyintang, 1667): 9. 16a-17b.

<sup>43</sup> Ye Xiaowan 沈倩君, "Dao zhinü Ye Qiongzhang" 悼甥女葉瓊章, in *Mingyuan shiwei chubian* 名媛詩緯初編, comp. Wang Shuzhen 王端淑, (qingyintang, 1667): 8. 17a-17b.

**挽葉瓊章 (王徽)**

生長金閨十七春，帶來丰骨不凡人。  
志翀雲表書千卷，筆洒秋空月一輪。<sup>44</sup>

**Elegy for Ye Qiongzhang (by Li Bi)**

The Song of *Courting Phoenix* were played five days ago,  
Its sound can still be heard now.  
You went towards the other side of the sky,  
Your figure cannot be seen, through the clouds on the top of mountains.

**挽葉瓊章 (李璧)**

五日求凰曲，仙韶猶可聞。  
之人天際去，望斷嶺頭雲。<sup>45</sup>

From the comparison of these two sets of poems, we can see that the family's impression of Ye Xiaoluan mainly came from their memories of her living details, such as the toilet table she used and the parrot she had; for other female writers who had never met with Ye Xiaoluan in person, however, their impression of her concentrated on her immortality. This phenomenon suggests two things: 1) The story of Ye Xiaoluan becoming an immortal had become so widespread that even women living in enclosed chambers had heard about her. 2) Whether or not they really believed in the story, they generally, like the male literati, agreed that the idea of becoming an immortal after death was something worth admiring.

---

<sup>44</sup> Wang Hui 王徽, "Wan Ye Qiongzhang" 挽葉瓊章, in *Mingyuan shiwei chubian* 名媛詩緯初編, comp. Wang Shuzhen 王端淑, (qingyintang, 1667): 14. 1a-1b.

<sup>45</sup> Li Bi 李璧, "Wan Ye Qiongzhang" 挽葉瓊章, in *Mingyuan shiwei chubian* 名媛詩緯初編, comp. Wang Shuzhen 王端淑, (qingyintang, 1667): 12. 14a.

## **Chapter 2: The Deconstruction and Consumption of** **Ye Xiaoluan in the Qing Dynasty**

As shown in the previous chapter, thanks to the publication and circulation of Ye Shaoyuan's *Noon Dream Hall Collection*, Ye Xiaoluan became a popular icon in the cultural center of China in the late Ming period. However, this trend was quickly interrupted by the political upheaval in the Ming-Qing dynastic transition. When Ye Xiaoluan once again entered the literati's field of vision, she was no longer a figure "of the present," but, like so many famous historical figures, had been dissolved into a series of "sign values" and absorbed into a "cultural repertoire of resources."

Two main concepts structure my analysis of this chapter. The first is "sign value." In sociology and economics, this term refers to the value of a commodity when it is consumed as a symbol for social status, prestige, power and so on. It differs from the value derived from the materials used to make it, as well as the functional value it satisfies in actual use. The concept was first coined by the French sociologist Jean Baudrillard, who contextualizes his theory of sign value in his critique on contemporary consumer society.<sup>46</sup> Here I use the term in a broader sense, referring to all the possible meanings that can be signified by a certain consumable item, which can be a feeling, a mood, an atmosphere, a life style and so on.

The second is "cultural repertoire." This contemporary notion of culture as a "repertoire" or "tool kit" comes from the cultural sociologist Ann Swidler. She argues that: "Culture influences action not by providing the ultimate values toward which action is oriented, but by

---

<sup>46</sup> See Jean Baudrillard, "The Consumer Society: Myth and Structure" trans. by Chris Turner. London: Sage, 1998 and Jean Baudrillard, "For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign" trans. and intro. by Charles Levin, St. Louis: Telos press Ltd., 1981.

shaping a repertoire or ‘tool kit’ of habits, skills, and styles from which people construct ‘strategies of action.’”<sup>47</sup> This means that no cultural existence has an intrinsic, absolute, and metaphysical value. Their value can only be realized through being selected, used, and related by individuals.

Both of these concepts focus on the value assigning process of a cultural entity, and so can be regarded as two sides of the same coin. “Sign value” emphasizes the state in which it exists and can be applied and exchanged in a public symbolic system, and “cultural repertoire” describes the relationship between this public sphere and the real people. I would like to suggest that we can better understand the sociocultural role of Ye Xiaoluan thinking of her as a micro-repertoire of features with sign values to be strategically used.

If the previous chapter presents a piling-up process of Ye Xiaoluan’s images, then this chapter deals with the deconstruction and consumption of Ye Xiaoluan. In this chapter we will see how the more specific images of Ye Xiaoluan’s were gradually dissolved into a series of cultural features, such “talented woman,” “female writer,” “gentlewoman,” “immortal,” “beloved daughter,” “the beautiful girl who died young,” and etc. Although we use a series of labels to roughly sum up the attributes represented by Ye Xiaoluan, we should acknowledge that no literati of Qing dynasty accepted this or “repertoire” in its entirety. They would always selectively choose some features from this “tool kit” and reject some others.

We will also explore how Ye Xiaoluan was “consumed” by readers who put together new creative images of her, which they fabricated with one or several features selected from her cultural micro-repertoire, features which had a special sign value that was meaningful only to

---

<sup>47</sup> Ann Swidler, “Culture in action: symbols and strategies,” *American Sociological Review* 51 (1986): 273.

them. Since the consumption of Ye Xiaoluan is extremely personalized, the sign value assigned to her may not have always been recognized and accepted by the public. However, the “consumer” could then choose to invite his friends to compose a poem on his consumption. It is through this confirmation that the sign value was solidified and became part of the public sphere. This point will be more fully discussed in the next chapter.

But first, I will show how the image Ye Xiaoluan was drawn upon by different authors, and how the different aspects of her image were used for different receptive purposes. Since most of the agents were male, I will inevitably approach the issues from a feminist and gender studies perspective. But instead of simply claiming she was a victim of male objectification of women, my intention here is to situate the reception history of Ye Xiaoluan within the intricate sociocultural context where it developed.

## 2.1 Ideal Companion

Wang Duanshu, a female literary critic of the Qing Dynasty, once made a very subtle comment on Ye Xiaoluan: “The best thing about her is that died right before her marriage” 尤妙未歸而逝. This comment points out something essential about Ye Xiaoluan—that is, the timely death renders her a delectable combination of virginity and budding sexuality. As Anne Gerritsen observes: “Imagining Xiaoluan as an immortal allowed these men to play with the tantalizing combination of her sexual awakening and her untainted moral purity.”<sup>48</sup> This very image is a re-creation of the male literati in the Qing Dynasty. They chose the attribute of “immortal,” thus endowing Ye Xiaoluan with a kind of transcendent salvific power. They also chose the attribute of “ideal woman” and therefore provided her a structural

---

<sup>48</sup> Ann Gerritsen, “The Many Guises of Xiaoluan,” 49.

value—that is, any male who is paired with this ideal woman must be an extraordinary man, so as to be a compatible match with her. Wei Hanhuang 魏寒簧, the female protagonist of You Tong’s drama “Juntian yue” (鈞天樂, Music of Central Heaven) is a perfect example.

You Tong 尤侗 (1618-1704) was a prolific writer in many genres, but particularly enjoyed the reputation of being a famous playwright. As Judith Zeitlin and Anne Gerritsen have pointed out, You Tong was infatuated with Ye Xiaoluan.<sup>49</sup> His admiration for her was evident in his choice of his daughters’ names (Qionghua 瓊華, Qiongying 瓊瑩 and Qiongying 瓊英, which correspond to Ye Xiaoluan’s courtesy name Qiongzhang 瓊章) and his frequent reference to her in his literary compositions.<sup>50</sup> In *Musics of Central Heaven* he reveals his obsession by describing her as his perfect match and companion lover.

The play is divided into two distinct parts. The action in Part One takes place in the flawed contemporary world, where men of talent and integrity would fail the Imperial Examination because it was presided over by corrupted officials. Part Two shifts to Heaven, and systematically rectifies the injustices and reverses the tragedies enacted in the first half of the play. The script invites an autobiographical reading, for some of the arias of the male lead Shen Bai 沈白 and his best friend Yang Yun 楊云 almost replicate the song lyrics written by You Tong and his real-life best friend Tang Chuanying 湯傳楹. In the same way, the female lead Wei Hanhuang 魏寒簧 is profiled with details extracted from *Noon Hall*

---

<sup>49</sup> Judith T. Zeitlin, “Spirit Writing and Performance in the Work of You Tong 尤侗 (1618-1704),” *T’oung Pao* 84 no.2 (1998): 102-135. and Anne Gerritsen, “The Many Guises of Xiaoluan: The Legacy of a Girl Poet in Late Imperial China,” *Journal of Women’s History* 17, no.2 (Summer 2005): 38-61.

<sup>50</sup> Except of *Musics of Central Heaven*, You Tong also wrote many poems for Ye Xiaoluan. Such “Xiji Fanshengxiang ju diao Yexiaoluan” 戲集《返生香》句吊葉小鸞 (Poems Made up Lines from *Fanshengxiang*: In Memorial of Ye Xiaoluan), “He Yexiaoluan mengzhongzuo” 和葉小鸞夢中作 (In Reply to Ye Xiaoluan’s Poems Written in Dream), and “Diao Fanshengxiang” 吊《返生香》 (In Memorial of *Fanshengxiang*). See You Tong 尤侗, *Xitang quanji* 西堂全集 (Full Collection of West Hall), in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 vol.1406, Shanghai: Shanghai gushi chubanshe, 2002.

*Collection*. Although Tong You never met Ye Xiaoluan in person, such details, along with the name that echoes Jin Shengtan's immortal creation, clearly indicates it is Ye Xiaoluan who serves as his primary model. However, Wei Hanhuang's characteristics are distinct from those of Ye Xiaoluan the immortal. From her biography and poetry, we learn that by nature Ye Xiaoluan was "lofty and untrammelled" and "disdained riches and luxury."<sup>51</sup> But in You Tong's imagination she is a beauty who triggers a deep resonance in scholars who go through career frustrations. For example, in You Tong's design, Wei Hanhuang's early death is triggered by Shen Bai's failure to pass the Imperial Examination. I quote a spoken line of her from Act Five "Sighing the Admission List":

She sighs and says: "Alas! In all ages, talented young men are destined for disappointment, and beauties are doomed to misfortune. Only those who endure the same misery can sympathize with each other. How many women are there in the world, who can possess Seven Perfume Carriage and Five Flower Mandate;<sup>52</sup> who can enjoy glory and wealth. But how pathetic I, Hanhuang, am, to be lonesomely confined in my boudoir, with my fragrance faded and powder weathered; just like a student who fails in Imperial Examination. Isn't that deplorable?"

(嘆介)咳，古來才子數奇，佳人薄命，同病相憐。世間多少女郎，七香車、五花誥，享受榮華。偏我寒簧，寂寞深閨，香消粉褪也。似下第秀才一般，好傷感人也。<sup>53</sup>

This kind of distortion is one of the manifestations of the deconstruction and consumption of Ye Xiaoluan's image. While selectively highlighting her qualities as an ideal companion and of an immortal, You Tong rejected other qualities from her "tool kit." This made Wei Hanhuang a valuable sign for his personal possession. The sorrow she vents was

---

<sup>51</sup> Shen Yixiu, "Biography," in *Red Brush*, 401.

<sup>52</sup> Seven Perfume Carriage is a luxurious carriage, which is said to be made out sandalwood or to be decorated with various perfumes. Five Flower Mandate is an imperial mandate given to high officials' mothers or wives. Here they signify the life of luxury and power.

<sup>53</sup> You Tong, "Juntian yue," in *Xitang wenji*, 586.

obviously not the sorrow experienced by Ye Xiaoluan, but a representation of You Tong's own unspoken complaints.

A similar story is recorded in Yuan Mei's *Suiyuan shihua* 隨園詩話. A student named Gu Jiansha 顧鑒沙 once dreamed of a goddess who told him that she was the Book Maid of the Moon Mansion and had a destined relationship with him. She had been ordered to deliver some books to the South Sea and asked him to accompany her. After many years had passed, Gu Jiansha rose to an official post in Guangdong [the province near the South Sea]. One day he bought a portrait of Ye Xiaoluan in the local market. Recognizing her as the goddess who had appeared in his dream, Gu Jiansha made a painting for her and invited his friends to write poems for it. A man named Fang Bo wrote: "It is regrettable that he understands the meaning of the poem too late; She has disappeared in the River City, like a whistling of a flute 怪他才解吟詩句，便是江城笛裏聲."<sup>54</sup> Similarly, Ye Xiaoluan was reduced to a thin combination of an immortal and female literatus. Through the predetermined relationship, we can fully expect that Gu Jiansha will become an ideal male with matching political talents. Moreover, as if worrying that the sign value of Ye Xiaoluan has been not fully transferred to Gu Jiansha in this short story, a line from the poem by Gu's friend is quoted, thus re-emphasizing the matching relationship of the two.

## 2.2 Role Model of Women Writers

It was not only men who found the counterpart of their ideal selves in Ye Xiaoluan. I have gleaned some indirect evidence that there were also some women who regarded Ye Xiaoluan as their favorite writer or even as their role model. For example, Wang Yunzhang's

---

<sup>54</sup> Yuan Mei 袁枚, *Suiyuan shihua* 隨園詩話 (1749): 6. 15a-16b.



王蘊章 jotting collection on female writers *Ranzhi yuyun* 然脂餘韻 mentions a poetess named Qiuxia 秋霞 who was the six-generation niece of Ye Xiaoluan. Qiuxia named her study room *Xiao shuxiang ge* (小疎香閣, Little Diluted Fragrance Pavilion) after Ye Xiaoluan's *Shuxiang ge* (疎香閣, Diluted Fragrance Pavilion), and so as the way of naming her anthology—Qiuxia entitled her anthology *Xiao shuxiang ge gao* (小疎香閣稿, Drafts from Little Diluted Fragrance Pavilion), a clear reference to Ye Xiaoluan's song lyrics collection *Shuxiang ge yigao* (疎香閣遺稿, Posthumous Drafts of Diluted Fragrance Pavilion).<sup>55</sup>

In his *Jianzhong tang shi* 儉重堂詩 the Qing poet Ji Maiyi 紀邁宜 also notes that one of his grandnieces was very fond of Ye Xiaoluan:

My nephew Gao Tongsun just lost his darling girl. On my way to my official post in Nanle, I made a detour to Yongle Town to visit him. I saw his daughter's wall inscribed with Master Lezi's interrogation of Ye Xiaoluan's spirit, and then sighed that her premature death was destined. I told my nephew there was no need to be heavy-hearted over this fact. So, I wrote this poem to comfort him.”

高甥桐蓀有愛女之戚，余以公事赴南樂便道過永固鎮相訪，見其齋壁錄葉瓊章與泐師問荅一則，因歎數之前定固不必怒然于懷也，爲作一絕句慰之。

Although Ji Maiyi's focus here is on the mysterious parallels between his grandniece's fate and Ye Xiaoluan's fate, from his account of the former's writing on the wall, we can speculate that this girl must have been infatuated with Ye Xiaoluan, or at the very least harbored some lofty emotions about her own destiny evoked by the image of Ye Xiaoluan.<sup>56</sup>

Yet another example is a poem written by the scholar-official Lu Jilu 陸繼輅 dedicated to

<sup>55</sup> Wang Yuanzhang 王蘊章. *Ranzhi yuyun* 然脂餘韻 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1918): 1.8a-8b.

<sup>56</sup> Ji Maiyi 紀邁宜, *Jianzhong tang shi* 儉重堂詩 (*Qianlong keben*): 6.17a.

his deceased daughter Lu Junshu 陸君淑. One of the lines is: “Her fate was predetermined when I named her after Tao Jingjie’s poem; my sorrow was predestined when I taught her the Buddhist subtleties of Ye Qiongzhang 詩識早成陶靖節，禪機悔授葉璠章.”<sup>57</sup> He then writes a footnote himself, explaining that her daughter loved chanting the words that the immortal Ye Xiaoluan supposedly spoke before her ordination.<sup>58</sup>

Unfortunately, these records are the sole source of our knowledge about these women writers. Since the texts tell us little about their reading experiences, it is next to impossible to reconstruct their worlds on the basis of these given materials. But at least they show that these young women successfully acquired the Ye Xiaoluan’s sign value as a talented woman writer. In Qiuxia’s case, this result was achieved because of the combination of her kinship with Ye Xiaoluan and her imitation of Ye Xiaoluan’s literary activities; In the cases of Ji Maiyi’s grandniece and Lu Jilu’s daughter, the result was achieved because of co-occurrence of their appreciation of Ye Xiaoluan and the fact that they shared the same fate with her. It can be seen that in this process at least half of construction was controlled by their own subjective initiative. Therefore, although the expression of their admiration of Ye Xiaoluan was more concealed and subtler than that of You Tong and Gu Jiansha, these women writers still achieved the same effect according to a similar communication-reception approach. That is, by building up a personal connection with Ye Xiaoluan, they were able to incorporate some of Ye Xiaoluan's special attributes in the process of their own self-image construction.

---

<sup>57</sup> Tao Jingjie 陶靖節 was the courtesy name of the famous poet Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (352-427). Lu Junshu’s formal name was Liangsheng 良勝, which was taken from a line by Tao Yuanming “Ruonü sui fei nan, weiqing liangsheng wu” 弱女雖非男，慰情良勝無. My liberal translation is: “Girls are not as good as boys, but it is better than to have no children.”

<sup>58</sup> Lu Jilu 陸繼輅, “Junshu wang ri” 君淑亡日, in *Chongbai yaozhai wenji* 崇百藥齋文集 vol.3 (1878): 3.17a-17b.

A more extreme example is the praise and construction of a women writer by male literati who would often bring up Ye Xiaoluan as a comparative reference standard of another less renowned woman writer. For example, when Chen Wenshu 陳文述 (1771-1834) wrote a poem for his female student Wang Zhonglan 王仲蘭, he praised her: “When she came to the world, she was like the ‘Playing Phoenixes’ Nongyu of the Qin. When she left the world, she was like the ‘Diluted Fragrance’ Ye Xiaoluan 跨來弄玉秦雙鳳, 歸去疎香葉小鸞.”<sup>59</sup> In addition, when Shi Taoyu 石韞玉 (1756-1837) wrote a preface to the collection of a woman writer named Qian Shoupu 錢守璞, he places her into a poetic lineage of women writers in history including Ye Xiaoluan:

Qian Shoupu’s style name is Lianyin. She has the talent of chanting willow catkins, and the brush comparable to a flowery hairpin.<sup>60</sup> She is good at composing poems and writing calligraphy. She and her husband respect with each other, constantly writing poems reciprocally. This is what the ancients called “a good match,” and they are indeed not inferior to this standard. Thinking about the talented women from ancient times to the present: Zhu Shuzhen was talented, but there was no good match for her.<sup>61</sup> Li Yi’an had the good match, but she was ill-fated.<sup>62</sup> Ye Xiaoluan had the innate intelligence, but her life was unfortunate. Only Lianyi enjoys the talent and a good match at the same time. Now she is on the way to the Western Guangdong with her husband. From now on, rivers and mountains will make her

---

<sup>59</sup> Chen Wenshu 陳文述, “Diao Tanhong ge nüshi Wang Zhonglan” 弔曇紅閣女史王仲蘭, in *Yidao tang ji* 頤道堂集 (1807): 13. 33a-33b. Chen Wenshu 陳文述 (1771 - 1834) was an important scholar and poet in Jiangnan area of the mid-Qing dynasty. His participation in female literature at the time was quite prominent. He organized and participated in the activities of the female literary community known as the “Bicheng Xianguan Female Disciple 碧城仙館女弟子.” Wang Zhonglan 王仲蘭 was one of his female students. Nongyu 弄玉 was a beauty in ancient Chinese myth, who was said to be the daughter of King Mu of the state of Qin in the warring period. At her birth, the king received lots of gifts, while among all the priceless treasure the girl was obsessed by a piece of green jade and could not take her hands off it. Thus, the king named the girl Nongyu, meaning playing with jade. When Nongyu grew into a fair lady and was extremely good at playing *xiao*, a Chinese vertical end-blown flute. She taught herself to play the instrument and the tune was as clear as the warble of a phoenix. Here Chen Wenshu alludes to Nongyu to explain Wang Zhonglan had an innate artistic talent.

<sup>60</sup> The “talent of chanting willow catkins” is an allusion to the famous female write Xie Daoyun 謝道韞 and the “brush comparable to a flowery hairpin” refers to the famous woman calligrapher Madam Wei 衛夫人.

<sup>61</sup> Zhu Shuzhen 朱淑真 (1135 – 1180) was a Chinese poetess who lived during the Song dynasty. She married an official with whom she had a bad marriage.

<sup>62</sup> Li Qingzhao 李清照 (1084 – 1155, alternatively 1081 –1141), pseudonym Householder of Yi’an 易安居士, was a Chinese writer and poet in the Song dynasty. She is considered as one of the greatest woman poets in Chinese history.

beauty shine, the feather-decorated carriage will bring her resplendence, and she will forever be blessed with her literary talents and the good match—this is something every woman has been prayed for. When they are about to leave, her collection is published. She asked me to write a preface for her, so I moistened my brush and wrote this preface to bid farewell for their departure.

錢氏守璞，字蓮因。以詠絮之才，簪花之筆，工詩詞，善翰墨，鴻案相莊，更唱迭和，古人所稱嘉耦，無以過之。予嘗論古來才女，若朱淑真有其才而無其耦，若李易安有其耦而無其命，若葉小鸞有其慧而無其福。今蓮因既抱雋才，又逢嘉耦，此時從夫子之官粵西。從此江山助美，翟芾增華，文齊福齊，實有古今閨閣中所禱祀以求而不可必得者。於其將行出其所著詩詞，問序於予。因濡筆為此序即以餞其行。<sup>63</sup>

In these two examples, Ye Xiaoluan, like many of her predecessors, has been largely reduced to being the symbol of a talented female writer. Therefore, even if the female writers who were praised themselves did not show any preference for Ye Xiaoluan, based on the commonality of their identities as female writers, they were still granted with the potential to be woven into the pedigree of female writers of the successive reigns and dynasties. And it was due to this metonymic relationship that they were affirmed to be talented female writers by their male admirers.

In the process, we can observe that female writers tended to be much more reserved and even passive than male writers when assigning sign value to themselves. But this example also shows that taking sign values from the cultural repertoire is not necessarily an active behavior but may also be a passive effect achieved by the shaping force of someone's own audience.

### 2.3 Revived Daughter

Apart from seeing an ideal figure of a talented young woman in Ye Xiaoluan, the story

---

<sup>63</sup> Shi Taoyu 石韜玉, "Lianyi ji xu" 蓮因集序, in *Duxue lu gao xugao* 獨學廬稿續稿 (Xieke duxie lu): 21b-22b.

of her becoming an immortal after death also provided an imaginary space for parents who had lost their daughters. Yu Yue 俞樾 (1821-1907) once wrote a passage about the spirit of Zhou Zhi 周芝—his daughter-in-law—showing up in her sisters’ dreams after death. This short piece is very similar to Shen Yixiu’s “A Biography of My Youngest Daughter Qiongzhang” in terms of content and structure.

The text can be divided into three parts. The first part consists of a description of things that happened in her life suggesting that she was an unworldly woman born with an innate intelligence and spirituality. For example:

Yunji [Zhou Zhi’s father] was the magistrate of the An’yi county in Jiangxi province. He died in a battle with bandits. Without any symptom, the girl also died one month after his death.

雲笈知江西安義縣，寇至死。之女距父死一月無疾而卒。

The girl had previously planted a peach tree in the garden. A few days before she died, she walked under the tree and stroked it a for a long time. She sighed: You have cost me painstaking care for many years.

女生前有手植桃樹一株在家圃中。臨卒前數日自至樹下，撫摩數四，歎曰：吾數年心血也。<sup>64</sup>

The second part records Zhou Zhi’s frequent appearance in her sisters’ dreams after death. In the dreams, Zhou Zhi made all kinds of prophecies, all of which were verified. What is slightly different from Shen Yixiu’s “A Biography of My Youngest Daughter,” however, is that in the postmortem world that Zhou constructs in his imagination, all the family’s dead relatives can be reunited.

On another night, Zhongying [Zhou Zhi’s sister] dreamed that Zhou Zhi was in her

---

<sup>64</sup> Yu Yue 俞樾, *Chunzai tang suibi* 春在堂隨筆 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 2000): 3. 9a.

bedroom. Zhongying knew her sister was dead and realized she was in a dream, so she asked her what it felt like to die. The girl answered: “I don’t know either. I only knew that someone suddenly took me to our father.” Zhongying asked: “Can I see our father when I die?” She replied: “All the dead will gather together, as they do in their lifetime. The Old Man Yinxue often comes to our father’s place. He sometimes paints, and we are happy about that.” The Old Man Yinxue mentioned here is my deceased father, who used to use the two characters “Yin Xue” to refer to the room he lived in. He could paint chrysanthemum or small-scale landscape painting with pale ink when he was alive. But he did not paint easily for others, so no one knew that he could paint. Even the Zhou family was very close with our Yu family, they did not know either. How could the girl tell this in her sister’s dream? This is truly strange.

又一夕仲英夢女人其臥內，仲英知其已死，且知己之為夢也。因問其死狀，女曰：“亦不自知，但鵲突聞覺有人引至父所耳。”問：“我他日死亦能見父否？”曰：“可凡死者皆相聚如生前。即印雪老人亦常在我父處。或時作畫，甚樂也。”女所稱印雪老人蓋即先君子，余家僑寓臨，平時以印雪二字顏所居軒。先君子生時能畫墨菊，或以淡墨作山水小幅。然不輕為人作，故無知者。即周氏與余家親串往來甚密，亦未之知也。女能於夢中言之，良足異矣。<sup>65</sup>

Reviewing the omens that appeared in her early years, in the third part, Yu Yue laments his daughter-in-law's unfortunate fate, and explicitly points out the similarities between Ye Xiaoluan and Zhou Zhi.

The girl was only six years old when she was betrothed to my family. After she died, her mother Madam Yao told me: “We had ignited two candles in the ceremony hall. Playing there, my daughter accidentally blew out the right one, and its tin candle holder also melted. We concealed this secret and didn’t let you know.” Was this a sign that she and my son’s fate would not intersect with each other? I am reminded of Ye Xiaoluan, the talented woman of the previous Ming dynasty. When she was betrothed to the Zhang family, they sent jujube tea as a present in return. This was the custom at the time. Her parents found a broken jade hairpin in the tea box. They were frightened and secretly discarded it. It turned out that she indeed died before her marriage. This is recorded in her father’s diary. I find these two events to be very similar.

余家初聘女時，女始六歲。女卒後，其母姚恭人為余言是曰：“然兩燭於堂。前女嬉戲滅其右之一，并錫槃鎔焉。因共祕其事，不以聞噫。”豈與吾兒無緣乎？因憶前明才女葉小鸞許嫁張氏壻家以棗茗為謝，俗所重也。茗中乃有斷

---

<sup>65</sup> Yu Yue 俞樾, *Chunzai tang suibi* 春在堂隨筆, 3. 9a-9b.

玉搔頭一枝，大驚，密棄之。後果未昏而天。事見其父天寥先生年譜。與此相類。<sup>66</sup>

In this example, Ye Xiaoluan provides a precedent for the resurrection that a dead daughter can still return to her loved ones in the form of a spirit. It provides an illusory comfort to the family members who are saddened by the loss of Zhou Zhi. This spiritual need, like those mentioned in previous sections, determines the sign values that are taken and rejected from the cultural repertoire of Ye Xiaoluan. The image chosen by Yu Yue, and Zhou Zhi's relatives in general, is Ye Xiaoluan the revived daughter in "A Biography of My Youngest Daughter," instead of Ye Xiaoluan the goddess who decided to abandon all worldly attachments. This conscious selection allows another postmortem space to be creatively imagined, an afterlife where the deceased family members—Zhou Zhi, her father, Yu Yue's father the Old Man Yinxue—and all those who will die in the future, can happily reunite.

It is particularly noteworthy, however, that at the end of his piece, Yu Yue explains his reasons for writing this biography, and invites his readers to compose poems for Zhou Zhi to promote her virtues and talents:

Ye Xiaoluan is indeed a talented woman, but that is all. For someone like Shuying [Zhou Zhi's style name], whose father is a loyal minister and who herself is a filial daughter, how can I not let her story be known? For this reason, I write this biography for her and record her anecdotes somewhere else. I hope other idle gentlemen in this world would also write poems and passages for her, so that her good deeds can be well-known.

夫小鸞特才女耳。若乃父為忠臣，女為孝女如叔英者不尤可傳乎？余既為之傳，又書其軼事，如此冀當世好事君子或為詩文以張之也。<sup>67</sup>

His appeal serves as a fitting conclusion not only to his piece, but to this particular chapter as

---

<sup>66</sup> Yu Yue 俞樾, *Chunzai tang suibi* 春在堂隨筆, 3. 10a-10b.

<sup>67</sup> Yu Yue 俞樾, *Chunzai tang suibi* 春在堂隨筆, 3. 10b.

well. In sum, the male literati's writing and re-creation of Ye Xiaoluan's image are not only due to the projection of their own desires, but also to the establishment and confirmation of certain sign values. Only by treating this process as a part of the symbolic system, but also as a series of single cases, can we more profoundly restore the reception history of Ye Xiaoluan's image in later generations.



## **Chapter 3: The Collective Connoisseurship of Ye Xiaoluan's**

### **Inkstone in the Early Modern Period**

Apart from her literary re-creation, Ye Xiaoluan was also famous for her inkstone. The inkstone remained unknown for more than one hundred years after Ye Xiaoluan's death; but once discovered sometime between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, it quickly became an item that literati and collectors flocked to see. Seeing in this inkstone and its rubbings a crux of sociocultural interactions, this chapter examines the circulation and transmission of this particular material object associated with Ye Xiaoluan and investigates the importance of building paratexts around it.

As we have discussed in Chapter 2, the eyebrow-shaped inkstone and its rubbings can be regarded as a special kind of cultural product endowed with sign values, for its value is not only derived from its fine quality, rarity, or antiquity, but also from the idea that it once belonged to Ye Xiaoluan. Whoever held, or one might even say "fondled," this inkstone might feel that he or she was physically connected with Ye Xiaoluan or at least viewing her from a voyeuristic position. It is this subjective illusion that made her inkstone a treasure eagerly craved by many literati and collectors. In this way, tracing the process of the pursuits of the eyebrow-shaped inkstone is not only meaningful in terms of art history, but also allows us to see how Ye Xiaoluan's literary images have been physically transmitted through each individual knot of the social network.

Different from the previous chapter, however, this chapter pays more attention to the receiving end, rather than the deconstruction-consumption process. My point here is to use

the inkstone and its rubbings to suggest a new paradigm for understanding the reception process of Ye Xiaoluan. By tracing the inkstone—the material carrier of Ye Xiaoluan’s literary images—we will see that her reception is ultimately a collective behavior. Any individual recipient’s reception must be confirmed by others to be meaningful. This would explain why every owner of the eyebrow-shaped inkstone would always invite his or her friends, fellow villagers and local celebrities to compose poems about it, which they would then gather into a collection—because only by placing an artwork in well-crafted frame can a connoisseur control its reception in a subtle and precise manner, thereby gaining and retaining authority of the interpretations of his or her own.

### 3.1 About the Inkstone

It is alleged that Ye Xiaoluan left behind a precious inkstone after her death. The so-called “eyebrow-shaped inkstone” 眉子硯 had an elliptical shape. On the surface it had a pattern of lines of a rhinoceros horn and its inkwell was in the shape of a crescent. There was a colophon inscribed on its back, explaining its origin and ownership:

My uncle obtained three stones from overseas, which were suitable raw materials for making ink slabs. He gave these stones to me and my siblings, and I, Qiongzhang, got the eyebrow-shaped one. I wrote two poems to commemorate this gift:

The prosperity of the Tianbao reign has passed,  
The painters of Chengdu start to make new designs.  
I have only learned to compose poems for three months,  
I hope the poets won’t make fun of my green hands.

Stretching my plain sleeves, I gently  
hold beneath the smoke of the Golden Duck Incense,  
In front of my clear windows and fine table, I  
spread out the writing paper made in Wu.  
I roll up the curtain to fill my inkstone with

rainwater drops from cherry trees,  
How many strings of my green zither have been  
dampened by this moisture?

Written on the Cold Food Festival of the *yisi* year (1605).

舅氏从海上获砚材三，分致余兄弟。琼章得眉子砚，云：“天宝繁华事已陈，成都画手样能新。如今只学初三月，怕有诗人说小鬟。”“素袖轻笼金鸭烟，明窗小几展吴笺。开帘一砚樱桃雨，润到青琴第几弦。乙己寒食题。”<sup>68</sup>

After the text, there is also a stamp of Ye Xiaoluan's seal, indicating she was both the writer of the inscription and owner of this inkstone.

This inkstone, however, was not recorded in Ye family anthology *Noon Dream Hall Collection*. It was not until about a hundred years after Ye Xiaoluan's death that it appeared mysteriously in Guangdong. After having read all the available literature on the inkstone, I can reconstruct its history roughly as follows:

The person who first owned this inkstone was a man named Tao Suizhi 陶綏之, who lived in the Panyu 番禺 area of Guangdong 廣東 province. Tao Suizhi was an obscure man of letters; the only thing we know about him was his penchant for collectables. After he obtained the inkstone, he cherished it very much and requested everyone he knew to compose poems about it. His enthusiasm was apparently so out of control that he even wrote a line to mock himself: “I have begged for poems for the eyebrow-shaped inkstone everywhere/ Any level-headed man would laugh at my silly obsession 到處乞題眉子硯，雅人應不笑儂癡。”<sup>69</sup>

Later the poems he collected were compiled into a book, but unfortunately it has been lost.

Only a limited number of the texts are still extant, including a preface and a song lyric written

---

<sup>68</sup> Gu Wendeng 顧文澄, “Meizi yan bingxu” 眉子硯並序, in *Liangzhe qiuxuan xulu* 兩浙輶軒續錄 comp. Ruan Yuan 阮元 (Hangzhou: Zhejaing guji chubanshe, 2012): 39.59a.

<sup>69</sup> Liang Shaoren 梁紹壬 was a scholar, official and poet. Our understanding of him is limited to existence of his collection *Liangban qiuyu an suibi* 兩般秋雨庵隨筆. Liang Shaoren 梁紹壬, “Meizi yan” 眉子硯, in *Liangban qiuyu an suibi* 兩般秋雨庵隨筆 (Zhenqi tang, 1837): 4.29b-31a.

by a certain Liang Shaoren 梁紹壬 (1792-?), a song lyric by Wu Lanxiu 吳蘭修 (1789-1839), and a set of three quatrains by Lang Baochen 郎葆辰 (1763-1839).<sup>70</sup>

The next verifiable owner was He Yuanxi 何元錫 (1766-1829), whose style name was Menghua 夢華. Living in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, He Yuanxi was a locally famous book collector and epigraphy specialist. He was also very fond of the eyebrow-shaped inkstone. As soon as he got his hands on it, he made rubbings of it which he placed in an album. Then, like Tao Suizhi, he showed off the album to all his friends and invited them to write poems for it. This collection has also been lost, but some of its texts can be found elsewhere, and include song lyrics by relatively well-known literati writers and collectors, such as Yan Yuanzhao 嚴元照 (1773—1817), Guo Lin 郭麟 (1767-1831), and Shen Tao 沈濤 (? - 1861).<sup>71</sup>

After He's death, the inkstone and the rubbings circulated separately. The famous woman writer Yang Yun 楊芸 (1774-1830) once obtained a copy of the rubbings. Like male literati of the time, she also invited people to appreciate the collection and to come up with poems for it, although because of her gender, she was only able to ask her family members. The extant works include a postscript and a set of poems written by herself, a song lyric by her uncle Yang Fangcan 楊芳燦, another song lyric by her paternal cousin Yang Kuisheng 楊夔生,

---

<sup>70</sup> Liang Shaoren 梁紹壬, “Meizi yan” 眉子硯, 4.29b-31a. Wu Lanxiu 吳蘭修 was a scholar, official and historian. He was famous for specializing in the history of the Southern Han Dynasty. See Wu Lanxiu 吳蘭修, “Shuying” 疏影, in *Guochao cizong xubian* 國朝詞綜續編 comp. Haiyan 海鹽, Huang Kuiqing 黃燮清 at el. (1873): 10. 2b-3a. Lang Baochen 郎葆辰 was a scholar-official. Before he tried and became a famous painter, he was an editor of the National Academy. His pieces are no longer available.

<sup>71</sup> Yan Yuanzhao 嚴元照, “Wang Jiangnan” 望江南, *Kejia shanguan ci* 柯家山館詞 (Lu Xinyuan ke Huzhou congshu, 1813): 1. 9b-10a. Guo Lin 郭麟, “Taichang yin” 太常引, *Lingfen guan ci sizhong* 靈芬館詞四種 (Xu Zeng: 1889): 1. 8b. Shen Tao 沈濤, “Nanluo ling” 南樓令, *Jiaocui xuan biji* 交翠軒筆記 (Dahua yinshuguan, 1968): 2. 18b-19a.

and a third song lyric by her maternal cousin Gu Han 顧翰.<sup>72</sup>

The next owner of the inkstone was the famous late Qing poet, calligrapher and intellectual Gong Zizhen 龔自珍 (1792-1841). Those who composed poems for it included Gong Zizhen himself, the famous woman writer Gui Maoyi 歸懋儀 (1762-1832), and the poet Gu Guangqi 顧廣圻 (1770-1839).<sup>73</sup>

The last known owner was Wang Foyun 王佛雲. Because the records of his connoisseurship of Ye Xiaoluan's eyebrow-shaped inkstone are the most detailed, I will fully discuss it as a case study in the second section. Since then, the eyebrow-shaped inkstone has been lost to history. But, luckily, an album of its rubbings, entitled "The Inkstone Inscription of Master of the Cooking Dream" 煮夢子硯銘, has been well-preserved till now.

Commissioned by the rubbing's owner Cai Qinggao 蔡慶高, the specialist of epigraphy Wu Qinglu 伍慶祿 has scanned, annotated and published the album leaves on an online news website.<sup>74</sup> Thanks to their generosity, we are able to have a better idea of the album's physical form. Discussion about the album and the paratexts in it will be conducted in the third section.

In general, the spread of Ye Xiaoluan's eyebrow-shaped inkstone had the following characteristics: 1) Geographical expansion. Due to the physical transportation of the inkstone, Ye Xiaoluan's popularity was expanded to the Guangdong region. 2) Gender balance. Despite

---

<sup>72</sup> Yang Yun 楊芸, "Ti Shuxiang ge yiji hou" 題疎香閣遺集后, *Yidao tang shi waiji* 頤道堂詩外集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002): 7. 10a-11b. Yang Fangcan 楊芳燦, "Taicheng lu" 臺城路, *Furong shangguan cichao* 芙蓉山館詞鈔 (1891): 2. 21b. Yang Kuisheng 楊夔生, "Baizi ling" 百字令, *Zhensong ge ci* 真松閣詞 (1834): 5. 19a-19b. Gu Han 顧翰, "Qing qingzhao" 慶清朝, *Guochao ci zongbu* 國朝詞總補 comp. Wang Chang 王昶 (1802) 26. 11a-11b.

<sup>73</sup> Wu Changshou 吳昌綬, *Ding'an xiansheng nianpu* 定盦先生年譜 (Renhe wushi shuangzhao lou, 1908): 23.

<sup>74</sup> Wu Qinglu 伍慶祿, "Shidu Ye Xiaoluan meizi yan taben ce" 釋讀《葉小鸞眉子硯拓本》冊, *Jinri toutiao* 今日頭條. Sep 3, 2017. <https://kknews.cc/culture/yn6ee5k.html>

their small number, female collectors and writers also participated in the appreciation of and the writing of poems about the inkstone. The scope and depth of their activities were the same as men's. 3) Collective behavior. The listed connoisseurship of the inkstone was highly similar in terms of organizational form. As the host, the owner would actively invite the literati to appreciate his or her collection; being invited, literati would then write poems praising the object and finally, the poems would be assembled and published as evidence of the collective appreciation.

### **3.2 Inkstone Serendipity: A Case Study of Wang Foyun and His “Yanyuan ji”**

In 1849, a low-ranking official by the name Wang Foyun 王佛雲 chanced to find an eyebrow-shaped inkstone in the marketplace. Realizing that this seemingly inconspicuous writing implement was the famous relic of Ye Xiaoluan, Wang Foyun was overjoyed at his discovery and named his study room as “Yanyuan an” (硯緣齋, Inkstone Serendipity Chamber) in commemoration. Shortly after, Wang Foyun was assigned to a new post in Songling county, the hometown of Ye Xiaoluan. This series of coincidences made him convinced that he must have a predestined relationship with Ye Xiaoluan, so he set out to collect everything he could find about Ye Xiaoluan. He first borrowed the “Chronology of Ye Tianliao [Shaoyuan]” from a local scholar, from which he was able to familiarize himself with the Ye family's condition in a quite detailed fashion. He then arranged a meeting with Ye Xiaoluan's patrilineal descendants. Knowing that one of them had a portrait of Ye Xiaoluan, he proposed making a copy of the painting. He also renovated Ye Xiaoluan's grave and allocated a piece of land to support its upkeep. Finally, he “collected and gathered poems from all around the country,” which he turned into a four-volume book entitled “Inkstone

Serendipity Collection.”<sup>75</sup>

Although this book has disappeared, but we can still find some of its contents from other sources. The existing works include: a set of three poems written by Wang Foyun, a set of *sanqu* 散曲 by the playwright Huang Junzai 黃鈞宰, another set of *sanqu* by a female dramatist Wu Yixiang 吳逸香, a song lyric by the woman writer Zong Wan 宗婉, and two prefaces that were respectively written by Gu Wendeng 顧文澄 and Yu Yue 俞樾.<sup>76</sup> It is worth noting that the poems are similar in content, which can be roughly described as “biographies” of the inkstone. The basic ingredients are: 1) an introduction of the origin of the inkstone; 2) descriptions about how it fits into the details of Ye Xiaoluan’s daily life, especially through the depiction of the scenes in which Ye Xiaoluan is writing poems or reading books in her study; 3) the bleakness of being displaced from the Ye family and getting lost among those too ignorant to recognize its value; 4) it finally finding a safe haven under Wang Foyun’s protection. Here is an example of the song lyric by Zong Wan:

Coming overseas, the stones were given to  
the handsome girls in orchid chambers with green windows.  
This inkstone was in an exquisitely round shape,  
as delicate as its owner’s poetic bones.  
In its chalcedony pit, in its ink puddle,  
the inkstone shaped like an eyebrow-like moon.  
Next to her zither, next to her toilet case,  
the inkstone served her brush to work on silk.

Alas! good dreams do not last long, like a night-blooming cereus that  
easily falls, into jade-like shatters.

---

<sup>75</sup> Gu Wendeng 顧文澄, “Meizi yan bing xu” 眉子硯並序, 39.59a.

<sup>76</sup> Gu Wendeng 顧文澄, “Meizi yan bing xu” 眉子硯並序, 39.59a. Huang Zaijun 黃鈞宰, “Meizi yan qu” 眉子硯曲, in *Jinhu langmo* 金壺浪墨 (Biyu lou, 1873):6. 7a-8b. Huang Zaijun 黃鈞宰, “Wu Yixiang” 吳逸香, in *Jinhu dunmo* 金壺遯墨 (Biyu lou, 1873): 2. 20a-21b. Zong Wan 宗婉, “Baizi ling” 百字令, *Mengxiang lou cigao* 夢湘樓詞稿 (Zongshi, 1880): 10a-10b. Yu Yue 俞樾, “Wang Foyun Yanyuan ji xu” 王佛雲硯緣集序, in *Binmeng ji* 賓萌集 (Chunzai tang, 1899): 3.16a - 17a.

Floating and sinking, up and down, it was finally  
again, packed in an embroidered purse.  
Being fondled for eight years, being cherished as always,  
the inkstone witnessed him tracing her notes.  
Did you, the raven-black brush, think that  
their fates were predestined to cross?

來從海上，向蘭閨分授，綠窗群彥。硯亦如人詩骨秀，斷就玲瓏圓轉。  
石髓坳中，墨云堆里，眉月彎彎現。琴邊奩畔，供他書破裊練。

無奈塵夢難長，曇華易散，流落瓊瑤片。屈指升沈經幾度，又被錦囊收斂。八  
載摩挲，一規珍重，運腕臨摹遍。愧儂鴉管，有緣亦預評點。<sup>77</sup>

Zong Wan's description is almost anthropomorphic: the inkstone is endowed with a numinous spirit, which perfectly parallels the spirituality of Ye Xiaoluan and her writing. Its delicate texture also echoes her (imagined) beautiful body, and her destiny determines its fate. Therefore, in a sense, the inkstone and Ye Xiaoluan can be regarded as one: the inkstone is her material carrier, and she is the soul of the inkstone. Surely, the act of viewing and fondling the inkstone can be interpreted as a manifestation of a desire to take possession of Ye Xiaoluan.<sup>78</sup> But on the other hand, the inheritance and protection of the inkstone can also be seen as a collaborative effort on the part of the cultural elites to provide another ending to Ye Xiaoluan's life story. Especially when this imagination is shared by both men and women writers, perhaps the latter are closer to the state of mind when they were invited to write poems for Wang Foyun's inkstone. It is the consensus on this kind of tenderness that defines the basic atmosphere of Wang Foyun's "Inkstone Serendipity Collection."

### 3.3 Paratext: A Public Zone of Interpretation

<sup>77</sup> Zong Wan 宗婉, "Baizi ling" 百字令, *Mengxiang lou cigao* 夢湘樓詞稿 (Zongshi, 1880): 10a-10b.

<sup>78</sup> For the interpretation about Wang Foyun projecting his desire onto Ye Xiaoluan through possessing the inkstone. See Anne Gerritsen, "The Many Guises of Xiaoluan," 54-55; and, Anne Gerritsen, "Searching for Gentility: The Nineteenth-Century Fashion for the Late Ming," in *The Quest for Gentility in China: Negotiations Beyond Gender and Glass*. ed. Daria Berg and Chloë Starr. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007): 197-198.



Paratext is a concept in literary interpretation. It refers to the materials that accompany the main text in a published book, usually provided by editors, critics, and publishers. Gérard Genette defines it as “a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of transaction: a privileged place of pragmatics and a strategy, of an action on the public, well or badly understood and accomplished, of a better reception of the text and a more pertinent reading—more pertinent, naturally, in the eyes of the author and his allies.”<sup>79</sup> In simple terms, paratext functions as a portal to the printed main text. Any reader who wants to access the main text must interpret it within the framework formed by the paratexts, thus more or less falling under the control of it.

The focus of this section is the paratext of an album of the rubbings of Ye Xiaoluan’s eyebrow-shaped inkstone—“The Inkstone Inscription of Master of the Cooking Dream” 煮夢子硯銘.<sup>80</sup> This beautifully-bound album has twelve leaves. The first page is the head page, which shows that the album was produced on January 24, 1923 by a collector named Han Ju 寒璠. The second and third pages are copies of the rubbings of Ye Xiaoluan’s eyebrow-shaped inkstone. The pages are covered with short notes and the seals of previous collectors. The fourth page is a painting produced by a painter named Liang Dingfen 梁鼎芬. The painting is entitled “Guan yan tu” (觀硯圖, Viewing the Inkstone), and depicts the scene where Liang Dingfen once got a chance to see the precious inkstone in a collector’s house. The fifth to twelfth pages are the poems, song lyrics, and short notes about the inkstone written by successive owners and art critics. These writings can be roughly divided into two

---

<sup>79</sup> Gérard Genette and Marie Maclean, “Introduction to the Paratext,” *New Literary History* vol. 22, No. 2, *Probings: Art, Criticism, Genre* (Spring, 1991): 261-262.

<sup>80</sup> Wu Qinglu 伍慶祿, “Shidu Ye Xiaoluan meizi yan taben ce” 釋讀《葉小鸞眉子硯拓本》冊, *Jinri toutiao* 今日頭條. Sep 3, 2017. <https://kknews.cc/culture/yn6ee5k.html>

types. The first type is similar to what was recorded in Wang Foyun's "Inkstone Serendipity Collection," which praise the inkstone as a medium for getting messages across between Ye Xiaoluan and the contemporary audience. The second type are more like scholars' textual research notes, clarifying the transmission process of the inkstone and its rubbings. Based on the above facts, it can be said that in this album it is the paratexts rather than the actual rubbings that are the most important part of this publication. Their existence will allow us to visually see how the diachronic collective appreciation has taken place in a public sphere.

This album is not fundamentally different from Wang Foyun's "Inkstone Serendipity Collection." It does however, show the occurrence pattern of the collective appreciations in a more comprehensive, more intuitive, and more well-developed way. First of all, it suggests the appreciation is essentially a spontaneous collective behavior. Unlike Wang Fuyun's "Inkstone Serendipity Collection," the creation of this album did not rely on a single collector's leadership.<sup>81</sup> The fact points out that the consensus among audiences was the main driver of reception, appreciation and consumption behaviors. Secondly, the album provides us with a concrete and observable space of reception, for the rubbings are literarily surrounded by poems, notes, seals and paintings created by the recipients. In this way we can more directly observe how the paratexts are related to the rubbings. Because of this kind of "tight wrapping," reader's reception and interpretation of the rubbings are controlled by the paratexts in a more powerful way. They must traverse these paratexts to reach the rubbings themselves. It is almost impossible for them to appreciate the rubbing itself directly without being influenced by these preconceived notions. The direct result of this effect is that the new

---

<sup>81</sup> One of the writers once pointed out in the postscript that he rebound the album and added some pieces of blank paper some that he could attach his own poems to the book.

recipient is assimilated by the previous recipients and becomes part of their group of collective appreciation. Last but not least, we need to see that the rubbings are not the main source of its significance. Rather, the rubbings are a substitute for the inkstone, and the inkstone is another substitute for Ye Xiaoluan. However, in this process of substitution, Ye Xiaoluan gradually disappears and appears to take a subordinate position similar to that of a background or a footnote. We can observe a trend in these paratexts—that is, what these connoisseurs care about and emphasize is not so much the fact that this inkstone once belonged to Ye Xiaoluan and so recalls her sad fate, her beauty and literary talents, but rather that this item has been repeatedly consumed by previous connoisseurs, and records kept of these various acts of consumptions.

In sum, after reviewing the entire history of the reception of Ye Xiaoluan, we find that her image actually has disappeared in a constant transformation and deferral of meaning, and the agents of this process have never simply been individuals, but rather groups of recipients linked by consensus.

# Conclusion

This thesis focuses on the reception and re-creation history of the woman writer Ye Xiaoluan from late-Ming period to early-ROC period. In the three chapters, I reviewed the three stages of her reception and re-creation. The first chapter shows the formation and iconization of Ye Xiaoluan's images. The fantasy of her was first of all having been catalyzed from the indifference and detachment of her own characteristics. Having been catalyzed by her early death, her bereft family remembers, especially her parents Ye Shaoyuan and Shen Yixiu, applied the traditional commemoration of male literati to their little girl, and thus formally promising her the potential for immortality. Such potential was further refined into a female immortal's image through the re-creation of the literary genius Jin Shengtan. Finally, Ye Xiaoluan the goddess, in her father and Jin Shengtan's joint propaganda, became a popular cultural icon at the time.

The second chapter focuses on the deconstruction and consumption of Ye Xiaoluan after the Ming-Qing transition. During this period, Ye Xiaoluan has changed from the present cultural icon to one of the many prominent figures in history that are ready to be referred to from the cultural repertoire. Readers would strategically select and reject the different aspects of her sign value to recreate her image according to their own aesthetic expectations and psychological requirements. Their projections include: 1) frustrated male literati finding salvation from an ideal woman; 2) as a member of the women writer's pedigree, providing a role model for other female writers; 3) offering psychological comfort to other parents who have lost their daughters.

The third chapter deals with the circulation process of Ye Xiaoluan's eyebrow-shaped

inkstone. The piece has a double meaning. On the one hand, it was a material carrier of Ye Xiaoluan's fantasies. By tracing the transmission of the inkstone, we are able to see on the micro level how her images were received by the reading public—in what scope and through which means. On the other hand, it was a link in the chain of deferrals of signifying. I mean, in the transmission process, the historically true Ye Xiaoluan was replaced by her fanciful images, the images were substituted by the inkstone, the inkstone itself was further substituted by its rubbings. In this continual postponement, the reception of Ye Xiaoluan has been increasingly dependent on the consensus of the recipient group, instead of on individuals' direct impression of her. As a result, the historical Ye Xiaoluan began to fade out of people's horizons.

As I pointed out in the introduction, a core issue in this process is that, as a female writer, Ye Xiaoluan's works were not well known, but instead it was she who has been widely lionized and commercialized. Different from previous studies, I argue that this phenomenon was not only due to the objectification and self-projection of male literati on women writers, but also decided by the general sociocultural context. Reviewing the reception and re-creation history of Ye Xiaoluan, we find that the more time passed, the more it relied on the agency of a group rather than that of an individual. Moreover, among these recipient groups, although the number of males was greater than that of females, the breadth, depth, and content of their activities did not show significant differences due to gender differences.

In this regard, I argue the concept of gender construction is fundamental to the study of Ye Xiaoluan, but what I concerned with is not the simple gender opposition, but her unique position as a woman writer who could almost completely drift away from the

male-dominated literary world. Ye Xiaoluan, as an aloof and detached woman, as a poetess whose talent was far beyond the average level, as pubescent girl who died strangely right before her marriage and who could not be placed into traditional secular social structures, as a goddess who allegedly abandoned all worldly attachments and became a Buddhist, has never encountered the venturing-into-male-literary-world kind of problem that every female writer would almost certainly encounter in her life.<sup>82</sup> I believe it was precisely because Ye Xiaoluan had such a unique “non-sexuality” that later generations of literati have paid more attention to her social roles and identities rather than her works. The increasing collectivity in her reception and re-creation was nothing more than a manifestation of the anxiety of contextualizing her into the already existed literary orders; but the better assimilation was, the further Ye Xiaoluan was pushed away from us.

---

<sup>82</sup> For further discussion on women writer’s struggle in male literary world, see Ronald C. Egan, *The Burden of Female Talent: The Poet Li Qingzhao and Her History in China*. Cambridge: Harvard-Yenching Institute, 2004.

# Bibliography

## Primary Sources:

Chen Wenshu 陳文述, “Diao Tanhong ge nüshi Wang Zhonglan” 弔曇紅閣女史王仲蘭, in *Yidao tang ji* 頤道堂集, 1807.

Chen Xunxiang 陳[上荀下大]纘 et al., comp. *Wujiang Xianzhi* 吳江縣志, 1747.

Feng Jinbo 馮金伯, comp. *Ciyuan cuibian* 詞苑萃編, 1805.

Gu Wendeng 顧文澄, “Meizi yan bing xu” 眉子硯並序, in *Liangzhe qiuxuan xulu* 兩浙輶軒續錄 comp. Ruan Yuan 阮元 (Hangzhou: Zhejaing guji chubanshe, 2012): 39.59a.

Guo Lin 郭麟, “Taichang yin” 太常引, *Lingfen guan ci sizhong* 靈芬館詞四種. Xu Zeng: 1889.

Gu Han 顧翰, “Qing qingzhao” 慶清朝, *Guochao ci zongbu* 國朝詞總補 comp. Wang Chang 王昶, 1802.

Huang Zaijun 黃鈞宰, *Jinhu langmo* 金壺浪墨, *Biyu lou*, 1873.  
\_\_\_\_\_, *Jinhu dunmo* 金壺遯墨, *Biyu lou*, 1873.

Ji Maiyi 紀邁宜, *Jianzhong tang shi* 儉重堂詩, *Qianlong keben*.

Li Mingwan 李銘皖 et al., comp. *Suzhou fuzhi* 蘇州府志, Jiangsu shuju: 1883.

Liang Shaoren 梁紹壬, “Meizi yan” 眉子硯, in *Liangban qiuyu an suibi* 兩般秋雨盒隨筆, Zhenqi tang: 1837.

Lu Jilu 陸繼輅, *Chongbai yaozhai wenji* 崇百藥齋文集, 1878.

Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修, *Liuyi Shihu* 六一詩話, in *Wenyuange siku quanshu* 文淵閣四庫全書. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2003.

Pan Yongyin 潘永因, *Songbai leichao* 宋稗類鈔 in *Wenyuange siku quanshu* 文淵閣四庫全書 (Shanghai: Shanghai gujichubanshe, 2003): 17.41a-41b

Qian Qianyi 錢謙益, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 列朝詩集小傳. Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1983.

\_\_\_\_\_, “Tiantai Le fashi lingyi ji” 天台泐法師靈異記, in *Muzhai chuxue ji* 牧齋初學集, in *Sibu congshu* 四部叢書 vol.1647. Shanghai: Hanfenlou, 1643:12a-16b.

Shen Tao 沈濤, “Nanluo ling” 南樓令, *Jiaocui xuan biji* 交翠軒筆記. Dahua yinshuguan,

1968.

Shi Taoyu 石韜玉, “Lianyi ji xu” 蓮因集序, in *Duxue lu gao xugao* 獨學廬稿續稿, Xieke duxie lu.

Wang Duanshu 王端淑, comp. *Mingyuan shiwei chubian* 名媛詩緯初編. Qingyin tang, 1667.

Wang Yunzhang 王蘊章. *Ranzhi yuyun* 然脂餘韻. Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1918.

Wu Changshou 吳昌綬, *Ding'an xiansheng nianpu* 定盦先生年譜. Renhe wushi shuangzhao lou, 1908.

Wu Lanxiu 吳蘭修, “Shuying” 疏影, in *Guochao cizong xubian* 國朝詞綜續編 comp. Haiyan 海鹽, Huang Kuiqing 黃燮清 at el. (1873): 10. 2b-3a.

Wu Qinglu 伍慶祿, “Shidu Ye Xiaoluan meizi yan taben ce” 釋讀《葉小鸞眉子硯拓本》冊, *Jinri toutiao* 今日頭條. Sep 3, 2017. <https://kknews.cc/culture/yn6ee5k.html>

Yan Yuanzhao 嚴元照, “Wang Jiangnan” 望江南, *Kejia shanguan ci* 柯家山館詞. Lu Xinyuan ke Huzhou congshu, 1813.

Yang Fangcan 楊芳燦, *Furong shanguan cichao* 芙蓉山館詞鈔, 1891.

Yang Kuisheng 楊夔生, *Zhensong ge ci* 真松閣詞, 1834.

Yang Yun 楊芸, “Ti Shuxiang ge yiji hou” 題疎香閣遺集后, *Yidao tang shi waiji* 頤道堂詩外集 comp. Chen Wenshu 陳文述 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002): 7. 10a-11b.

Yu Yue 俞樾, *Chunzai tang suibi* 春在堂隨筆. Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 2000. \_\_\_\_\_, *Binmeng ji* 賓萌集. Chunzai tang, 1899.

Yuan Mei 袁枚, *Suiyuan shihua* 隨園詩話, 1749.

Ye Shaoyuan 葉紹袁, comp. *Wumengtang Ji* 午夢堂集. Ji Lei 冀勒 ed. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2015.

You Tong 尤侗, *Xitang quanji* 西堂全集, in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 vol.1406, Shanghai: Shanghai gushi chubanshe, 2002.

Zhou Liangong 周亮工, *Yinshuwu shuying* 因樹屋書影. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981.



Zong Wan 宗婉, *Mengxiang lou cigao* 夢湘樓詞稿. Zongshi, 1880.

Secondary Sources:

Baudrillard, Jean. *The Consumer Society: Myth and Structure*, trans. by Chris Turner. London: Sage, 1998.

\_\_\_\_\_, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. and intro. by Charles Levin, St. Louis: Telos Press Ltd., 1981.

Bruner, Jerome. "The Narrative Construction of Reality," *Critical Inquiry* 1 (1991): 1-21.

Cai Jingping 蔡靜平, "Mingqing zhiji fenhu yeshi wenxue shijia yanjiu," 明清之際汾湖葉氏文學世家研究 PhD Diss., Fudan University, 2003.

Chang, Kang-i Sun. *The Late-Ming Poet Ch'en Tzu-lung: Crises in Love And Loyalism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983.

Chen Yujun 陳宇俊, "Wumeng tang jiqi nüxing chuanguo," 午夢堂及其女性創作 MA diss., Suzhou University, 2004.

Chen Yibei 陳怡貝, "The Study on the Poetess of Wumengtang Family: A Discussion Centered on Their Exchanged Ci-Poems," 午夢堂家族女詞人研究——以酬唱詞為討論中心 MA diss., National Chengchi University, 2014.

Company, Robert Ford. *Making Transcendents: Ascetics and Social Memory in Early Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009): 40-61.

Deng Hongmei 鄧紅梅, *Nüxing cishi* 女性詞史. Jinan: Shangdong jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000.

Du Guiping 杜桂萍, "Shixing jiangou yu wenxue xiangxiang de dacheng: Lun Ye Xiaoluan wenxue xingxiang de wenxueshi yiyi" 詩性建構與文學想象的達成——論葉小鸞文學形象生成演變的文學史意義, *Wenxue pinglun* no.3 (2008): 56-63.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Mingmo caizi Tang Chuanying yu You Tong Juntianyue chuanqi" 明末才子湯傳楹與尤侗《鈞天樂》傳奇, *Fudan xuebao*, no.6 (2013): 20-30.

Durrant, Stephen. Li Wai-ye and David Schaberg, trans., *Zuo Traditions / Zuo zhuan: Commentary on the "Spring and Autumn Annals"* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016): 1124-1125.

Ebrey, Patricia. "Women, Marriage and the Family in Chinese history," in Paul S. Ropp ed. *Heritage of China: Contemporary Perspectives on Chinese Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990): 197-223.

Egan, Ronald C. *The Burden of Female Talent: The Poet Li Qingzhao and Her History in China*. Cambridge: Harvard-Yenching Institute, 2004.

- Furth, Charlotte. "Androgynous Males and Deficient Females: Biology and Gender Boundaries in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century China," in *Late Imperial China*, 9 (1988): 1-31.
- Genette, Gérard and Marie Maclean, "Introduction to the Paratext," *New Literary History* vol. 22, No. 2, Probing: Art, Criticism, Genre (Spring, 1991): 261-272.
- Gerritsen, Anne. "The Many Guises of Xiaoluan: The Legacy of a Girl Poet in Late Imperial China," *Journal of Women's History* 17:2 (2005): 38-61.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Searching for Gentility: The Nineteenth-Century Fashion for the Late Ming," in *The Quest for Gentility in China: Negotiations Beyond Gender and Glass*. ed. Darai Berg and Chloë Starr. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007): 188-207.
- Huang, Martin W. "Sentiments of Desire: Thoughts on the Cult of Qing in Ming-Qing Literature," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, 20 (1998):153-184.
- Idema, Wilt and Beata Grant. *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004.
- Kellner, Douglas, "Jean Baudrillard," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = [<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/ baudrillard/>](https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/ baudrillard/).
- Ko, Dorothy. *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.
- Li, Wai-ye. *Enchantment and Disenchantment: Love and Illusion in Chinese Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Lin Jinyu 林津羽, "The Phantom of A Talented Woman: Gendered Writing in the Late-Ming Ye Xiaoluan's *Fanshengxiang*," 才女魅影:晚明葉小鸞《返生香》的性別書寫 in *Zhongji xuekan*. no.4 (2004): 75-97.
- Lu Lin 陸林, "Wumengtān jī zhōng Lè Dāshī qí rén: Jīn Shēngtān yú wǎn Míng Wújiāng Yè shì jiāoyou kǎo" 《午夢堂集》中泐大師其人:金聖嘆與 晚明吳江葉氏交遊考, *Xibei shida xuebao* 西北師大學報, Vol. 41, No. 4 (July 2004): 22-25.
- Mann, Susan. *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.
- Meng Yuzhong 孟羽中, "The Study on the Relationship Between the Life and Literature Form of Wujiang Ye Family in the Late Ming and Early Qing Dynasties," 明清之際吳江葉氏家族的生活意態與文體書寫 MA diss., Nanjing University, 2008.

- Qu Xianghong 曲向紅, "The Study on Women's Poems and Ci-Poems of the Ye's Family in Wujiang," 吳江葉氏女性詩詞研究 MA diss., Shangdong Normal University, 2004.
- Ropp, Paul S. "Women in Late Imperial China: A Review of Recent English-language Scholarship," in *Women's History Review*, 3:3 (1994): 347-383.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Love, Literacy, and Laments: Themes of Women Writers in Late Imperial China," in *Women's History Review*, 2 (1993): 107-141.
- Swidler, Ann. "Culture in action: symbols and strategies," *American Sociological Review* 51 (1986): 273-286.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2001.
- Wang Nini 王昵昵, "The Study on Ci-Poems of Ye Xiaoluan in Late Ming Dynasty," 明末女詞人葉小鸞研究 MA diss., Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics, 2013.
- Widmer, Ellen. "The Epistolary World of Female Talent in Seventeenth-Century China," in *Late Imperial China* 10, no. 2 (1989): 1-43.
- Widmer, Ellen. and Kang-i Sun Chang, ed. *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.
- Wu Bili 吳碧麗, "Mingmo Qingchu Wujiang Yeshe jiazhu de wenhua shenghuo yu wenxue" 明末清初吳江葉氏家族的文化生活與文學 MA diss., Nanjing Normal University, 2005.
- Wu Zhenglan 吳正嵐, "Jin Shengtan yu Qian Qianyi de sixiang yuanyuan" 金聖嘆與錢謙益的思想淵源, in *Journal of Fuzhou University (Philosophy and Social Science)* no.78 (2007): 66-73.
- Xu Dishan 許地山, *Fuji mixun de yanjiu* 扶箕迷信的研究. Beijing: Shangwu yishuguan, 1999.
- Zhang Qinghe 張清河, "Study on Women Literature of Ye Family in Late Ming Dynasty Wujiang City," 晚明吳江葉氏女性文學研究 MA diss., Wuhan University, 2005.
- Zhang, Xiaoquan Raphael. "Marginal Writing in Seventeenth-Century China: Ye Shaoyuan and His Literary Family," PhD diss., Washington University in St. Louis, 2010.
- Zhao Xuepei 趙雪沛, *Mingmo Qingchu nüciren yanjiu* 明末清初女詞人研究. Beijing: Capital Normal University Press, 2008.
- Zeitlin, Judith T., "Spirit Writing and Performance in the Work of You Tong 尤侗

(1618-1704),” *T'oung Pao* 84 no.2 (1998): 102-135.

# Appendix

## Translation: Sequel to Distant Messages 續窈聞 (Excerpt)

Master Le'an from Suzhou, senior and virtuous, was first born in the periods of Chen and Sui. As a disciple he learned from Master Zhiyi of Tiantai Buddhism the way of concentration and illumination. It was over a thousand years ago, when he fell into the path of gods. Now he is reincarnated in female form. He is able to use Buddhist means to deal with the dead. His deeds are detailed in Master Qian's "Biography of Spirituality."<sup>83</sup>

The date of yesterday was July 22, 1635.<sup>84</sup> We respectfully and reverently set up incense, flowers, banners and curtains in order to welcome the Master's presence. At noon, the female scribes arrived in the first place. They told us: "The Master will arrive at sunset." I, along with my family, held our breath and waited silently.

After a good while, the Master finally arrived. As soon as he stepped down from his altar, he said: "The Female Scribe of Falling Petals told me earlier that you had two volumes of *Red Trousseau* in your possession.<sup>85</sup> Can I borrow it and have a look?"

I kowtowed to the Master and expressed my appreciation: "I am afraid it would be an affront to your holy spirit. It is too modest of you to use the word 'borrow'."

Then I submitted the volumes to his view. Having read the books, the Master said: "Do you want to immortalize them?"

---

<sup>83</sup> See Qian Qianyi 錢謙益, "Tiantai Le fashi lingyi ji" 天台泐法師靈異記 (Biography of Tiantai Master Le's Spirituality), in *Muzhai chuxue ji* 牧齋初學集 (Collected Works of Elementary Studies of Mr. Muzhai), in *Sibu congkan jibu* 四部叢刊 (Series of the Four Vaults) vol.1647, Shanghai: Hanfenlou, 1643:12a-16b.

<sup>84</sup> The date is converted into Gregorian calendar. The original Chinese lunar calendar date is the ninth day of the sixth month of *yihai* year.

<sup>85</sup> *Red Trousseau* (彤奩, *Tonglian*) is the title of Ye Xiaoluan's poetry collection.

I straightened my back and moved forward on my knees, saying: “Two daughters of mine died years ago. It was like witnessing pearls sinking [in water] and jades falling [to the ground]. I was truly broken-hearted. Thinking about their graceful behavior and elegant deeds in the past, I can’t imagine they have abandoned themselves in grass and weeds. All I long for is to comfort my sorrow. How dare I covet immortality? Having heard your kind consolation, I feel their ethereal fragrance become even more pitiful. I wonder if I may have the honor of inviting the Master seated on the lotus seat to carve some petals.<sup>86</sup> It would brace up the herbs’ tender buds in the wilderness.<sup>87</sup> A word carved by your knife is a bamboo message preserved for a thousand years. Isn’t that something higher than my sentiment on life and death?” Tearfully, I thus implored him.

*(The Master wrote prefaces to Red Trousseau and painted some paintings.)*

*(Ye Shaoyuan asked the Master the whereabouts of other deceased family members.)*

I then asked about my deceased daughter Xiaoluan.

The Master answered: “She is the Book Maid of the Moon Mansion.”

I asked if the Moon Mansion was the celestial palace on the moon, the one commonly known as “Vast Cold Palace.”<sup>88</sup> The Master said: “No. They are different.”

“But why she debased herself as a mortal in this life?”

---

<sup>86</sup> Here “the Master seated on the lotus seat” is a circumlocution of the word “you,” a respectful way to refer to Master Le’an. “To carve some petals” is a rhetorical phrase that means to write something.

<sup>87</sup> Here “the herbs’ tender buds” refers to Ye Shaoyuan’s deceased daughters.

<sup>88</sup> In Chinese mythology, *Guanghan gong* (廣寒宮, Vast Cold Palace) is related with Chang’e 嫦娥, Chinese goddess of the Moon. It is said that Chang’e took the elixir of life, flew upwards towards heaven, and chose the moon as residence. *Guanghan gong* is the palace she lived in.

The Master said: “To play.”

“To play? Then why did she come to my home?”

The Master said: “If an immortal wants to play, she will definitely choose a pure and honest family. It is also because you have met her in your previous lives.”

I asked when we had met. The Master said: “You were Qin Taixu 秦太虛 in your last life, and before that you were Meifu 梅福.<sup>89</sup> That is when you met Qiongzhang. Back then Qiongzhang was a woman named Songde 松德. Before you reincarnated as Meifu, you were Lu Zhonglian 魯仲連.<sup>90</sup> That is when you had another meeting [with her]. Your wife was Qin Taixu’s wife, the daughter of Su Zimei 蘇子美.<sup>91</sup> Before that she was Cai Jing’s 蔡經 sister.<sup>92</sup> That is when she came across Qiongzhang. Everyone in your family has an intricate pedigree. I cannot see it thoroughly.”

I asked: “Where is [Ye Xiao] luan now?”

The Master said: “In the immortal’s mansion on Mount Hou 緱山.”<sup>93</sup>

I asked: “Is it what we today call Mount Songhou 嵩緱嶺, the one in Zhongzhou 中州?”

The Master said: “No. It is beyond clouds, in the Moon Mansion.”

“What was her name?”

The Master said: “Hanhuang 寒簧.”

“Has she taken back her old name?”

---

<sup>89</sup> Qin Taixu 秦太虛 (1049 - 1100), more frequently referred to as Qin Guan 秦觀, was a famous *ci* poet of Northern Song dynasty. Meifu 梅福 is said to be an immortal of Western Han dynasty.

<sup>90</sup> Lu Zhonglian 魯仲連 (c.305 BCE - c.245 BCE) was a sophist and politician of Warring States period.

<sup>91</sup> Shu Shunqing 蘇舜卿 (1009 - 1049), styled Zimei 子美, was a scholar-official of Northern Song dynasty. There was no record, however, that Shu Shunqing’s daughter was married to Qin Guan.

<sup>92</sup> Cai Jing 蔡經 is a character in Ge Hong’s 葛洪 (283 - 343) *Shenxian zhuan* (神仙傳, The Tales of Immortals).

<sup>93</sup> Mount Hou 緱山 is one of the abodes of the immortals. It is said that the Queen Mother of West had lived there. It is also said Mount Hou was the place where Wang Ziqiao 王子喬 left the world and ascended to heaven.

The Master said: “No. She is now called Ye Xiaoluan.”

I asked: “How does her destiny tie in with that of her fiancé, Mr. Zhang?”

The Master said: “They met once. Mr. Zhang in his previous life was a man surnamed Zheng, the son of a high-ranking official of Zhejiang. Before that he was Master Gucan 固參宗師, who was also a brilliant person. When he was of the Zheng family, he showed his talent from a young age. He claimed he had consorted with the Female Scribe of Yujing. Hanhuang overheard his words. She came to the door of his study and showed herself in a pergola. Seeing a girl in his garden, Mr. Zheng was surprised and did not realize that it was a goddess manifesting herself to him. This incident took place on the third day of the third month of the second year of Tianshun reign.<sup>94</sup> The reason why Mr. Zhang’s destiny is tied to hers is because at that time, he did not have the chance to see her clearly. It is because of his dissatisfaction that he came to seek her again.”

I asked: “If their destinies are tied with each other, why did they not get married in the end?”

The master said: “Hanhuang was amused by and interested in Student Zheng because of his wild words. But as soon as she manifested herself, she regretted it. She did not want to be banished to the world of men, nor did she wish to conduct the contemptible and sordid thing [with him]. But those who were in power in the celestial court had already blamed her for smiling to Student Zheng. That was why she came. Because she regretted it soon after, even though she came, she would not get married.”

I tearfully pleaded with the Master to wield his power and call back her soul.

---

<sup>94</sup> This date corresponds to the date of April 15, 1458.



The Master said: “Her soul is in the celestial residence. I’m afraid it would be hard to call her back. Also, we need to go across Mount Peng and Weak Water. It would be too far.”<sup>95</sup> I pleaded repeatedly.

*(Master Le’an called back the soul.)*

Here she came out. I asked her: “Now that you are one of the immortals, can you tell what it looked like when you died? Did anyone come to guide you?”

My daughter said: “When Bodhisattvas die it is called a final death. When sentient beings die, it is called a conventional death. My death was still a conventional death. When I was on my way, I saw boys whose faces were like jade; I saw girls whose faces were like pearls; I saw buildings decorated with purple-gold banners, coral-red flags, and cinnabar-red tassels; I saw green lions standing watch at both ends of bridges; I saw red dragons shouldering carriages by two sides; I saw yellow clouds shelter my head, green clouds support my feet, red clouds pave a way for me, and white clouds cloak my body. I was so happy; I felt no pain.”

I asked: “How did you come today?”

She answered: “Again, I rode on clouds.”

I asked: “Did you see your grandmother?”

She answered: “No.”

“Did you see your sister Zhaoqi?”

---

<sup>95</sup> Mount Peng 蓬山 and Weak Water 弱水 are located in the immortals’ land.

She answered: “She is in Nihil Leaf Hall.”

“How did you know it was her?”

She answered: “Master Le’an told me.”

“Did you see your second oldest brother?”

She answered: “Yes. Right now, he is outside the door. My youngest brother is also there.”

I asked: “Your youngest brother is only a toddler. Is anyone holding him?”

She answered: “He is tugging at my second oldest brother.” (At that night I also conducted a fire sermon ceremony for my dead son Shicheng 世稱. That’s why they all showed themselves.)

Their conversation went on. The Master said: “It starts with ignorance; ignorance gives rise to action; action causes consciousness; consciousness causes name and form; name and form cause the six sense organs; the six sense organs cause contact; contact causes sensation; sensation causes desire; desire causes attachment; attachment causes existence; existence causes birth; birth causes aging and death. If you wish to listen, I will explain in detail.”<sup>96</sup> Then he stopped spirit writing for a long time. “That’s strange! Yes. The primary thing is to cut off attachment,” he said: “The marvel of Bodhisattvas is precisely due to their emptiness and illusory nature. Your intelligence must have been bestowed by the heaven.”

Thus, my daughter composed a poem and offered it to Master Le’an, which I record as follows:

---

<sup>96</sup> Here the Master refers to the “Twelve *Nidānas*” or “Twelve-Linked Chain of Dependent Origination” in Buddhism.

“How could the Weak Water quell a poisonous dragon?”<sup>97</sup>

Because of your contribution, my Master, I steered my rudder.

Now, I will bid my farewell to the Lord of Hibiscus,<sup>98</sup>

and subserviently serve in the breeze blowing from the lion seat.”<sup>99</sup>

The Master replied: “I do not dare [to accept this compliment].”

My daughter said: “I wish I could become one of your disciples. I will not go back to my celestial residence anymore.”

The Master said: “Whoever wishes to become my disciple must be ordained. Whoever receives my ordination must first undergo my interrogation. Let me ask you—Have you ever committed the crime of killing?”<sup>100</sup>

My daughter replied: “Yes, I have.”

The Master asked: “How?”

My daughter said: “Once I asked Xiaoyu [a maidservant] to have flower bugs removed; I

---

<sup>97</sup> In Chinese mythology, “Weak Water” is said to be a river in immortal land. Its water is too “weak” to even float feathers, and that is why it gets its name. “Poisonous dragon” is a commonly used Buddhist metaphor in Chinese literature, which usually stands for passions that have to be tamed. For example, the Tang poet Wang Wei (699 -761) once wrote: “Chan meditation quells poisonous dragons.” The line means the writer’s will is too weak to tame passions.

<sup>98</sup> “Lord of Hibiscus” refers to Shi Manqing 石曼卿 (994 - 1041), a Song literatus who was famous for his dissolute behavior. It is said Shi Manqing became an immortal after death. Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072) records the story in his notes: “After Manqing’s death, one of his old friends saw him. ‘It was like falling into a trance or a dream,’ the friend said: ‘he told me he became a ghost-immortal, the Lord of Hibiscus City.’ Shi Manqing invited the friend to visit his city but got declined. He then left in anger, riding astride on a white mule that ran quickly as if flying. It is also alleged that Shi Manqing later visited a scholar in Haozhou. Again, he invited him and failed. Shi Manqing thus left him a poem as a gift.” See Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修, *Liuyi Shihu* 六一詩話 (Six One Poetic Notes), in *Wenyuange siku quanshu* [dianzi ban] 文淵閣四庫全書 [電子版] (Wenyuange edition of the Treasures of the Imperial Library [Electronic Version]) Hong Kong: Digital Heritage Publishing Ltd, 2006.

<sup>99</sup> “Lion seat” is the place where a Buddha is seated. A Buddha’s preaching is likened to a lion’s roar and the Buddha to a lion because he preaches the Law without fear. This line, along with the previous one, is the writer’s pledge to abandon her divinity and to become a disciple of Master Le’an.

<sup>100</sup> The Master interrogates Ye Xiaoluan about the “Ten Evil Acts” in Buddhism, which are mentioned in *Lotus Sūtra*.

also damaged a butterfly's wings with my gauze."

"Have you ever committed the crime of stealing?"

My daughter said: "Yes, I have. My eyes savored the verdancy of someone else's tree; My ears captured the melody from someone else's bamboo flute."

"Have you ever committed the crime of lust?"

My daughter said: "Yes, I have. Indulging in self-admiration of my curved eyebrows, I peeped in the mirror at night; Embroidering my dress with a pair of birds, I had a fetish for spring."

The Master then interrogated about the four evils of the mouth. He asked: "Have you ever lied?"

My daughter said: "Yes, I have. I said I was born in Very Joyous in my last life; I claimed I was with Saraswati in this life."<sup>101</sup>

"Have you ever engaged in flattery?"

My daughter said: "Yes, I have. I said a madam's calligraphy was [as if] made of incense; I said a lady's words [were as if] carved out of snow."

"Have you ever been double-tongued?"

My daughter said: "Yes, I have. I gossiped with the moon with cheerful and sorrowful sentences; I commented on flowers with short and long lines."

"Have you ever said something harsh?"

My daughter said: "Yes, I have. I satirized a swallow in fear that it would draw up my curtain; I cursed the east wind because of my sympathy for a withering flower.

---

<sup>101</sup> "Very Joyous" is a Buddhist term. It refers to the first stage on the Mahayana bodhisattva's path of awakening, in which one rejoices at realizing a partial aspect of the truth. Saraswati is a Buddhist goddess.

The Master then interrogated her about three poisons of being: “Have you ever felt greed?”

My daughter said: “Yes, I have. I hoarded a thousand volumes of albums; I filled up a garden with all kinds of flowers.”

“Have you ever felt hatred?”

My daughter said: “Yes, I have. I blamed Daoyun for making me knock on my shriveled inkstone; I envied Cui Hui for letting me take off my jade hairpin.”<sup>102</sup>

“Have you ever felt attached?”

My daughter said: “Yes, I have. I abandoned my jewelry for loving a jade of Han dynasty; I donated my powder box to make a coffin for flowers’ spirit.”

The Master was full of praise for [my daughter’s] answer: “From Six Dynasties up to now, what people like Mister Wen and Mister Li have been pursuing so hard is nothing but a beautiful line.<sup>103</sup> They may even exhaust their blood and have their beards turn grey for it; once they finally find one, they would be delighted and jealous of their creation for days. You, however, can improvise on beautiful lines in your ordination. If these old men were to hear about this, would they not shed tears? The only sin you have is flattery.” Thus the Master ordained my daughter as a Buddhist monastic, giving her the religious name of “Eradicate Wisdom” (斷智, *duanzhi*).

---

<sup>102</sup> “Daoyun” refers to Xie Daoyun (c.340 - c.399), one of the most famous talented women in Chinese history. The line is meant to say Xie Daoyun’s literary talent is so extraordinary that when the writer tries to compose a poem she would feel anxious. Cui Hui was a courtesan of Tang dynasty. Famous for her beauty, Cui Hui has been eulogized by male literati for centuries. The Song scholar-official Su Shi (1037-1101) portrayed her as follow: “When jade hairpin slides over, her hair falls to ear; She is like a graceful lotus swaying on the autumn water.” Here “take off my jade hairpin” means the writer feels ashamed of her appearance in comparison with Cui Hui.

<sup>103</sup> “Mister Li and Mister Wen” here refers to Wen Tingyun (812-870) and Li He (790-816), two poets who are famous for their meticulous choice of words.

My daughter then asked: “What do you mean by ‘wisdom’?”

The Master said: “There is the wisdom to understand the various paths to enlightenment, the wisdom to understand the universal aspect of a phenomenon, and the wisdom to understand both the universal aspect and individual aspects of a phenomena.”<sup>104</sup>

She further asked: “What do you mean by ‘eradicate’?”

The Master said: “To eradicate the illusions innumerable as particles of dust and sand. To eradicate the illusions about the true nature of existence. Since there are three kinds of wisdom to obtain, there are accordingly three kinds of illusion needed to be eradicated. Bodhisattvas’ virtue is being able to eradicate the two categories of illusions mentioned above.”<sup>105</sup>

My daughter said: “Bodhisattvas obtain wisdom by not trying to obtain anything; surely they would eradicate illusions by not trying to eradicate anything.”

The Master was surprised: “I no longer dare to treat you as an [ordinary] immortal. You are far beyond that.” Therefore he renamed her “Annihilated Limits” (絕際, *jueji*).

---

<sup>104</sup> “Three Wisdoms” are mentioned in *Prajnaparamita sūtras*.

<sup>105</sup> The “Three Illusions” are coined by the Tiantai school of Buddhism. They are: (1) illusions of thought and desire, (2) illusions innumerable as particles of dust and sand, and (3) illusions about the true nature of existence. The illusions of thought and desire are illusions to be eradicated by persons of the two vehicles (voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones) and bodhisattvas. The other two categories of illusions are those that bodhisattvas alone go on to eliminate.