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Women's Painting-Poetry of Late Imperial China

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

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in East Asian Languages and Cultural Studies

by

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ABSTRACT

Women's Painting-Poetry of Late Imperial China

by

Yang Zhao

This dissertation examines women's voices and contributions to the Chinese painting-poetry tradition. Akin to the Western ekphrastic poetry, painting-poetry (*tihua shi*, or literally, "poems inscribed on paintings") is a poetic subgenre concerning the verbal representation of visual images in pre-modern China. As an inter-artistic tradition combining poetry and painting—the two most revered forms of classical Chinese literature and art—painting-poetry flourished in the late imperial period, coincided with the rise of women's literary and artistic culture. Previous scholarship has largely neglected the large number of painting-poems composed by Ming-Qing women, most of whom had the dual identities of poet and painter. The research of women's painting-poetry leads to a string of questions: What is the significance of women's painting-poetry? What is the relationship between women's painting-poetry and the longstanding Chinese literary tradition? How does women's painting-poetry cross both visual art and literary discourses? How do we perceive and interpret the distinct thematic concerns and gendered characteristics in women's painting-poetry? How does women's painting-poetry constitute a women's literary subculture?

In an attempt to explore the range of possible answers to these questions, this dissertation will first reconstruct the lost history of women's painting-poetry from its emergence in the Tang (618–907) to its pinnacle in the Ming-Qing period, and then focus on Ming-Qing women's gender intervention in the male-dominated poetic tradition through three chronological case studies of three representative women painter-poets—Li Yin, Xi Peilan, and Gu Taiqing—ranging from the late Ming (1368–1644) to the late Qing (1644–1911). The investigation shows that Chinese women not only participated in the painting-poetry tradition from its establishment, but also strategically employed the text-image interaction between painting and poetry in their painting-poems as a predominant means for self-expression, social networking, and immortalizing their talent and fame in late imperial China.

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Introduction

This dissertation aims to explore the positions occupied by women in painting-poetry (*tihua shi* 題畫詩), and to further examine women's gendered voices as represented in the inter-artistic poetic tradition initiated by male literati in the context of dynamic historical and social conjunctures in late imperial China (ca. 1600–1900).[1] The overarching evolution of painting-poetry had been complicated, and largely perpetuated by the male literati. Previous scholars have paid careful attention to the history of painting-poetry as established by the male literati, while women's voices and contributions to the poetic subgenre are rarely mentioned. Thus, in what follows, I will underline women's endeavors in composing painting-poetry. First, I will articulate the lost history of women's painting-poetry as it emerged before and continued into the Ming-Qing period. Then, I will analyze Ming-Qing women's distinct contributions to the preexisting male-dominated poetics and their female precursors through three chronological case studies ranging from the late Ming (1368–1644) to the late Qing dynasty (1644–1911). These three case studies of three representative women painter-poets—Li Yin 李因 (style name Shi'an 是庵, 1611–1685), Xi Peilan 席佩蘭 (original name Ruizhu 蕊珠, style name Daohua 道華, 1760–after 1829), and Gu Taiqing 顧太清 (original name Chun 春, courtesy name Meixian 梅仙, 1799–1877)—demonstrate how their individual voices in their own poetry collections are mutually embedded in painting-poems and situated in varied social, literary, and artistic communities of late imperial China.

[1] There are several translations of the term *tihua shi* currently. Ronald C. Egan translated *tihua shi* as "poems inscribed on paintings," "poems on paintings," and "painting-poetry" in "Poems on Paintings." In the foreword to Jonathan Chaves, *The Chinese Painter as Poet*, Willow Hai Chang translated the term as "inscriptional poetry on a painting." Although the first character *ti* means "to inscribe" (*hua* and *shi* refer to "painting" and "poetry," respectively), a *tihua shi* is not necessarily inscribed on its source painting, so I adopt Egan's translation of the word as "painting-poetry."

I believe the study of Ming-Qing women's painting-poetry will significantly enhance our current understanding of women's gendered discourse and contribution to literature and painting in pre-modern China. The research of women's painting-poetry leads to a string of questions: What is the significance of women's painting-poetry? What is the relationship between women's painting-poetry and the longstanding Chinese literary tradition? How does women's painting-poetry cross both visual art and literary discourses? Do gender differences leave an imprint on women's painting-poetry? If so, how do we perceive and interpret those distinct thematic concerns and gendered characteristics in women's painting-poetry? How does women's painting-poetry constitute a women's literary and artistic subculture? This dissertation is the first book-length study in English to methodically explore the range of possible answers to these questions and attempts to offer a comprehensive and in-depth examination of women's painting-poetry in late imperial China.

In the past three decades, under the influence of Western feminism, gender, and other critical theories, leading scholars in the field of Chinese literature and history have examined the rise of a large body of women's writings in the late imperial epoch.[2] Their painstaking investigations of women's writings, encompassing *shi* 詩 (ancient-style and regulated poems) and *ci* 詞 (song lyrics) poetry, *tanci* 彈詞 (rhymed prosimetric verses), drama, and fiction, not only demonstrate the literary creativity of Ming-Qing women authors, but also substantiate the female subject's engagement in Chinese literature and their distinctive contributions to the male-dominated literary sphere. On the other hand, a number of pioneering intellectuals in the discipline of art history have inquired into pre-modern

[2] These influential scholars in the field of Chinese literature and history include Kang-i Sun Chang, Grace S. Fong, Beata Grant, Wilt Idema, Dorothy Ko, Wai-yee Li, Xiaorong Li, Susan Mann, Maureen Robertson, Ellen Widmer, among others.

Chinese women's paintings.[3] In particular, they have scrutinized women's poetic inscriptions (*tiba* 題跋, also translated as "colophon") as a means to interpret their paintings. These fruitful lines of inquiry in literature and art history provide a point of departure for the present study of women's painting-poetry in late imperial China.

The analysis of painting-poetry has been largely neglected in the previous research on women's writings. Meanwhile, art historians have not paid sufficient attention to women's paintings in relation to literary culture. After an exploration of painting-poetry anthologies, women writers' individual poetry collections (*bieji* 別集), and the Ming-Qing Women's Writings Database, I have discovered more than 3,000 painting-poems written by women poets, the majority of whom were painters themselves, in the Ming-Qing period.[4]

Edwin and Shirley Ardener formulated the "Muted Group Theory" (MGT), which holds that the subordinate group in a society has to adopt the mainstream language system to guarantee that its voice can be heard.[5] In response to Ardeners' theory, Elaine Showalter has introduced the English term "gynocritics" from French to refer to "a female framework for the analysis of women's literature."[6] Marilyn M. Cooper has argued that writing is a social interactive activity that emanates from the process of forming and maintaining interpersonal

[3] Scholars who have contributed to the study of women's paintings include but are not limited to Lara Blanchard, James Cahill, Ellen Johnston Laing, De-Nin Lee, Hui-shu Lee, and Marsha Weidner.

[4] The Ming-Qing Women's Writings Database is a digital archive of women's writings from late imperial China sponsored by McGill University. The project is accessible via the website: https://digital.library.mcgill.ca/mingqing. Through the Boolean Search on the website in the list of poem titles with the combination of keywords: *ti* 題 and *tu* 圖 or *hua* 畫 not *bi* 壁, a result of 3,849 painting-poems are found.

[5] Ardener, "'The Problem' Revisited."

[6] Showalter, "Toward a Feminist Poetics," 28.

connections in the face of established social systems.[7] Furthermore, in the field of pre-modern Chinese women's literature, Maureen Robertson has adopted the theory of "minor literature" to view Ming-Qing women's writings as a minor tradition in Chinese literary history.[8] While I find the theoretical insights of the Arderners, Showalter, Cooper, and Robertson generally useful for my investigation of Ming-Qing women's practice of painting-poetry, I wish to enrich them by examining how women artists (of poetry and/or painting) were interacting with both the preexisting tradition and the contemporary socio-cultural milieu as conscious agents in late imperial China. The dissertation shows that Ming-Qing women artists represent complicated gendered subjectivities within or against the longstanding Chinese history of painting-poetry.

Why Painting-Poetry? The Significance of Painting-Poetry as a Subgenre

From a comparative perspective, the Chinese painting-poetry finds its Western counterpart in the ekphrastic poetry because they are both traditions that describe works of art in textual forms. Ronald C. Egan succinctly defines painting-poetry as a distinctive poetic subgenre comprising poems generated by their source paintings, no matter whether they are physically inscribed on these paintings or not.[9] In classical Chinese culture, poetry was a revered genre that was supposed to express "what is on the mind intently" (*shi yan zhi* 詩言志).[10] On the

[7] Cooper, "The Ecology of Writing" and *Writing as Social Action*.

[8] Robertson, "Literary Authorship by Late Imperial Governing-Class Chinese Women and the Emergence of a 'Minor Literature,'" 385.

[9] Egan, "Poems on Paintings," 421 and *Word, Image, and Deed in the Life of Su Shi*, 283.

[10] Translated by Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, 26. Owen has offered a detailed discussion of this phrase since its origin in the *Yaodian* 堯典.

other hand, Chinese painting is often reckoned as "silent poetry" (*buyu shi* 不語詩 or *wusheng shi* 無聲詩) because of its embodiment of poetic intent (*shiyi* 詩意) to relay a painter's underlying messages.[11] As a combination of the two most prestigious manifestations of literature and art, painting-poetry is not only a poetic subgenre unique in the Chinese literary tradition, but also an emblem indicative of the maturity of classical Chinese culture.[12]

Egan's definition of painting-poetry identifies painting-poems as "literary artifacts" belonging to the domain of Chinese literature, which can be examined independently and apart from their source paintings.[13] While this definition accurately captures the textual nature of painting-poetry, the subgenre was undeniably born with an inter-artistic character, straddling the divide between poetry and painting because these poems were ultimately written in response to their source paintings. Although the presence of a painted image is not mandatory, the juxtaposition of painting and poetry undoubtedly maximizes the mutual aesthetic value of the two forms. Therefore, I will focus on several extant paintings in my inquiry into women's painting-poetry in hopes of developing an interdisciplinary analysis, whereas the lack of other source paintings does not create any barriers to the study due to the independence of painting-poetry as a literary subgenre.

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[11] See Su Shi's painting-poem, "Han Gan's Horse" 韓幹馬: "Du Fu's poem is a shapeless painting, / Whereas Han Gan's painting is a silent poem" 少陵翰墨無形畫，韓幹丹青不語詩. Also see one of Huang Tingjian's 黃庭堅 (1045–1105) painting-poems, "Following Zizhan [i.e., Su Shi] and Ziyou's [i.e., Su Zhe] Inscriptions on the *Painting of Resting in Silence*" 次韻子瞻子由題憩寂圖: "Lord Li had lines that he did not want to say, / He painted a silent poem with light ink" 李侯有句不肯吐，淡墨寫出無聲詩. Chinese poetry is also referred to as "audible painting" (*yousheng hua* 有聲畫).

[12] Sullivan, *The Three Perfections*, 73.

[13] Egan, "Poems on Paintings," 442.

Chinese literati demonstrated an enduring interest in painting-poetry throughout recorded pre-modern history.[14] Poems written in the poetic mode of *yongwu* 詠物 (singing of objects) to describe painted beauties, screens, and fans emerged in the Six Dynasties (220 or 222–589). In the Tang dynasty (618–907), the heyday of classical Chinese poetry, painting-poetry was established as an independent poetic subgenre thanks to the large production of poems dealing with wider subject matters of paintings by illustrious poets throughout the dynasty. Among these leading figures from different social stratum, Zheng Qian's 郑虔 (691–759) poem written in calligraphy and accompanied with his painting was exalted by Emperor Xuanzong (r. 713–756) as *Zheng Qian sanjue* 鄭虔三絕 (Zheng Qian's Three Perfections), which coined the term *sanjue* to refer to the consolidation of the three arts of poetry, painting, and calligraphy.[15] Wang Wei 王維 (style name Mojie Jushi 摩詰居士, 701–761) was venerated by posterity as the first painter-poet for his mastery of the two arts. Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770) was the first poet to produce a significant number of painting-poems (22 in total), which greatly contributed to the formation of painting-poetry as a poetic subgenre.[16]

In his painting-poems, Du Fu vividly recreates the image in a textual form as an embodiment of his personal aspiration. Moreover, he applied the painting theories of *shen*

[14] For a detailed analysis of the generic evolution and poetics of painting-poetry, see Pan, *The Lyrical Resonance between Chinese Poets and Painters* and Chaves, *The Chinese Painter as Poet*. For the scholarship on this subject in Chinese, see Liu Jicai 劉繼才, *Zhongguo tihua shi fazhan shi* 中國題畫詩發展史 and Kong Shoushan 孔壽山, *Zhongguo tihua shi daguan* 中國題畫詩大觀.

[15] *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書, 202.5766. For a detailed discussion of the "Three Perfections," see Sullivan, *The Three Perfections*.

[16] Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature*, 428.

神 (soul), *gu* 骨 (bone), and *qiyun* 氣韻 (spirit resonance) brought up by Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之 (ca. 348–405) and Xie He 謝赫 (fl. 6th century) in the Six Dynasties to the verbal assessment of painted objects to highlight the spiritual resonance rather than the physical resemblance between art and reality. His most famous and controversial criticism of the court painter Han Gan's 韓幹 (706–783) painting techniques in "Song of a Painting: Presented to General Cao Ba" 丹青引贈曹將軍霸 triggered a long-lasting debate in the poetic subgenre that continued through the late imperial period: "But Han Gan paints only the flesh; he does not paint the bone, / And will let the fire of the boldest steed melt away and be lost" 幹惟畫肉不畫骨，忍使驊騮氣凋喪.[17]

Painting-poetry as a poetic subgenre went through a revolutionary transformation in the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127) because Su Shi 蘇軾 (styled "Layman of Eastslope," or Dongpo Jushi 東坡居士, 1037–1101) and his literati coterie not only composed a large number of painting-poems, but also articulated a theoretical basis for the kinship between painting and poetry.[18] Su Shi's observation on Wang Wei's painting and poetry is celebrated as the classic rubric for the connection between these two arts: "When one tastes Mojie's poems, there is painting in his poetry; when one views Mojie's painting, there is poetry in his painting" 味摩詰之詩，詩中有畫；觀摩詰之畫，畫中有詩.[19] In "Two Poems Written

[17] Translated by Stephen Owen, *The Poetry of Du Fu*, 13.68.

[18] Egan indicates that Su Shi and Huang Tingjian wrote more than two hundred painting-poems, so the total quantity of painting-poems written by Su Shi and his literati coterie should be beyond this number. See Egan, "Poems on Paintings," 420.

[19] Su Shi, "Shu Mojie *Lantian yanyu tu*" 書摩詰《藍田煙雨圖》, *Su Shi wenji* 蘇軾文集, 70.2209. All translations in this dissertation are my own, unless otherwise noted.

about the Rootless Flowers Painted by Secretary Wang From Yanling” 書鄢陵王主簿所畫折枝二首, he reiterates Du Fu’s notion that physical resemblance should not be the principal criterion for evaluating a painting: “Judging a painting in terms of formal likeness, / Such understanding is close to a child’s” 論畫以形似，見與兒童鄰.[20] He then discerns the identical nature for creating poetry and painting: “Poetry and painting actually follow the same rule: / Both are *tiangong* [literally, Nature’s work] and *qingxin* [literally, fresh]” 詩畫本一律，天工與清新.[21]

Following this theoretical framework, Su Shi and his literati coterie promulgated *wenren hua* (文人畫, literati painting; also known as *shiren hua* 士人畫) and practiced text-image synthesis by inscribing some of their exchanged painting-poems in the postscript to the source paintings found in *Misty River, Layered Peaks* 烟江叠嶂图 (1088; fig. 0.1-2) and *Collating Books* 勘書圖 (also known as *The Ear Picker* 挑耳圖) by Wang Shen 王詵 (ca. 1048–ca. 1103).[22] Previous art historians have contended that Su Shi and his coterie adopted the interplay between the two paintings and their poetic inscriptions to communicate coded political and personal messages amidst drastic factional battles.[23] After the traumatic “Crow Terrace Poetry Trial” (*wutai shian* 烏台詩案) of 1079, they turned to painting and

[20] Translated by Daan Pan, *The Lyrical Resonance between Chinese Poets and Painters*, 258.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Although *Collating Books* is traditionally attributed to Wang Qihan 王齊翰 from the Five Dynasties Period (907–979), Peter Sturman argues that Wang Shen is more likely the painter based on the inscriptions in its postscript. See Sturman, “In the Realm of Naturalness,” 175.

[23] See Murck, *Poetry and Painting in Song China*, 126-56. Also see Sturman, “In the Realm of Naturalness,” 173-8 and “Tongxunxing huihua—jiedu Su Shi, Wang Gong yu Wang Shen” 通訊性繪畫：解讀蘇軾、王鞏與王詵.

calligraphy for more channels of self-expression and Su Shi himself completed some of his most renowned literary and artistic works in his exile.[24]

Thanks to their dual identities as painter-poets, Su Shi and his literati coterie identified Wang Wei as their paragon. Moreover, they minimize the extensive textual recreation of the source painting often found in Du Fu's poems and expand their personal reactions to images in their painting-poems.[25] In the process of promoting *wenren hua*, they regarded poetry as their primary pursuit and painting as the surplus of their poetry. For instance, Su Shi described Wen Tong's 文同 (courtesy name Yuke 與可, 1019–1079) calligraphy and painting as the "remnants of [his] poetry" 皆詩之餘.[26] He also recognized Li Gonglin 李公麟 (styled "Layman of Longmian," or Longmian Jushi 龍眠居士), who was known for his paintings, as a poet: "Since ancient times, painters have never been vulgar people, / Truly, their marvelous imaginations emerge together with poetry. / Longmian Jushi is, at root, a poet, / He can make thunderbolts fly across the Dragon Pond" 古來畫師非俗士，妙想實與詩同出。龍眠居士本詩人，能使龍池飛霹靂.[27] The second line is reminiscent of the line in the Daoist canon, *Daode jing* 道德經, to link the "nameless" (*wuming* 無名) with the "named" (*youming* 有名) as two things "emerge together with

[24] In the most recent discovery of Su Shi's painting, *Twisted Tree and Strange Rock* 枯木怪石圖 (ca. 1082–1095; also translated as *Old Trees, Rock, and Bamboo*), Mi Fu's 米芾 (1052–1107) poetic inscription is also found in the postscript to the painting. Sturman considers the painting genuine based on the location of Mi Fu's inscription and seal in his talk at the UCLA Sammy Lee seminar, "Signatures and Inscriptions of the Song Literati," November 1, 2019.

[25] Egan, "Poems on Paintings," 450-1.

[26] "Ti Wen Yuke hua mozhu pingfeng zan" 題文與可畫墨竹屏風贊, *Su Shi wenji*, 22.614.

[27] "Ciyun Wu Zhengchuan kumu ge" 次韻吳傳正枯木歌, *Su Shi shiji* 蘇軾詩集, 36.1962.

different names" 同出而異名.[28] By drawing a parallel between the two arts and the Daoist concepts, Su Shi improved the value of literati painting to be the epitome of their poetic imagination and cultivation since the two arts share the same origin.[29]

Although Su Shi and his circle established the physical consolidation of poetry and painting, text and image were not fully integrated at least until the next generation of these literati. Evidence for this is found in the earliest extant painting with a self-inscribed painting-poem on its image, *Cloudy Mountains* 雲山圖 (fig. 0.3), by Mi Fu's son Mi Youren 米友仁 (1074–1151).[30] Emperor Huizong's (r. 1100–1126) royal patronage also helped to consolidate the fusion of text and image, embodied in the self-inscribed poems written in his own "Slender Gold" script (*shoujin ti* 瘦金體) on several paintings attributed to him, including *Mountain Birds on a Wax-Plum Tree* 臘梅山禽圖 (fig. 0.4) and *Golden Pheasant and Cotton Rose Flowers* 芙蓉錦雞圖 (fig. 0.5). In 1187, the first anthology dedicated to painting-poetry, *Sheng hua ji* 聲畫集 (The Collection of Sound and Painting), was edited by Sun Shaoyuan 孫紹遠 to collect painting-poems written by Tang and Song literati. Influenced by this anthology, Chen Si 陳思 later published the first individual collection of painting-poetry, *Ti hua ji* 題畫集 (The Collection of Inscriptions on Paintings), in 1230 to

[28] *Daode zhenjing zhushu* 道德真經注疏, 1.1.

[29] For a more detailed discussion about the relationship between poetry and painting for Su Shi and his circle, also see Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting*, 22-31.

[30] Chaves, *The Chinese Painter as Poet*, 34. For a more detailed discussion of Mi Youren's painting, see Sturman, "Citing Wang Wei."

include the Northern Song historian Liu Ban's 劉攽 (or Liu Shugan 劉叔贛, 1022–1088) painting-poems.[31]

The late imperial period witnessed a golden age of painting-poetry thanks to the full establishment of the four arts, i.e., poetry, painting, calligraphy, and seal engraving. In the historical context of the burgeoning trade and commerce in the southern part of the Yangtze River (i.e., the Jiangnan area), a multitude of Ming artists contributed to the refinement of painting-poetry by integrating poetry into their paintings, including Xu Wei 徐渭 (1521–1593; fig. 0.6) and the central members of the influential Wumen school 吳門畫派.[32] More literati compiled individual collections of painting-poems, the most well-known being Li Rihua's 李日華 (style name Zhulan 竹嬾, 1565–1635) *Zhulan huaying* 竹嬾畫賸 (Zhulan's Painting Companion) in the late Ming. At the same time, the professional painters in the Jiangnan area standardized a set of principles for adding poetic inscriptions, seals, and other artistic elements on paintings for sale, which downplayed the independence of painting-poetry as a literary subgenre and instead solidified its amalgamation with painting.[33] As Fang Xun 方薰 (1736–1799) comments in *Shanjing ju hualun* 山靜居畫論 (Painting Theories in the Residence of Mountain Quietness): "Lofty feelings and leisurely thoughts, what painting could not fully express was then given to poetic inscriptions; later generations

[31] Gu Shuguang 谷曙光 believes that the poet Liu Shugan in the collection actually refers to Liu Ban. See Gu, *Guantong yu jiayu* 貫通與駕馭, 387.

[32] The leading figures in the Wumen school were Shen Zhou 沈周 (1427–1509), Wen Bi 文壁 (style name Zhengming 徵明, 1470–1559), and Tang Yin 唐寅 (style name Bohu 伯虎, 1470–1524).

[33] Pan, *The Lyrical Resonance between Chinese Poets and Painters*, 156.

were influenced by this" 高情逸思，畫之不足，題以發之，後世乃為濫觴.[34] As opposed to Su Shi's earlier theory that *wenren hua* was an overflow of poetry, painting-poetry had now become a means to supplement the painting's insufficiency to convey the painter's feelings.

With the publication of the first imperial-commissioned anthology of painting-poetry under Emperor Kangxi (r. 1661–1722) in 1707, *Yuding lidai tihua shilei* 御定歷代題畫詩類 (The Imperial Classification of Painting-Poetry in Past Dynasties), the literary subgenre was elevated to its apex in the pre-modern history. In the previous year, *Yuding Peiwen zhai yongwu shixuan* 御定佩文齋詠物詩選 (Imperially Commissioned Anthology of Poetry on Objects in the Peiwen Studio) was published, which contains a section on "Painting" 畫 featuring painting-poems from the Tang to the Ming. The twenty-volume *Yuding lidai tihua shilei* compiled by Chen Bangyan 陳邦彥 is a grander project that gathers 8,962 painting-poems dated from the Tang to the Ming and classifies them into thirty categories. In the preface to the anthology, Emperor Kangxi concisely designates the significance of painting-poetry: "The art of drawing and painting is near to the Dao; the genre of painting-poetry is related to the governing of the state" 夫圖繪藝事也，而近於道。題畫詩之一類也，而通於治.[35] By associating painting-poetry with political governance, the emperor effectively endorsed the literary status of this subgenre with his imperial authority and guaranteed painting-poetry's rapid development in subsequent years. Following his grandfather, Emperor Qianlong (r. 1735–1796) deemed painting-poetry one of his favorite pastimes, and

[34] *Xishan woyou lu* 溪山臥游錄, 2.65.

[35] Translated by Daan Pan with modifications, *The Lyrical Resonance between Chinese Poets and Painters*, 186.

he became notorious later for inscribing too many poems on paintings in his imperial collection. Backed by imperial patronage, painting-poetry thrived in artist circles in the Jiangnan area during the High Qing, an exemplar of which is the Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou 揚州八怪 (fig. 0.7).[36]

Following these broader cultural trends, women's painting-poetry blossomed in the late imperial period, due in part to advancement in women's literacy and their increased participation in artistic activities from the seventeenth century onward. This is particularly apparent in the Qing dynasty, following the rise of gentry women's (*guixiu* 閨秀) participation in writing and painting.[37] Dorothy Ko has labeled the seventeenth century as "the age of visual representations" because of the popularity of the text-image combination in illustrated books and the exchange of portraits among educated men and women in the Jiangnan area.[38] In his study of Ming-Qing figure paintings produced for female viewers, James Cahill has also noticed that the emergence of women writers, women readers, and writings about women was "equally true for painting."[39] Against the backdrop of the text-image integration and women's culture, painting-poetry was an ideal embodiment of women's literary and artistic achievements and expressions. Binbin Yang has argued that inscriptions produced by gentry women on their painted self-portraits in the Qing dynasty

[36] Kong, *Zhongguo tihua shi daguan*, 676-7.

[37] See Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, for the rise of women's culture in the seventeenth century. Also see Mann, *Precious Records*, for the continuation of women's culture in the eighteenth century.

[38] Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 57.

[39] Cahill, "Paintings Done for Women in Ming-Qing China," 35.

were a way to construct their exemplary images based on Confucian gender values.[40] To this date, Huang Yiguan's book in Chinese remains the most extensive treatise on women's painting-poetry in late imperial China. She not only probes into the social and literary background for women's painting-poetry in this period, but also offers an informative prosopography of the group image of women poets and the general development of their painting-poems from the late Ming to the High Qing.[41]

While I have found inspirations in these scholars' works, both are limited by the scales at which they treat their subjects. Yang's approach of combining textual and visual materials to uncover women writers' gendered sentiments and life stories is truly commendable, but her analysis is restricted to just three gentry women's inscriptions on self-portraits. At the other end of the scale, Huang's attention to the broad thematic concerns and evolution of women's painting-poetry does not allow her to offer detailed studies of how women's lives relate to their painting-poems in specific cases. Moreover, her emphasis on women as passive subjects confined in the boudoir emulating the male literati's poetic conventions largely overlooks the female agency embedded in women's painting-poetry particularly from the Yuan dynasty onwards. As a result, there is much to gain from a more thorough study of women's painting-poetry in pre-modern China.[42]

[40] See Yang, *Heroines of the Qing*, 39-86.

[41] See Huang Yiguan 黃儀冠, *Wanming zhi Shengqing nüxing tihua shi yanjiu* 晚明至盛清女性題畫詩研究.

[42] Other scholarship on Ming-Qing women's painting-poetry includes Dai Lizhu 戴麗珠, "Qingdai funü tihua shi" 清代婦女題畫詩 and Duan Jihong 段繼紅, "Qingdai nüxing tihua shi lun" 清代女性題畫詩論.

Engendering Painting-Poetry: Objectives, Theories, and Approaches[43]

The extensive *Yuding lidai tihua shilei* compiled in the early Qing contains around twenty painting-poems written by fourteen women of previous dynasties, most of them from the Ming.[44] From the Republican Period (1912–1949), Li Junzhi's 李濬之 (1868–1953) *Qing huajia shishi* 清畫家詩史 (A Poetry History of Qing Painters) features a selection of more women painter-poets, including 137 women painter-poets of the Qing dynasty are incorporated. The rapid increase of women's painting-poetry in Li's anthology compared to previous anthologies is evidence that the Qing dynasty can be considered a pinnacle of women's painting-poetry in pre-modern China. However, among a total of more than 2,000 painter-poets in Li's anthology, the 137 women painter-poets constitute only 6.85% of the authors included. Furthermore, Li's anthology adopts the traditional technique of classification, in which women painter-poets are categorized in the last two volumes of the anthology in a descending rank of gentry ladies (*guige* 閨閣), nuns (*ni* 尼), female Daoists (*nüguan* 女冠), and courtesans (*mingji* 名妓) as a reflection of their inferior social status in the orthodox Confucian gender ideology which prevailed in pre-modern China.

Previous scholars have shown that notwithstanding the sex segregation and behavior codes prescribed by the Confucian classics, the rise of women's writing still emerged from

[43] The word "engender" in this dissertation is used differently from its meaning in the dictionary. I follow the previous scholarship in the field of gender studies to use this word to refer to an investigation of women's contribution to a particular subject from a gendered perspective. For a detailed discussion of the meaning of "engender" in the context of gender studies, see Gilmartin, *Engendering China*, 1-2.

[44] The fourteen poets are Xue Tao 薛濤 (唐), Empress Yang 楊後 (南宋), Zheng Yunduan 鄭允端 (元), Dong Shaoyu 董少玉 (明), Meng Shuqing 孟淑卿 (明), Fan Huzhen 范壺貞 (明), Tian Juanjuan 田娟娟 (明), Wang Wei 王微 (明), Jing Pianpian 景翩翩 (明), Xue Susu 薛素素 (明), Ye Xiaoluan 葉小鸞 (明), Ni Renji 倪仁吉(明), a woman surnamed Fan 范氏 (明), and a woman surnamed Wu 武氏 (明).

the late Ming to the Qing dynasty in these two social groups of women writers, i.e., courtesans and gentry ladies.[45] The fortunes of the courtesan and the gentry lady cultures were in flux. While the courtesan culture in the Jiangnan area was thriving in the late Ming, it was superseded by the active literary and artistic community of gentry women in the Qing dynasty because the Manchu government discouraged prostitution. Gentry women writers devised a series of textual strategies to negotiate the conflict between their literary pursuits and traditional Confucian female virtue. Maureen Robertson has offered an explicit analysis of women writers' manipulation of "authorial" and "textual" subjects in their self-prefaces and poems to mediate the social pressure of gender hierarchy through displaying a contradictory authorial self.[46] After several social and cultural movements, gentry ladies began to step out of their inner chambers to participate in literary and artistic activities in the Qing. In *Qing huajia shishi*, 131 out of the 137 women painter-poets are labeled as gentry ladies, whereas only one is in the category of courtesan.[47] The huge contrast implies that the majority of women's painting-poetry was produced by gentry ladies because they had surpassed courtesans to become actively involved in the numerous literary and artistic communities in the Qing dynasty.

[45] For a detailed discussion of the Confucian gender segregation, see Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters*, 21-44. For the general development of women's literature in pre-modern China, see, for example, Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush*.

[46] Robertson, "Changing the Subject."

[47] Only one woman painter-poet, Su Gaosan 蘇高三, is listed in the category of *fulu* 附錄 (appendix) and according to her biography in the anthology, she was a courtesan. The tradition of organizing a poetry anthology of both genders in pre-modern China specifically categorizes women, monks, nuns, and Daoists in the same category after male poets and only precedes the last two categories of ghosts and folklores. In other words, women writers are arranged on the border between human beings and spiritual figures.

Since the compilation and circulation of anthologies can help us understand the classical canonization of a group of writers in a particular literary genre, we can see from the marginal position of women's painting-poetry in these anthologies how our current perception of painting-poetry is male-centered. This marginal position also limits access to women's primary texts and makes it difficult to establish their literary and artistic fame. The paucity of women's painting-poetry in the canons of Chinese painting-poetry indicates that this study cannot simply rely on the major anthologies in the poetic subgenre. Therefore, I have turned to Ming-Qing women writers' individual poetry collections and the digitized Ming-Qing Women's Writings Database, in which I have found the rich primary sources of women's painting-poetry adequate to engender the male-dominated Chinese painting-poetry.

The objective of this dissertation is to establish a historical and theoretical framework for understanding painting-poetry by Ming-Qing women by investigating women's textual production as it was situated in a web of social, literary, and artistic connections forged under changing cultural conditions. As a minor tradition within the long male-dominated Chinese literary culture, women's painting-poetry not only retained the preexistent poetics and attributes established by the male literati, but also adapted existing poetic norms to represent their gendered subjectivities, namely, their distinct experiences and sentiments in varied social roles and their perspectives on historical events in the context of Confucian gender hierarchy.

Edwin and Shirley Ardener have argued in their "Muted Group Theory" (MGT) that the subordinate group in a society has to adopt the language system established by the dominant group to ensure that their voices can be heard. Nonetheless, the dominant mode of expression is not sufficient to convey their distinct needs, which renders the subordinate

group mute. According to the MGT, when members of the "muted" group need to express their thoughts, they adopt the dominant mode of expression and suppress their own languages lest their voices be ignored in society. In this way, we can see how women belong to a "muted" group in the male-dominated pre-modern Chinese society. Although the male-dominated poetics in the painting-poetry tradition can relate universal experiences of both genders, some of women's distinct experiences and perceptions cannot be conveyed by the established poetics due to gender differences. This distinctly female subjectivity is shaped by social norms of ethical behaviors and gender values, including women's collective sentiments, aesthetic assessments, and reflections of history and destiny, all from a woman's perspective. It is the need to express this female subjectivity that impels women to adapt the preexistent poetics of painting-poetry.

MGT has inspired a group of Western feminist scholars to reinvestigate the traditional male-centered literary history in order to discover a female literary tradition or subculture without rigidly adapting women's literature into the male literary culture. By documenting and reinterpreting minor English women novelists' works, Elaine Showalter argues that English women not only had their own literature long ago, but also constituted a female literary tradition as a literary subculture united by the values, conventions, experiences, and behaviors of each member within the larger social system. She substantiates the formation of the English female literary subculture by categorizing its evolution into three major phases, i.e., Feminine (imitation and internalization), Feminist (protest and advocacy), and Female (self-discovery).[48] Postmodern feminists have criticized the concept of a female tradition and the term "gynocritics" advocated by Showalter and

[48] See Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*. Also see Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*.

other feminist scholars have been censured by postmodernist feminists. Toril Moi, for one, criticizes Showalter's mistake of equating novels and the women's experience depicted in them with the women author's autobiography.[49]

However, unlike the novel, classical Chinese poetry has been instrumentally used as a means of self-representation and expression. Moreover, as Xiaorong Li acutely observes, "The notion of women's experience is a valid basis for feminist literary analysis to the extent that it is taken as a sociocultural category evolving with its historically specific context and as a ground for the formation of female subjection and subjectivity."[50] Consequently, given the shared institutional patriarchal context in Western and Chinese history, it is productive to examine the development of women's painting-poetry in pre-modern China by focusing on female tradition and women's experience.

Furthermore, Marilyn M. Cooper has proposed that writing is a social interactive activity generated by the process of forming interpersonal connections in the context of established social systems. In other words, instead of an isolated process of literary creation, writing is the crystallization of a writer's association with a cluster of external forces, including other individuals, diverse familial and social groups, and normative cultural ideologies. The textual identity and expression of a writer is also established by interacting with these external things. Women's textual production in late imperial China was not created in an isolated process, even when women were physically restricted into the inner court of the household. This is particularly true in the case of painting-poetry with its dual social nature primarily rooted in the character of poetry. Stephen Owen has called Chinese

[49] Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, 1-9.

[50] Li, *Women's Poetry of Late Imperial China*, 16.

poetry as a "companionable art" that is capable of "speaking to others in the present and creating a living community across time."[51] Poetry is always written in dialogue with others, be they past or present.

Most of women's painting-poetry was written for a recipient based on a painting, whether that painting was produced by the recipient or not. These recipients of a woman's painting-poems include ancient painters, teachers, female or male friends, her husband, and other family members in her natal or marital household. Even in the case of Li Yin, who collected a series of self-inscribed painting-poems for her own paintings in her poetry collection, these poems were intended to be circulated in the Ming loyalist (*yimin* 遺民) community, attested by the fact that the last two volumes of her poetry collection were published by the loyalist disciples of her late husband in the Qing. Moreover, many of Li Yin's painting-poems were written for commemorating her loyalist husband who committed suicide during the Ming-Qing transition. If we consider her late husband as the intended recipient, Li Yin's self-inscribed painting-poems indeed transcend space and time in Owen's sense. The reciprocal nature testifies that women's painting-poetry is a social product of their active interaction with artistic and literary communities as filtered through their perception of the Confucian gender ideology during the dynamically changing circumstances of late imperial China.

Maureen Robertson has adopted the theory of "minor literature" proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari to describe Ming-Qing women's writings as a minor tradition in Chinese literary history. The concept of "minor literature" refers to the fact that marginal writers in a literary culture are endowed with the freedom to adapt the preexistent major

[51] Owen, "Poetry in the Chinese Tradition," 296.

language and canon to fulfill their own expressive needs. In light of Robertson's argument, women's painting-poetry can be regarded as a minor tradition within the male-dominated literary subgenre of painting-poetry. Male literati had established the norms of painting-poetry, in both the *shi* and *ci* genres, long before women poets entered the field. Rather than invent a new poetics, women assimilated and adapted the male-dominated poetics of painting-poetry for their own gendered purposes.

While the theories of the Ardeners, Showalter, Cooper, and Robertson provide the theoretical framework, this dissertation adopts a two-fold literary approach to scrutinize Ming-Qing women's painting-poetry. First, it utilizes an inter-textual analysis to demonstrate how their writings make use of the poetics of painting-poetry established by male literati to express their own gendered subjectivities. Second, it investigates the varied modes and purposes embedded in women's painting-poems in light of the late imperial historical framework in combination with their life trajectories in a web of literary and social connections. When the source painting of a painting-poem is available, I will also closely examine its artistic features to describe its text-image interplay. I have adopted these literary and artistic approaches in order to best make sense of my primary sources, which are painting-poems.

Although women's painting-poetry permitted the inscription of poems on their source paintings as a literary subgenre, the Confucian gender hierarchy still played a role in the way these painting-poems were preserved. Tao Yongbai and Li Shi have shown how, compared to courtesans who inscribed verses and painting-poems on their paintings while socializing with male literati, gentry ladies typically just inscribed dates and their individual

names on paintings.[52] Gentry ladies might collect their painting-poems in individual poetry collections that could be circulated by their contemporaries and readers in later generations.[53] Since most of the painting-poems examined in this dissertation were written by gentry women in the Qing, rather than being inscribed on paintings, these painting-poems are generally included in their individual poetry collections. As a result, the abundant painting-poems in women's individual poetry collections, which starkly contrasts with the lack of surviving paintings with poetic inscriptions, means that the best way to fully understand women's painting-poetry is by taking a literary approach.

Primary Sources

The dissertation's primary sources fall into three main textual and visual categories: first, female-authored painting-poems; second, male- and female-authored inscriptions, prefaces, biographies, and other comments on female-authored painting-poems and paintings; and third, paintings by women painter-poets. The selection of women's painting-poems and women painter-poets, including both the *shi* and *ci* genres, is guided by theoretical considerations in combination with the social and literary context in a chronological framework. The term "Ming-Qing" in the dissertation refers to the period from roughly 1600 to 1900, which corresponds to the rise of women's painting-poetry in late imperial China.

The women's painting-poems studied in this dissertation were mostly written in the Qing, the golden age of women's painting-poetry. These painting-poems are mainly located in three categories of sources: painting-poetry anthologies, women writers' individual poetry

[52] See Tao Yongbai 陶咏白 and Li Shi 李湜, *Shiluo de lishi* 失落的歷史, 62.

[53] See Li Shi, *Mingqing guige huihua yanjiu* 明清閨閣繪畫研究, 222.

collections, and the Ming-Qing Women's Writings Database. Grace S. Fong has remarked that anthologies are intrinsically selective because they are compiled based on certain editing criteria and strategies to include texts, organize contents, and arrange structures.[54] Those male and female editors' varied principles for selecting and ranking poems reflect their discrepant values in canonizing women painter-poets in late imperial China. On the other hand, both Owen and Fong have expounded on the autobiographical nature of those individual poetry collections organized in chronological sequence.[55] The women's individual poetry collections examined in this dissertation are compiled chronologically without exception, and thus can be trusted to convey these women's life trajectories in a relatively accurate manner.

Although most of the female-authored primary sources considered here were produced by gentry women, I do not mean to imply that the painting-poetry of courtesans is irrelevant to the thematic concerns of the study. First, in the Ming-Qing transition, a group of renowned talented courtesans elevated their social status through marrying into gentry households as concubines. These courtesan-turned-gentry-ladies are generally included in the category of "Gentry Ladies" (*guixiu* or *guimen* 閨門) in later poetry anthologies compiled in the Qing. Second, gentry women had surpassed courtesans in their active engagement in social gatherings of writing and painting, particularly in the High Qing, when women's membership in poetry clubs became a literary trend in the gentry class

[54] Fong, "Gender and the Failure of Canonization," 133.

[55] See Owen, "The Self's Perfect Mirror" and Fong, *Herself an Author*, 9-12. However, Luca Bender has examined Du Fu's poetry collection in chronological order and its possible uncertainty. See Bender, *Du Fu Transforms*, 26-30.

households.[56] In this way, gentry women's painting-poetry represent the peak of women's painting-poetry.

Male- and female-authored inscriptions, prefaces, postscripts, biographies, and other comments on female-authored painting-poems and paintings reflect the assessment and reception of these women by their contemporaries and later scholars. Although women authors sometimes wrote prefaces to their own poetry collections, many of the inscriptions and prefaces were written by their husbands, friends or disciples of their husbands, their mentors, or later male literati. Additionally, the commentary biography of each woman painter-poet in male- and female-edited anthologies offers a secondary source for glimpsing the contemporary evaluation and reception of the female subject. Finally, visual images of women's painting-poems will be added when they are available.

Structure and Chapter Outline

The dissertation contains four chapters to examine women's painting-poetry in the historical period from the Ming-Qing transition to the late Qing. Chapter 1 introduces the lost history of women's painting-poetry as it emerged before and continued into the Ming-Qing period and lays a foundation for scrutinizing the three case studies in the subsequent three chapters. The three chapters of case studies chronologically examine the painting-poems written by three representative women painter-poets from the late Ming to the late Qing in relation to their life trajectories.

Chapter 2 focuses on painting-poems on plum blossoms written by Li Yin, one of the talented courtesan-turned-gentry-ladies and Ming loyalists in the turbulent Ming-Qing

[56] See Li Shi, *Mingqing guige huihua yanjiu*, 69.

transition. Although the woman painter-poet never inscribed her own paintings, her painting-poems are preserved in the three volumes of her individual poetry collection, *Zhuxiao xuan yincao* 竹笑軒吟草 (Recited Drafts from Laughing Bamboo Studio). In addition to her painting-poems, I will also pay attention to two of her paintings, *Flowers and Birds* 花鳥圖 (1642) with an inscription by her husband, Ge Zhengqi 葛徵奇 (?–1645), and the later *Flowers of the Four Seasons* 四季花卉圖卷 (1649) produced after her husband's martyrdom. The interdisciplinary study of Li Yin's painting-poems and paintings allow us to scrutinize her gendered experience and feelings she faced when confronting the devastating loss of the country and her husband in the turbulence of the dynastic transition.

Following this chaotic period, the High Qing was a relatively peaceful and flourishing time. Correspondingly, we notice a wave of gentry ladies' increasing participation in poetry clubs at the time. Chapter 3 examines Xi Peilan's painting-poems written for Yuan Mei 袁枚 (style name Jianzhai 簡齋 and Suiyuan Zhuren 隨園主人, or "Master of the Sui Garden," 1716–1797) and Qu Bingyun 屈秉筠 (courtesy name Wanxian 宛仙 and Xielan 協蘭, 1767–1810) to construct her heterosexual and homosocial communities. In addition to their association with Yuan Mei as his female disciples, Xi's reciprocal painting-poems with Qu show that the two gentry ladies built a network of relationships centered on their homosocial friendship in their hometown Changshu 常熟 (in modern-day Jiangsu Province 江蘇省). Xi's husband, Sun Yuanxiang 孫原湘 (courtesy name Zixiao 子瀟 and Changzhen 長真, 1760–1829), equated Qu Bingyun to Li Yin in terms of their artistic talents: "There is nothing she [i.e., Qu Bingyun] cannot write. She is most adept at drawing flower-and-bird paintings with ink and brush. Her brush is soft and

her wrist is powerful, the spiritual resonance [of the painting] is transcendental. In addition to Li Yin and Chen Shu, she is another rarity" 詞翰靡所不能，最工白描花鳥，毫柔挽勁，神致超逸，於李因、陳書外，別出一奇.[57] This comment encapsulates how the male and female members in the two literati households had established a literary and artistic community.

Maureen Robertson has pointed out that poems addressed to friends are rarely included in anthologies, whereas they are ubiquitous in women's individual poetry collections because friendship is one of the central relationships in the Confucian ideology. The neglect of poems written for friends leads to the misconception that women's friendship poems are few and insignificant.[58] Xi's painting-poems addressed to Qu in her *Changzhen'ge ji* 長真閣集 (Collection from the Everlasting Truth Tower) embody two of the major Confucian relations in pre-modern China, i.e., family and friend. By investigating these painting-poems, I offer a more panoramic view of the two women painter-poets and their interaction with educated male and female members of their literary and artistic communities in the High Qing.

Finally, Chapter 4 scrutinizes Gu Taiqing's painting-poems composed in both *shi* and *ci* forms in the late Qing. Gu Taiqing lived through the decline of the Manchu regime, but the woman painter-poet's elite social standing as a member of the royal family provided stability in the midst of political turmoil, foreign invasion, and constant warfare. In contrast to Li Yin, who conveyed her everlasting sorrow and loyalist sentiments during the Ming-

[57] Sun Yuanxiang, *Tianzhen'ge ji* 天真閣集, Volume 22.

[58] Robertson, "Literary Authorship by Late Imperial Governing-Class Chinese Women and the Emergence of a 'Minor Literature,'" 379-80.

Qing dynastic change, Gu Taiqing, the beloved concubine of the Manchu prince Aisin-Gioro Yihui 愛新覺羅·奕繪 (style name Taisu 太素, 1799–1838) only indulged in bemoaning the personal misfortunes of her husband's death and the subsequent changes in the royal household.

Gu Taiqing initially received literary training from her husband and eventually surpassed his poetic fame and achievements to be considered the top Manchu female poet in the Qing, embodying how women transformed male literati's established poetics in the painting-poetry tradition. Influenced by a long family tradition in her marital royal residence, Gu exchanged a cluster of painting-poems with her husband, relatives, and friends in response to their own and other painters' paintings. By examining the way text and image interact between her poems and paintings, particularly *Portrait of Listening to the Snow* 聽雪小照 (1837) and *Apricot Tree* 文杏圖 (1837), the last chapter shows that Gu Taiqing's painting-poems represent the mature phase of women's painting-poetry in the late Qing for self-expression and social networking. Through these paintings and poems, she reinforced her "companionate marriage" with Yihui, kinship with other royal members, and homo-social bonds with her women's literary and artistic community.[59]

While there were thousands of painting-poems composed by female subjects in late imperial China, what I attempt to do within the limited scope of these four chapters is articulate the most representative thematic concerns, women poets, and the modes of their writing in relation to the dynamic social, historical, and cultural conditions of the Ming and Qing dynasties. Women's painting-poetry is at its core a result of self-representation shaped

[59] For the definition of the term "companionate marriage," see Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 179.

by external factors. This dissertation views women artists as conscious writing agents and explores how they interacted with China's longstanding cultural traditions in both fine arts and poetry as well as their contemporary familial, social, and artistic communities from their subjective perspectives.

Chapter One

A Lost Tradition: Women's Painting-Poetry in Pre-Modern China

By linking extant women's painting-poems scattered in varied historical documents, anthologies, and individual poetry collections to one another, this chapter offers a survey of women's painting-poetry in order to trace female subjectivities embedded in these texts of pre-modern China. Here, "women's painting-poetry" refers to painting-poems which were, as suggested by the available evidence, actually composed by women, as opposed to men assuming a woman's voice. The investigation accounts for the primary modes of expression, thematic concerns, and gender awareness in women's painting-poems within the context of the authors' respective social statuses and life experiences. As a minor tradition within the painting-poetry, women's painting-poetry generally followed the generic evolution of the poetic subgenre, which was mainly determined by generations of male literati. However, women not only demonstrated their literary and artistic prowess; their distinct experiences and emotions made significant contributions to the development of painting-poetry. Part I of this chapter scrutinizes women's painting-poetry before the Ming-Qing period and Part II focuses on Ming-Qing women's painting-poetry with emphasis on their popular motifs, including flowers and plants 花木 (*huamu*), beauties 美人 (*meiren*, also known as *shinü* 仕女), exemplary women (*lienü* 列女), and self-/portraits 小照 (*xiaozhao*, also known as *xiaoxiang* 小像 or *xiaoying* 小影).

Scant attention has been paid to the development of women's painting-poems other than Huang Yiguan's succinct summary in Chinese.[60] This chapter attempts to enrich the existing scholarship by reconstructing the lost history of women's painting-poetry from the

[60] See Huang, *Wanming zhi Shengqing nüxing tihua shi yanjiu*, 35-42.

Tang to the Ming-Qing period. Elaine Showalter has remarked that women writers have often found that they are, "in a sense, without a history, forced to rediscover the past anew, forging again and again the consciousness of their sex."[61] Hui-shu Lee has also noted that the majority of women's works were "either lost or misunderstood," including those by women "in the imperial ranks whose contributions through patronage have largely passed unnoticed."[62] Regarding the few women who were canonized in the literary and artistic tradition, Tao Yongbai and Li Shi have attributed their success to the support of powerful male literati in their households rather than their own artistic talents and achievements.[63] These scholarly observations bespeak the needs to examine the history of women's painting-poetry from its emergence to the Ming-Qing period.

The history of women's painting-poetry before the Ming-Qing period is largely fragmentary, with the only extant works being authored by two women authors in each dynasty from the Tang onwards. Notwithstanding their limited modes and motifs, these painting-poems attest to women's early interest and engagement in every stage of the painting-poetry tradition since its very establishment. These early painting-poems offer a paradigm for examining how Ming-Qing women expanded their rich, complex voices while women were on the rise as a newly recognized creative force. The limited number of women's painting-poems prior to the Ming-Qing period does not necessarily mean that women rarely engaged in the poetic subgenre. Rather, it may indicate that their works were not preserved due to the lack of printing technology and the fact that women's writing was

[61] Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, 11-2.

[62] Lee, *Empresses, Art, and Agency in Song Dynasty China*, 21.

[63] Tao and Li, *Shiluo de lishi*, 100.

controversial.[64] In general, women's writing was discouraged in pre-modern China. Therefore, even if women did produce painting-poems, there was little chance of their works being publicized and collected until the rise of women's culture in the Ming-Qing period.

"Men Among the Womenfolk": Women's Painting-Poetry before the Ming-Qing Period

Apart from a few poems on painted fans and screens from the Six Dynasties period, the earliest surviving painting-poems by women are those written by Xue Tao 薛濤 (770–832) and Xue Yuan 薛媛 (fl. ca. 860–874) of the Tang dynasty. In the subsequent Song and Yuan dynasties, a handful of women writers, including Empress Wu 吳皇后 (1115–1197), Empress Yang 楊皇后 (1162 or 1172–1233, also known as Yang Meizi 楊妹子), Guan Daosheng 管道昇 (1262–1319), and Zheng Yunduan 鄭允端 (ca. 1327–1356), produced painting-poems on a broad range of subjects. The extant painting-poems indicate that women from three social groups—namely, courtesans, gentry ladies, and imperial women—had participated in the poetic subgenre before Ming-Qing women entered the arena.

This section proceeds in a general chronological order to examine the painting-poems written by these three distinct social groups of women prior to the Ming-Qing period. Separated by their upbringing and experiences related to their social status, these women benefited from different degrees of resources and privileges that fostered a unique culture of painting-poetry in each of their social groups. Nevertheless, as Dorothy Ko has pointed out, the gap between these social groups is not "insurmountable" because ultimately, women

[64] For the controversy of women's writing, see, for example, Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush*, 4-5.

were expected to occupy the same gendered position of remaining subordinate to their men.[65] In one inscription, Guan Daogao 管道昊 praises her younger sister, Guan Daosheng, as "a man among the womenfolk" 女丈夫 because with her artistic and literary skills, she had surpassed the traditional duties of a woman in pre-modern China.[66] This term likewise applies to the talented women examined in this section. United by their gender, these women produced the extant painting-poems that constitute the tradition of early painting-poetry by women.

THE TANG'S "WOMAN COLLATOR OF BOOKS"

Painting-poetry was established as an independent poetic subgenre in the Tang period. *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩 (Complete Poems of the Tang) includes more than 220 painting-poems by almost one hundred poets. Despite this profusion of poetry, women's painting-poetry is rarely seen until Xue Tao's work in the mid-Tang. As a courtesan, Xue Tao demonstrated her public connection with the circle of literati in her painting-poem on a landscape painting gifted to her by a scholar. The best-known women writers in the Tang were courtesans, who acquired the poetic and artistic skills to entertain their male literati patrons on social occasions. As one of the most active courtesan writers, in later dynasties Xue Tao was considered to be an exemplar of talented courtesans. She was addressed as a woman Collator of Books 校書 (*jiaoshu*), a minor official position normally assigned to male scholars who

[65] Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 257.

[66] Qian Yong 錢泳, *Lüyuan conghua* 履園叢話, 10.280.

excelled in the imperial examinations. The title became a euphemism for courtesans during the Ming-Qing period in their poetic exchanges.

As a registered military courtesan (*yingji* 營妓) who frequently served wine and composed poems in the company of male scholar-officials at their banquets, Xue Tao's painting-poem, "Reciprocating Scholar Yong's Gift of the *Painting of the Ba Gorge*" 酬雍秀才貽巴峽圖, attests to her assimilation into the male literati culture:

One thousand layers of cloudy mountains and
ten thousand acres of lakes, 千疊雲峯萬頃湖，
White waves diverge and go off to encircle
the region of Jing and Wu. 白波分去繞荊吳。
I was touched by your understanding of my reclusive intention, 感君識我枕流意，
For which reason, you showed me the painting of
the gateway to Gorge Qutang again. 重示瞿塘峽口圖。[67]

In the first two lines, she describes the scenery of Gorge Ba along the Yangtze River as depicted in the landscape painting she received from Scholar Yong. The word "reclusive intention" [*zhenliu* 枕流, or literally, "pillow on streams"] in the third line refers to Sun Chu's 孫楚 (220–293) explanation of his hermetic lifestyle to his friend: "My reason for pillowing on streams is to 'wash my ears,' and my reason for rinsing with rocks is to 'sharpen my teeth'" 所以枕流，欲洗其耳；所以漱石，欲礪其齒.[68] In the last two lines,

[67] *Quan Tang shi*, 795.5.

[68] Translated by Richard Mather, *Shih-shuo hsin-yü*, 434.

the poetess expresses her gratitude for the empathy he has shown regarding her hermitic aspirations.

As landscape painting began to gain popularity in the Tang, the theme of retreating into the natural world was widespread among the male literati, who took inspiration from the hermit poet Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (also known as Tao Qian 陶潛, 365?–427), revered as the poet's poet since the High Tang. By combining these two motifs that were in vogue, Xue Tao's painting-poem can easily pass for a male scholar's poem. As a response to a scholar's gift, the painting-poem serves as a thank-you note, demonstrating her social interaction as a public woman with male literati in addition to her espousal of the literati's tastes in poetry and painting. Xue Tao's painting-poem, which was written to bond with her male scholar patron, exemplifies the relation of the poetic subgenre to her social status and establishes an early model for the famous courtesans of the late Ming.

EMPRESS WU AND EMPRESS YANG OF THE SONG

Powerful women in the imperial harem were free of the social restrictions regarding women's writing and produced some painting-poems in the Southern Song. Almost all the extant painting-poems they composed were originally inscribed on paintings by court painters, following the integration of text and image initiated by Su Shi's literati coterie and favored by Emperor Huizong in the late Northern Song. Despite the collapse of the Northern Song due to the Jurchen invasion, Emperor Gaozong (r. 1127–1129), the founding father of the Southern Song, was also a connoisseur of literature and arts. While imperial women had written poetry during previous periods, it was during Emperor Gaozong's reign that literary and artistic training was formally added to their curriculum to parallel that of the male

literati at the time. As a result, more royal women began to participate in the practice of painting-poetry. This included Emperor Gaozong's wife, Empress Wu, as well as her disciple Empress Yang.

Hui-shu Lee has analyzed how Empress Wu established the artistic model of inscribing poems on paintings by court painters for Empress Yang, her hand-picked partner for Emperor Ningzong (r. 1194–1224). In her investigation of their extant artistic works, she shows that the two empresses frequently inscribed poems on paintings of flowers, which served as highly feminine images, for self-promotion.[69] In her recent study, Lara Blanchard has observed that the romantic connotations of their poetic inscriptions on flower-and-bird paintings originated from the consolidation of painting, poetry, and calligraphy in Emperor Huizong's *Mountain Birds on a Wax-Plum Tree*.[70] As art historians have mainly paid attention to their painting-poems inscribed on a couple of extant paintings, other painting-poems by these two empresses have remained largely overlooked. An inquiry into these painting-poems indicates that in addition to feminine and romantic undertones, Empress Wu and Empress Yang communicate autobiographical messages or manifest a gender-neutral tone through the image of the flower.

In his *Yunshi zhai bitan* 韻石齋筆談 (Essays from the Rhyming Stone Studio), Jiang Shaoshu 姜紹書 (?–1680) claims that he once saw Empress Wu's two poetic inscriptions on Xu Xi's 徐熙 (886–975) flower-and-bird paintings. In one of these two painting-poems,

[69] For a detailed discussion of Empress Wu and Empress Yang's artistic achievements, see Hui-shu Lee, *Empresses, Art, and Agency in Song Dynasty China*, 118-218.

[70] Blanchard, *Song Dynasty Figures of Longing and Desire*, 259.

"Inscribed on Xu Xi's Herbaceous Peony" 題徐熙芍藥, Empress Wu reveals her fondness for the white herbaceous peony:

When beautiful peach and plum are swept bare,	秾李夭桃掃地無，
I am surprised to see the jade dish and basin.	眼明驚見玉盤盂。
In Yangzhou, I recognized its lovely spring-breeze face,	揚州省識春風面，
After seeing all the flowers, none of them are better than it is.	看盡群花總不如。[71]

Song shi 宋史 (History of the Song) presents an account of Empress Wu's father dreaming of an herbaceous peony in bloom before her birth, which foreshadowed her marriage to Emperor Gaozong.[72] Therefore, the painting-poem about the flower may not only be a manifestation of her familiarity with the male-dominated poetic tradition, but also be of personal significance.

The first line's evocation of "beautiful peach and plum" (*nongli yaotao* 秾李夭桃) borrows a term from *Shijing* 詩經 (Book of Songs) that refers to beautiful young ladies. The imagery of "being swept bare" (*saodi wu* 掃地無) and "the jade dish and basin" (*yu panyu* 玉盤盂) at the end of the first two lines both allude to Su Shi's poem about the white herbaceous peony in "The Jade Dish and Basin" 玉盤盂: "A variety of flowers scatter about in a mess to form the remains of spring, / When the white herbaceous peony blooms, they are swept bare" 雜花狼藉占春余，芍藥開時掃地無.[73] In the third line, Empress Wu hints

[71] *Yunshi zhai bitan*, "Xian sheng huanghou hanzao" 憲聖皇后翰藻.

[72] *Song shi*, 243.8646.

[73] *Su Shi shiji*, 14.680.

at Yangzhou's position as the center of cultivation for the herbaceous peony in the Song.[74] The rest of the line borrows from Du Fu's poem, "Singing My Feelings on Traces of the Past" 詠懷古蹟: "In the painting did one recognize her face of the spring breeze? / —with pendant rings in vain her soul comes back in the moonlit night" 畫圖省識春風面，環佩空歸夜月魂.[75] The imagery of "face of the spring breeze" (*chunfeng mian* 春風面) describes Wang Zhaojun's 王昭君 (c. 50 BC–?) beauty, and Du Fu's original line expresses his lament for her fate of being married away from her homeland. In addition to having a personal association with the flower, as in the case of Wang Zhaojun, Empress Wu also moved from the north to the south to follow her husband during the turbulent dynastic transition. Accordingly, the herbaceous peony in the poem may stand for the empress herself. In the last two lines, by describing the flower's peerless beauty as other flowers wither, she metaphorically implies her own worthiness after wartime.

In "Inscribed on the Album of Chrysanthemum" 題菊花冊, Empress Yang connects the male poet Tao Yuanming, who was known for his admiration of chrysanthemums, to the feminine image of the immortal of flower:

Do not pity the money that is used to buy wine in the morning,	莫惜朝來準酒錢，
Tao Yuanming himself is the immortal of this flower.	淵明身即是花仙。
A cup filled with chrysanthemum wine on the Double Ninth Festival,	重陽滿滿杯中泛，

[74] For the cultivation of the herbaceous peony in Yangzhou, see Wang Guan 王觀 (1035–1100), "Yangzhou shaoyao pu" 揚州芍藥譜.

[75] Translated by Stephen Owen, *The Poetry of Du Fu*, 17.36.

A thread of its golden color marks one year. 一縷黃金是一年。[76]

Previous female writers frequently alluded to Tao Yuanming's imagery of the "eastern hedge" in "Drinking Wine" 飲酒 to symbolize the chrysanthemum: "I picked a chrysanthemum under the eastern hedge, / off in the distance I leisurely gazed on south mountain" 採菊東籬下，悠然見南山.[77] In her song lyric, "To the Tune of 'Getting Drunk in the Shadow of Flowers'" 醉花陰, Li Qingzhao 李清照 (1084–1155) wrote the famous line, "I drank by the eastern hedge until after dusk, / There was subtle fragrance filling my sleeves" 東籬把酒黃昏後，有暗香盈袖.[78] In a painting-poem attributed to Empress Wu inscribed on a fan painting, *Peach Blossom Chrysanthemums* 膽瓶秋卉圖, the empress uses the same imagery to denote the precious pink chrysanthemum in the image: "In the autumn breeze under the warm sun, it fills the eastern hedge, / Ten thousand layers of light red clustered by emerald green branches" 秋風融日滿東籬, 萬疊輕紅簇翠枝.[79] Instead of the classic allusion, Empress Yang directly equates the recluse poet with the incarnation of the flower, which achieves a fusion of the male scholar figure and the image of the flower immortal.

Imperial women enjoyed the education, resources, and privileges inaccessible to women from other social ranks, and it was for this reason that their painting-poems had a higher chance of being preserved. Their poetic inscriptions on paintings show that women

[76] *Yushi shuhua tiba ji* 郁氏書畫題跋記, 110.

[77] *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu* 陶淵明集箋註, 247.

[78] *Shuyu ci zhu* 漱玉詞注, 14.

[79] Translated by Hui-shu Lee, *Empresses, Art, and Agency in Song Dynasty China*, 142.

began to participate in the interaction between text and image in response to the trend among the members of the literati and the royal patronage in the Song. Nonetheless, their creative uses of the image of flowers suggest that the subject matter available for women at the time was limited, which called for an expansion of the conventional feminine image in later dynasties.

THREE GENTRY WIVES FROM THE TANG TO THE YUAN

The earliest instance of a gentry woman participating in the painting-poetry tradition is Xue Yuan's "A Self-Portrait, Sent to My Husband" 寫真寄夫 of the late Tang. Very little is known about Xue Yuan except for her status as the wife of scholar Nan Chucai 南楚材, and this painting-poem is the only work she left behind. The poem is written in the traditional feminine mode of the boudoir plaint 閨怨 (*gui yuan*), expressing a woman's sorrow regarding her withered appearance and her action of drawing a self-portrait:

Intending to draw with my paintbrush,	欲下丹青筆，
I first picked up the treasured mirror and felt its coldness.	先拈寶鏡寒。
Having experienced my face growing lifeless,	已經顏索寞，
I gradually realized that hair on my temples had withered.	漸覺鬢凋殘。
Although it was easy to sketch my tearful eyes,	淚眼描將易，
It was hard to portray my pent-up sorrow.	愁腸寫出難。
I am afraid that you will completely forget me,	恐君渾忘却，

Unroll the painting from time to time to take a look. 時展畫圖看。[80]

In the last two lines, the poetic persona urges her husband to remember her longing for him by looking at the portrait. While the assumption of a female persona by the male literati in their boudoir plaints is often interpreted as expressing personal or political frustrations, a poem like this one attributed to Xue Yuan is often understood as an autobiographical description of an abandoned woman's plight.

According to the original note to the poem, Nan Chucai was planning to leave Xue Yuan for the Governor of Ying's daughter. When the female painter-poet heard of this, she sent her self-portrait together with the poem to her husband, which brought him back home. The note also includes the verse composed by the people from the same village to commend her strategic use of painting to salvage her marriage: "If she had not shown him her painting, / She would have been left alone in a vacant room" 若不逞丹青，空房應獨守. Blanchard has also pointed out that Xue Yuan's case demonstrates that "wives might avail themselves of tropes indicating attachment, as a means of competing with other women."[81] She further contends that this poem implies "painting might serve as a more natural reflection of feelings than poetry" by understanding the word "portray" (*xie* 寫) as "write" in the two lines: "Although it was easy to sketch my tearful eyes, / It was hard to portray my pent-up sorrow."[82] However, the word can also refer to "paint" in classical and modern Chinese, which is consistent with its meaning in the title of the poem (*xiezhen* 寫真, or literally "copy

[80] Xue Yuan's story and her painting-poem are included in *Yunxi youyi* 雲溪友議, "Zhen shi jie" 真詩解.

[81] Blanchard, *Song Dynasty Figures of Longing and Desire*, 22.

[82] Ibid.

a likeness"). Therefore, the female painter-poet is more likely exclaiming the difficulty of manifesting her inner "pent-up sorrow" (*chouchang* 愁腸) in the painting, whereas the sadness can be read in almost every line of her poem. Instead of her painting, she deployed the interplay of text and image to win her husband back because without the textual explication, Nan Chucai might have had a hard time deciphering the message hidden in her portrait.

Furthermore, Xue Yuan's painting-poem on her self-portrait is a combination of the stories of two previous women, Su Hui 蘇惠 and Cui Hui 崔徽, who used poetry and self-portraiture to transmit their attachment to their partners, respectively. With the growth of painting-poetry in the Tang, Xue Yuan was probably inspired by the two women to adopt the text-image interplay to rouse her husband's feelings. Her two lines mentioned above later inspired Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖 (1550–1616) to suggest Du Liniang's 杜麗娘 (also translated as Bridal Du) state of mind when the female protagonist paints her own self-portrait in the *Mudan ting* 牡丹亭 (The Peony Pavilion): "Easy to sketch freshness of youth, / hard to portray the pain at heart" 三分春色描來易，一段傷心畫出難.[83]

Of the group of female gentry in the Song, only one painting-poem, "Ink Plum" 墨梅, by Zhu Shuzhen 朱淑真 (also known as Zhu Shuzhen 朱淑貞, 1063?–1106) has survived. The painting-poem projects the fashionable motif of the plum blossom with Su Shi and his literati coterie's advocacy of painting-poetry. Nonetheless, Zhu Shuzhen's existence

[83] Translated by Cyril Birch*, The Peony Pavilion*, 68.

and the authenticity of her poetry collection, *Duanchang ji* 斷腸集 (A Broken Heart), has long been a subject of debate.[84]

In the Yuan, at least two gentry ladies, Guan Daosheng and Zheng Yunduan, left behind a cluster of painting-poems. Guan Daosheng, wife of the eminent scholar-official Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫 (courtesy name Zi'ang 子昂, 1254–1322), was a poet, painter, and calligrapher herself, so all her extant painting-poems were once self-inscribed on her own paintings to demonstrate her mastery of the "Three Perfections" associated with the literati vogue of the time.[85] Born and married into gentry families, Zheng Yunduan followed the family tradition of receiving an education at a young age and later shared intellectual interests with her scholar husband. Her individual poetry collection, *Suyong ji* 肅雝集 (Collection of Solemn Harmonies), contains at least thirty painting-poems on several thematic concerns, which shows her attachment to the poetic subgenre.[86] In their painting-poems, both Guan Daosheng and Zheng Yunduan demonstrate greater awareness of gender than their female predecessors, which signals that they began to adapt the male-dominated poetics of painting-poetry to represent their subjective experiences and considerations as women.

Rather than the feminine image of the flower, Guan Daosheng was celebrated for her ink paintings depicting bamboo, which in the male literati tradition was traditionally associated with refined taste, uprightness, and resilience. In addition to a painting-poem

[84] For the authenticity of Zhu Shuzhen's poetry collection, see Sophie Volpp, "Zhu Shuzhen (1063?–1106)," 100 and Idema and Grant, 244-8.

[85] Jennifer Purtle, "Guan Daosheng (1262–1319)," 127.

[86] Idema and Grant, 271.

about a plum blossom written at the empress dowager's request, most of her extant painting-poems were inscribed on her ink paintings of bamboo. The literary and artistic culture of bamboo was initiated at the latest during the Six Dynasties by Wang Huizhi 王徽之 (338–386) with his question: "How can there be one day without this gentleman [i.e., the bamboo]?" 何可一日無此君邪.[87] In the Northern Song, Su Shi reiterates Wang Huizhi's idea in the poem, "The Monk in the Green Bamboo Pavilion in the Yuqian County" 於潛僧绿筠轩: "I would rather have no meat in my food, / I cannot have no bamboo in my residence. / No meat makes people skinny, / But no bamboo makes people vulgar" 寧可食無肉，不可居無竹。無肉令人瘦，無竹令人俗.[88] As a member of Su Shi's literati coterie, Wen Tong was honored as a paragon of ink bamboo painting. In "Ode to the Ink Bamboo Painted by Wen Yuke in the Temple of Ordination Platform" 戒壇院文與可畫墨竹贊, Su Shi elaborates on the virtues of the plant in Wen Tong's painting: "Wind blows on its tips and rain hits its sheaths, / It braves the hailstone on top. / Frosty roots and snowy joints, / It pierces gold and metal at the bottom" 風梢雨籜，上傲冰雹。霜根雪節，下貫金鐵.[89]

As an active participant in her husband's literati circle, Guan Daosheng assimilated the literary and artistic conventions about bamboo and altered the masculine portrayal to represent the emotions she experienced in her roles as a gentry wife and mother. In her painting-poem, "On an Ink Bamboo Painting Sent to Zi'ang" 寄子昂君墨竹, she uses the

[87] *Jin shu* 晉書, 80.2103.

[88] *Su Shi shiji*, 9.448.

[89] *Su Shi wenji*, 21.614.

bamboo's growth to remind her husband that he has been travelling away from home for so long that her beauty is fading:

On the day you left, the bamboo was first planted;	夫君去日竹初栽，
The bamboo has turned into a grove and you have yet to return.	竹已成林君未來。
Once my jade visage has faded it can hardly be restored—	玉貌一衰再難好，
Unlike a flower which dies to bloom again.[90]	不如花落又花開。

The female painter-poet's wifely sentiment echoes Xue Yuan's painting-poem on her self-portrait in the Tang, written with the same intention of bringing her husband back home. But in contrast to Xue Yuan, she transformed a symbol of the male literati to communicate her own gendered expression. Given the literati couple's mutual adoration for bamboo, Guan Daosheng likely selected the poetic and visual image with the intention of alluding to the bamboo planted at their own residence as a reminder of their conjugal and intellectual connections.

In another painting-poem, "Inscribed on a Painting" 題畫, Guan Daosheng switches her role from wife to mother while describing the bamboo emerging in spring:

As spring is fair, today is also fair,	春晴今日又逢晴，
Casually I stroll with my children under the bamboo.	閒與兒曹竹下行。
The sense of spring is recently much stronger;	春意近來濃幾許，
Leafy, leafy my children grow by the side of the stone.[91]	森森稚子石邊生。

[90] Translated by Jennifer Purtle with modifications, "Guan Daosheng (1262–1319)," 127.

[91] Ibid., 128.

After providing a description in the first two lines of her outing with her children in the bamboo forest, the female painter-poet reinforces her motherly perspective by rendering the new bamboo as "children" (*zhizi* 稚子) in the last line. The depiction conjures her maternal affection for her children and bamboo alike, an effect that is not produced by male literati.

The expression of women's experiences as wife and mother in Guan Daosheng's painting-poems was to become a proto-feminist voice in Zheng Yunduan's painting-poems contemplating the fate of women in the late Yuan. In her preface to *Suyong ji*, Zheng Yunduan reveals that her motivation for writing poems is to impart "inspiring and admonitory ideas" 感發懲創之義, separating herself from the traditional feminine mode widespread in the poems of her female contemporaries and predecessors.[92] One of the themes in her painting-poems is her resentment at the social restraints imposed on women.

In the first poem of the collection "Song for a Landscape Screen" 山水障歌, Zheng Yunduan provides a verbal description of the landscape painting on her eastern silk. The imagined journey then leads to the words in the last four lines, which convey bitterness about being confined in the inner chamber without any opportunities to visit the mountains and waters in person:

I own a piece of fine eastern silk,	我有一匹好東絹，
Upon which are painted the countless hills of the south.	畫出江南無數山。
Could the brushwork be inferior to Li Yingqiu's?	筆法豈下李營丘？
I wager it surpasses Yang Qidan.	直疑遠過楊契丹。
The work of skilled hands is not easily found,	良工好手不可遇，

[92] Translated by Peter Sturman, "Preface to *Suyong ji*," 677-8.

But this painting is rich and capably composed.	此畫森然能佈置。
Layered hills and stacked peaks converge and open,	層巒疊嶂擁復開，
Strange rocks and tall pines solemnly face one another.	怪石長松儼相對。
Plank bridge and grass hut are by the forest's edge,	板橋茅屋林之隈，
A quick stream splashes the rocks, sounding like thunder.	瀑流激石聲如雷。
Revealed, I feel as if seated under Mount Lu,	恍然坐我匡廬下，
And sense that all worldly dust has been cleansed from my breast.	便覺胸次無凡埃。
But this body is destined to age in the inner chambers,	此身已向閨中老，
I regret for no way to profoundly transcend myself.	自恨無緣致幽討。
This life has been consigned to cloth socks and grass sandals,	布襪青鞋負此生，
Long I face this painting with these useless, deep regrets.[93]	長對畫圖空懊惱。

The female poet started the poem with Du Fu's line in "A Playful Song on a Painting of Paired Pines" 戲為雙松圖歌: "Master Wei, Master Wei, I have met you several times— / I own a piece of fine eastern silk, / and I value it no less than a piece of embroidery or brocade" 韋侯韋侯數相見，我有一匹好東絹，重之不減錦繡段.[94] In the original poem, Du Fu then asks his friend to give free rein to paint on the silk. As if she is following Du Fu's request, Zheng depicts her landscape painting on the silk in detail. According to her, the skill of her painting surpasses the male painters Yang Qidan 楊契丹 (active between 581–619) and Li Cheng 李成 (919–967). Her spiritual voyage through the landscape

[93] Translated by Zheng Guangyi with modifications, "Zheng Yunduan (ca. 1327–56)," 132-3.

[94] Translated by Stephen Owen with modifications, *The Poetry of Du Fu*, 9.39.

painting recalls the trope of *woyou* 臥遊 (recumbent travel), a means by which the male literati experienced a substitute form of travel by viewing landscape paintings and/or reading travel notes when they were physically unable to embark on the journey; painting-poetry was one of the major textual productions inspired by the *woyou* experience.[95] While the male literati's recourse to *woyou* was often due to sickness or political reasons, most women could only dream of a carefree journey away from their inner chambers due to the restrictions imposed by Confucian gender norms.

In her textual recreation of the painting, Zheng Yunduan opts for powerful and bold words to depict the image's wild mountains and waterfalls. The masculine mode creates a marked contrast with the imagery of "the inner chambers" (*guizhong* 閨中) in the last four lines, where she painfully realizes that as a woman who is destined to grow old in the domestic sphere, her aspiration to visit the painted landscape becomes "useless, deep regrets" (*kong aonao* 空懊惱). As the first work in her poetry collection, this painting-poem has special significance for Zheng Yunduan and sets the tone for her expression of gender inequality in the rest of her poetry collection.

In "The Painting of the Immortal Hairy Girl" 毛女圖, Zheng Yunduan states that she is a follower of the Daoist immortal, Hairy Girl, a maid in the imperial palace who moved to the mountains after the fall of the Qin dynasty (221 BC–207 BC):

I am also a disciple of this person,	我亦斯人徒，
By accident I ran against the rule of the world.	偶然攖世網。
Touching the scroll, I pondered,	撫卷發深思，

[95] See Wang, *Reverie and Reality*, 6.

"When can I withdraw from the world with her?" 何當共長往。[96]

In the second line, "the rule of the world" (*shiwang* 世網) refers to the social, moral, and gender restrictions of the mundane world with which the female poet often found herself at odds. After asserting her rebellious stance against worldly oppression in the first two lines, in the last two lines Zheng Yunduan unveils her yearning to retreat into the mountains with the Daoist immortal.

In addition to the paintings that address the theme of landscapes and the Daoist immortal, Zheng Yunduan also paid attention to historical events in order to reassess female suffering. In the first two lines of "Inscribed on the Painting of Riding with Emperor Ming of Tang" 題明皇並轡圖, she recreates the intimate scene of Emperor Xuanzong and his beloved Consort Yang 楊貴妃 (719–756) riding horses together after a banquet. In the last two lines, however, she turns sharply to critique the emperor's subsequent sacrifice of the consort during the An Lushan Rebellion 安史之亂 (755–763) to stabilize his political power:

After Sanlang sank into drunkenness, 三郎沈醉後，

He got on a horse and Yuhuan followed. 上馬玉環隨。

How come the day that he escaped west, 如何西幸日，

Was not a time to saddle up together? 不是並鞍時。[97]

By using their nicknames, Sanlang and Yuhuan, the poet intimates the tender feelings the lovers had for each other as they enjoyed royal life in the capital. The romantic image

[96] *Yuan shi xuan chuji* 元詩選初集, 2529.

[97] *Mingyuan huishi* 名媛彙詩, 6.18a.

establishes a sense of irony in the fact that the emperor was unable to repeat the same scene on his way to Sichuan since he allowed the consort to be executed to maintain his dominance. From her perspective as a woman, Zheng Yunduan empathizes with the consort's tragic fate and subordinate position in the relationship. Her painting-poem keenly interrogates the illusory nature of the royal love relationship, which was eulogized in Bai Juyi's "The Song of Everlasting Sorrow" 長恨歌.

The feminine mode in the painting-poems that Xue Yuan and Guan Daosheng sent to their husbands reflects the predominant position of the conjugal relationship in the lives of gentry ladies. While Guan Daosheng linked the literati's use of bamboo with marital longing and children, Zheng Yunduan bravely pondered the repressed status of women in the patriarchal society. The three painting-poems by the gentry ladies exhibit women's increasing awareness of their own gender. Moreover, they began to consciously mediate between their subjective perspective and the literati's established tradition of painting-poetry to create gendered representations. Female agency will become more prominent in the Ming-Qing period, when women's painting-poetry entered its full bloom.

"Now a Wang Mojie Appears in the Boudoir": Ming-Qing Women's Painting-Poetry

Represented primarily by courtesans in the late Ming and gentry ladies in the Qing, Ming-Qing women left behind thousands of painting-poems that address a wide range of thematic concerns. Many poetry collections by Ming-Qing women contain painting-poems, and in some instances, painting-poems account for more than half of the total works included in these collections. For example, in the gentry lady Cao Zhenxiu's 曹貞秀 (courtesy name Moqin 墨琴, 1762–1822) *The Small Draft in the Pavilion of Writing Rhymes* 寫韻軒小稿,

the majority of her poems are painting-poems. Echoing their female predecessors, Ming-Qing women continued to adapt the preexisting poetics of painting-poetry to articulate their gender differences and represent their diverse female subjectivities. Some even attempted, for the first time, to engender the painting-poetry genre. In her painting-poem "Inscribed on the Small Painting of Autumn Forest Scenery by Sister Ci Sheng" 題次昇姊秋林小景, the Qing poetess Shen Qi 沈綺 wrote, "There is painting in poetry and poetry in painting, / Now a Wang Mojie appears in the boudoir" 詩中有畫畫中詩，深閨今見王摩詰.[98] While the first line clearly alludes to Su Shi's classical comment on the integration of painting and poetry, the second line addresses her friend's engagement in the two arts in the female space of the boudoir and further extols her as a female counterpart of Wang Wei, the paragon of the painting-poetry tradition. These two lines exemplify women's internalization of and intervention in the poetic modes established by male literati in the painting-poetry tradition for their own expressive needs.

In addition to the adaptation of the existing poetics, the phenomenon of assimilating the characteristics of male literati to represent women's aspirations and martial spirits became widespread in the Ming-Qing period due to a literary trend that Kang-i Sun Chang refers to as "cultural androgyny."[99] The term refers to a synthesis of cultural interests and literary elements of both genders in the writing of Ming-Qing women, with women writers manifesting the qualities and lifestyles of scholars, whereas their male counterparts exhibited a tendency to self-feminize. Women's adoption of the literati's traits in their painting-poems reflects the dynamic relationship between women's painting-poetry and the

[98] *Guochao guixiu zhengshi ji* 國朝閨秀正始集, 12.10a-b.

[99] Chang, "Ming-Qing Women Poets and Cultural Androgyny."

overall painting-poetry tradition in the Ming-Qing period. Rather than contradict their unique gendered voices, the masculine traits represented in their painting-poems are still a part of their subjectivities and are delivered from a woman's perspective. The androgyny demonstrates that a group of Ming-Qing women transformed the conventionally passive and emotional tone associated with them and is also indicative of their negotiation with Confucian female virtue to show their talents, like the literati, through cultural activities.

For instance, in her painting-poem, "Self-Inscription on *The Painting of Lotus and Duck*" 蓮鴨圖, the female painter-poet Li Yin, akin to Shen Qi, identified with Wang Wei in order to reveal her capacity for painting and poetry: "If one believes in the karma of rebirth, / In a former life, I must have been the one from Wangchuan" 若信三生因果事，前生應是輞川人. The location "Wangchuan" (Wang Stream Villa) refers to Wang Wei's retirement estate where he produced a group of twenty quatrains and the legendary painting, *The Painting of Wangchuan* 輞川圖, which depicts the scenery of the villa. Furthermore, Li Yin's line is reminiscent of Wang Wei's poem, "Inscribed on *The Painting of Wangchuan*" 題《輞川圖》, in which he wrote, "In this world, wrongly am I a poet, / In a former life, I must have been a painter!" 宿世謬詞客，前身應畫師.[100] Rather than depict herself as a female painter-poet in the boudoir in the manner of Shen Qi, Li Yin transcended the boundaries of gender to directly assert her own mastery of both arts as comparable to that of her male predecessor in the painting-poetry tradition. The self-image she portrays in the

[100] Translated by Chaves, *The Chinese Painter as Poet*, 29. The title of Wang Wei's poem is also known as the last one in his "Six Spontaneous Works" 偶然作六首.

painting-poem echoes Xu Qin's 徐沁 (1626–1683) observation about her artworks: "This is one who stayed in the boudoir yet attained a scholarly spirit" 此閨閣而得士氣者.[101]

With a significant number of Ming-Qing women starting to participate in the composition of painting-poems, an array of thematic concerns becomes discernible. The most popular of these include flowers and plants, beauties, exemplary women, and self-/portraits. These major thematic concerns are generally consistent with the subject matter that predominates in the male-dominated painting-poetry tradition, with some variations.[102] For instance, although women composed numerous painting-poems on landscape paintings, this is not the top thematic concern for them, as it was for the male literati. This discrepancy can presumably be attributed to the Confucian gender hierarchy, which resulted in women being confined to the inner chamber. Even if they had the rare opportunity to leave their boudoir to visit some famous sceneries, it was normally with their male relatives. Therefore, when they saw landscape scenes depicted in paintings, it mostly evoked their sorrow of being women as the one addressed by Zheng Yunduan in "Song for a Landscape Screen." In her "Inscribed on the Painting of the Three Gorges" 題三峽圖, Xi Peilan also expresses a similar sentiment: "After all, the *woyou* experience made me ashamed that I was not a man" 臥遊畢竟愧非夫.[103] While flowers and plants as well as self-/portraits are evident in earlier painting-poems composed by women, beauties and exemplary women are relatively new tropes for Ming-Qing women. These major thematic concerns in women's painting-poetry

[101] *Minghua lu* 明畫錄, "mingyuan" 名媛.

[102] For the statistics regarding the number of painting-poems in each category of *Yuding lidai tihuashi lei*, see Pan, *The Lyrical Resonance between Chinese Poets and Painters*, 184.

[103] *Changzhen'ge ji*, 474.

reflect women's tastes and interests in the world around them and in themselves as a gender group in their particular historical and social context.

FLOWERS AND PLANTS

Flowers and plants are the favored trope in Ming-Qing women's painting-poetry, which is tied to their interest in flower-and-bird paintings.[104] As previously explained, Empress Wu and Empress Yang's poetic inscriptions in the Song demonstrated the gendered correspondence between women and flowers. In the Yuan, Guan Daosheng adapted the image of bamboo from the male literati tradition for her self-representation. Ming-Qing women greatly expanded the motifs in this category, with the most favored including plum blossoms, peach blossoms, orchids, bamboo, chrysanthemums, narcissi, apricots, lotuses, crabapples, and peonies. They may also, depending on a painting's subject matter, combine two motifs. In this case, the most popular pairing is the plum blossom together with bamboo, which matches the traditional theme of twin purities of plum blossom and bamboo 梅竹雙清 paintings. While Ming-Qing women primarily wrote painting-poems for flower-and-bird paintings that they or members of their female network had created, they also paid tribute to their female predecessors by inscribing on paintings by their female predecessors. For instance, many of them inscribed on Guan Daosheng's ink bamboo paintings.

In general, Ming-Qing women maintained the gendered correspondence with flowers, and the feminine mode traditionally associated with the image of the flower is still evident. However, a multitude of painting-poems about flowers exhibit a more powerful

[104] For Ming-Qing women's engagement in flower-and-bird paintings, see, for example, Weidner et al., *Views from Jade Terrace*.

tone, rejecting the feminine label and underscoring the lofty aspirations of the women writers. Both Bin'e 彬娥 and Gu Taiqing's painting-poems in the form of *shi* and *ci* below demonstrate how women writers broadened the feminine convention of flowers to represent their female subjectivities.

In late spring of 1798, the female painter-poet Bin'e inscribed two quatrains on her own album of flowers, entitled "Inscribed on My Own Painting Album of Flowers" 題自畫花卉冊. In the first one, she wrote:

I will not follow thousands of flowers in competing during spring, 不隨萬卉共爭春，
A painting of a surviving flower branch has true character. 一幅殘枝品格真。
Tree branches and leaves boast in vain the virtue of pine and cypress. 柯葉漫誇松柏節，
The scene of four seasons will naturally renew every year.[105] 四時光景自常新。

According to Yun Zhu's 惲珠 (1771–1833) short biography, Bin'e was a concubine of a provincial governor and after her husband passed away, she supported herself by selling paintings. As she claims in the preface to the two poems, her household had run out of food and the album of flowers was painted at the request of an official and an elder. At the end, she states her motivation for inscribing the poems: "Since I have been relying on this to make a living and I am already old, why would I decline this request? Therefore, I painted this to respond to them and completed two quatrains to talk about my intention" 妾既藉此謀生，且老矣，又何辭焉？遂寫此荅之，並成二絕以道意. Based on the preface, the "surviving flower branch" in the second line refers not only to the flowers that remain in the late spring, but also serves as a symbol of the author as an old woman who has outlived her

[105] *Guochao guixiu zhengshi ji*, 10.a-b.

husband. Instead of feeling pity for the withering flowers and herself, the female painter-poet conveys an optimistic outlook, asserting that her virtue is akin to that of the evergreen pine and cypress.

In her song lyric to the tune of "Green Wutong Ballad" 蒼梧謠, subtitled "Self-Inscribed on the Fan of Ink Peony on the Third Day of the Third Month" 正月三日自題墨牡丹扇, Gu Taiqing wrote: "You, / lightly swept your flower branch, awaiting a fine wind. / A species from the Precious Jade Terrace in the immortal land, / You will not present yourself in the endearing red color" 儂，淡掃花枝待好風。瑤臺種，不作可憐紅.[106] The imagery of "fine wind" in the second line is reminiscent of Xue Baochai's 薛寶釵 line in *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢 (Dream of the Red Chamber, also known as *The Story of the Stone* 石頭記): "When the fine wind comes, / He will whirl us upwards into the skies" 好風憑借力，送我上青雲.[107] This line is normally interpreted as expressing Baochai's desire to realize her personal aspiration. The "lovely red color" in the last line is a classical allusion to women's physical charm and rouge. In dialogue with the peony that she herself painted in ink, the female author communicates her contempt for the traditional womanly behavior of pleasing others with physical beauty and endeavors to fulfill her own ambition.

BEAUTIES

Although male literati had been writing about painted beauties from the very beginning of the painting-poetry tradition, women's participation in this thematic concern was not seen

[106] *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji* 顧太清奕繪詩詞合集, 209.

[107] Translated by David Hawkes with modifications, *The Story of the Stone*, 3.388.

until the Ming-Qing period.[108] This new trend was very likely related to the burgeoning of women as viewers and consumers of *meiren hua* 美人畫 (beautiful woman paintings). This painting genre includes generic beautiful woman paintings and imaginary portraits of well-known women of the past. James Cahill has brought up that *meiren hua* and true portraits of living courtesans and gentry ladies should be two separate genres with their own conventions.[109] These two genres are also distinct from the paintings of exemplary women, which are traditionally associated with didactic messages. In contrast to their position as an object of the male gaze in the male literati's painting-poems, women offered an intriguing same-sex perspective to communicate their admonishment, innermost admiration, sympathy, and other sentiments that they would project onto the painted beauty. In the Yuan, Zheng Yunduan had questioned Emperor Xuanzong's passion for Consort Yang. Ming-Qing women continued to re-evaluate historical and fictional beauties to recognize their achievements and remove the negative stereotypes about them. Nevertheless, Confucian gender values do still play a role in their comments on certain women figures.

In one of Ji Lanyun's 季蘭韻 (1793–1848) "Ten Poems Inscribed on the Painting Album of Beauties" 題美人畫冊十首, she wrote a painting-poem on the image of Bao Si 褒姒 (791–771 BC), the beautiful queen of King You of Zhou (r. 781–771 BC):

A bow of mulberry and quiver of rush: 檿弧箕服國將亡，

the kingdom would soon fall,

[108] In her talk "Reading Feminine Subjectivities: Poetic Responses by Women to Paintings of Women in Ming and Qing China" on May 21, 2021 at UCLA, Grace Fong mentioned that 86 poems on beauty paintings can be found in the Ming-Qing Women's Writings Database.

[109] Cahill, *Pictures for Use and Pleasure*, 159.

Everyone said the queen had invited catastrophe. 盡道中宮召禍殃。

Maybe it was not that Bao Si was not a virtuous lady, 未必褒姒非淑女，

King You of Zhou himself was inferior to King Wen. 幽王自不及文王。[110]

The first two lines reiterate the mainstream assessment of Bao Si as a femme fatale who caused the fall of the Western Zhou (1045–771 BC). Nonetheless, from her female perspective, Ji Lanyun boldly shifts the blame to the king, indicating that even if Bao Si was a virtuous woman, King You of Zhou was still unable to continue his governance because he himself was not a capable ruler on a par with the King Wen of Zhou (1152–1050 BC), the founder of the dynasty.

In another poem, on the image of Consort Yang, Ji Lanyun echoes Zheng Yunduan's sympathy for the imperial concubine and the unpredictable nature of the emperor's affections in "Inscribed on the Painting of Riding with Emperor Ming of Tang":

The oath of the inlaid box and gold hairpin was voided, 鈿合金釵誓已非，

At Mawei, she should quickly transform to clouds and fly away. 馬嵬及早化雲飛。

The monarch's favor has been hard to keep since ancient times, 君恩自古難長久，

You cannot guarantee that he will not detest

her plumpness one day. 保勿他年厭婢肥。[111]

The first line of the poem is clearly derived from the depiction in Bai Juyi's "The Song of Everlasting Sorrow": "Let me take up these familiar old objects to attest to my deep love, / The filigree case, the two-pronged hairpin of gold, I entrust to you to take back" 唯將舊物

[110] *Chuwange ji* 楚畹閣集, 3.15a.

[111] Ibid., 3.15b.

表深情，鈿合金釵寄將去.[112] In the original poem, Consort Yang splits her inlaid box and gold hairpin in the immortal land and gives half to the Daoist messenger sent by Emperor Xuanzong as a token of their steadfast love. However, Ji Lanyun believes that the oath of love between them has been broken with Consort Yang's death and that even if she had not been killed during the rebellion, the emperor would have lost interest in her eventually.

Notwithstanding the gender awareness exhibited in these painting-poems, Confucian gender morality can still be observed in some Ming-Qing women's painting-poems on beauties. In the same group of painting-poems, Ji Lanyun regards Shuangwen 雙文 (also known as Yingying 鶯鶯), the female protagonist in the *Yingying zhuan* 鶯鶯傳 (Story of Yingying) and the *Xixiang ji* 西廂記 (Romance of the Western Chamber), as a pitiful figure who made the mistake of initiating her rendezvous with Scholar Zhang by sending him a poem:

Do not blame her for being flirtatious, 休將輕薄咎微之，
She went astray when she waited in the western chamber
under the moon. 自誤西廂待月時。
Only for a sudden feeling of making amends, 只是忽情為補過，
She should not have left behind the poem of meeting an immortal. 不應留得會真詩。[113]

Ji Lanyun's poem was likely written in reaction to Xi Peilan's painting-poem on the same figure in her "Inscribed on the Album of Female Beauties" 題美人冊子. The two female

[112] Translated by Paul W. Kroll, "Po Chü-i's 'Song of Lasting Regret' A New Translation," 100.

[113] *Chuwange ji*, 3.16a.

painter-poets hailed from the same poetic community in Changshu and the wording in their first two lines is similar, except that Xi Peilan's view on Shuangwen was purely critical:

One should blame her for being flirtatious, 底須輕薄咎微之，
Who sent her to wait late in the western chamber under the moon? 誰遣西廂待月遲。
Separated by the wall, flowers' shadows moved by themselves, 花影隔牆風自動，
How was that related to you who inscribed a poem? 干卿何事卻題詩。[114]

Intriguingly, as two active female painter-poets themselves, both Ji Lanyun and Xi Peilan agree that Shuangwen's romantic employment of poetry to communicate her feelings and secretly invite her lover to meet with her in the western chamber was inappropriate. Their opinions about this particular beauty conformed to the orthodox view of the genre of stories about love between talented scholars and beautiful women 才子佳人 (*caizi jiaren*) in gentry households in the Qing. The plot of these love stories in favor of free love runs counter to the precept of arranged marriage as prescribed by Confucian etiquette. In *Honglou meng*, Grandmother Jia 賈母 makes a long speech to reproach the figure of beautiful women in this type of romance:

> They are always amazingly well-educated, a model of decorum, a regular paragon of all the virtues—that is, until the first presentable young man comes along. As soon as *he* appears on the scene—it doesn't matter who or what he is—all their book-learning and the duty they owe their parents fly out of the window and the next moment they are "making their plans for the future" and generally carrying on in a

[114] *Changzhen'ge ji*, 467.

way that would bring blushes to the cheek of a cat-burglar—certainly not in the least like respectable, educated young ladies.[115]

Although *Honglou meng* is a novel with fictional elements, Grandmother Jia's words reflect the mainstream negative social values of female protagonists in love stories from the perspective of a female head of a gentry household in the Qing. As an embodiment of Confucian female virtue in the novel, Xue Baochai also admonishes Lin Daiyu for quoting lines from the *Mudan ting* and the *Xixiang ji* during family gatherings within the household. What these criticisms imply is that even though gentry ladies could read these love stories in private, their public reference or approval of them was considered a social taboo, particularly for unmarried girls.

Likewise, Confucian marital morality regarding married women also pervades some of the women's painting-poems on beauties. Gan Lirou 甘立媃 (1743–1819) wrote in her "Inscribed on a Painting of a Sleeping Beauty" 題睡美人圖:

Her drowsy phoenix eyes are slit, deeply hidden, 朦朧鳳眼細深藏，
Her slanting, dewy lotus feet are exposed on the embroidered bed. 仄露蓮鉤壓繡床。
Do you know that Luofu has her own husband? 知否羅敷夫自有，
Do not look for King Xiang of Chu in the dream. 休從夢裡覓襄王。[116]

By depicting the beauty's phoenix eyes and lotus feet in her sleep, the first two lines conjure up a sensual ambience, akin to the poems of the male literati. James Cahill has observed that as opposed to men, women, particularly gentry ladies, might favor *meiren hua* on the "cool"

[115] Translated by David Hawkes, *The Story of the Stone*, 3.30.

[116] *Yongxuelou gao*, 4.13b-4.14a.

or non-erotic side to depict female figures from their own social group and "to include some indications of their personal concerns and feelings, even when there are implications as well of their continuing subordination to men in many aspects of their lives."[117] Based on Gan Lirou's textual recreation in the first two lines, her source painting should be on the "warm" side of Cahill's scale. Given its boudoir setting, this painting was probably hung in her inner chamber, which implies that she might enjoy the image with her husband in their marital life.

However, in her last two lines, the erotic aura is quickly dispersed. The allusion to Luofu in the third line refers to the famous beauty in the folk song (*yuefu* 樂府) poem of the Han, "Mulberry Lane" 陌上桑, who rejects an official's sexual advances by asserting that she has a husband. In the last line, King Xiang of Chu alludes to King Qingxiang of Chu 楚頃襄王 (298–263 BC), who encounters a goddess in his dream in Song Yu's 宋玉 (fl. 298–263 BC) "Rhapsody on the Goddess" 神女賦. The female author employs the two allusions in the last two lines to remind the sleeping beauty in the image that, as a married woman, she should not think of another lover even in the most private space of her dreams.

In the *Mudan ting*, Du Liniang preserves her virtue and virginity by dreaming of her intimacy with Liu Mengmei, which differentiates her from Shuangwen. Based on Gan Lirou's admonition, even this kind of romantic reverie was no longer allowed in the Qing. The female author's didactic emphasis on Confucian morality is in accordance with the poetic movement of "being earnest and gentle" 溫柔敦厚 (*wenrou dunhou*) led by Shen Deqian 沈德潛 (1673–1769) to revive the ideal "orthodox" poetics and behaviors in the

[117] Cahill, *Pictures for Use and Pleasure*, 165.

Confucian classic, the *Book of Rites*.[118] Gan Lirou's poem on the painting of sleeping beauty reveals a female audience's possible reactions to *meiren hua* with erotic overtone. In contrast to the male literati's emphasis on the painted beauty's physical charm or inner longing, gentry women may use these paintings to establish their own virtuous images in their painting-poems.

EXEMPLARY WOMEN

The tradition of depicting exemplary women started with the *Lienü zhuan* 列女傳 (Biographies of Exemplary Women) attributed to Liu Xiang 劉向 (77BC–6BC), which was later partially illustrated by Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之 (ca. 344–406) in his painting, *Wise and Benevolent Women* 列女仁智圖. As an essential textbook in the orthodox Confucian curriculum for the education of women, the *Lienü zhuan* played a significant role in promulgating women's morality all the way through the late imperial era. As Susan Mann has observed, in addition to the orthodox *Lienü zhuan*, male literati of the Ming-Qing period created an alternative model of women's history with the *baimei* 百美 ("one hundred beauties") genre.[119] Mann and Xiaorong Li each consider the cases of Yun Zhu and Li Shuyi 李淑儀 (1817–?) to show that women were inspired by these two modes to write their own histories in the Qing.[120] Cao Zhenxiu's painting-poems in collaboration with Gai Qi's 改琦

[118] For a more detailed discussion of the poetic movement, see Xiaorong Li, *Women's Poetry of Late Imperial China*, 54-5. Grace Fong has examined Gan Lirou's poetry collection in relation to her life trajectory. See Fong, *Herself an Author*, 12-53.

[119] Mann, *Precious Records*, 208.

[120] Ibid., 208-14 and Li, "Woman Writing about Women," 53-60.

(style name Qixiang 七薌, 1773–1828) illustrations present a new case of women's redefinition and rewriting of exemplary women with an interaction between text and image.

With her "Sixteen Miscellaneous Poems Inscribed on Paintings" 題畫雜詩十六首, Cao Zhenxiu wrote a group of painting-poems for sixteen legendary and historical women. Later, she inscribed them on Gai Qi's paintings in standard script. Gai Qi's album of sixteen paintings accompanied by Cao Zhenxiu's poetic inscriptions is thus entitled *Album of Exemplary Women Painted by Gai Qixiang and Inscribed by Cao Moqin* 改七薌畫曹墨琴題列女圖冊 (also translated as *Famous Women*, 1799).[121] Although the name of their project follows the mode of *Lienü zhuan*, Cao Zhenxiu's selection of legendary and historical women figures falls under the category of the *baimei* genre. However, rather than emphasizing physical beauty or virtue, Cao Zhenxiu's depiction of exemplary women highlights their engagement in varied cultural activities that encompass education, writing, reading, calligraphy, poetry criticism, music, and martial arts. In one of the painting-poems, "Zhongji Attended the Banquet in the Inner Palace" 仲姬內宴 (fig. 1.1), she praises Guan Daosheng's skills in calligraphy, which received imperial favor in the Yuan:

> From Xingqing Palace she returned, her jade pendants tinkling, 興慶朝回響珮琚，
> Her whole family was so refined, they could all produce calligraphy. 一家風雅揔能書。
> By imperial decree, her *Thousand Character Essay* was

[121] The album is currently collected in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET) and accessible via the link: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/733847. For an introduction to the work by Joseph Scheier-Dolberg, Assistant Curator in the Department of Art in the Met, see: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/online-features/metcollects/famous-women.

embellished in jade, 千文准敕教裝玉，

A Golden Lotus Lantern guided her straight back home.[122] 也抵金蓮送直廬。

Other talented women depicted in her painting-poems include Lady Xuanwen 宣文君 (283–?), Ban Zhao 班昭 (ca. 49–ca. 120), Wei Shuo 衛鑠 (272–349), Shangguan Wan'er 上官婉兒 (664–710), and Wu Cailuan 吳彩鸞. Probably due to the fact that Cao Zhenxiu was best recognized for her calligraphy, three of these talented women were exceptional female calligraphers. By acclaiming these talented women in her painting-poems, Cao Zhenxiu transformed the image of exemplary women from the chaste and filial figure of Confucian gender ideology to brilliant individuals with literary and artistic expertise. This offered a new definition of exemplarity in accordance with the rise of women's culture in the Ming-Qing period.

In the preface by Cao Zhenxiu's husband Wang Qisun 王芑孫 (style name Lengqie Shanren or "Man of Mt. Laṅka" 楞伽山人, 1755–1817), which is inscribed on the album in semi-cursive script (fig. 1.2), he states the motivation for the text-image collaboration arranged by his disciple, Shen Shu 沈恕 (courtesy name Qiyun 屺雲, 1775–1812):

> As a couple, each of us used to write painting-poems to give Qiyun as gifts. After he had already compiled them together into one volume and stored it in the Garden of Old Ni, he asked Gai Qixiang to supplement their paintings, organized each of our painting-poems into an album, and asked us to write them again [on the album]. Moreover, he was worried that someone would imitate and take the painting craftily or forcibly with a sidelong glance, so he also asked for this preface so that he can

[122] Translated by Ju-hsi Chou with modifications, in *Journeys on Paper and Silk*, 138-46.

specially collect them. In this way, he treated a pair of straw sandals as preciously as two pieces of jade: isn't this a bit much?"

余夫婦嘗各寫題畫詩以贈屺雲，既已合裝一卷藏之古倪園矣，復屬改君七薾補作其畫，各裝一冊，而求重書之。又恐巧偷豪敓者之睨其殽也，並求題記以專弆翫。然葛屨一輛而雙璧珍之，無廼過耶。

The preface reveals that Gai Qi painted two groups of paintings for each of the couple's painting-poems, probably because their original source paintings were not available. While the couple's painting-poems were generated by their source paintings, they again generated Gai Qi's paintings. In this sense, Gai Qi's paintings can be regarded as "paintings of poetic intents" (*shiyi tu* 詩意圖). The couple then inscribed their own painting-poems on Gai Qi's paintings. Finally, at Shen Shu's request, Wang Qisun added this preface to prove the authenticity of the two albums in case other people produced fake copies later.

A renowned collector of ancient books, calligraphy, and painting who hailed from a wealthy family in Songjiang 松江 (modern-day Shanghai), Shen Shu stored his large collection in the Garden of Old Ni and socialized with distinguished literati and artists, including Wang Qisun and Gai Qi, in the Jiangnan area. In addition, Cao Zhenxiu's album contains an inscription by Liao Yunjin 廖雲錦 (1766–1835), one of Yuan Mei's female disciples, claiming that she had viewed the album in 1800 (fig. 1.3). Although Wang Qisun modestly compared their painting-poems to "a pair of straw sandals," Shen Shu's effort to bring about the text-image collaboration and keep the two albums as treasures in his immense collection speak to the value of the project. More than redefining the exemplary women, the collaboration, preservation, and circulation of Cao Zhenxiu's painting-poems in the Qing epitomize the active association of gentry women with male and female members

of literary and artistic communities in their use of the poetic subgenre, usually with the support of a male member of their households.

SELF-/PORTRAITS

When the female figure in the painting articulates its visual likeness to a contemporary individual, the painting is referred to as a portrait. Although women writers did create inscriptions on some historical portraits and portraits of men, most of their painting-poems on portraits in the Ming-Qing period were written for their female relatives, friends, and acquaintances as well as for themselves. Dorothy Ko has mentioned that the exchange of self-portraits was "customary" in the elite circles because "direct face-to-face communications and resonance between like-minded individuals became cherished ideals" in the late Ming.[123] Binbin Yang's study of women's textual inscriptions on portraits has demonstrated that women in the Qing participated in the circulation of their images for intended elite viewers in the context of "a heightened sense of the self among the artists and the literati, as well as a new cultural individualism at large."[124] As I will show in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, the practice of requesting and inscribing painting-poems on portraits became particularly common from the High Qing onwards when women had greater opportunities to attend cultural activities and build social connections.

Ming-Qing women's portraits were normally commissioned or painted by themselves. When they created inscriptions on other people's portraits, they would specify the recipient's name and the setting for the portrait. When they inscribed their own portraits,

[123] Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 49-50.

[124] Yang, *Heroines of the Qing*, 41. For more discussion of Ming-Qing women's portraits, see Mao Wenfang 毛文芳, *Juan zhong xiao li yi bai nian* 卷中小立已百年, 47.

they would include the word "self-inscribed" 自題 (*ziti*). The motif of portraits is often combined with other thematic subjects, particularly flowers, plants, and landscapes, so as to make it possible to visualize the setting of the image and deliver coded messages. Because of the nature of portraits as a mirror image of an individual, the painting-poems on other people's portraits are imbued with social significance and those on one's own portraits are a convenient means for self-representation. Ultimately, the symbolism that other objects offer for self-representation can hardly surpass the innate connection between oneself and one's own image. Because of the intention for publicity, the portraits were normally produced with the subject's idealized self-recognition and the viewer's reception in mind to reflect the subject's morality, taste, cultural pursuits, and other individualistic traits in a pictorial form. By requesting and inscribing painting-poems on portraits, women promoted their fame, deepened their mutual understanding, and reinforced social bonds. Even when a woman passed away, her female friends and relatives might write painting-poems to commemorate her and their past relationship.

For instance, Wu Zao 吳藻 (ca. 1799–1862) inscribed her female friend Xu Yunlin's 許雲林 portrait with a song lyric to the tune of "High Terrace" 高陽台, subtitled "Sister Yunlin Asked me to Inscribe on Her *Small Portrait of Lake and Moon Permeating the Zither*" 雲林姊囑題湖月沁琴圖小影. After describing the painted scenery in the first stanza, in the second stanza she identifies her friend as a soulmate:

Few are those on the sea who understand Cheng Lian's tone,	成連海上知音少，
But when his seven strings move,	但七條絲動，
They stir my jasper zither.	移我瑤琴。

By the winding balustrade,	六曲闌幹，
I ask whose soft white hands will be leaning on it with me?	問誰素手同憑。
When can we unite in house by the lake,	幾時共結湖邊屋，
Waiting for long bamboo flute to	待修簫、
Come join our twinned sounds.	來和雙聲。
Halt for a moment:	且消停。
A section of autumn yearning,	一段秋懷，
I will play for you to listen.	彈與儂聽。[125]

In the first line, Cheng Lian refers to the renowned zither player Bo Ya's 伯牙 master. By imagining the scene where she plays the zither together with Xu Yunlin, the female author conveys her longing to pour out her heart through the sound of zither when they see each other one day. In addition to Wu Zao, Gu Taiqing and Shen Shanbao 沈善寶 (courtesy name Xiangpei 湘佩, 1808–1862) also wrote painting-poems on the same portrait for Xu Yunlin at her request. Their painting-poems on the same portrait create a space for these women writers to exchange their feelings and renew their homosocial friendship connected by the shared interests in writing, painting, and music.

In addition to inscribing other people's portraits, Ming-Qing women were also enthusiastic about inscribing their own portraits with painting-poems. While women's self-inscriptions on their own portraits can be traced to Xue Yuan's "Drawing a Self-Portrait to Send to My Husband" in the Tang, Du Liniang's inscription on her self-portrait in the

[125] *Xiangnan xuebei ci* 香南雪北詞, 18a-b.

Mudan ting gave rise to another wave of self-portrayal in the late imperial period.[126] In contrast with the romantic undertones in Xue Yuan and Du Liniang's painting-poems intended to be sent to their loved ones, Ming-Qing women tended to focus on the nature of self-representation of their own portraits as an outlet for reviewing their life experience and expressing their underlying desires. Even though they may have treated the mirror images in the portraits as others so as to observe their physical appearances, they usually went further to reveal their inner emotions.

In her "Self-Inscribed on My Portrait" 自題小像, Qian Shoupu 錢守璞 (ca. 1801–1869) inscribed her portrait with a group of eight poems to record each stage of her marital life: entering her husband's household, exchanging poems with her husband, giving birth to her first child, taking care of her in-laws, marrying off her daughter, enduring her husband's death, educating her son, and finally spending the rest of her life as an old lady. In the last poem, she depicts her own image in the portrait in contemplation of her past and future:

Thirty years of hard work, the hair on my temples is almost white. 卅載辛勤鬢欲皤，
I have experienced both severe frost and violent snow. 嚴霜厲雪儘經過。
My lofty bone structure can still be seen, 崚嶒骨相看還在，
My red face has fully withered: what can be done about aging? 凋盡朱顏奈老何？[127]

Rather than lamenting her fading beauty, the female painter-poet deems that the signs of aging in the portrait attest to her trajectory as a woman who fulfilled her Confucian familial duties as wife, mother, daughter-in-law, and widow. Organized in chronological order, Qian

[126] For more discussion of Du Liniang's portrait, see Wang, "The Emaciated Soul," 42-6.

[127] *Xiufolou shigao* 繡佛樓詩稿, 2.35a.

Shoupu's eight painting-poems on her own portrait not only constitute an autobiography for her married life, but also construct and immortalize her image as a female paragon of virtue for posterity.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted some of the important stages, painter-poets, and developments in the lost history of women's painting-poetry from the Tang to the Ming-Qing period. While women from the three social groups of courtesans, imperial women, and gentry ladies established the classical modes and motifs, these were further developed by women of the Ming-Qing in order to engage in more thematic concerns and demonstrate greater gender awareness in their painting-poems. It should also be noted that even though proto-feminist ideas emerged from the Yuan dynasty onwards, Ming-Qing women also composed many painting-poems in the traditional feminine mode and there is still an observance of the orthodox Confucian gender hierarchy in their painting-poems, as evidenced by some of their painting-poems on beauties.

The investigation provided here of the most popular thematic concerns, including flowers and plants, beauties, exemplary women, and self-/portraits, is by no means exhaustive. Ming-Qing women also wrote about other subject matters in their painting-poems. For instance, they wrote many painting-poems on the theme of educating children (*jiaozi* 教子 or *kenü* 課女), providing reflections on their gender roles and duties as mothers. The overview in this chapter offers a framework for understanding how women established a gendered poetics so as to express their needs, emotions, aspirations, and collective

experiences in their painting-poems, which then leads to three in-depth case studies of women's painting-poetry in late imperial China.

Chapter Two

Engendering the Plum Blossom:

Li Yin's Painting-Poetry in the Ming-Qing Transition

On a long day, tranquil and secluded, no cares for mundane affairs,
On treebranch-tips, springtime birds sang to each other blithely.
Moistening a brush and unfolding a piece of paper, I inscribed a poem idly,
With the ink I drew a painting of plum blossoms.
長日清幽俗事無，枝頭春鳥任相呼。濡毫展紙閑題詠，畫幅梅花水墨圖。

—Li Yin, "Inscribed on Plum Blossoms" 題梅花[128]

This chapter will focus on the recurrent trope of the plum blossom (*mei* 梅, also translated as "prunus") in Li Yin's painting-poetry in relation to her flower-and-bird paintings that contain an image of this particular flower. In contrast to its limited presence in her extant paintings, the plum blossom is represented in her poetry—particularly the painting-poems she created for her own paintings—with far greater frequency than any other objects featured in the three volumes of her poetry collection. Moreover, in the two volumes written after the collapse of the Ming dynasty and the death of her husband, the poetic imagery is richly imbued with personal significance, signaling the female painter-poet's growing attachment to the flower following this momentous turning point in her life. While Li Yin's early depictions of plum blossoms preserve the classical symbolism that had emerged from the Northern Song dynasty and matured by the end of the Yuan dynasty, she gradually transformed the flower into a metaphor for her self-image and her late husband within the context of national and personal trauma. Thus, Li Yin's gendered adaptation of

[128] *Zhuxiaoxuan yincao* 竹笑軒吟草, 65.

the image in her poetry and paintings transcended the conventions of the literati and turned the plum blossom into an emblem of her own subjectivity. The painter-poet depicted the plum blossom in a multifaceted way, providing it with a variety of connotations, and this innovative approach was the result of her literary and artistic skill as well as the interplay between gender values and the turbulent dynastic transition.

A native of Qiantang 錢塘 (modern-day Hangzhou 杭州), Li Yin was a female painter-poet during the late Ming and the early Qing.[129] In a biography written by her contemporary Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610–1695), the eminent scholar and Ming loyalist equates her with Liu Rushi 柳如是 (1618–1664) and Wang Wei 王微 (1600–1647), two other talented courtesans in the Jiangnan region who turned into gentry ladies by becoming concubines of male elites in the late Ming:

> At that time, there was Liu Rushi in Yushan, and Wang Xiuwei [Wang Wei] in Yunjian, both renowned for being kindred spirits with their husbands in literary-artistic sensibility and accomplishments. Shi'an [Li Yin] was on a par with them [literally, 'was the third foot of the tripod']. Even a country bumpkin or a common laborer admired these as wondrous romantic tales [literally, 'tales of the Jade Terrace'].
>
> 當是時，虞山有柳如是，雲間有王修微，皆以唱隨風雅聞於天下，是庵為之鼎足，傖父擔板，亦艷為玉台佳話.[130]

[129] Hu Wenkai 胡文楷 states that Li Yin hailed from Kuaiji 會稽 (modern-day Shaoxing 紹興), whereas other sources generally consider her hometown to be Qiantang. See Hu, *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao* 歷代婦女著作考, 108-9.

[130] Translated by Wai-yee Li, *Women and National Trauma in Late Imperial Chinese Literature*, 125. This biography is also inscribed on Li Yin's *Flowers of the Four Seasons*. For a detailed discussion of Huang Zongxi's biography of Li Yin, see Fong, *Herself an Author*, 111-2.

Although Li Yin's early life as a courtesan is not mentioned in extant biographies, Huang's juxtaposition of her with the other two well-known courtesan-concubines designates a parallel life trajectory, as she went from being a celebrated courtesan to a beloved concubine of the late Ming official Ge Zhengqi. Nevertheless, several scholars have shown that the position that Li Yin occupies is a distinctive one and that she outshines other talented courtesan-concubines from the time of the Ming-Qing transition, particularly given her status as the widow of a martyr and her production of poetry and painting after Ge Zhengqi's suicide to honor the fallen Ming dynasty.

Ellen Widmer has pointed out that Li Yin surpasses Liu Rushi and Wang Wei by being designated as a virtuous wife in Yun Zhu's (1771–1833) didactic *Guochao guixiu zhengshi ji* (The Anthology of Correct Beginnings by Inner-Chamber Talents of the Present Dynasty). Furthermore, she has noted that Li Yin's loyalist attachments, represented by her numerous literary works following Ge Zhengqi's death, formed the image of her as a symbol of "moral purity."[131] Grace S. Fong has also observed that Li Yin's case is unusual given that "while many literary concubines wrote and published when they were relatively young, few did so as widows, as they depended primarily on the husbands' moral, social, and economic support to be able to write within the family context."[132] Last but not least, Wai-yee Li has focused on Li Yin's martial spirit, which crystallizes in her poetry with the masculine imagery of the sword, relaying a female loyalist's resentment over the

[131] Widmer and Chang, *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*, 6.

[132] Fong, *Herself an Author*, 56.

unfulfillment of her political ambition due to gender inequality during the chaotic historical change in late imperial China.[133]

Although previous studies have, based on her literary works, established Li Yin's image as a virtuous Ming loyalist and wife of a martyr, scant attention has been given to the interplay between her poetry and paintings as complementary representations of her subjectivity and agency in grappling with the devastating loss of her country and her husband. A cross-media investigation of text and image is imperative in particular for exploring this prolific painter-poet's spiritual journey, which is embedded in the literary and artistic works she created during her widowhood. Li Yin rarely revealed the background or her state of mind for her paintings through inscriptions. Instead, it had typically been Ge Zhengqi who had written inscriptions on her earlier works to document the context of the artistic creation. For instance, he inscribed a long passage on *Flowers and Birds* (fig. 2.1-2). Ge's inscriptions on Li Yin's paintings not only exemplify the couple's intellectual compatibility, but also were intended, as he stated, to "distinguish them [i.e., Li Yin's paintings] from fake ones" 以別贋鼎.[134]

After Ge Zhengqi's suicide in 1645, most of Li Yin's paintings only contain basic information such as her signature, date of creation, location, and seal.[135] The underlying reason for Li Yin's reluctance to inscribe her own paintings is debatable. Grace S. Fong has alluded to the possibility that the notion of Confucian female virtue restricted her self-

[133] Li, *Women and National Trauma in Late Imperial Chinese Literature*, 150-2.

[134] "Xu *Zhuxiaoxuan yincao*" 序竹笑軒吟草, 4-5.

[135] Only two of her extant paintings, *Two Sailboats Compete to Cross the River* 雙帆競渡 (1634) and *Plum Blossoms and Sparrows* 梅雀圖 (1658), collected in the National Palace Museum, Taipei, include the recipient of each painting in addition to the basic information.

expression.[136] However, for an author who published three volumes of poetry in her lifetime, the Confucian gender code was unlikely to have been the only reason why she restrained her voice in her own artistic works. Based on her experience, I suggest that there are three other reasons that may play a role in the absence of her inscriptions. First, Li Yin mainly supported herself by selling paintings after she had been widowed, so the commercial purpose of her paintings curtailed her self-expression. Second, her reluctance to create inscriptions on her own was a private way to commemorate her late husband, since this had been an activity they had enjoyed together. Finally, throughout her widowhood she intended to retain her image as a gentry lady, and as mentioned before, courtesans typically inscribed paintings as a way to interact with male literati in late imperial China.

However, a cluster of painting-poems on Li Yin's own paintings are included in the three volumes of her poetry collection, *Zhuxiao xuan yincao* 竹笑軒吟草 (Recited Drafts from the Laughing Bamboo Studio), which can be regarded as valuable materials to supplement her paintings. While the title of the poetry collection is derived from the name of Li Yin's studio, the origin of the phrase "laughing bamboo" clearly alludes to Su Shi's comment on Wen Tong's ink bamboo paintings.[137] Although the first volume of her poetry collection was published with Ge Zhengqi's assistance in accordance with the trend of concubine writing in the late Ming, the last two volumes, *Zhuxiao xuan yincao xu* 竹笑軒吟草續 (Sequel to Recited Drafts from the Laughing Bamboo Studio) and *Zhuxiao xuan yincao san* 竹笑軒吟草三 (Recited Drafts from the Laughing Bamboo Studio Volume Three), were published after her husband's death in the early Qing and in 1683, respectively,

[136] Fong, *Herself an Author*, 112.

[137] See Su Shi, "Shishi Xiansheng huazhu zan" 石室先生畫竹贊, *Su Shi wenji*, 21.613.

with the support of Ge Zhengqi's students and other loyalists. Based on her mourning poems included in the second volume, it seems likely that Ge Zhengqi committed suicide during the time that she was writing it. The publication of the last two volumes speaks to the female painter-poet's renown among members of the loyalist community and their recognition of her talent.

As Huang Zongxi wrote in his biography, "After the Supervisor of Attendants [i.e., Ge Zhengqi] passed away, their family fortunes were lost, and Shi'an was all by herself. She was so sad, heart in pain and bones broken, and she expressed this in her poems" 光祿捐館，家道喪失，而是庵茕然一身，酸心折骨，其發之為詩.[138] Moreover, her paintings were so popular that they became a local specialty of Haining 海寧 (in modern-day Zhejiang Province 浙江省) and without her husband's inscriptions, "there were more than forty people in the same town who faked her paintings" 而假其畫者，同邑遂有四十餘人.[139] Arranged in chronological order, Li Yin's painting-poetry does not just reflect the rise of women's painting-poetry in the Ming-Qing period but also serves as a reliable account for examining the painter-poet's spiritual journey and her literary and artistic achievements.

Li Yin's Early Painting-Poetry and the Literati Tradition of Plum Blossoms

In his biography, Huang Zongxi reveals that Li Yin's parents initiated the girl into the art of poetry and painting in her childhood and that her exceptional literary and artistic talent

[138] Huang, "Li yin zhuan" 李因傳, 88.

[139] Ibid.

brought her fame before the age of fifteen.[140] The celebrated romantic relationship between Liu Rushi and Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582–1664) started from the courtesan's poetic line on the beauty of peach blossoms around West Lake 西湖: "Peach blossoms get their air among beauties" 桃花得氣美人中. As with the romance between Liu Rushi and Qian Qianyi, Ge Zhengqi was attracted to Li Yin because of her poetic line on the plum blossom: "One branch will wait behind and bloom in late spring" 一枝留待晚春開. Li Yin's poem about plum blossoms belongs to the poetic genre of *yongwu*, in which an object is personified to relay the poet's spiritual aspirations (*tuo wu yan zhi* 托物言志). Contrasting with Liu Rushi's intention to celebrate the physical allure of peach blossoms, Li Yin's line not only demonstrates her literary talent but also expresses her recognition of the courage and loftiness represented by the image of the plum blossom. Ge later recollected his admiration after reading the line in the preface to Li Yin's poetry collection: "[I] was consequently amazed and took her [as my concubine]" 遂異而納之.[141]

Before Ge Zhengqi's death, the couple enjoyed a "companionate marriage" based on their shared literary and artistic interests. Scholars of the same era drew parallels between them and the two exemplary literati couples, Li Qingzhao and Zhao Mingcheng 趙明誠 (1081–1129) as well as Guan Daosheng and Zhao Mengfu, to extol their conjugal harmony and Li Yin's mastery of both poetry and painting.[142] Except for one work, all of Li Yin's painting-poems in the first volume of her poetry collection are exchange poems written in

[140] Ibid.

[141] "Xu *Zhuxiaoxuan yincao*" 序竹笑軒吟草, 4.

[142] See, for example, Huang, "Li yin zhuan," 88.

correspondence with her husband to comment on landscape paintings. The consistent thematic concern of these painting-poems is linked with Ge Zhengqi's preference for and skill in this genre. As he used to say, "She is inferior to me in landscapes, while I am inferior to her in flowers" 山水姬不如我，花卉我不如姬.[143]

Although plum blossoms do not appear as a theme in these painting-poems, four poems in this volume are dedicated to recording the multiple excursions the woman painter-poet makes to admire the sight of plum blossoms. In one of the poems, entitled "Viewing the Plum, Following My Husband the Supervisor's Rhyme" 看梅，次家祿勛韻, Li Yin suggests the superiority of plum blossoms to the peach blossoms around West Lake: "Thousands of peach blossom trees surrounding ten *li* of the banks around West Lake, / They are not as good as those flowers after snow on Solitary Hill" 繞堤十里桃千樹，不及孤山雪後花.[144] The poetic imagery of "flowers after snow" (*xuehou hua* 雪後花) refers to plum blossoms, underscoring the flower's purity and integrity. Moreover, the location for viewing the plum blossoms, Solitary Hill in West Lake, alludes to the story of the hermit-poet Lin Bu 林逋 (967–1028) in the Northern Song. In another poem, "Twelve Quatrains for Recollecting the Jiangnan Area, Following My Husband the Supervisor's Rhyme" 憶江南十二絕句，次家祿勛韻, Li Yin again categorizes the plum blossom as Lin Bu's flowers: "One thousand trees of snow in ten *li* of spring wind, / All of them are the Lin family's plum blossoms of the past" 春風十里千株雪，盡是林家舊日梅.[145]

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[143] *Wusheng shishi* 無聲詩史, Volume 5.

[144] *Zhuxiaoxuan yincao*, 23.

[145] Ibid., 24.

These exchange poems about plum blossoms indicate the couple's mutual fondness for the flower. In addition to poetry and painting, seasonal outings to appreciate the flower was clearly one of their favorite pastimes. Li Yin's utilization of this poetic imagery related to plum blossoms suggests that, at this early stage of her life, she was acquainted with the plum blossom tradition developed by the male literati over the centuries. Thanks to the flower's tendency to endure the chill of winter and bloom before other flowers during the transition from late winter to early spring, plum blossoms had long been cherished as markers of spring's arrival and, even more significantly, the hermetic preference for shunning the mundane pursuits of fame and fortune.

As a recurrent figure in Li Yin's poems about plum blossoms, Lin Bu was an exemplar in the literati tradition of the flower. Since the poet was loath to serve the court because he despised the political life of the time, he led a reclusive life on Solitary Hill in West Lake. According to myth, instead of having a family, the hermit took great delight in planting plum trees and raising cranes, which is the origin of the phrase *meiqi hezi* 梅妻鶴子 (literally, "taking the plum as his wife and the crane as his son"). The phrase is a vivid reflection of Lin Bu's eccentric lifestyle and special attachment to plum blossoms. Furthermore, his depiction of plum blossoms in the poem, "The Small Plum Tree in the Mountain Garden" 山园小梅, was venerated as an exemplar by later literati of the dynasty, including Mei Yaochen 梅堯臣 (1002–1060), Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072), and Su Shi. They subsequently produced many poems about plum blossoms, advancing the poetic vogue for the flower.

Following its popularity in literature, the ink plum painting genre soon burgeoned in literati painting at the end of the Northern Song. Xu Qin attributed the origin of the genre to

Monk Zhongren 仲仁 (also known as Monk Huaguang 花光 or 華光, d. 1123), whose ink wash technique was further developed by Yin Bai 尹白 and Yang Wujiu 揚無咎 (1097–1169).[146] In her thorough investigation of the ink plum genre, Maggie Bickford has pointed out that plum blossoms, despite not being very popular, had appeared before the Northern Song in five colors in paintings by Xu Xi and his followers.[147] Nonetheless, Zhan Dunren 詹敦仁 (914–979) wrote a painting-poem on an ink plum painting in the Five Dynasties, entitled "One Poem for Repaying Jie An's Gift of an Ancient Ink Plum" 介庵贈古墨梅酬以一篇.[148] The term "ancient ink plum" (*gu momei*) indicates that the painting might have been created even earlier than Zhan Dunren's time. While the original painting is no longer extant, Zhan Dunren's painting-poem shifts the origin of the ink plum genre to the Five Dynasties or earlier, which evinces the textual value of painting-poetry. Influenced by the poetic vogue among the literati, ink plum painting flourished in the Northern Song. As Bickford has astutely observed, the development of the ink plum genre was an ideal embodiment of the interchangeability between classical Chinese poetry and painting as well as between poetic and pictorial values, which was the foundation of literati painting.[149]

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[146] See Xu, *Ming hua lu*, Volume 7. Also see Guo Ruoxu 郭若虛 and Wu Qiming 吳企明, *Tuhua jianwen zhi jiaozhu* 圖畫見聞志校注, 648. Wu Qiming mentioned that Yin Bai preceded Monk Zhongren in his work with ink plum. However, Zhao Mengfu also remarked, "Everyone in the world who talks about ink plum considers Huaguang to be the origin" 世之論墨梅者，皆以華光為首. Therefore, even though Yin Bai produced ink plum paintings before Monk Zhongren, the latter was more influential among literati.

[147] Bickford, *Ink Plum*, 1-2.

[148] Guo and Wu, *Tuhua jianwen zhi jiaozhu*, 648. Also see Chen Shangjun 陳尚君, *Quan Tang shi bu bian* 全唐詩補編, 509.

[149] Bickford, *Ink Plum*, 75.

As the late Northern Song also witnessed the maturity of painting-poetry, which was advanced by the same versatile scholars who advocated for literati painting, i.e., Su Shi and his literati coterie, their adoration of plum blossoms was naturally reflected in their painting-poems. Su Shi wrote a painting-poem on Zhao Chang's 趙昌 (959–1016) painting of plum blossoms.[150] As a central member of the literati coterie, Huang Tingjian composed several painting-poems on Zhongren's ink plum paintings. One of the painting-poems was composed during his visit to Zhongren, as explained in the long poem title: "Zhongren of Huaguang Monastery brought out poem scrolls by Qin Guan and Su Shi. In consideration of the two brilliant scholars of the country, who can no longer be seen, I sighed deeply when I unrolled these scrolls. Since Zhongren painted several blossoming plum branches along with distant mountains beyond the clouds for me, I followed Shaoyou's [i.e., Qin Guan] rhyme to record [the event] at the end of the scroll" 花光仲仁出秦蘇詩卷，思二國士不可覆見，開卷絕嘆，因花光為我作梅數枝及畫煙外遠山，追少遊韻，記卷末.[151] As Huang Tingjian stated sorrowfully, both Su Shi and his follower Qin Guan 秦觀 (courtesy name Shaoyou 少遊, 1049–1100) had perished in the ongoing factional battles from the mid-Northern Song onwards. Huang Tingjian himself was also in one of the final periods of political exile before the end of his life. Beholding his late friends' poems and Monk Zhongren's ink plum painting, the poet wrote the woeful painting-poem:

[150] Su Shi, "Four Poems on Wang Boyang's Collection of Zhao Chang's Flowers: Plum Blossoms" 王伯敭所藏趙昌花四首—梅花. Su Shi wrote almost forty poems on the theme of plum blossoms.

[151] *Huang Tingjian shiji zhu* 黃庭堅詩集注, 678. For Huang Tingjian's visit to Zhongren and their contributions to the ink plum genre, see Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting*, 99 and Murck, *Poetry and Painting in Song China*, 179-88.

Having long slept in the cold wind and rain on the Orange Isle, 長眠橘洲風雨寒，

For whom do the plum bloom today? 今日梅開向誰好。

Even [sadder]: Dongpo is now six feet under, 何況東坡成古丘，

I will never again see the snakes from the brush he had wielded. 不覆龍蛇看揮掃。[152]

In the second line, the poet communicates how the image of the plum blossom deepened his sorrow because the people who had appreciated the flower and written poems about them were now gone. Therefore, it was with the image of plum blossoms that Huang Tingjian commemorated his close friends and their bygone activities.

In the late Northern Song, the plum blossom found imperial favor in Emperor Huizong's paintings, as evidenced by *Mountain Birds on a Wax-Plum Tree*. While his refined plum blossom in the palace was categorized as *gongmei* 宮梅 (palace plum), the rustic plum blossom acclaimed by the literati was primarily labelled as *jiangmei* 江梅 (river plum, also known as *yemei* 野梅, wild plum). Due to the Jurchen invasion, the Song moved its capital to the southern city of Lin'an 臨安 (modern-day Hangzhou). As a native of the Jiangnan region, plum blossoms were cultivated widely and led to the expansion of the plum blossom culture.[153] It was during this period that Fan Chengda 范成大 (1126–1193) wrote the earliest treatise on plum blossoms and their botanical classifications, *Fancun meipu* 范村梅譜 (Fan-Village plum register). The *gongmei*, which incorporated multiple species of plum blossoms, remained the imperial family's favorite. Emperor Huizong planted

[152] Ibid.

[153] For a detailed discussion of the plum blossom culture in the Southern Song, see Bickford, *Ink Plum*, 27-44.

thousands of *Lü'e mei* 綠萼梅 (green calyx plum), the most precious type of *gongmei*, and built a hall called *E Lü Huatang* 萼綠華堂 (Grand Hall of the Green Calyx) amidst them in his imperial garden.[154] The hall was rebuilt with the same name in the imperial palace in Lin'an, still as a scenic spot for viewing plum blossoms.[155]

Following royal aesthetic preference, court painters specifically produced paintings of *Lü'e mei* in the Southern Song. One of the most famous is Ma Lin's 馬麟 (1180–after 1256) *Layer upon Layer of Icy Tips* 層疊冰綃圖 (1216) with a poetic inscription by Empress Yang (fig. 2.3). This particular poetic inscription belongs to a group of four painting-poems she inscribed on a set of four types of plum blossoms in Ma Lin and his father Ma Yuan's 馬遠 (1160–1225) paintings.[156] Her inscription indicates that it was a gift for Supervisor-in-Chief Wang 王提舉, and that the feminine and romantic image of *Lü'e mei* in the interplay of text and image might have been bestowed on the official for his marriage or anniversary; as an imperial flower, the image of *Lü'e mei* also signifies Empress Yang's status as a powerful imperial woman.[157] There is a nostalgic sentiment evoked in the second line of her painting-poem, which reads: "Embracing the heart of sandalwood and recalling an old fragrance" 擁抱檀心憶舊香. The last phrase, "the old fragrance" (*jiuxiang*) can be read as a reference to a past romance, and the work was more likely a gift to celebrate the official's anniversary with his principal wife.

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[154] *Song shi*, 85.2101.

[155] Zhou Mi, *Wulin jiushi* 武林舊事, 4.51.

[156] For the other three poems, see Xiang Dingxuan 項鼎鉉, *Huhuan riji* 呼桓日記, 525.

[157] See Lee, *Empresses, Art, and Agency in Song Dynasty China*, 203-5. Also see Blanchard, *Song Dynasty Figures of Longing and Desire*, 259-62.

During the period of Mongol rule in the Yuan, the plum blossom was imbued with historical significance and became a symbol for the identity of the traditional Chinese literati.[158] For the Chinese scholars marginalized by the new social hierarchy, the loss of the country to foreign invaders and the unequal treatment they received were considered a severe humiliation. In their poems and paintings, they utilized the lofty image of the plum to express their virtue as literati in the bleak political circumstances. Wang Mian's 王冕 (ca. 1287–1359) painting-poem that he inscribed on his own painting, *Ink Plum* 墨梅圖 (fig. 2.4), epitomizes the ideal of the painter-poet's integrity in the late Yuan. As he wrote in the last two lines, "I do not want other people to praise how pretty it is, / I only wish to retain the air of purity in the universe" 不要人誇好顏色，只留清氣滿乾坤.

By the time Li Yin employed the motif of the plum blossom in her literary and artistic works during the Ming-Qing transition, the flower's aesthetic tradition associated with reclusion, mourning, romantic feelings, and dynastic conquest had been fully established. However, the burgeoning of women's painting-poetry in late imperial China reinvigorated the classical emblem of the literati from a gendered perspective. As shown in Empress Yang's painting-poems above, plum blossoms are one of the earliest subjects to emerge in women's painting-poetry. In the Yuan, one painting-poem, "Inscribed on Painted Plum" 題畫梅, by Guan Daosheng is extant. Li Yin was a pioneer among Ming-Qing women who wrote about plum blossoms because, as a widow who endured a series of national and personal traumas, her painting-poems reconstruct the flower as her self-image, her companion, and even an incarnation of her late husband.

[158] Bickford, *Ink Plum*, 170.

Women Undergoing National Trauma: Li Yin's Painting-Poems on Plum Blossoms

In the postscript to the last volume of *Zhuxiao xuan yincao*, Yang Dejian 楊德建 identified the plum blossom as the central thematic concern in Li Yin's poetry collection and attributed this phenomenon to the personal qualities she shared with the flower:

> Moreover, throughout her collection, the only thing she lingered on and celebrated repeatedly was the plum blossom. [This] must be that the old lady's disposition has always been composed, never arrogant when she enjoyed a wealthy life. Her virtue has been as pure as ice and snow, remaining calm even when she faced frustration. Therefore, [her] aspirations can be seen in this object which served as a figure.
> 且其一編之中，留連反覆三致意者，獨有取於梅花。要亦太夫人之質素凝華，安富貴而不驕；冰雪貞操，當冷落而自若。故為比物見志云尔.[159]

According to Yang Dejian, the female painter-poet presented the plum blossom as an image of herself. While she wrote many poems about plum blossoms in general, the latter are also the most prominent images in the painting-poems she inscribed on her own paintings.

As mentioned above, in her early poems Li Yin connected plum blossoms with Lin Bu to imply her admiration for the hermit-poet's virtue. In her solitary widowhood, she adopted the trait of reclusiveness to follow a lifestyle similar to Lin Bu in the company of his plum blossoms. In her "Inscribed on the Plum" 題梅, Li Yin transforms the exquisite *Lü'e mei,* once cultivated in the imperial palace, into a symbol of virtue detached from the mundane world:

The green calyx flower is simple and gorgeous with pure fragrance, 素艷清芬緑萼花，

[159] "Ba" 跋, *Zhuxiaoxuan yincao*, 102.

Upright and graceful, its slender silhouette is on the window gauze. 亭亭瘦影隔窗紗。
Welcoming the chill, it alone embraces fidelity through ice and frost, 迎寒獨抱冰霜操，
Leaving no trace of any flaws in the mundane world. 不著紅塵半點瑕。[160]

Unlike the delicate and romantic portrayal in Empress Yang's painting-poem on *Lü'e mei*, Li Yin highlights the morality of the flower in her painting-poem. Although the first two lines still describe *Lü'e mei* as an elegant beauty, the last two lines sharply turn the flower into a heroine who is steadfast in her purity and loftiness, unaffected by harsh conditions. Written after the death of her husband and the fall of the Ming due to the Manchu invasion, the painting-poem presents the image of the plum blossom as a brave woman upholding her morality, and this can be viewed as a representation of her personal aspiration to be a female Ming loyalist in order to commemorate her late husband for the rest of her life.

Li Yin, now a widow, produced *Flowers of the Four Seasons* (fig. 2.5) in 1649. As with *Flowers and Birds,* which she had painted shortly before the major turning point of her life, there is a group of painted flowers in the order of the seasons' changes. As a marker of the transition between the end of one year and the beginning of another, a branch of plum blossoms is delineated as the last one in the group in both paintings with monochromic wet ink. One of the major differences between them is that the two birds sitting on the branch in *Flowers and Birds* are absent in *Flowers of the Four Seasons*, which evokes her loss of country and spouse during the dynastic transition. Instead of the two birds, the plum blossom is paired with a camellia branch in *Flowers of the Four Seasons*. In *Flowers and Birds*, Li Yin includes the reign of the last Ming emperor and date of the year in the lunar

[160] *Zhuxiaoxuan yincao*, 73.

calendar, "Chongzhen *renwu*" 崇禎壬午, in her small inscription. But in *Flowers of the Four Seasons*, she only inscribes the date of the year, *jichou* 己丑. The practice of omitting the Qing emperor's reigns from her paintings persisted throughout her entire life as a sign of her loyalism.

Although the composition of *Flowers of the Four Seasons* followed the conventional patterns of the bird-and-flower paintings of the Wu School masters such as Chen Chun 陳淳 (style name Baiyang Shanren 白楊山人, 1483–1544) and Zhou Zhimian 周之冕 (1521–?), Li Yin's uneven and freehand brushwork demonstrates her skillful execution of the flowers. Again, in contrast to the graceful *gongmei* in Ma Lin's painting, the slanting gesture of her plum blossom branch grasps the essence of *yemei* as depicted in Lin Bu's incomparable lines in "The Small Plum Tree in the Mountain Garden": "Sparse shadows reflected horizontally and slantingly on the clear and shallow water, / the hidden fragrance bobbed under the dusky moon" 疏影橫斜水清淺，暗香浮動月黃昏.[161]

In the last two volumes of her poetry collection, Li Yin constantly recorded her engagement with plum blossom paintings in painting-poems as well as other poems. For instance, she wrote in "I Randomly Recalled the Plum Blossoms on a Summer Day and Improvised Five Poems" 夏日偶憶梅花口占（五首）: "I spent the long day on a light silk, / And painted several branches to recall its icy figure" 輕綃一幅消長日，為憶冰姿畫數枝. However, extant paintings by Li Yin that focus on the flower alone are rare. Her fan painting, *Plum Blossoms and Sparrows* (fig. 2.6), painted at the request of a Lady Wu 吳夫人 is one example. In the painting, two sparrows are singing on a plum blossom branch in

[161] *Lin Hejing ji* 林和靖集, 2.87.

spring. Considering the lack of other extant paintings by her that depict plum blossoms, Li Yin's painting-poems document her lost paintings and reveal that the plum blossom was a vital image in her artistic life.

From a courtesan who attracted Ge Zhengqi with her poetic line about a plum blossom to a concubine who held Lin Bu in high esteem, and finally to a widow who represented herself as a Ming loyalist through poems and paintings on the plum blossom, Li Yin proceeded to adopt the flower as a vehicle for her self-expression, and it also grew more and more appropriate to her personal experience. The female painter-poet's consistent emphasis on the morality of plum blossoms aligned with the literati tradition and may be a reflection of her distinctive social status as a courtesan-concubine in the context of the Ming-Qing transition. In his preface to Li Yin's *Zhuxiao xuan yincao*, Ge Zhengqi states that his concubine's early life was so destitute that she had to seek alternative means to satisfy her obsession with studying because her family could not afford basic writing supplies: "Seeing how down and out her family was, [Li Yin] collected mosses to serve as paper, swept up [leaves of] persimmons to practice writing, and trapped fireflies in her curtain to become lights. No one in the world had ever heard of this" 顧家貧落魄，積苔為紙，掃柿為書，帷螢為燈，世未有知者.[162] Combining Ge Zhengqi's account with Huang Zongxi's aforementioned remark that she received a literary and artistic education in her childhood with her parents' support, the female painter-poet was probably born into a poor scholarly family and later became a courtesan.

Li Yin's experience as a courtesan conforms to the social mechanism defined by Dorothy Ko as "the courtesans' ladder of success" in the late Ming. The term indicates that a

[162] "Xu *Zhuxiaoxuan yincao*," 4.

girl from a humble background could potentially transcend her social status by studying a designed curriculum covering literary and artistic skills and becoming a talented courtesan with the intention of finally marrying into a gentry household as a concubine.[163] Likewise, Ellen Johnston Laing has observed that a woman's capacity for painting, calligraphy, and poetry could be an asset to her future marriage because a gentry man was disposed to select a partner in light of their mutual cultural interests.[164] Accordingly, in lieu of fortune and romance, the famous courtesan-concubines' elevated status demonstrates how interwoven the social institutions of gender, education, and marriage were. By having marital relationships with male elites, their identities as concubines in noble households gradually superseded their previous status as courtesans. In some poetry anthologies compiled in the Qing, the works by talented courtesan-concubines are collected in the section for gentry wives (*zheng* 正) instead of courtesans (*yan* 艷).[165]

Li Yin's affiliation with the courtesan-concubine group by no means stands in contradiction with the morality she upheld, as embodied in the image of plum blossoms, in the context of the Ming-Qing transition. During the social and political upheavals of the dynastic change, famous courtesans were frequently associated with heroism and loyalism. The dominant Confucian ethics of conjugal and political loyalty were equally applied to gentry ladies and courtesans in their education, so women from both groups could achieve their virtue by staying loyal to their men and by extension, to their own country.[166] As

[163] Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 260.

[164] Laing, "Women Painters in Traditional China," 87-8.

[165] Chang, "Ming and Qing Anthologies of Women's Poetry and Their Selection Strategies," 158-9.

[166] Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 257.

mentioned above, in Yun Zhu's *Guochao guixiu zhengshi ji*, an anthology compiled in the Qing to advocate orthodox Confucian female morality, Li Yin obtained a higher status than other courtesan-concubines, including Liu Rushi and Wang Wei. While Li Yin is listed in the first volume under the category of gentry ladies, other courtesan-concubines are included in another list with an editor's note at the end: "[These women poets enumerated] above originated from the registry of courtesans" 以上出籍名妓.[167] Unlike Liu Rushi and Wang Wei, who passed away shortly after the Manchu conquest, Li Yin's persistent expression of loyalism—both to her husband and to the fallen nation—in the last forty years of her life successfully established her virtue, which might be a main reason for her success in meeting Yun Zhu's strict selection criteria.

In addition to their Confucian education, courtesans' daily literary and artistic interaction with literati strengthened their political awareness and alliance with the literati tradition. The practice of polygamy in late imperial China led to the disparity between a principal wife (*zhengshi* 正室) and a concubine (*pianfang* 偏房) after the latter married into a gentry household. As Grace Fong has explained, the principal wife was usually from a gentry family and occupied the central position in the inner compound, whereas the concubine was assigned to a marginal place. The discrepancy in status was also reflected in their literary activities. While the principal wife could obtain resources from her natal family, the concubine had to rely on her husband and the principal wife to acquire literary and artistic training.[168] Although Li Yin had received an education before entering the

[167] *Guochao guixiu zhengshi ji*, 14a.

[168] Fong, *Herself an Author*, 79-81.

household, Ge Zhengqi's guidance was still essential for her later achievements in poetry and flower-and-bird paintings.

In his preface to Li Yin's poetry collection, Ge Zhengqi states that his talented concubine originally imitated the misty mountain landscape of Mi Fu and Mi Youren. He then advised her to examine the technique of Chen Chun's flower-and-bird paintings, which was widely admired by the literati group in the Jiangnan region.[169] Li Yin then carved a wood statue of Chen Chun to honor him as an exemplar and diligently emulated his style.[170] Li Yin's endeavor was such an artistic feat that her flower-and-bird paintings were praised for having grasped Chen Chun's essence. The frontispiece to *Flowers of the Four Seasons* contains Huang Junshi's 黃君實 inscription, which describes her painting style as exhibiting "the lingering charm of Baiyang" 白楊遺韻 (fig. 2.7). Of the few women painters who received compliments from the male literati, she was ranked as the most skilled regarding her handling of the brush.[171]

In the aftermath of the collapse of the Ming, Li Yin further suffered the personal trauma of her husband's death as a martyr. In the preface to the poem, "Recollecting the Past" 憶昔, Li Yin gives an account of Ge Zhengqi's decision to commit suicide as a way to follow the fallen country: "The supervisor said that he could only repay the country by committing suicide. I said that sacrificing his life to achieve virtue would not save the current situation. [We] faced each other and wept; a myriad of feelings surged up" 祿勛有

[169] For the legacy of Chen Chun among women painters in the Jiangnan area, see Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 57-60.

[170] "Xu *Zhuxiaoxuan yincao*" 序竹笑軒吟草, 4.

[171] Sturman, *The Artful Recluse*, 159 and Gong Weiling, "Li Yin," 125.

言，惟以死報國。余云殺身成仁，無救於時。對泣唏噓，萬感交集.[172] This account reflects their divergent ideas about virtue and martyrdom, which might be the reason why she decided to stay alive after she lost her husband.

In her widowhood, Li Yin endured both financial and emotional hardship during the time of political turmoil. What had been a former pastime based on the artistic training she received from her husband turned to a livelihood after she was widowed, as she wrote in "Inscribed on a Landscape Painting" 題山水畫:

Idly, the Mi Family Boat carries calligraphy and paintings, 閒攜書畫米家船，
With a bamboo hat and a fisherman's rain cape,
I go and return by myself. 斗笠漁蓑獨往還。
This will be a means of livelihood for the rest of my life, 自是一生生計了，
Paintings will become my "cane-head" money to buy alcohol. 丹青堪作仗頭錢。[173]

The painter-poet first describes her lonely state as a widow all alone in the world and then addresses the fact that paintings are to become her source of income from now on. The last phrase of the poem, the imagery of the "'cane-head' money to buy alcohol" (*zhangtou qian* 仗頭錢) alludes to the lofty scholar Ruan Xiu's 阮修 (270–311) uninhibited manner of hanging copper cash on the head of his cane and walking to the wineshop to drink. By comparing her livelihood to the money used to buy wine, Li Yin demonstrates her unflinching integrity and aspiration to lead a simple and carefree life.

[172] *Zhuxiaoxuan yincao*, 67.

[173] Ibid., 58.

In contrast to the optimism she exhibits regarding her financial plight, Li Yin's emotional state was miserable after her husband's death. One of the predominant manifestations of her inner torment is her increasing emotional attachment to plum blossoms. In addition to the growing quantity of painting-poems about plum blossoms in the last two volumes of her poetry collection, the flower becomes not just a symbol of a virtuous self-image but appears as her emotional companion. The female painter-poet planted plum blossoms in her widowhood and often recorded her solitary activity of painting the plum blossoms outside her window gauze. In these painting-poems, the flower is characterized as a longtime friend who constantly keeps her company as she tries to capture it in her paintings. In a group of six painting-poems entitled "Painting Plums" 畫梅, she depicts the plum blossom as her only companion in the winter. Since she regards the flower so highly, she is worried that she cannot portray its beauty in her painting:

All alone, with no support, I was accompanied by
    the plum blossom, 煢煢無倚伴梅花，
Intending to rely on its purity through the rest of the year. 欲仗清標度歲華。
Blowing on my icy ink, I pondered that I could not
    draw it successfully, 呵凍尋思描不就，
Let me not messily scribble it with a clumsy brush. 莫將拙筆亂塗鴉。[174]

Li Yin beheld the plum blossoms she planted around her studio and recalled her suffering all those years in a long title: "After my husband passed away, I lived in the Laughing Bamboo Studio alone, and it has been many years since these plum blossoms were

[174] Ibid., 96.

planted with my own hands. People in the past used to say that aspen trees served as pillars and beautiful women would eventually turn into ashes. Even trees are like this, how could people endure it? Frustrated by the lonely and desolate circumstances, I randomly composed eight short poems" 自家祿勛逝后余獨居竹笑軒，手植梅花到今又數尋矣。昔人有云白楊作柱紅粉成灰，樹猶如此人何以堪。憮景凄涼，偶占短句八首.[175] In this group of poems, she describes the solitary activities centered on the plum blossom that she engages in, which includes drawing the flower: "I love plum blossoms, so I copy its simple figure, / Plum blossoms pity me, so they send me the fragrance" 我愛梅花臨素影，梅花憐我送香來.[176] In her view, the flower was a soulmate who could reciprocate her affection and empathize with her plight.

Because of the fondness the couple had shared for the flower, the imagery of the plum blossom sometimes transcends the role of a companion to become a personal emblem of her late husband. Like Huang Tingjian, who mourned his late friends with the trope of plum blossoms, Li Yin also associated the flower with Ge Zhengqi in order to commemorate her late husband. The couple's relationship had been initiated by the plum blossom and in their blissful marriage, they also enjoyed viewing, writing, and painting the flower together. Moreover, Ge Zhengqi's righteousness in sacrificing himself for the country conforms to the longstanding connotation of plum blossoms in the literati tradition. In one of the eight poems from the previous group, Li Yin recollects the very beginning of their relationship, which was generated by the poetic line about plum blossoms she had written as a courtesan:

I used to chant that I wished the plum blossom

[175] Ibid., 74.

[176] Ibid.

would wait till late spring, 曾詠梅花待晚春，

The one in the tomb should be concerned about

the one who is alive. 泉臺應念未亡人。

I am afraid that rebirth might be an unrealistic thought, 再生恐是非非想，

I wish he would be reborn as a flower's soul in the next life. 愿化花魂作後身。[177]

In the second line, "the one in the tomb" (*quantai* 泉臺) clearly refers to Ge Zhengqi and "the one who is alive" (*weiwang ren* 未亡人) is a standard way that widows in late imperial China would refer to themselves. As the one who is alive, the painter-poet wished that her late husband still remembered her in the other world. The two Buddhist terms in the last two lines, "an unrealistic thought" (*feifei xiang* 非非想) and "next life" (*houshen* 後身), exhibit Li Yin's religious belief and show her deep longing to see her late husband reborn as an incarnation of the plum blossom spirit.

In the last poem of "Painting Plums," Li Yin reveals her desire to send a plum blossom branch to inform her late husband of the arrival of spring:

I was going to pluck a branch of plum blossom

to convey the message of spring, 待傳春信折梅花，

I wished to send it to the tomb, but the road is too far. 欲寄泉台去路賒。

I sat until dusk, when the moon was bright in the sky, 坐到黃昏明月上，

Hidden fragrance and sparse shadows entered my window gauze. 暗香疏影入窗紗。[178]

[177] Ibid.

[178] Ibid., 96.

By indicating that the tomb is too distant to send her husband plum blossoms, the mournful widow is alluding to the insurmountable distance between life and death. Looking in vain for a way to communicate with her late husband, the female painter-poet sits until the plum blossom comes to visit her at night. Although the last two lines still employ Lin Bu's classical phrases, including "dusk" (*huanghun* 黃昏), "moon" (*yue* 月), and "hidden fragrance" (*anxiang* 暗香), to describe the plum blossom, in the last line the image of the flower conjures up the incarnation of her husband to come to comfort her and respond to her longing.

The connection between the plum blossom and her late husband becomes apparent when combining the painting-poem with her mourning poems for her husband and for plum blossoms. In "An Elegy to Mourn Jiekan" 悼亡詩哭介龕, Li Yin discloses that she had mistaken the shadow of the plum blossom outside her window for her husband: "Seeing the shadow of plum blossoms outside the window at midnight, / I wondered if that was you who returned in the moonlight" 夜深窗外梅花影，疑是君從月下歸.[179] In "Mourning for the Plum Blossom" 吊梅, Li Yin expresses her grief at plum blossoms that parted before the flower season had come to an end: "I bade the plum blossom farewell and the plum blossom bade me farewell, / with whom was the hazy fragrant soul going to wander?" 我別梅花花別我，芳魂縹緲傍誰遊.[180] The woeful scene evokes Li Yin's traumatic separation in life and death from her husband. By mourning the plum blossom, Li Yin also metaphorically mourns

[179] Ibid., 42.

[180] Ibid., 95.

her late husband, who has assumed the spiritual form of the plum blossom as a result of her innermost wish.

When the female painter-poet wondered with whom the flower's soul would be travelling, the question echoed her experience of taking trips with Ge Zhengqi to his official posts before her life was upended by national and personal traumas. After Ge Zhengqi's death, she encountered a landscape painting that had been collected in a friend's household in the war and that was inscribed with a quatrain written by her husband. She records the event in the long title: "Flames of war endanger the city, and I was extremely startled and fearful. I temporarily lived in the residence of Mrs. Li in the north suburb. I saw that there was a painting inscribed with a quatrain Jiekan left behind, which was created from 1635, already ten years ago now. I could not help but well up with sadness. I mixed the ink with tears and wrote six quatrains to his rhymes" 烽火危城，身驚風鶴，借居北郊李氏莊，見有介龕遺畫兼題絕句，為乙亥年所作，今十載矣，不禁淒然，以淚和墨依韻六絕. In these matching painting-poems featuring her deceased husband, Li Yin calls to mind the joyful journeys they used to take, which cannot be repeated:

Your brush and ink fully depicted the tranquility of the landscape,	筆墨曾窮山水幽，
It is such a pity that you are now buried in a Beimang tomb.	可憐人在北邙丘。
Cloudy peaks, old trees, and a thousand layers of cliffs,	巒煙古樹千重嶂，
When could I travel together with you?	何日同君一處遊。[181]

The last line's rhetorical question, which the painter-poet directs towards her late husband, is comparable to the question she asks the plum blossom. Their emotional and intellectual

[181] Ibid., 47.

companionship in their happy marriage was destroyed by the political upheaval. After saying goodbye, the painter-poet could only immerse herself in everlasting mourning and pining to see her husband and the flower again.

Conclusion

Li Yin's painting-poetry is an ideal means for fully investigating the painter-poet's artistic and literary achievements. While the limited extant paintings do not show plum blossom as a central motif, her poetry collection fills the gap to indicate that drawing and writing about the flower was a favorite activity throughout her widowhood. As a talented courtesan, Li Yin initially aligned herself with the literati's traditional representation of the flower. Her personal experience of losing her country and her husband further prompted her to purposefully adopt the plum blossom as a symbol for her own image as a Ming loyalist, a companion in her widowhood, and an emblem of her late husband. Li Yin's life trajectory from being a talented courtesan-concubine to a Ming loyalist epitomizes the culture of the courtesans and the latter's involvement with painting-poems to express their political and personal emotions during the turbulent Ming-Qing transition. Her constant loyalist expressions to her country and her husband, which were crystallized in the image of the plum blossom during her forty years as a widow, established the virtue and reputation that eventually drove the male and female writers of the Qing to rank her as a gentry lady.

The legacy of Li Yin's paintings and poems was greatly valued by later female painter-poets in the High Qing. Many of them would also share her passion for plum blossoms. A group of gentry ladies in Changshu, including Xi Peilan, Qu Bingyun, Gui Maoyi 歸懋儀 (1761–1832), and Qian Mengdian 錢孟鈿 (1739–1806), inscribed poems on

her *Ink Flower and Bird Scroll* 水墨畫鳥卷子. The painting was collected by a local official and Gui Maoyi observes in the preface to her poem that "those who inscribed on the painting are all ladies at the time" 題詞者都一時女士也.[182] Based on Xi Peilan's preface to her poem, the painting was produced in 1667. Since Li Yin only inscribed the date of the year, *dingwei* 丁未, without indicating the reign of the Qing emperor, Xi Peilan points out in the preface that "some people say that the scroll was painted in [the *dingwei* of] the Wanli reign (1573–1620), which is a mistake" 或云是萬歷，誤也.[183]

Almost one hundred years after the painting was produced, these gentry ladies not only commemorated the painter-poet's morality and suffering in the Laughing Bamboo Studio, but also celebrated her literary and artistic achievements in their painting-poems. Xi Peilan considered her rootless flowers to be loyalist symbols for losing the motherland: "With an aching heart, she longs for the landscape of her nation in a song, / When she paints a flower, she does not paint its root attaching to the soil" 傷心一曲念家山，畫花不畫根連土.[184] Echoing Li Yin's attachment to plum blossoms, Gui Maoyi compares her to the famous flowers and believes that she surpassed her husband: "This beauty was originally a shadow of famous flowers, / How can her husband compare to her?" 美人原是名花影，夫婿從何及得來.[185] Living in a different social and cultural milieu, most of these gentry ladies

[182] "Ti Li Shi'an nüshi shuimo huaniao juan" 題李是庵女史水墨花鳥卷, *Xiuyu xucao* 繡餘續草, 2.1a.

[183] "Li Yin shuimo huaniao juanzi" 李因水墨花鳥卷子, *Changzhen'ge ji*, 550.

[184] Ibid.

[185] "Ti Li Shi'an nüshi shuimo huaniao juan," *Xiuyu xucao*, 2.1b.

were Yuan Mei's female disciples who also formed a local poetic and artistic community. Their painting-poems represent the next stage of women's painting-poetry in the High Qing.

Chapter Three

"Competing to Chant of the Light Willow Catkins in the Wind": Xi Peilan's Painting-Poetry in the High Qing

The turbulent Ming-Qing transition that Li Yin painfully depicts in her painting-poems came to an end in 1683, when Emperor Kangxi defeated the last group of Ming loyalist resistance. The longest-reigning emperor in Chinese history then inaugurated an era of stability and prosperity, which is widely known as the High Qing. In her groundbreaking scholarship on women's culture during the High Qing, Susan Mann extends the traditional timeframe for the "flourishing age" 盛世 (*sheng shi*) to end not with the death of Emperor Qianlong but rather in 1839, the year before the start of the Opium War. In addition to other distinctive features of the High Qing, Mann has observed that educated gentry women writers considered themselves to be "emblems of that historic time—as living proof of the fullest realization of the Manchu civilizing project."[186] Moreover, she has identified two competing models of erudite women— the "moral instructress" and the "brilliant prodigy"—at the heart of the debate between two High Qing scholars, Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 (1738–1801) and Yuan Mei.[187]

In contrast to Zhang Xuecheng, who discouraged women's poetry, Yuan Mei's ideal of a female prodigy draws on Xie Daoyun's 謝道韞 poetic imagery of "willow catkins" 柳絮 (*liuxu*), which is an allusion to snow.[188] As a pioneering advocate of women's talent and writing, Yuan Mei accepted a group of female disciples in his old age to promote their

[186] Mann, *Precious Records*, 22.

[187] Ibid., 83.

[188] Ibid., 92.

literary fame and social networks outside their households. In 1796, he collected and published poems written by nineteen of his most favored female disciples in *Suiyuan nü dizi shixuan* 隨園女弟子詩選 (A Selection of Poems by Female Disciples in the Sui Garden).[189] It is important to note that this was not the first literary and artistic group open to gentry women. The Banana Garden Poetry Club 蕉園詩社, organized by a group of women in Hangzhou during the early Qing, is generally considered the first public women's society because, as Dorothy Ko has put it, of "its physical visibility in public and the literary fame of its members."[190] In contrast with this women's community, Yuan Mei's female disciples participated in the first public mixed-sex poetry club in the High Qing to be led by a male literatus.

As the disciple with the highest number of poems collected in *Suiyuan nü dizi shixuan*, Xi Peilan was widely recognized as Yuan Mei's top student. In his preface to her individual poetry collection, *Changzhen'ge ji*, Yuan Mei exalts Xi Peilan's poetic genius: "Each and every word issues from her natural intelligence. Without collecting the purple passages of the ancients, she is capable of the marvelous purity of a heavenly loom, and her tones and rhythms resound like jade. Such a poetic talent only rarely finds its match in the women's quarters!" 字字出於性靈，不拾古人牙慧，而能天機清妙，音節琮琤，似此詩才，不獨閨閣中罕有其儷也.[191] This comment expresses Yuan Mei's view that Xi Peilan's poems embodied his poetic theory of "natural intelligence" (*xingling* 性靈, also translated as

[189] Although its table of contents contains the name of twenty-eight female disciples, the anthology only collects the poems written by nineteen of them.

[190] Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 234.

[191] Translated by Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush*, 607.

"nature and inspiration") and the female painter-poet corresponded to his image of a female prodigy. Intriguingly, when her close friend Qu Bingyun joined her to become one of Yuan Mei's female disciples, Xi Peilan conveyed their ambition to give free reign to their talent in Yuan Mei's poetry club by making a reference to "willow catkins" in the following two lines: "When are we going to stand together in snow at the gate of the Yuan mansion, / Competing to chant of the light willow catkins in the wind?" 何當並立袁門雪，賭詠風前柳絮輕.[192]

Within the context of the thriving cultural communities in the High Qing, this chapter will focus on Xi Peilan's painting-poems as the predominant social medium for forming her literary and artistic connections with Yuan Mei's poetry club, the local women's community in Changshu, and Qu Bingyun's household. Her active participation in the communities is represented by the two paintings, *The Thirteen Female Disciples of the Sui Garden Seek Instruction at Lake Tower* 隨園十三女弟子湖樓請業圖 (1796) and *Painting of the Flower Historians in the Flower Bud Palace* 蕊宮花史圖 (1798), and her painting-poems on them. Of all the members of the local women's community, Qu Bingyun was the most frequent recipient of her painting-poems. Before they became Yuan Mei's female disciples, the two women had been neighbors and had already developed an intimate friendship, which was to last for twenty-four years until Qu Bingyun's death.[193] With painting-poetry, Xi Peilan not only initiated and maintained her personal relationships with

[192] "Wen Wanxian yi yi dizi li jian Suiyuan xiji fengjian" 聞宛仙亦以弟子禮見隨園喜極奉簡, *Changzhen'ge ji*, 475.

[193] Based on Sun Yuanxiang's record in *Tianzhen'ge ji*, David Hawkes has traced that Xi Peilan and Qu Bingyun knew each other in 1786 and Qu passed away in 1810, so their friendship lasted roughly for twenty-four years. See Hawkes, "Hsi P'ei-lan," 119.

Yuan Mei and Qu Bingyun, but also created a nexus of connections with their heterosexual and homosocial cultural communities.

Previous scholars who have investigated Xi Peilan's poetic achievement have emphasized the "companionate marriage" she had with her scholar-official husband, Sun Yuanxiang, who was also a student of Yuan Mei.[194] Moreover, in his treatise on Qu Bingyun, Louis Liuxi Meng has examined Xi Peilan's role as a regular member of Qu's local literary circle in Changshu.[195] Binbin Yang and Yuanfei Wang have both pinpointed the text-image interplay in Xi Peilan's literary and artistic works. While Yang considers her portraits of Qu Bingyun as "a means of female bonding," Wang examines the female subjectivity of emaciation (*qiaocui* 憔悴) in her poem, "Self-Inscribed on My *Portrait Against Flowers*" 自題背花小影.[196] Nonetheless, none of them address the social role that Xi Peilan's painting-poems played in initiating and sustaining the varied literary and artistic communities associated with her male mentor Yuan Mei and her female friends in Changshu.

In Xi Peilan's individual poetry collection, *Changzhen'ge ji*, at least one-quarter of the total poems are painting-poems, mostly written in correspondence with male or female acquaintances to depict paintings, record special events, communicate feelings, or mourn female friends. Zhong Huiling has also noted that the majority of Xi Peilan's poems are

[194] These works include Chang, "Matching in Rhymes and Reality," and Lui, "A Haunting Voice."

[195] See Meng, *Poetry as Power*, 80-1.

[196] Yang, *Heroines of the Qing*, 47 and Wang, "The Emaciated Soul," 53-8.

reciprocal poems, with most of them being painting-poems.[197] The vast number of painting-poems in Xi Peilan's poetry collection has even prompted David Hawkes to identify her as "a painter and occasional poetess," whereas Yuan Mei and Sun Yuanxiang praised her first and foremost for her poetic abilities.[198] Sun even modestly attributed his poetic enlightenment to his wife: "As a lad in my early teens I scarcely knew what the word poetry meant. I started learning to write poetry after I married Xi Peilan in 1776" 原湘十二三時，不知何謂詩也。自丙申冬，佩蘭歸予，始學為詩.[199]

The increasing frequency of painting-poems in Xi Peilan's collection, which is arranged chronologically, reflects the expansion of her artistic and literary circles as she used painting-poetry as a powerful means to interact with both male and female members of her literary and artistic communities. Although Volume 1 of *Changzhen'ge ji* only includes two painting-poems, the proportion of painting-poems steadily rises from Volume 2 onwards, when she became acquainted with Qu Bingyun and Yuan Mei, and finally constitutes almost half the works in Volume 5. In Volume 7, which is the last of the anthology, seven of the ten poems are painting-poems (70%). In his study of the large number of poems exchanged with friends and acquaintances in Northern Song poets' collections, Colin S.C. Hawes contends that the major function of writing poems in the period was "to develop and sustain human relationships" within the social hierarchy.[200] He

[197] Zhong Huiling 鍾慧玲, "Xi Peilan 席佩蘭," 179.

[198] Hawkes, "Hsi P'ei-lan," 118. All the names in Hawkes' original translation were in Wade-Giles.

[199] Translated by David Hawkes, "Hsi P'ei-lan," 114.

[200] Hawes, *The Social Circulation of Poetry in the Mid-Northern Song*, 3.

classifies the exchanged poems into three categories, which serve the following functions: "(1): to initiate relationships or overcome social barriers; (2): to sustain and deepen existing relationships; and (3): to bid farewell to friends departing on journeys and to commemorate the dead."[201] Xi Peilan's painting-poems addressed to numerous contemporary recipients in the High Qing fall under all three of the categories in Hawes's analysis. Moreover, she strategically used the interplay of text and image between her painting-poems and the paintings associated with her communities to develop her literary and artistic networks.

"I Hope That You Understand the Meaning of Picking Up Flowers": Xi Peilan in Yuan Mei's Community of Female Disciples

Yuan Mei and Xi Peilan's mentor-pupil relationship started with her request for his poem on her self-portrait. In their later correspondence, Xi Peilan wrote two painting-poems for Yuan Mei. While the first of these signals her affiliation with his community, the other one demonstrates her sisterhood with Qu Bingyun as a fellow female disciple. As Yuan Mei's female disciples were normally brought into contact with him by mutual connections, Xi Peilan was most likely introduced to him by her husband and their local scholar friend Wu Weiguang 吳蔚光 (1743–1803). In his *Suiyuan shihua buyi* 隨園詩話補遺 (Addenda to the Sui Garden Poetry Talks), Yuan Mei gave an account of their first meeting in Changshu in 1788. According to Yuan Mei, prior to the meeting he had suspicions that Xi Peilan's poems had been written by her husband, but the three poems she presented to him during the visit convinced him that her poetic talent perhaps even exceeded her husband's:

[201] Ibid., 56.

She gave me a small portrait of herself which she wanted me to inscribe. Slipping it into my sleeve, I carried off her husband on a visit to Wu Weiguang for some drinks. Towards evening she came to present me with three poems which she had written. I could see at once from the delicacy and brilliance of the style that Xu Shu was indeed more than a match for Qin Jia.[202]

以小照屬題，余置袖中，即拉其郎君同往吳竹橋太史家小飲。日未暮，而見贈三律來。讀之，細膩風光。方知徐淑之果勝秦嘉也。

The reference to Xu Shu and Qin Jia in the last sentence is borrowed from the three poems Xi Peilan presented to him. Xi Peilan collected the three poems, entitled "Presented to Master Yuan Jianzhai" 上袁簡齋先生, in her poetry collection and the second of these contains the line, "You directly advocate for Xu Shu's superiority to Qin Jia" 直推徐淑勝秦嘉.[203] She uses the allusion to the devoted couple Xu Shu and Qin Jia in the Eastern Han (25–220), who exchanged poems to express their steadfast love to each other, to convey her admiration for Yuan Mei's promotion of women's writing. Yuan Mei then playfully refers to Xi Peilan's line in his entry to evoke her "companionate marriage" with Sun Yuanxiang and her poetic excellence and outshining of her husband.

As Yuan Mei discloses in the account, Xi Peilan initiated their relationship by asking him to inscribe on her portrait, which was a common practice in gentry women's networking during the High Qing. Although he does not mention the name of the portrait, Xi Peilan's note at the end of her three poems for Yuan Mei indicates that it was her *Portrait of Picking*

[202] Translated by David Hawkes with modifications, "Hsi P'ei-lan," 114.

[203] *Changzhen'ge ji*, 473.

Up Flowers: "At the time, I had requested [Master Yuan] to inscribe on my *Portrait of Picking Up Flowers*" 時方以拈花小影乞題. This *Portrait of Picking Up Flowers* is in all likelihood the same one as her *Portrait Against Flowers* 背花小影. Xi Peilan included her own poem on the portrait, "Self-Inscribed on My *Portrait Against Flowers*," shortly before these three poems for Yuan Mei in Volume 2, which indicates that she herself had painted the portrait.

By Xi Peilan's time, the practice of preparing a self-portrait and circulating painting-poems on it had become a vogue among gentry women writers as mentioned in Chapter 1. Zhou Yuezun 周月尊, a concubine of Bi Yuan 畢沅 (1730–97) and possibly a female disciple of Yuan Mei, once sent the latter a self-portrait and asked him to inscribe a poem on it. She explained that her request was motivated by a desire to perpetuate her fame: "I sincerely want you to hand my name down to posterity by means of your collected writings, something that will enable me to lessen any regrets I feel about my life" 誠欲藉傳姓氏于集中，則生平之憾始釋然也.[204] Yuan Mei was not the only one who received Xi Peilan's request for an inscription. Xi Peilan had at least asked her neighbor Qu Bingyun for a poem on the same portrait.[205] While asking for painting-poems on her *Portrait Against Flowers*, Xi Peilan was probably in the process of establishing her reputation and broadening her literary and artistic communities. A poetic inscription on her portrait by Yuan Mei, who was a cultural celebrity in the High Qing, along with his recognition of her poetic talent, would

[204] Translated by Jerry Schmidt, "Yuan Mei (1716–98) on Women," 145.

[205] Qu Bingyun inscribed a song lyric, "Jin chan dao: Daohua nianhua xiaoying" 錦纏道·道華拈花小影, on Xi Peilan's portrait. *Yunyulou ji* 韞玉樓集, 2802.

have doubtlessly crowned her achievements and expanded her local reputation to a wider circle.

Yuan Mei, however, did not inscribe a poem on the portrait as Xi Peilan had requested. Instead, he made a series of arrangements for her portrait by asking his other female disciples to inscribe poems on it with his own colophon: "Peilan was profound and beautiful in the portrait. I am old, so I do not dare to inscribe on it. I brought it to Hangzhou and told Madame Wang Yuru to add setting for it, Lady Sun Yunfeng and Lady Sun Yunhe to inscribe *shi* and *ci* poems, and I wrote a few words as the postscript to honor the 'Three Perfections' at the time" 佩蘭小照幽艷，余老矣，不敢落筆。帶至杭州，屬王玉如夫人為之布景，孫雲鳳、雲鶴兩女士題詩詞，余跋數言，以誌一時三絕云.[206] Wang Yuru and the two sisters, Sun Yunfeng 孫雲鳳 (1764–1814) and Sun Yunhe 孫雲鶴, were already Yuan Mei's female disciples. Yuan Mei later juxtaposed Sun Yunfeng with Xi Peilan and ranked her poems in the first volume of *Suiyuan nü dizi shixuan* after Xi Peilan's. As he wrote in "A Poem about Two Talents from the Inner Chambers" 二閨秀詩:

Talented poets who paint their eyebrows are few indeed,	掃眉才子少，
It was hard to find two worthy disciples like them.	吾得二賢難。
Sun Yunfeng hails from Hangzhou's Vulture Peak,	鷲嶺孫雲鳳，
Xi Peilan is a native of Changshu's Mount Yu.[207]	虞山席佩蘭。

In her examination of the Sun sisters' poems inscribed on Xi Peilan's portrait, Yuanfei Wang has explained that while Sun Yunfeng's song lyric presents the exquisite and

[206] *Suiyuan Shihua*, 8.831.

[207] Translated by Jerry Schmidt with modifications, "The Golden Age of Classical Women's Poetry in China," 249.

serene image of Xi Peilan standing in the courtyard outside her boudoir, Sun Yunhe's poem focuses on the female painter-poet picking up flowers, creating an association with the Buddhist tale of a goddess scattering flowers on bodhisattvas and their disciples as the former pass on their doctrines 天女散花:

> She hopes to inherit the legacy of her teacher to serve the lotus platform.
> With her own eyes, she sees the heavenly flowers falling and blooming.
> Her poetic world is enlightened by the realm of Chan Buddhism.
> She does not disperse the flowers but holds them back with her fingers.[208]
> 想承衣缽伺蓮台，親見天花落又開。詩境忽從禅境悟，不教散去卻拈來。

In the Buddhist tale that is being alluded to, the cultivation of the disciple who cannot disperse the flowers is considered incomplete. Thus, Wang has astutely argued that Sun Yunhe gave the tale a new twist to complement Xi Peilan's poetic prowess.[209]

Xi Peilan, in the final stanza of "Presented to Master Yuan Jianzhai," offers her own explanation of the image of picking flowers that contrasts with Sun Yunhe's reading and provides another Buddhist allusion:

> I need to bother you to trim the false form of my poetic style, 詩格要煩裁偽體，
> How dare I secretly enhance my appearance in the painting? 畫圖何敢秘丰神。
> I hope that you understand the meaning of picking up flowers, 願公參透拈花旨，
> Whether I am a disciple at the seat of the King of Emptiness? 可是空王座下人。[210]

[208] Translated by Yuanfei Wang with modifications, "The Emaciated Soul," 54-6.

[209] Ibid.

[210] *Changzhen'ge ji*, 473.

Although the title indicates that this is not a painting-poem, these lines touch on the portrait to relay the painter-poet's hidden message to her master. In the first two lines, Xi Peilan modestly comments on her own poetry and painting skills and seeks Yuan Mei's advice. In the third line, she urges Yuan to understand her tacit image of picking up flowers and alludes to the flower sermon in Chan Buddhism. In the story, the Buddha was at a gathering and wordlessly picked up a flower; only one of his disciples, Mahākāśyapa 摩訶迦葉 (the putative first patriarch of Chan), understood the meaning and smiled. This story crystallized into the set phrase, "pick up a flower and smile" 拈花微笑, which symbolizes a deep, mutual understanding between two individuals. By elevating Yuan Mei's status to that of the Buddha, in the last line Xi Peilan artfully expresses her wish to become Yuan Mei's female disciple. The painter-poet utilized the complementary text-image connection between her portrait and poem to create an ingenious request for Yuan Mei's mentorship.

With his painstaking arrangements of the "Three Perfections" on her portrait, Yuan Mei did more than simply comply with Xi Peilan's original request to endorse her talent and, even more significantly, introduced her into the core of his circle of female disciples in Hangzhou. Eight years after their first meeting, Yuan Mei commissioned the famous painting, *The Thirteen Female Disciples of the Sui Garden Seek Instruction at Lake Tower* by You Zhao 尤詔 and Wang Gong 汪恭. The first section of the painting (fig. 3.1-2) recreates his second gathering with his female disciples at the Sun sisters' natal family estate by West Lake in 1792. In his inscription, Yuan Mei states that when he sojourned there, his female disciples from around the area brought their poems and came to ask for his advice. He further identifies each woman in the painting. After this inscription, three additional female figures are painted in the last section of the painting (fig. 3.3). Based on Yuan Mei's

second inscription, these three female disciples attended another gathering in 1795, so he asked his old friend surnamed Cui 老友崔君 to add them to the painting. In his first inscription, Yuan Mei compares the painting to Tao Hongjing's 陶弘景 (456–536) *Painting of the Ranks of the Realized Spirits* 真靈位業圖, which implies that his intention is not only to create a memento of their two gatherings, but also to immortalize these talented gentry women writers in the same manner as for Daoist deities.

Although Yuan Mei's two inscriptions present the painting as a reflection of the two gatherings in 1792 and 1795, this is actually not the case, for some of the women depicted in the painting, including Xi Peilan, did not attend the two gatherings in person. In his analysis of the painting, Jeffrey Riegel has identified two differences between the image and reality: First, Yuan Mei did not include the other two male literati, Ming Bao 明保 and Wang Wenzhi 王文治 (1730–1802), who attended the gathering in 1792. Second, only seven female disciples participated in the gathering in 1792. Therefore, Riegel has concluded that "what Yuan Mei wanted his artists to portray was an imaginary roster of some of his favorite female disciples rather than a gathering that actually occurred."[211]

In the painting, Yuan Mei is sitting in a pavilion accompanied by his nephew's wife, Dai Lanying 戴蘭英, and her little son to read a scroll, which likely contains poems by his female disciples. The thirteen female disciples in the first section of the painting are interacting with each other and engaging in all kinds of leisure and cultural activities. This includes composing poems, painting, playing the zither, reading, fishing, strolling, and talking. The painting is reminiscent of a female version of the male literati gathering

[211] Riegel, "Yuan Mei (1716–1798) and a Different 'Elegant Gathering,'" 107.

depicted in the legendary *Elegant Gathering in the Western Garden* 西園雅集 and attended by Su Shi and his literati coterie in the Northern Song.[212] Yuan Mei indicates that the woman playing the zither is Xi Peilan and the woman sitting by the table is Qu Bingyun. Intriguingly, in contrast with the other female disciples in the painting, only Xi Peilan is directly facing the viewer. Riegel has suggested that Yuan Mei intended for Xi Peilan and himself to be the two focal points of the painting, with the effect being that it looks like they are staring directly at each other.[213] This deliberate arrangement not only highlights Xi Peilan's status as his favorite female disciple, but also echoes their mutual understanding imbued in the image of "picking up flowers" in Xi Peilan's previous poem and the portrait presented to him. In response to Xi Peilan's hope of their mutual understanding, Yuan Mei had also labelled her as one of his "three soulmates in the inner chamber" 閨中之三大知己 out of his more than twenty female disciples.[214]

In addition to Yuan Mei's own inscriptions, the painting contains thirty-one seven-syllable regulated poems by his male and female disciples, which indicates that he had circulated the painting widely and requested painting-poems from his connections.[215] Although Xi Peilan did not attend the gathering, at Yuan Mei's request she contributed a painting-poem, entitled "Master of the Sui Garden Ordered Me to Inscribe on *The Thirteen Female Disciples of the Sui Garden Seek Instruction at Lake Tower*" 隨園先生命題十三女

[212] Ibid., 96.

[213] Ibid., 104.

[214] *Suiyuan Shihua*, 10.905.

[215] Riegel, "Yuan Mei (1716–1798) and a Different 'Elegant Gathering,'" 105.

弟子湖樓請業圖. After describing the scenery of the location, the painter-poet reveals her spiritual journey of the previous ten years:

For ten years I dreamt in vain of Hangzhou's Western Cold Bridge, 十年枉作西冷夢，
Then before I knew it my whole body had entered the painting. 早已全身入畫圖。
There the Master sat erect, wielding his colored brush, 先生端坐彩毫揮，
While we competed to offer up our inscriptions on jade-like
paper and ask for the red banner of his teaching. 爭捧瑤箋問絳帷。
Among them was one playing a zither who resembled me. 中有彈琴人似我，
Counting them we can see that on the zither there are
exactly thirteen stops.[216] 數來剛好十三徽。

Xi Peilan confides that she has been yearning to join the cultural activity in Hangzhou for ten years and beyond all expectation, she has now been incorporated into the painting without having attended the event. The timeline matches her first meeting with Yuan Mei and her interaction with other female members in the community through painting-poems afterwards. With the painting-poem, the female painter-poet vicariously attended the gathering and declared her presence in Yuan Mei's community.

The painter-poet then turns to the image of Yuan Mei and points out that the female disciples are engaged in a competition to compose poems. The scene invokes the description in Chapter 38 of *Honglou meng*, when the young girls of the poetry club at Prospect Garden are pondering their poems on the theme of the chrysanthemum during the crab feast, with each of them involved in different activities to come up with their lines. Xi Peilan observes

[216] Translated by Jeffrey Riegel, "Yuan Mei (1716–1798) and a Different 'Elegant Gathering,'" 107.

that she herself is the female disciple who is playing the zither. In the next line, the painter-poet mentions the thirteen stops on the zither because she determines that the number "thirteen" has a special meaning in the painting. The number corresponds to the thirteen female disciples depicted in the painting and also aligns Yuan Mei's teaching with the Thirteen Classics 十三經 in the Confucian tradition so as to extol his achievement of instructing female disciples.[217] This is not the only time Xi Peilan elevates Yuan Mei's mentorship to the status of the orthodox Confucian classics. In another poem, she links his poetic instruction to *Neize* 內則 (Regulations for the Inner Sphere) in *Liji* 禮記 (The Book of Rites): "The teaching of poetry is always connected with *Nei ze*, / A beauty also loves having a reputation for being an expert in literary and artistic skills" 詩教從來通內則，美人兼愛擅才名.[218] While the *Nei ze* is the earliest source prescribing sex segregation, Xi Peilan boldly equates Yuan Mei's promulgation of women's poetry with the didactic Confucian canon in order to justify women's pursuit of literary and artistic reputation in the public community during the High Qing.

In addition to the poem inscribed on *The Thirteen Female Disciples of the Sui Garden Seek Instruction at Lake Tower*, Xi Peilan exchanged another painting-poem with Yuan Mei in response to his inscription on the *Painting of an Orchid* 如蘭圖, a painting that Xi Peilan and Qu Bingyun collaborated on when they swore to become sisters.[219] The image

[217] Riegel, "Yuan Mei (1716–1798) and a Different 'Elegant Gathering,'" 107-8.

[218] "Wen Wanxian yi yi dizi li jian suiyuan xiji fengjian," *Changzhen'ge ji*, 475.

[219] Xi Peilan and Qu Bingyun each wrote a poem in return to express their gratitude to Yuan Mei. Qu Bingyun's poem is entitled "Yu yu Daohua yuewei jiemei, yin hui *Rulan tu*, Suiyuan xiansheng tishi qishang. Yiyun chengxie" 余與道華約為姊妹，因繪《如蘭圖》，隨園先生題詩其上。依韻呈謝. *Yunyulou ji*, 2768.

of the orchid is not just a pun on their style names, but also functions as a female variation on the *lanpu* 蘭譜 (genealogical record) that men exchange when they become sworn brothers. The idea of *lanpu* is derived from the line in the *Yijing* 易經 (The Book of Changes): "The words from the same heart, their smell is like an orchid" 同心之言，其臭如蘭.[220] Yuan Mei clearly sensed the meaning of the orchid in his female disciples' painting, so he alludes to the line in the *Yijing* in his poetic inscription to commend their sisterhood: "With the same smell and heart, this image is beautiful, / The painting grasps the flower's splendor look" 并臭同心影亦佳，丹青寫出好容華.[221]

In the group of two poems, "A Thank You to Master of the Sui Garden for Inscribing on the *Painting of an Orchid*" 謝隨園先生題如蘭圖, Xi Peilan echoes Yuan Mei by including the line from the *Yijing* in different part in the two poems to describe the flower in the painting and indicates her sisterhood with Qu Bingyun. In the first poem, she writes, "A bunch of flowers drawn with the same heart in the painting, / Roaming toward the master's brush tip to bloom" 畫中一簇同心朵，走向先生筆底開.[222] In the second poem, she continues: "When we recite it, the scent was also as fragrant as an orchid, / Both of us two sisters were fond of it when we read it together" 吟來氣亦馥如蘭，姊妹同看各喜歡.[223] In contrast to the formal and respectful tone of her previous painting-poems to Yuan Mei, Xi Peilan adopts an affectionate persona to illustrate her relationship with Qu Bingyun. By

[220] *Zhouyi zhengyi* 周易正義, 7.164.

[221] *Yunyulou shi*, 2769.

[222] *Changzhen'ge ji*, 499.

[223] Ibid.

employing the poetic imagery of the "same heart" (*tongxin* 同心), a recurrent image in her painting-poems addressed to her close friend even before her acquaintance with Yuan Mei, the painter-poet conveys their female-female bond, which is another type of empathy—one that is distinct from the mentor-disciple relationship with Yuan Mei as represented by the image of "picking up flowers."

"With Deep Affections, We Tied the Bond of the Same Heart from Afar": Xi Peilan in the Women's Community with Qu Bingyun in Changshu

Xi Peilan used the image of the "same heart," which was reserved for her closest female friends, most frequently in the painting-poems addressed to Qu Bingyun. Both from Changshu, the two female painter-poets became acquainted in 1786 when Xi Peilan and Sun Yuanxiang moved into the neighborhood where Qu Bingyun and her scholar husband, Zhao Tongyu 趙同鈺 (courtesy name Ziliang 子梁), resided. Like Xi Peilan and Sun Yunxiang, the gentry couple also enjoyed a "companionate marriage" and were fond of cooking and organizing parties. The two cultured households frequently interacted with each other, attending the same gatherings, sending gifts, and exchanging poems and paintings.[224] Through the inter-household connections, Xi Peilan and Qu Bingyun then introduced each other to their respective literary and artistic communities to form a local women's community in Changshu.

After becoming Yuan Mei's disciple in 1788, Xi Peilan introduced Qu Bingyun to Yuan Mei, and she became his disciple in 1794, presumably with the support of Sun Yuanxiang and Wu Weiguang. As Louis Liuxi Meng has explained, apart from the three

[224] Hawkes, "Hsi P'ei-lan," 119.

gatherings, Yuan Mei's female disciples "did not form one large group, but rather various small groups" based on their family lineage and region.[225] Furthermore, he identified Qu Bingyun as the "soul" of the local community because she hosted a local gathering of twelve women and commissioned the *Painting of the Flower Historians in the Flower Bud Palace* to record the event in 1796.[226] Sun Yuanxiang produced a group of four painting-poems with a preface entitled "Inscribed on the *Painting of the Flower Historians in the Flower Bud Palace*" 題蕊宮花史圖, to document the twelve female participants in detail. Based on his preface, Qu Bingyun actually organized two gatherings—not just one—for the *Painting of the Flower Historians in the Flower Bud Palace* in 1796 and 1798.

During the first gathering, the twelve women drew lots to each represent an image of a historical or legendary beauty, with each beauty being associated with a flower from each month of a year. Then, Qu Bingyun portrayed the twelve women and asked a professional painter to add ancient costumes to each of them based on the roles they had assumed. After two years, the painting was complete, and Qu Bingyun invited the twelve women for another gathering to celebrate the event. Sun Yuanxiang's painting-poems and preface were written after the second gathering upon the painting's completion. In his preface, Sun Yuanxiang explains that Qu Bingyun's motivation for producing the painting of the "elegant gathering" 雅集圖 of these talented women was to "pass on [their images and fame] to posterity" 以傳久遠.[227] To commemorate the project, Xi Peilan wrote a painting-poem, "Wanxian Sketched the *Portrait of the Flower Historians in the Flower Bud Palace*" 宛仙

[225] Meng, *Poetry as Power*, 80.

[226] Ibid., 77.

[227] *Suxiang suibi* 粟香隨筆, *Suxiang erbi* 粟香二筆, 1.244.

白描蕊宮花史小影. Inspired by Yuan Mei, who compared *The Thirteen Female Disciples of the Sui Garden Seek Instruction at Lake Tower* to the *Painting of the Ranks of the Realized Spirits*, Xi Peilan's poem also applauded Qu Bingyun's transformation of the Daoist masterwork into a token of the female gathering: "This beautiful woman has her own 'brush that sprouts flowers,' / And painted a different *Painting of the Ranks of the Realized Spirits*" 嬋媛自有生花筆，別寫真靈位業圖.[228] The term "brush that sprouts flowers" alludes to Wang Renyu's 王仁裕 (880–956) story of Li Bai's 李白 (701–762) dream, in which the tip of the young poet's brush grows flowers as a sign of his literary fame in the future.[229] Xi Peilan uses the term to praise her female friend's talent in painting instead.

Although Qu Bingyun initiated the project of the *Painting of the Flower Historians in the Flower Bud Palace*, at the first gathering the twelve women were not fully acquainted with one another because they came from several different families and communities. As Xi Peilan indicates in the long title: "Each of the twelve women in the *Painting of the Flower Historians in the Flower Bud Palace* by Wanxian had someone they did not know. During the spring outing this year, Zhao Ruobing, Li Canhua, Yan Caihuang, Yan Danyu, and Tao Lingqing met each other at the stopping place for the boat. Wanxian and I heard the sound and missed each other even more. When we looked back, we could not have predicted this. Therefore, I record this event and send this poem to Wanxian" 宛仙作蕊宮花史圖十二人

[228] *Changzhen'ge ji*, 557.

[229] *Kaiyuan tianbao yishi* 開元天寶遺事, 2.38.

者，各有未相識也。今歲春遊，趙若冰、李餐花、言採皇、言淡玉、陶菱卿相見於舟次，而余與宛仙尤聞聲相思，顧未得預焉。因紀其事兼寄宛仙.[230]

As with the Banana Garden Poetry Club, the twelve women participating in their local homosocial community were mainly related to each other by kinship and marital relations, neighborhood proximity, and friendships with male literati.[231] But one additional dimension of the structure of the women's community in Changshu is that four of its members—namely, Xi Peilan, Qu Bingyun, Gui Maoyi, and Bao Yin 鮑印 (courtesy name Zungu 尊古)—were also Yuan Mei's female disciples. Of the remaining eight women, Li Canhua, Xie Cuixia 謝翠霞, and Tao Lingqing belonged to Xi Peilan's household. In the preface to "Song for Three Poetry Friends" 詩中三友歌, Xi Peilan wrote that Li Canhua and Xie Cuixia were learning about poetry from her: "Li, the wife of my husband's younger brother, and Xie, the wife of my husband's nephew, are both studying poetry with me. The sophistication of their thought is improving day by day and we quite enjoyed the happiness of exchanging poems" 叔姒李、侄婦謝，俱學詩於予，思致日勝，頗有酬和之樂.[232] The three of them exchanged poems that appear at the very beginning of Xi Peilan's poetry collection, which shows that they formed an active familial poetry community. Meanwhile, Ye Tiaofang 葉苕芳 was Qu Bingyun's sister-in-law and the two of them used to paint and compose poems together. Zhao Ruobing was Zhao Tongyu's sister. Thanks to the friendship

[230] *Changzhen'ge ji*, 518.

[231] For the structure of the Banana Poetry Club, see Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 237.

[232] *Changzhen'ge ji*, 559.

between Xi Peilan and Qu Bingyun, these women were brought into a larger regional community in Changshu.

In the local women's community, Xi Peilan mainly used painting-poetry to network with the talented gentry women beyond her household. For instance, she followed Bao Yin's rhyme to inscribe on her older sister Bao Shuyun's 鮑叔韞 portrait and she wrote two poems on Zhao Ruobing's paintings. These painting-poems constitute the only form of correspondence between Xi Peilan and these two women in her poetry collection. Starting when she was middle-aged, Xi Peilan frequently interacted with Gui Maoyi, who was also a close friend of Sun Yuanxiang's; their poetic correspondence also began with her poem on Gui Maoyi's painting. Of these women outside of her household, Xi Peilan's bond with her sworn sister Qu Bingyun was the strongest, as evidenced by her two extant portraits and approximately fifty poems produced for her, eighteen of which were painting-poems.[233] They were, in other words, the core of the women's community in Changshu.

As with Yuan Mei, Xi Peilan's first poetic interaction with Qu Bingyun in her poetry collection was written in response to Qu Bingyun's poem on her *Portrait of Dispersing the Coldness* 消寒小影. In the poem, "A Thank You to Qu Wanxian for Kindly Inscribing on My Portrait, Following Her Original Rhyme" 謝屈宛仙惠題小影即次原韻, Xi Peilan employs the phrase "same heart" for the first time in their relationship: "With deep affections, we tied the bond of the same heart from afar, / For good verses, I first smell the fragrance of letting them out of your mouth" 深情遙結同心契，好句先聞脫口香.[234] The

[233] Louis Liuxi Meng has mentioned that Qu Bingyun wrote more than twenty poems about Xi Peilan. See Meng, *Poetry as Power*, 80.

[234] *Changzhen'ge ji*, 470.

imagery of "letting them out of your mouth" (*tuokou* 脫口) matches Qu Bingyun's original line on her portrait: "The new poems out of your mouth fly in the same manner of willow catkins, / The pure sound of chanting connects to the eaves of the Xie family" 脫口新詩飛柳絮，吟聲清接謝家簷.[235] Qu Bingyun again alludes to Xie Daoyun's poetic imagery of willow catkins to exalt Xi Peilan's poetic prowess.

However, in Qu Bingyun's poetry collection, *Yunyulou ji* (Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower), the female painter-poet inscribed three other poems on Xi Peilan's paintings before the one on the *Portrait of Dispersing the Coldness*. Therefore, by the time Xi Peilan requested her neighbor's poem on the portrait, they had already developed a friendship from their inter-household activities. In her first poem to match Xi Peilan's poem on a painting of orchid, Qu Bingyun also uses the allusion from the *Yijing* to refer to their relationship: "When we look at the painting together, its smell is the same as / The fragrant herb of your family in the clear breeze of the past" 畫裏相看臭味同，儂家香草舊清風.[236] Qu's comparison between the fragrance of the orchid and the herb in Xi Peilan's household in former times implies that rather than an icebreaker in Yuan Mei's case, the frequent exchange of painting-poems between the two female painter-poets serves as an outlet to communicate their feelings and reinforce their sisterly relationship.

In "Inscribed on Wanxian's Painting of an Orchid" 題宛仙畫蘭, Xi Peilan utilizes the imagery of the "same heart" again to denote their tender sentiments:

Exquisitely and cleverly, she bent her wrist to

[235] "Daohua Xiaohan xiaoying" 道華消寒小影, *Yunyulou ji*, 2764.

[236] "He Daohua ti hualan" 和道華題畫蘭, ibid., 2762.

draw crossed branches,	玲瓏妙捥寫交枝，
Which precisely refers to tender thoughts of the same heart.	恰稱同心宛轉思。
A plain drawing of double shadows,	一幅白描雙影子，
That is when Peilan herself is by Xielan's side.	佩蘭親傍協蘭時。[237]

In the first two lines, the female painter-poet describes her friend's delicate movements as she paints orchids and acclaims Qu's brushwork for capturing their shared thoughts generated from the "same heart." In the last two lines, Xi Peilan regards the two orchid branches in intimate proximity as representative of herself and Qu Bingyun. In the last line, Xi Peilan notes that Xielan (literally, "to assist the orchid") is "a style name Wanxian gave herself" 宛仙自號. In light of their friendship, Qu Bingyun probably came up with the style name to match Xi Peilan's style name (literally, "orchid" or "to wear an orchid").[238] By linking their images and names to the orchid in the painting-poem, she transforms the flower into a symbol of their close relationship.

When Qu Bingyun became a female disciple of Yuan Mei in 1794, Xi Peilan recorded the moment excitedly in "Upon Hearing that Wanxian Also Met Master Yuan Mei for the Rites of the Disciple, I was Extremely Pleased and Presented this Poem" 聞宛仙亦以弟子禮見隨園喜極奉簡. In the poem, the term "same heart" appears again as an embodiment of their female-female bond: "Fragrant orchids dare to commit themselves to a bond of the same heart, / A female talent like a jade bamboo shoot is truly suitable for the

[237] *Changzhen'ge ji*, 491.

[238] Meng, *Poetry as Power*, 80.

leader's visit" 芳蘭敢托同心契，玉笋真宜領袖行.[239] While the first line signifies their sisterhood as represented by the image of orchid, the second line refers to Yuan Mei and Qu Bingyun's new mentor-pupil relationship.

Unlike the avant-garde mixed-sex community led by Yuan Mei, gentry women's communities like the one in Changshu emerged in the early Qing and continued into the High Qing. As Dorothy Ko has observed, the development of women's communities signaled "the emergence of female gender as a category of social organization and self-identity."[240] Regardless of age or familial role, these women formed a "voluntary bond of womanhood" because of their shared enthusiasm for literary and artistic pursuits.[241] Within the women's community, women writers sometimes found themselves having to employ the established language of the literati to communicate their homosocial friendship and admiration.[242] In Xi Peilan's case, the imagery of the "same heart" is an embodiment of what Maureen Robertson referred to as a hybrid of "the literati-feminine and the literati-masculine voices from both friendship poetry and love poetry."[243] For the literati-masculine voice, the "same heart" refers to sworn brothers, whereas for the literati-feminine voice, the "same heart" normally stands for the mutual devotion between heterosexual lovers. For instance, in one of the *Nineteen Old Poems* 古詩十九首, "Crossing the River to Pick Lotus" 涉江採芙蓉, the female narrator uses the term to lament being separated from her loving

[239] *Changzhen'ge ji*, 475.

[240] Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 292.

[241] Ibid.

[242] Robertson, "Voicing the Feminine," 82.

[243] Ibid., 97.

husband: “Sharing the same heart, we are living apart. / I can only spend my remaining years in sorrow” 同心而離居，憂傷以終老.[244] Consequently, Xi Peilan had to negotiate with the previous literati tradition to adapt the term to represent her sisterhood with Qu Bingyun. Even if there may be a certain degree of ambiguity regarding her use of the term to express same-sex attachment, this is dispelled when her painting-poems are examined within the context of their inter-household relationship.

Sun Yuanxiang and Zhao Tongyu complemented the gifts of their wives and were recognized as two of the “Four Talents in Mount Yu” 虞山四才子. The two couples’ literary and artistic abilities enabled them to engage in various refined activities within and between their households. In a painting-poem on Qu Bingyun’s flower-and-bird painting, “Wanxian’s Painting Scroll of Crabapple Flowers and Twin Birds” 宛仙海棠雙鳥畫卷, Xi Peilan remarks, “There is poetry in painting and painting in poetry, / You must surely care for me just as I care for you” 畫亦有詩詩有畫，卿須憐我我憐卿.[245] Like many female writers in the Ming-Qing period, Xi Peilan uses a classical reference to Su Shi’s poem in order to express praise for another’s mastery of poetry and painting. The second line borrows the legendary female writer Feng Xiaoqing’s 馮小青 well-known lines: “I gaze at the reflection of my gaunt face in the spring stream, / You must surely care for me just as I care for you” 瘦影自臨春水照，卿須憐我我憐卿.[246] While Feng Xiaoqing’s original line is a narcissistic comment on beholding her own reflection in the river, Xi Peilan depicts the

[244] *Zhongguo zhi meiwen jiqi lishi* 中國之美文及其歷史, 109.

[245] *Changzhen’ge ji*, 491.

[246] Translated by Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush*, 510.

images of herself and of Qu Bingyun as mirroring and endearing one another, which is similar to her metaphor of the two orchid branches in "Inscribed on Wanxian's Painting of Orchid" 題宛仙畫蘭.

The intimacy between the two, however, is eclipsed in the last line of the poem when Xi Peilan turns to emphasize Qu Bingyun's wifely role in her household: "This [painting] perfectly adds stories to the Zhao family, / Which will enjoy the same renown as Madame Guan's bamboo" 恰與趙家添故事，管夫人竹共佳名.[247] By comparing Qu Bingyun to Guan Daosheng in terms of artistic and literary talent, Xi Peilan also alludes to the "companionate" relationship she enjoyed with her spouse, just like the female paragon who lived in the Yuan.

Sun Yuanxiang was also keen to participate in the literary and artistic interaction between the two households. In addition to his painting-poems and preface written on the *Painting of the Flower Historians in the Flower Bud Palace*, he once added a plum blossom branch to Qu Bingyun's painting of orchids. Xi Peilan recorded the event in her painting-poem, "Wanxian Painted Several Spring Orchids and Zixiao Added a Branch of Plum Blossom, So I Playful Inscribed Next to It" 宛仙畫春蘭數朵子瀟添梅一枝於旁戲題:

The demeanor of the orchid by her hair is so distinct, 鬢側幽蘭意態殊，
She herself copied it with her brush at the dressing table. 妝臺點筆自臨模。
This poet forces plum blossom calyces to fit in the painting, 詩人強為添梅萼，
Do you know whether these flower branches would like

[247] Ibid.

to join each other? 知道花枝肯合無？[248]

In the first two lines, Xi Peilan depicts Qu Bingyun's process of painting the orchid in her boudoir. Then, in the last two lines, she turns to make fun of her husband by asking if the plum blossom he painted would fit into Qu Bingyun's painting. The humorous and harmonious ambience in the painting-poem demonstrates that the two gentry households had established another literary and artistic community in Changshu.

Qu Bingyun suffered from liver disease for most of her life, and this was also the main cause for her untimely death. Xi Peilan compared Qu Bingyun to the character Lin Daiyu from *Honglou meng* in her poem, "Inscribed on Wanxian's Poetry Manuscripts" 題宛仙詩稿: "Her literary and artistic talent is only suitable to live in the Naiad's House" 才情只合住瀟湘.[249] In this masterpiece, which was published in the High Qing, the fragile and intelligent female protagonist Lin Daiyu's residence in the Prospect Garden is called the Naiad's House 瀟湘館. Lin Daiyu was often celebrated for her "talent for chanting of the willow catkin" 詠絮才. By equating Qu Bingyun with Lin Daiyu, Xi Peilan recognized that Qu Bingyun also meets Yuan Mei's criteria for a female prodigy. In one of the portraits she painted for Qu Bingyun, *Portrait of Lady Wanxian* 宛仙夫人小像 (fig. 3.4), Xi Peilan captured the tranquil and frail image of Qu Bingyun with fine and smooth brushwork. In the "Eulogy for My Portrait" 小像自贊 (fig. 3.5) she wrote in response to the portrait, Qu Bingyun writes in standard script to playfully attribute her emaciation to her putative ancestor Qu Yuan 屈原 (c. 340 BC–278 BC), rather than her sickness:

[248] *Changzhen'ge ji*, 514.

[249] Ibid., 486.

Why is your look so thin that it is centered around the withered body?

Why is your countenance so sorrowful that the spirit is in autumn?

For whose sake do you worry?

The waning of orchids? The withering of chrysanthemums?

Alas! It is the legacy of my ancestor's *Encountering Sorrow*!

子神胡臞，集於枯也。子顏胡愁，氣在秋也。子為誰耶？蘭之衰耶？菊之萎耶？噫，其我祖離騷之遺耶！

In another painting-poem, "Inscribed on the Picture of Qu Wanxian Holding the Plum Blossom" 題屈宛仙拈梅圖, Xi Peilan echoes Qu Bingyun to recognize Qu Yuan as her ancestor:

Fragrant herbs in dense array were listed in the *Verses of Chu*, 香草離離譜楚辭，

Among the verses, only plum blossoms are not mentioned. 辭中偏未及南枝。

Readily and effortlessly, the plum blossom

took shape under your hand, 被君隨手輕拈出，

Which is a kind of addendum to *Encountering Sorrow*. 補得《離騷》一種遺。[250]

Intriguingly, Qu Bingyun and Xi Peilan both select the same character "*yi*" 遺 with its different meanings in their respective last lines pertaining to Qu Yuan's esteemed anthology *Encountering Sorrow*. While Qu Bingyun uses the character to articulate that her sorrow in the image is inherited from her ancestor's classic work, Xi Peilan praises her friend for complementing the anthology with a flower that is absent from the original text.

[250] Ibid., 484.

In 1810, Qu Bingyun passed away due to her chronic liver illness. In the last poem addressed to her close friend in the poetry collection, "Lament for Qu Wanxian" 哭屈宛仙, Xi Peilan recalls the *Painting of an Orchid* 如蘭圖 they collaborated on to renew their oath as sisters in the next life: "I will keep the bond of orchid with you, / I hope we will retie with deep affections our karmic connection in the next life" 與君留得如蘭約，願結深情再世緣.[251] The second line is reminiscent of her line in their early painting-poetry correspondence: "With deep affections, we tied the bond of the same heart from afar." Xi Peilan continues, "I promised to be a sister to you; we once drew the *Painting of an Orchid* together" 與君訂為姊妹，嘗合寫《如蘭圖》.[252] Thus, the image of orchid was elevated to be an everlasting incarnation of their sisterhood in the earthly life and beyond.

Conclusion

In her study of Luo Qilan 駱綺蘭 (1756–after 1813), who was another Yuan Mei's female disciple, De-Nin D. Lee asked: "Could *tihuashi* (i.e., painting-poetry) by Luo and women like her constitute the core of a literatae 女史 (*nüshi*) tradition on painting?"[253] In Xi Peilan's case, the answer to this question is definitely in the affirmative. The female painter-poet utilized painting-poetry to develop her three literary and artistic networks with Yuan Mei's group of female disciples, the women's community in Changshu, and Qu Bingyun's household. In her painting-poems, she adapted the two images of "picking up flowers" and

[251] Ibid., 557.

[252] Ibid.

[253] De-Nin Lee, "More Than Mere Diversion," 77.

the “same heart” to represent her connections with Yuan Mei and Qu Bingyun, respectively. Furthermore, the two paintings of “elegant gatherings”—*The Thirteen Female Disciples of the Sui Garden Seek Instruction at Lake Tower* and *Painting of the Flower Historians in the Flower Bud Palace*—demonstrate her central position in their communities as an example of the ideal female prodigy in the High Qing. In the late Qing, Gu Taiqing further deepened and expanded the scope of the literary and artistic community with her painting-poems in the form of *shi* and *ci*, which attested to the maturation of women’s painting-poetry.

Chapter Four

A Manchu Woman Artist:

Gu Taiqing's Painting-Poetry in the Late Qing

By examining Gu Taiqing's painting-poems composed within and outside her marital royal residence, this chapter traces how the female painter-poet relays her distinct sentiments, religious beliefs, and emotional bonds with her familial and social networks at each stage of her life's trajectory. As mentioned in Chapter 2 in regards to Li Yin, Grace Fong has emphasized that within the gentry household, the concubine occupied a marginal position and had to rely on her husband and the principal wife to receive poetic training. However, since concubine authors were free from the principal wife's familial obligations, the "side room" position offered them the space to transgress Confucian gender conventions and represent feminine beauty with sensual details and celebrate the love between the couple.[254] Due to her earlier life experience as the granddaughter of a political criminal and later as a concubine, Gu Taiqing's case both conforms to and transforms the "side room" position analyzed by Fong.[255] Through the cross-genre practice of composing poems in relation to her own and others' paintings, Gu not only significantly transformed some of the major poetic conventions established by male literati but also established her subjectivity as a talented painter-poet, which transcended her problematic, obscure family background as well as her marginal social status as a concubine.

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[254] Fong, *Herself an Author*, 79-81.

[255] Gu Taiqing received the official title of *ce fujin* 側福晉 ("side" wife), so her status was higher than a regular concubine without a title (*qie* 妾) in the Qing royal marriage system. However, in comparison to *di fujin* 嫡福晉 (principal wife), she still belonged to the "side room" position as indicated by her title.

Gu Taiqing, the prolific woman writer of the late Qing, is widely considered to be the top-ranked Manchu female poet as well as the first woman novelist of pre-modern China.[256] Her sizable poetic oeuvre, consisting of *Tianyouge ji* 天游閣集 (Collection from the Tower of Celestial Wandering), which includes her *shi* poems, and her *ci* collection, entitled *Donghai yuge* 東海漁歌 (Fisherman's Songs from the Eastern Sea), has received substantial scholarly attention.[257] In addition, scholars have studied her sequel to *Honglou meng*, *Honglou meng ying* 紅樓夢影 (Shadow Dream of the Red Chamber), and two plays, *Taoyuan ji* 桃園記 (The Peach Garden) and *Meihua yin* 梅花引 (The Plum Blossom Prelude).[258]

Previous studies have, however, largely neglected Gu's dual identity as a Manchu painter-poet and her substantial textual production of painting-poems in relation to paintings, many of which are her own artistic works. Zhang Juling, one of the earliest scholars to have categorized Gu Taiqing's painting-poems, has observed that the woman writer composed 248 painting-poems over the course of her life, including 150 poems in the *shi* and 98 in the *ci* form. She has noted that while it was common practice to inscribe *shi* poems on paintings in late imperial China, Gu Taiqing's refined painting-poems in the form of song lyrics not only provide a perfect complement to their source paintings but also

[256] See, for example, Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush*, 630.

[257] Scholars writing in English who have contributed to the study of Gu Taiqing's poetry include Grace S. Fong, Wilt Idema, Beata Grant, Qiaole Huang, and Yanning Wang, among others. For a survey of the scholarship on Gu Taiqing in Chinese from the late Qing to the contemporary period, see Wu Yongping 吳永萍 et al., *Qingdai sanda nü ciren yanjiu* 清代三大女詞人研究, 195-201.

[258] For a discussion of Gu Taiqing's novel, see Widmer, *The Beauty and the Book*, 179-216 and Geng, "Mirror, Dream and Shadow," 101-11. Martin Huang discussed Gu Taiqing's plays in his talk, "Performing Self: The Autobiographical in Women's Drama in Qing China," at UCLA on February 16, 2018.

contribute to the history of the poetic subgenre.[259] The most extensive treatise on Gu Taiqing's painting-poems to date is Mao Wenfang's book chapter in Chinese, which offers an analysis of the female painter-poet's inscriptions on portraits.[260] In the past decade, several dissertations and one thesis in English have also broached the significance of Gu's painting-poems in the context of her marital relationship, women's community, and self-representation.[261]

Although these existing studies provide material for understanding Gu Taiqing's painting-poems, none of them comprehensively address her motivations for consistently writing in the poetic subgenre of painting-poetry at every stage of her life. Moreover, it is necessary to give closer consideration to the interplay that takes place between text and image in terms of her poems and extant paintings. This chapter will examine Gu Taiqing's painting-poems written in both the *shi* and *ci* genres, the great majority of which are exchange poems with her husband, children, natal and marital relatives, and male and female friends in response to their own and others' paintings. The massive production of poems related to her paintings indicates that in addition to her other poems, the female painter-poet utilized painting-poetry as a primary means to form a nexus of relationships within and beyond the royal household.

Unlike Li Yin, Xi Peilan, and most of the other Han Chinese female painter-poets discussed in previous chapters, Gu Taiqing is first and foremost celebrated for *ci* rather than

[259] Zhang Juling 張菊玲, *Kuangdai cainü Gu Taiqing* 曠代才女顧太清, 155-7.

[260] See Mao, *Juanzhong xiaoli yi bainian*, 309-69.

[261] See Geng, "Mirror, Dream and Shadow," 63-72. Also see Chang, "Matching in Rhymes and Reality," 278-309 and Chang, "Self-representation in Selected Poems of Gu Taiqing (1799–1877)," 22-39.

shi poems. In her study of Manchu women poets in the Qing, Wilt Idema has observed that these women from the conquest elite enjoyed greater freedom than their male relatives to read and write Chinese even during the rulers' campaigns to emphasize their Manchu identity.[262] With the support of their families, many Manchu women engaged in the practice of writing poetry to express their gendered experiences. Moreover, although they were restricted from participating in public life like Han gentry women, Manchu women were not required to practice foot binding and thus had greater access to horseback riding and other sports.[263]

Gu Taiqing was born into a once-privileged Manchu family and was a resident of Beijing for most of her life, and her case is consistent with those of other Manchu women. Yet unlike other Manchu women in Beijing, who mostly produced *shi* poems and interacted with each other under the Banner system, her mastery of *ci* and networking with Han Chinese women poets have prompted Idema to consider her as "a representative of the Jiangnan tradition of women's literature."[264] There are three potential reasons for this association of Gu Taiqing with the Jiangnan women's literary tradition. First, some of her poems allude to her early experience in the Jiangnan area prior to her marriage to the Manchu prince Yihui.[265] Second, for the sake of her marriage, her identity shifted from that of a Manchu woman to that of the daughter of a Han bondservant, and this probably prevented her from closely socializing with other Manchu women. Finally, the Manchu

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[262] Idema, *Two Centuries of Manchu Women Poets*, 3.

[263] Ibid., 19.

[264] Ibid., 7.

[265] See, for example, her song lyric on a painting, "An xiang" 暗香, *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 194.

couple's enthusiasm for the Han literary and artistic culture in their "companionate marriage" encouraged the female painter-poet to write in both *shi* and *ci*.

Gu Taiqing did not acquire the skill of writing the *ci,* or song lyric, until she was thirty-seven years old, as evidenced by the first volume of *Donghai yuge*, which appeared at least ten years later than her earliest *shi* poems in *Tianyouge ji*.[266] As the beloved concubine of Yihui, the woman writer received literary and artistic training from her erudite husband.[267] When she was studying the *ci* genre, she compiled three volumes of song lyrics written by her literary predecessors.[268] As such, her song lyrics are often praised for having grasped the essence of works by Li Yu 李煜 (937–978), Qin Guan, Zhou Bangyan 周邦彥 (1056–1121), and Jiang Kui 姜夔 (1155–1221); she herself is esteemed as the most prominent female song lyricist after Li Qingzhao.[269] During the revival of the *ci* genre in the Ming-Qing period, Li Qingzhao served as the role model for many women writers who were attracted to the tradition with feminine associations.[270] In addition to assimilating established poetics, Gu Taiqing also developed her own style to communicate nuanced feelings in her

[266] Gu Taiqing and Yihui's age in this chapter refers to their nominal age (*xusui* 虛歲) because they calculated their age in this way.

[267] Scholars have debated whether she also learned *shi* poems from Yihui. For instance, Zhang Zhang 張璋 thinks that Gu started writing *shi* poems at a young age, whereas Idema and Grant believe that she learned both *shi* and *ci* from Yihui. See Zhang, *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 5 and Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush*, 630.

[268] See Gu, "Jixuan songci sanjuan suiyi cizhong qiyanzhe jiwei sanshijiu jueju" 既選宋詞三卷遂以詞中七言者集爲三十九絕句, *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 55-8.

[269] Jin Qicong 金啟孮 has pointed out that during the Qing, Wu Zao was generally considered the best female poet of the dynasty, but Gu Taiqing later replaced her as the top-ranked female poet of the Qing in the early Republican Period. See Jin, "Manzhou nü ciren Gu Taiqing he *Donghai yuge*" 滿洲女詞人顧太清和《東海漁歌》, 798-9.

[270] Egan, *The Burden of Female Talent*, 240.

song lyrics. The critic Kuang Zhouyi's 況周頤 (1859–1926) comment captures the exquisiteness of her song lyrics:

> The beauty of Taiqing's song lyrics resides in their overall atmosphere rather than in [specific] words and phrases. If one looks for it in the total form or general organization, one finds it impossible to put one's finger on any one or two things, or on the artistry and craft of this sound or that word.
>
> 太清詞，其佳處在氣格，不在字句，當於全體大段求之，不能以一二闕爲論定，一聲一字爲工拙.[271]

Thanks to her poetic fame and skill, Gu Taiqing was considered by her contemporaries to be on a par with the male song lyricist Nalan Xingde 納蘭性德 (1655–1685) of the Qing.[272]

Both Gu Taiqing's and Yihui's poetry collections provide a wealth of information for contextualizing Gu's painting-poetry practices. While Gu's *Tianyouge ji* "reads like a record of her daily life," Yihui's poetry collections were also organized chronologically with informative titles and prefaces to chronicle the stages of his life.[273] The emphasis on love and emotions intrinsic to song lyrics enabled the couple to utter their subtle feelings supplement to the account in their *shi* poems. Based on an investigation of both Gu and Yihui's writings, this chapter contends that Yihui and the family tradition of the Mansion of Prince Rong 榮親王府 (later known as the Southern Mansion of Prince Chun 醇親王府南府) played a role in Gu's engagement with painting-poetry. Influenced by the enthusiasm

[271] Translated by Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush*, 636.

[272] Kuang Zhouyi, "Xileng yinshe ben *Donghai yuge* xu" 西冷印社本《東海漁歌》序, 709.

[273] Fong, "Engendering the Lyric," 136-7.

that the family she married into had for this inter-artistic form, the female painter-poet gave free rein to her talent to convey her subjectivity in her painting-poems and eventually exceeded her husband's fame in the poetic subgenre.

Gu Taiqing's Early Life and Yihui's Painting-Poetry

Details about Gu Taiqing's early life remain obscure because there are very few extant records of her pre-marital existence. Based on her poetry collection and some historical documents, modern scholars have generally agreed that she was a descendant of a noble Manchu family in the Qing, the Xilin Gioro clan 西林覺羅氏, which belonged to the Bordered Blue Banner 鑲藍旗.[274] Her grandfather was E Chang 鄂昌 (?–1755), who was the nephew of Grand Secretary E'ertai 鄂爾泰 (1677–1745). As one of Emperor Yongzheng's (r. 1722–1735) most trusted mandarins, E'ertai continued to serve at court during the subsequent Qianlong reign and was praised by Emperor Qianlong as one of the most prominent scholars of the Qing.[275] However, after E'ertai's death, E Chang was implicated in Emperor Qianlong's literary inquisition of Hu Zhongzao 胡中藻 (1695–1755), a disciple of E'ertai, which led to the aristocratic household's downfall. E'ertai's memorial tablet was removed from The Temple of Eminent Statesmen 賢良祠 (*Xianliang ci*) and E Chang was ordered to commit suicide. As a descendant of a political criminal, Gu Taiqing's father E Shifeng 鄂實峯 was forced to work as an itinerant scholar and his family had to

[274] See, for example, Zhang, *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 1.

[275] *Qingshi gao* 清史稿, 370.10549.

move to the outskirts of Beijing to live in the Light Division Camp in the Fragrant Hills 香山健銳營.[276]

Although some historians believe that the misfortune of E'ertai's family was a result of factional disputes, Liu Sufen has attributed it to the Manchu household's overt adoption of the Han Chinese lifestyle and literary culture, which violated Emperor Qianlong's taboo.[277] Despite the financial and emotional turmoil, the Manchu household's family tradition ensured that their descendants were well-educated after the downfall.[278] As demonstrated in their later poetic correspondence, Gu Taiqing and her siblings were capable of reading and writing. Since E'ertai's granddaughter married Yongqi 永琪 (1741–1766), the Prince Rong of the First Rank (*heshuo rong qinwang* 和碩榮親王), Gu Taiqing may have had opportunities to visit her aunt, who was also Yihui's grandmother, in the Mansion of Prince Rong.[279] Since they both loved literature and art, they may have even been attracted to each other before their marriage. Although they were born in the same year, Gu Taiqing ranked higher than Yihui in terms of family seniority and they formed an aunt-nephew relationship. Based on the old Manchu custom, their marriage was not considered incest, and the arrangement is a reflection of their Manchu origins.[280]

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[276] Zhang, *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Women*, 52.

[277] Liu Sufen 劉素芬, "Wenhua yu jiazu" 文化與家族, 38.

[278] Zhang, *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Women*, 52-3.

[279] Jin, "Manzhou nü ciren Gu Taiqing he *Donghai yuge*," 795. However, some scholars believe that Gu Taiqing lived in the south before her marriage. See, for example, Liu, "Wenhua yu jiazu," 45.

[280] Qi Gong 啟功, "Gu Taiqing ji xu" 顧太清集序, 2.

Yihui inherited the diminished noble title, Prince of the Third Rank (*duoluo beile* 多羅貝勒), and the Mansion of Prince Rong from his grandfather, Yongqi, and his father, Mianyi 綿億 (1764–1815), Prince Rongke of the Second Rank (*rongke junwang* 榮恪郡王). The three generations of princes in the Mansion of Prince Rong were all deeply fond of literature, painting, and calligraphy, which gave rise to rich literary and artistic cultivation and collections within the royal residence.[281] In 1820, at the age of twenty-two, Yihui recorded in a long poem title that he had an ongoing project that involved compiling his late father's artistic works with inscriptions and also that he had accumulated two hundred and fifty poems he himself had written from the age of twelve onwards:

> Since last May, I have been respectfully editing my late father's calligraphy and paintings, together with inscriptions, collections, and portraits, and anthologizing them into three volumes, entitled *The Collection of Treasured Writing in the Study of Southern Rhyme*. It is now more than halfway complete. I started to preserve my poems at the age of twelve and up to the age of nineteen, I have obtained one hundred poems. I organized them into *The Collection Under Twenty* [literally, "uncapped collection"].
>
> 余自去年五月，恭校王考書畫並題跋、收藏、寫真，錄成三卷，名之曰《南韻齋寶翰錄》，今已就大半。余自十二歲以後存詩，至十九歲得百首，爲《未冠集》。[282]

[281] Jin, "Manzhou nü ciren Gu Taiqing he *Donghai yuge*," 795.

[282] *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 380.

The Collection Under Twenty is later included as the first volume (*juanshou* 卷首) in his early anthology of *shi* poems predating his marriage to Gu Taiqing, *Guanguzhai miaolian ji* 觀古齋妙蓮集 (Collection of the Fine Lotus in the Study of Viewing Antiques). In the collection, the young prince composed a cluster of painting-poems that demonstrate his expertise in poetry and painting, in keeping with his long family tradition of artistic and literary learning.

For instance, in a poem on his own horse painting, entitled "Self-Inscribed on Painted Horse as a Gift to Master Han Yunxi" 自題畫馬贈韓雲溪師傅, he not only pays tribute to Wang Wei and Du Fu, his predecessors in the painting-poetry tradition, but also participates in the classical debate regarding Han Gan's horse paintings that was initiated by Du Fu: "Running into the vast expanse, the horse can be entrusted until death. / This intention is known by me and Han Gan" 至死堪託無空闊，此意吾知韓幹知.[283] Yihui inscribed on his portrait for the first time with "Self-Inscribed on the *Portrait of Holding the Writing Brush*" 自題拈毫小照 (fig. 4.1). Mao Wenfang has identified the source portrait for this painting-poem as the one included in Zhang Zhang's *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji* and she has further attributed the Buddhist motif in the poem to the prince's feelings of vicissitude after witnessing the death of his granduncle, Emperor Jiaqing (r. 1796–1820), in the same year.[284] However, Yihui also dwells on the relationship between himself and his portrait as self and other in the poem, which becomes a recurring motif in his later painting-poems on portraits: "The only thing that is hard to differentiate is the other and self, / The most

[283] Ibid., 385.

[284] Mao, *Juanzhong xiaoli yi bainian*, 316

difficult thing to resemble is the spirit" 不易區分惟物我，最難相肖是精神.[285] While the philosophical musing about self and other can be traced to Buddhist and Daoist doctrines, it is also one of the recurrent themes in the painting-poetry tradition. By identifying the "spirit" (*jingshen* 精神) as the key to setting himself and his portrait apart, Yihui showed his familiarity with the painting-poetry tradition.

As indicated by their titles, *Guanguzhai miaolian ji* is normally considered a collection of correspondence with his principal wife, Miaohua 妙華 (1798–1830), and his first anthology of song lyrics, *Xiechun jingshe ci* 寫春精舍詞 (The Lyric in the Study of Writing the Spring), is devoted to his later romance with Gu Taiqing.[286] Among the numerous song lyrics on paintings in the anthology, Yihui's affection for a beautiful woman depicted in a painting, expressed to the tune of "The Moonlight is Pure" 月華清 and subtitled "A Rhapsody of the Back of the Beauty in the Painting" 賦畫中背面美人, is reminiscent of his love affair with Gu Taiqing: "I remember that we used to meet in the land of immortals in my dream. / I saw your sorrowful face in the mirror once. / You said, 'To avoid gossip, please don't tell others that my name is Xu Feiqiong'" 記閬苑、夢裏相逢，窺半面、鏡中愁絕。饒舌，許飛瓊姓名，對人休說.[287] This line alludes to the mid-Tang poet Xu Chan's 許瀍 poem about visiting immortals 遊仙詩 (*youxian shi*), "Recording a Dream" 記夢. The poet was advised by Xu Feiqiong, the beautiful maid of the Queen Mother of the West (*Xi Wangmu* 西王母), to remove her own name from the original poem

[285] *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 400.

[286] Xu Hongquan 胥洪泉, *Gu Taiqing ci jiaojian* 顧太清詞校箋, 3.

[287] *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 424.

because she intended to hide her existence from the mundane world.[288] This line epitomizes Yihui's marriage with Gu Taiqing because they had to go through the same arduous process of concealing her real identity—in this case, as the descendant of political criminal—from the world outside the Mansion of Prince Rong.

Due to Gu Taiqing's problematic family history, other members of the Mansion of Prince Rong did not approve her marriage to Yihui. Nevertheless, Yihui brought their relationship to fruition by registering his bride as the daughter of Gu Wenxing 顧文星, a Han commandant in his household.[289] In the year that they were married, Yihui wrote two poems on Gu Wenxing's murals and painted screens commissioned by Mianyi: "Song of the Painting on a Wall in the Hall of Knowing Pleasure" 知樂堂畫壁圖歌 and "Inscribed on the Painted Screen of Spring Water by the Late Commandant Gu Wenxing" 題故護衛顧文星春水壁障. In the first poem, Yihui commemorates Gu Wenxing's painting techniques and loyal service to his late father by describing his two paintings depicting the Peach Blossom Spring (*taohua yuan* 桃花源) on the eastern and western walls in the Hall of Knowing Pleasure located inside the Mansion of Prince Rong:

He served the late prince for thirty years,	侍我先王三十年，
And his painting skills show his deep comprehension of Caodong Chan.	畫法深參曹洞禪。
His dry bones were buried in the wasteland for ten years,	十載枯骨埋荒煙，

[288] *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記, Volume 70.

[289] See Zhang, *Kuangdai cainü Gu Taiqing*, 3. Another hypothesis about her change of surname is that she was adopted by a bondservant family surnamed Gu. See Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush*, 630.

Later generations should transmit his fame via these paintings. 後世當以此畫傳。[290]

In the third line, Yihui reveals that it had been ten years since the commandant's passing. With the exception of these two painting-poems, Yihui did not mention anything about the commandant in his poetry collection, so his commemoration in this particular year was probably related to the new identification of Gu as Gu Wenxing's daughter in order to fulfill their marriage.[291] Moreover, the poem reflects the late Prince Rongke's interest in the arts.

Yihui's painting-poems demonstrate the inter-artistic appreciation that reigned within the Mansion of Prince Rong for generations. The prince wrote painting-poems throughout his life for important occasions and pastimes. For instance, after the birth of his youngest son with Gu Taiqing, Zaitong 載同, he inscribed eight poems on Zhou Chen's 周臣 (style name Dongcun 東村, 1460–1535) *Painting of Transmitting Classics* 傳經圖 to express his ardent expectations for this son.[292] When Zaitong passed away before his first birthday, Yihui buried the painting with him and followed the rhyme of his eight painting-poems to write another poem that mourns the loss of his young son.[293] Idema has pointed out that Manchu men rarely depicted the sadness caused by the death of their children, with Yihui's painting-poems serving as an exception in this case.[294] Following on her husband's

[290] *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 435.

[291] Ibid., 728.

[292] See Yihui, "Ti Zhou Dongcun *Chuanjing tu*" 題周東村傳經圖, *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 558.

[293] See Yihui, "Shier yue ershier ku jiuer Zaitong, yong ti Zhou Dongcun *Chuanjing tu* ba jueju yun, ji yi citu wei xun. Tuwei yuanba yue, xiazhi qianyiri wanfan hou, chengxing yihui, de shi bashou" 十二月二十二哭九兒載同，用題周東村《傳經圖》八絕句韻，即以此圖為殉。圖尾原跋曰，夏至前一日晚飯後，乘興一揮，得詩八首, *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 570-1.

[294] Idema, *Two Centuries of Manchu Women Poets*, 31.

passion for the genre as well as family tradition, Gu Taiqing likewise began to produce painting-poems in her "companionate marriage."

An Alternative Status within the Mansion of Prince Rong

Gu Taiqing formally entered the Mansion of Prince Rong as Yihui's concubine in 1824 at the age of twenty-six and lived there until she was asked to move out with her children following the prince's untimely death in 1838, when they both turned forty years old. The fourteen years of blissful marriage in the royal residence constitute the happiest stage of Gu's life. After Miaohua passed away in 1830, the prince did not take another wife or concubine, so the two of them provide a rare case of a monogamous relationship in the pre-modern Chinese royal family. They enjoyed each other's companionship and intellectual rapport for eight years until Yihui passed away. While each one of them composed more than one thousand *shi* and *ci* poems throughout their lives, the quantity of the poems they exchanged over the course of fourteen years is the most of any poetic correspondence between married couples in pre-modern China.[295] Each of them wrote more than one hundred poems to exchange with each other and around one-quarter of these exchange poems are painting-poems.[296]

Normally, in the late imperial period marriage symbolized another phase in a woman's life cycle due to the new roles and duties assigned to her by the marital family. However, living in disguise as Gu Chun, Gu Taiqing's identity underwent dual transformations when she entered the Mansion of Prince Rong as Yihui's concubine. In

[295] Zhang, *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 5.

[296] Based on Zhang Juling's list of the couple's poems of *changhe* 唱和 (singing in harmony). For the list, see *Kuangdai cainü Gu Taiqing*, 75-88.

addition to leaving the role of a maiden to become a concubine, she also left behind her identity as a Manchu woman to identify as a Han bondservant's daughter. A contemporary of Gu Taiqing, Yun Zhu, wrote a biography about her in *Guochao guixiu zhengshi ji* and introduces her in the following way: "Gu Taiqing: courtesy name Zichun, belonging to the Han Banner, the concubine of Prince of the Third Rank Yihui" 顧太清：字子春，漢軍人，多羅貝勒奕繪側室.[297] Although Gu Taiqing's poetry collection does not attest to this, one of Yun Zhu's descendants indicates that the two renowned female painter-poets were acquainted with each other.[298] Yun Zhu's record of Gu Taiqing's identity as a Han woman implies that her Manchu identity was concealed from the world outside the Mansion of Prince Rong.

Like Miaohua and other gentry women, Gu Taiqing had received a proper education from her once prestigious natal family prior to entering the Mansion of Prince Rong. Then, under the guidance of her husband, she greatly expanded her literary and artistic horizons. While she playfully composed some poems in the *xiangyan* style 香豔體 (fragrant and bedazzling style, also known as *xianglian ti* 香奩體), many of her poems also demonstrate her traditional roles as a virtuous wife, dutiful mother, and obedient daughter-in-law in accordance with the Confucian gender orthodoxy. After Miaohua passed away, Gu performed the family obligations of principal wife to manage the household with the status of concubine. Although she assumed the role of principal wife, her banishment after Yihui's death again manifests her status as a concubine. Her fluid role in the royal residence

[297] *Guochao guixiu zhengshi ji*, 20.1a.

[298] See Wang Ailan 王愛蘭 (1921–?), "Li Yimang chao peiben *Donghai yuge* tiba" 李一氓鈔配本《東海漁歌》題跋, 717.

suggests that she had an alternative status situated between the two conventional roles of principal wife and concubine.

Based on the evident increase in her production of painting-poems over the years, Gu Taiqing's marital family was a source of great inspiration for her engagement with the poetic subgenre. Furthermore, her increasing expertise in poetry and painting enabled her to represent gendered voices in painting-poems. The affectionate couple often appreciated paintings and exchanged poems that reflect their aesthetic tastes and express their emotions. Gu's earliest volume in *Tianyouge ji* collected her *shi* poems composed between the ages of twenty-eight and thirty-six, with approximately 40% of them being painting-poems. With a few exceptions, the majority of these painting-poems comment on the paintings by famous painters that include Li Tang 李唐 (ca. 1066–ca. 1150), Qian Xuan 錢選 (ca. 1235–ca. 1305), Ni Zan 倪瓚 (1301–1374), Shen Zhou 沈周 (1427–1509), Tang Yin 唐寅 (1470–1524), and Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470–1559), as well as two Ming-Qing female painter-poets, Wang Duanshu 王端淑 (1621–1701) and Chen Shu 陳書 (1660–1735).[299]

In "Ten Heptasyllabic Quatrains Inscribed on Yun Nantian's Album of Paintings" 題惲南田畫冊十絕句, Gu Taiqing inscribed one poem on each of the ten flower-and-bird paintings in an album by the eminent early Qing painter, Yun Shouping 惲壽平 (style name Nantian,1633–1690), in 1829. Yun Shouping's own poetic inscription on the album leaf of *Lilies* 百合 reads, "Ink spills in the golden pot, / Fragrant breeze fills the Jasper Garden. /

[299] Mao Wenfang has indicated that Gu Taiqing was in contact with Chen Shu, the celebrated female painter active during the Qianlong reign, through the exchange of painting-poems. See Mao, *Juanzhong xiaoli yi bainian*, 345. However, Chen Shu passed away more than sixty years before Gu Taiqing was born. Gu Taiqing inscribed two poems on Chen Shu's paintings. She most likely had access to these paintings through the imperial collection and her friend, Li Renlan 李紉蘭, because Li was the wife of the great-great-grandson of Chen Shu's son, Qian Chenqun 錢陳群 (1686–1774).

Sounds of a jade flute playing in the night with a bright moon, / A row of goddesses dance in cloudy dresses" 墨汁灑金壺，香風滿瑤圃。玉簫明月夜，一隊霓裳舞.[300] Rather than merely depicting the image, Gu incorporates the painter's original inscription in her last line of the poem on *Lilies*: "The painter's mature brush once inscribed poetic lines / [comparing the flower to] goddesses in cloudy dresses dancing at night in the Jasper Garden" 畫師老筆曾題句，瑤圃霓裳舞夜闌.[301] Likewise, in Yihui's matching painting-poems, "Twelve Heptasyllabic Quatrains Inscribed on Yun Nantian's Album of Paintings, Composed Together with My Concubine Taiqing" 題惲南田畫冊十二絕句同側室太清作, the prince joins his concubine to adapt the painter's original inscription into his last two lines on the same painting: "He self-inscribed the line of the ink in the golden pot, / A row of goddesses in cloudy dresses revolving in a serene and pure manner" 墨汁金壺自題句，霓裳一隊回幽清.[302]

The couple's exchange poems with a common motif and writing technique not only show their reverence for the painter's textual representation on his own images, but also their intellectual affinity for each other. As Gu wrote at the end of the painting-poems on Yun Shouping's painting, "Together we unrolled the painting by a master, / and gasped in admiration after one hundred and forty years" 明窗共展高人畫，百四十年一嘆欷.[303] The Manchu modern connoisseur Qi Gong (1912–2005) disclosed that he once saw this album of

[300] *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 12.

[301] Ibid.

[302] Ibid., 476.

[303] Ibid., 13.

paintings by Yun Shouping with the royal couple's painting-poems on each page. He observed the calligraphy of these poetic inscriptions in detail:

> Taisu used dark ink and the lady used light ink. I examined it closely and found that the lines in light ink were also written by Taisu, who intentionally changed the outward appearance of his brushwork and wielded the light ink to differentiate from his own writing. He knew that the lady was seemingly not proficient in the eight methods of calligraphy yet, or if she directly wrote on Nantian's paintings, she would inevitably be hesitant. Li Yi'an [i.e., Li Qingzhao] recorded the activity of reading and painting in the Hall of Returning, and the only thing she did not mention was calligraphy. Such an oft-told tale of changing his brushwork to write for his concubine supplements gaps in the historical record of former worthies did not possess. Moreover, Zhao Mingcheng mixed his own writings into Yi'an's song lyrics and he still could not cover up the classic line of "the person is more emaciated than the yellow flower." This anecdote was highly praised and transmitted then and now.
>
> 又曾見惲南田畫花卉冊，逐頁畫上有太素與夫人題句。太素用濃墨，夫人用淡墨。諦觀之，淡墨亦太素所書，特略變筆勢，運以淡墨以示別。知夫人於八法似未諳熟，或以直書南田畫上，未免躊躇耳。李易安記歸來堂中讀書館畫，獨未及筆硯之事，如此變體代書之佳話，亦足補前賢故實之所未備。又趙明誠以自作雜易安詞中，而不能掩"人比黃花瘦"句，為古今之所艷傳。[304]

According to Qi Gong, Yihui ghostwrote for Gu Taiqing when they inscribed their painting-poems on Yun Shouping's paintings because, at this initial stage of their marriage, she was

[304] Qi Gong, "Gu Taiqing ji xu," 3.

not skilled in or confident with her own calligraphy. Qi Gong believes that this anecdote does not serve to undermine Gu Taiqing and, furthermore, attests to the "companionate marriage" that enriched the traditional favorite pastimes between a literati couple as established by the exemplary pair Li Qingzhao and Zhao Mingcheng. In addition, Qi Gong notes that Gu Taiqing's literary fame would eventually surpass her husband's, just like her female precursor.

While these painting-poems on previous painters show that the artistic collection in the Mansion of Prince Rong and its network offered her access to these masterpieces, their simplicity and lack of female agency demonstrate that Gu Taiqing was still in the process of learning the skill of writing painting-poems under her husband's guidance. From the end of the first volume onwards, the increasing sophistication of her descriptions of images and the representation of subtle sentiments point to the maturation of her painting-poems. By the time she was thirty-seven, she began to fully partake in the Mansion of Prince Rong's family tradition, using painting-poetry as a central channel for self-representation and communication with family members and friends. The royal couple frequently inscribed their own and each other's paintings and portraits. She also inscribed poems on her own paintings as gifts for her mother-in-law and for Miaohua's oldest daughter, Mengwen 孟文.[305]

In 1834, Gu Taiqing wrote a song lyric on the portrait of Precept Master Zhang Jiaozhi 張教智 (courtesy name Kunhe 坤鶴, 1770–1840) to the tune of "Water Dragon

[305] See Gu, "Wei taifujin xie putao tuanshan jingti yijue" 爲太福晉寫蒲桃團扇敬題一絕 and "Zhegu tian: wei Mengwen xie donghua xiaofu bingti" 鷓鴣天·爲孟文寫冬花小幅並題, *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 14-5 and 186.

Chant”水龍吟, subtitled “Inscription for a Portrait of Old Man Zhang Kunhe: Written Using the Rhymes of Bai Yuchan’s ‘Herb-Gathering Path’” 題張坤鶴老人小照，用白玉蟾《採藥徑》韻.[306] Zhang Jiaozhi was the seventeenth-generation abbot of the White Cloud Monastery (Baiyun guan 白雲觀), the center of the Quanzhen School 全真 (Complete Perfection) of Daoism in Beijing, and the extant portrait of him in the monastery’s collection contains Gu Taiqing’s inscription of the song lyric in semi-cursive script (fig. 4.2). The postscript to the song lyric inscribed on the portrait states that the portrait was originally drawn in 1820 and that Gu inscribed her song lyric on it on March 24, 1835 in her studio, the Tower of Celestial Wandering, in the Mansion of Prince Rong (道光元年所傳舊像呈政座下時，道光十有五年歲在乙未三月廿四書於天遊閣). At the end, Gu referred to herself as “Taiqing, a junior student” 後學太清, in accordance with her role as a pupil who received Daoist instruction and rites from Zhang Jiaozhi. In contrast to her reluctance to inscribe on Yun Shouping’s painting album six years before, the smooth and adept handwriting demonstrates the mastery in calligraphy and song-lyric composition that the female painter-poet had acquired since then.

After making the acquaintance of several wives of the Han officials in Yihui’s literary circle in Beijing in 1835—Xu Yunjiang 許雲姜 and her older sister Xu Yunlin, Shi Shanzhi 石珊枝, and Li Renlan—Gu Taiqing began to frequently interact with these Han Chinese women and their family members mainly by writing painting-poems. Yihui sometimes also joined in their exchange of painting-poems, which speaks to his

[306] Translated by Beata Grant, “The Poetess and the Percept Master,” 334. Grant has examined Gu Taiqing’s Daoist activities centered in the White Cloud Monastery.

encouragement of his concubine's literary and artistic activities. For instance, when Xu Yunlin's daughter, Sun Jinglan 孫靜蘭, suffered an untimely death, her maternal grandmother, Liang Desheng 梁德繩 (1771–1847, courtesy name Chusheng 楚生, style name Old Woman in the Ancient Spring Studio 古春軒老人) drew *The Painting of Cloudy Shadow and Dreamy Traces* 曇影夢痕圖, based on a dream scene, to commemorate the granddaughter. She then self-inscribed twenty heptasyllabic quatrains on the painting and circulated the painting widely among her family and friends to solicit poetic inscriptions.[307] As Gu remarks in the preface to her song lyrics written to the tune of "Young Swallow Flew Away" 乳燕飛: "Poetic inscriptions filled the scroll, so I followed Xu Danru's rhymes to add two song lyrics" 題詠盈卷，遂次許淡如韻二闋.[308] Yihui had also followed the rhyme to inscribe a song lyric to the tune of "Song of Golden Thread" 金縷曲.[309] As Sun Jinglan had previously been betrothed to Xu Yunjiang's oldest son Ruan En'guang 阮恩光, the grandson of the eminent scholar-official Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1849), Gu Taiqing wrote another *shi* poem on the painting after the girl was entered into the Ruan family's genealogical register.

The numerous painting-poems on Liang Desheng's painting not only demonstrate that the action of inscribing poems on paintings was a common social activity in the elite circle, but also evince the social bonds that existed among the Mansion of Prince Rong, the

[307] See Wu Zao's preface to her song lyric on the painting, "Dongxian ge: ti *Tanying menghen tu*" 洞仙歌·題曇影夢痕圖, *Xiangnan xuebei ci* 香南雪北詞, 18b-19a.

[308] *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 52.

[309] Ibid., 669-70.

Xu family, the Ruan family, and other literati households.[310] As Gu Taiqing was introduced to these Han Chinese gentry women and their family members through Yihui's circle of friends, their exchange of painting-poems shows that the Manchu couple transcended their ethnic identities by actively assimilating and utilizing this traditional Han cultural form. In contrast to Yun Zhu, who was a Han Chinese woman married into an aristocratic Manchu family, Gu Taiqing represents another model of fusion between Manchu identity and Han culture. With her literary and artistic skills having matured and even surpassed Yihui, in 1837 Gu Taiqing wrote painting-poems on her own paintings and portraits that were to become among her most famous and helped solidify her renown as the finest female poet of the Qing.[311]

Self-Inscription and Self-Projection: Gu Taiqing's Painting-Poems in 1837

In 1837, the year before Yihui passed away and Gu Taiqing was expelled from the Mansion of Prince Rong, the female painter-poet reached the peak of her literary and artistic production. Yihui had left his official post two years before, so the couple had more time to take trips and enjoy their refined pastimes. Additionally, Gu Taiqing continued to interact with her female friends and their family members, largely through painting-poems. She became acquainted with another talented Han Chinese woman writer, Shen Shanbao, and over the course of their lives they developed a close friendship. This section will examine three of the song lyrics Gu inscribed in this year and how they complement the images in her

[310] Mao, *Juanzhong xiaoli yi bainian*, 337.

[311] See Zhang, *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 737 and 740. Zhang Zhang considers that Gu Taiqing's poetic skills began to exceed Yihui in 1835 and four of her painting-poems written in 1837 to be among her best works.

paintings and portraits by illustrating her gendered sentiments and aspirations. Yihui joined his concubine to write poems for each painting, mostly in the *shi* form, and this is sometimes considered a sign that he was incapable of matching Gu Taiqing's song lyrics at this stage of their marital life.[312] Gu further circulated her paintings and portraits among her female connections for additional poetic inscriptions.

One of her extant portraits, the *Portrait of Listening to the Snow*, was completed in this year (fig. 4.3).[313] In this portrait, Gu Taiqing is depicted with a hairstyle and garments that were popular among aristocratic women at the time. She is leaning against a bamboo balustrade to appreciate the falling snow outside. The smile on her face shows that she is delighted with the snowy landscape. Snow-covered plum blossoms and bamboo, which symbolize her virtue and taste in the literati tradition, grow in exuberant profusion outside the window. The background shows a glimpse of her room. A lighted lamp in the corner reveals that it is late at night; a section of a painting and two stacks of books on the wooden desk convey the painter-poet's literary and artistic pursuits. The absence of the conventional feminine and sensual images of a boudoir implies that the female painter-poet is either in her studio or has transformed her boudoir into a space for reading and painting.

Although it is unknown if the portrait was drawn by Gu Taiqing herself or by someone else, Gu undoubtedly intended for the portrait to establish her image as a female scholar.[314] Nevertheless, previous studies have generally neglected the meta-painting

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[312] Ibid., 737.

[313] Zhang Zhang took a photograph of the portrait reproduced by the contemporary painter Pan Jiezi 潘絜茲 (1915–2002) in 1978 and included it on the first page of *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*. Another color copy of the portrait is included in Jin Qicong and Jin Shi 金適, *Gu Taiqing ji jiaojian* 顧太清集校箋.

[314] Geng, "Mirror, Dream and Shadow," 144.

(picture-within-a-picture) in progress on the desk, merely concluding that Gu was only reading before taking a break to enjoy the view of the snow. The visual representation of women's activity of reading is prevalent in the Ming-Qing period thanks to the rise of women's literary culture. For instance, in one of Emperor Yongzheng's screens of twelve beauties 十二美人圖 (fig. 4.4) and Leng Mei's 冷枚 (ca. 1669–1742) *Weary of Reading in the Spring Boudoir* 春閨倦讀 (1724; fig. 4.5), each of the two beauties holds an open book.[315] The beauty in Leng Mei's painting is portrayed as taking a break from reading a volume of *Mingyuan shigui* 名媛詩歸 (Sources of Notable Women's Poetry), an anthology of women's poetry attributed to the editorship of the late-Ming scholar Zhong Xing 鍾惺 (1574–1625). A closer look at the painting on Gu Taiqing's desk shows that in addition to reading, the painter-poet has also been engaging in the project of painting the plum blossom—her favorite flower, as indicated by her poems and courtesy name Meixian (literally, "an immortal of plum blossoms")—that blooms outside her window.

Craig Clunas defines meta-paintings as the images "that are aware of their own status as images, and that are designed to prompt reflection (pun intended) on the nature of these particular paintings and of paintings as meaningful surfaces more broadly."[316] According to Clunas, women's association with meta-painting emerged at the latest with the publication of a woodblock illustration of *Mudan ting* in 1617, in which Du Liniang depicts her own

[315] For a detailed discussion of Emperor Yongzheng's screens of twelve beauties, see Wu Hung, *Feminine Space in Chinese Painting*, 448-62. James Cahill has paid attention to the erotic messages in Leng Mei's *Weary of Reading in the Spring Boudoir*. See Cahill, *Pictures for Use and Pleasure*, 182. For more discussion of Leng Mei's painting and the visual representation of women's reading and writing in late imperial China, see Julia M. White, "Educated and Probably Dangerous Women in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Chinese Painting," 23-33 and Sarah Handler, "Alluring Settings for Accomplished Beauties," 64-73.

[316] Clunas, *Chinese Painting and Its Audiences*, 80.

portrait by looking at her reflection in the mirror. The practice of exhibiting women's artistic activity in paintings became more common from the High Qing onwards. Clunas considers *The Thirteen Female Disciples of Garden Sui Seek Instruction at Lake Tower*, which was examined in Chapter 3, to be one such example. In the painting, one of Yuan Mei's female disciples, Liao Yunjin, is creating a painting with a plum blossom branch.[317] The interest in the visual representation of women's creation of meta-paintings is attributable to the celebration of women's culture in the Ming-Qing period.[318] Although Gu Taiqing is not directly shown painting the plum blossom in the *Portrait of Listening to the Snow*, the setting of her room suggests that the female painter-poet had been reading and painting, signifying her participation in the women's literary and artistic movement that flourished in the late imperial period. By depicting the way in which the snow distracts her from her cultural pursuits, the image adds another artistic dimension to reinforce her attachment to snow, which is a classic symbol of purity, lofty pursuits, and truth.

In the song lyric written for the painting to the tune of "Song of Golden Thread" and subtitled "Self-Inscribed on the *Portrait of Listening to the Snow*" 自題聽雪小照, Gu recreates the context of her actions and inner state that night to enrich the visual messages communicated by the painting:

Alone, I was reading in front of the faint lamp.	兀對殘燈讀。
I heard that outside the window,	聽窗前、
The wind was whistling,	蕭蕭一片，

[317] Ibid. 80-3.

[318] Ibid.

The cold sound struck on the bamboo.	寒聲敲竹。
I sat until late at night and the wind was even stronger	坐到夜深風更緊，
The walls were dim, and the snuff of the lamp was like a bean.	壁暗燈花如菽。
I felt that my emerald green sleeves,	覺翠袖、
And my clothes were so thin that I got goosebumps.	衣單生粟。
I stood up, hooked the curtains, and looked at the night scene.	自起鉤簾看夜色，
Weighing down the plum blossom branches was a myriad dots of jade in a current.	壓梅梢萬點臨流玉。
The flying snow was rapid,	飛雪急，
Ringing around the steep roof.	鳴高屋。
Jumbled clouds, dark and dim, pervaded the empty valley.	亂雲黯黯迷空谷。
Embracing the boundless land,	擁蒼茫、
Frozen flowers and cold pistils,	冰花冷蕊，
I could not distinguish the forest from the mountain.	不分林麓。
How many poetic sentiments repeatedly came to my ears?	多少詩情頻在耳，
The fragrance of flowers perfumed me with a rich scent.	花氣薰人芬馥。
I specifically painted the scene onto	特寫入、
The raw silk horizontal scroll of painting.	生綃橫幅。
Was it because I have been partial to snow all my life?	豈為平生偏愛雪，
It was because I wanted to preserve my true	

appearance for the human world.	為人間留取真眉目。
By the curving balustrade,	欄干曲，
I stood serenely by myself.	立幽獨。[319]

In the first stanza, Gu Taiqing indicates that she had been reading by the lamp in the room until she was interrupted by the wind and snow outside. Based on the first line of the second stanza, "Jumbled clouds, dark and dim, pervaded the empty valley" 亂雲黯黯迷空谷, the painter-poet was not in her studio, the Tower of Celestial Wandering in the Mansion of Prince Rong, but rather the Tower of Pure Breeze 清風閣 (Qingfeng ge) in their family villa, the Southern Valley 南谷 (Nangu), situated in Mt. Dafang 大房山 in the suburbs of Beijing. Yihui purchased the land and started to build their countryside estate and future cemetery in 1834. Three years later, the Tower of Pure Breeze and several other major elements were completed before the song lyric was written. The couple sometimes spent their leisure time there and wrote many poems about the family villa.[320] In Yihui's *shi* poem on his concubine's portrait, "Inscribed on Taiqing's *Portrait of Listening to the Snow*" 題太清聽雪小照, the first two lines echo Gu Taiqing's depiction of the mountain valley: "Flying white obscured the crowded mountains, / Cold clouds veiled the empty valley" 飛素暗群山，寒雲冪空谷.[321]

[319] *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 229.

[320] Zhang, *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 739-40. For a detailed discussion of their poems about the Tower of Pure Breeze, see Chang, "Self-Representation in Selected Poems of Gu Taiqing (1799–1877)," 63-88.

[321] *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 617.

In the second stanza of her song lyric, Gu Taiqing begins to describe the snowy scene she is beholding by the balustrade in the painting, which creates another landscape painting in the audience's imagination. In addition to reproducing the visual and auditory aspects of the scene, as previous scholars have noted, other sensations are also evoked in her depiction of the snowy night, including the feeling of chilliness (*shengsu* 生粟), the mental shifts involved in recalling poetic lines (*shiqing pin zai'er* 詩情頻在耳), the sweet fragrance of plum blossoms in front of her window (*huaqi xunren* 花氣薰人), and finally, her desire to preserve the scene in her painting as relayed in this line, "It was because I wanted to preserve my true appearance for the human world" 為人間留取真眉目.

The significance of the poetic imagery, "true appearance" (*zhen meimu* 真眉目, or literally, "true eyebrows and eyes"), is twofold. First, it refers to Gu Taiqing's own appearance as a middle-aged elite Manchu woman with literary and artistic talent, captured in the portrait to be transmitted in the human world.[322] The visual and poetic images in the portrait and song lyric such as the plum blossoms, bamboo, and snow denote her virtue and reclusive tendencies. As examined in previous chapters, Ming-Qing women adapted the images of plum blossoms and bamboo from the literati tradition for their own self-expression. In comparison to these two plants, the snow is an image unique to this female writer in Beijing because snow is rarely encountered in the Jiangnan area.[323] In the literati tradition, one of the major allusions of snow is Yuan An's 袁安 (?–92) early experience of being stuck in the snow; the scholar would rather have starved to death in poverty than ask

[322] Mao, *Juanzhong xiaoli yi bainian*, 328.

[323] Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush*, 636.

for help.[324] The story is later used to refer to a recluse's noble character. Gu Taiqing used the image of snow as the theme of her portrait to convey her righteousness and aspiration to retreat to the family mountain villa. Yihui matches his concubine's reclusive sentiment at the end of his poem by alluding to the hermit poet Tao Yuanming's "The Song of Returning Home" 歸去來兮辭: "Returning to the mountain, / We drink together and the stone turns green in spring" 歸去來山中，對酌春岩綠.[325]

In addition to the gendered intervention in the symbolism from the literati tradition, the image of snow leads to more connotations in the case of Gu Taiqing. The word "snow" (*xue* 雪) has the meaning of restoring one's reputation by revealing a truth that has been covered for a period of time (*zhaoxue* 昭雪, literally "shed light on snow"). As a Manchu lady who had to disguise herself as a Han Chinese woman for her marriage, Gu Taiqing probably also wants to preserve her true image as a means to transcend her fake identity. Furthermore, snow is associated with the Buddhist philosophy of emptiness and spiritual enlightenment in the religious framework of *Honglou meng*, which is consistent with Gu Taiqing's religious beliefs and interest in the novel. The tragic ending of the aristocratic household's downfall in *Honglou meng* is encapsulated by one line that represents a snowy scene: "Like birds who, having fed, to the woods repair, / They leave the vast expanse of white landscape desolate and bare" 好一似，食盡鳥投林，落了片白茫茫大地真乾淨.[326] As the first woman author who personally suffered from the collapse of her own aristocratic

[324] *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書, 45.1518.

[325] *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 617.

[326] Translated by David Hawkes with modifications, *The Story of the Stone*, 1.144.

family and later wrote a sequel to the novel, Gu was likely aware of the association between snow and the illusory nature of the human world.

Second, the "true appearance" can refer to her ongoing artistic engagement with the meta-painting in the portrait. Before this line, the female painter-poet explicitly depicts her own action of painting her portrait amidst the snow: "I specifically painted the scene onto, / The raw silk horizontal scroll of painting" 特寫入、生綃橫幅. In addition to the portrait, the meta-painting on her desk containing a fragment of plum blossoms outside the window is a perfect embodiment of her artistic project. In this way, the female painter-poet in the portrait is standing alone in front of the window to observe the world of snow for her own painting and song lyric—namely, the meta-painting in the portrait and this song lyric inscribed on the portrait. In his poem on her portrait, Yihui echoes his concubine with his comment that the snow scene and her feelings generated by it deserve to be commemorated in the portrait and/or the meta-painting: "This sentiment should be painted, / this view is really elegant" 斯情正堪畫，此景良不俗.[327]

In addition to her husband, Gu Taiqing also asked her friend Xu Yunlin to take the portrait to the latter's cousin, Wang Duan 汪端 (1793–1839), in the Jiangnan area to solicit a poetic inscription from the woman writer. Wang Duan then wrote eight quatrains on the portrait and recorded the event in her poem title, "My cousin Xu Yunlin came back from the capital and asked for my inscription on the royal lady Taiqing's *Portrait of Listening to the Snow*, so I followed Lady Huarui's palace style poetry to write eight quatrains to respond to her" 表妹許雲林自京師以太清福晉聽雪圖索題，爲效花蕊夫人宮詞體書八絕句應之.

[327] *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 617.

In her poems, she emphasizes Gu Taiqing's royal identity by describing her attire and makeup as that of a palace lady (*neijia zhuang* 內家妝). She further focuses on the image of the plum blossom in the portrait in order to praise her ethereal beauty and virtue. Instead of Li Yin's preference for the wild plum in the Ming-Qing transition as examined in Chapter 2, Wang Duan compares Gu Taiqing to the exquisite palace plum due to her royal status: "Its graceful fragrance filled the jade terrace in the fair spring, / After all, the palace plum is better than the wild plum" 曼香春霽滿瑤台，畢竟宮梅勝野梅.[328]

More significantly, Wang Duan mentions that she heard of the portrait from another woman writer, Cai Yusheng 蔡玉生, before Xu Yunlin brought it to her: "I knew the Woman Scholar Huayang in the past, / She told me the existence of the painting in the golden boudoir" 華陽女史曾相識，爲說金閨有此圖.[329] Although Cai Yusheng and other women's poems on the portrait are not extant, Wang Duan's poems indicate that Gu Taiqing had passed the portrait around to her connections so as to bond with other talented women writers. While Xi Peilan and other women in the Jiangnan area normally only made social contacts within the Jiangnan area by requesting poems on their portraits, Gu Taiqing's cross-regional interaction with the women in the south demonstrates her conscious effort to expand her social network, participate in women's culture, and perpetuate her literary and artistic fame.

Also in 1837, Gu Taiqing inscribed another song lyric to the tune of "Swallow Returns to the Roof Beam" 燕歸梁, subtitled "Self-Inscribed on the Painted Apricot" 自題

[328] *Ziran haoxuezhai shichao* 自然好學齋詩鈔, 10.33b.

[329] Ibid.

畫杏, on her extant painting, *Apricot Tree* 文杏圖 (1837; fig. 4.6). In the song lyric, Gu Taiqing recollects the joyous time when she went horseback riding with her husband on a spring excursion and encountered a beautiful apricot tree that she depicted in her painting:

Satisfied, we quickened our horses' hooves in the eastern wind.	得意東風快馬蹄。
By the slender grass and sandy embankment,	細草沙隄。
Several apricot branches were exuberant and splendid, reflected in the clear stream.	幾枝豐艷照清溪。
Past the weeping willow,	垂楊外，
And to the west of the small bridge.	小橋西。
When I painted it, I was afraid its spirit would not resemble the real one.	寫來還恐神難似，
The plump and the thin,	肥與瘦，[330]
Should agree.	要相宜。
Under the bright window, I ask you to inscribe it	明窗下倩君題，
Just to remember,	聊記取、
The time we once travelled together.	舊遊時。

Similar to Yihui's emphasis on the "spirit" in his earlier painting-poem examined above, Gu Taiqing is also concerned that her painted apricot does not resemble the real one spiritually. The next line uses "plump" (*fei* 肥) and "thin" (*shou* 瘦) to refer to the flowers and leaves,

[330] I transcribed the inscription on the painting. In the poetry collection, this line is "肥和瘦" in *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 239.

which alludes to her female precedent Li Qingzhao's famous line in her song lyric to the tune of "As If in a Dream" 如夢令: "The green one should be more plump, the red thinner" 應是綠肥紅瘦.[331] Ronald Egan has pinpointed that Li Qingzhao derives the word "thin" from Han Wo's 韓偓 (842–923) *shi* poem and uses it in a "highly original" way to imply the withered flowers.[332] However, Gu Taiqing employs the same word to refer to the growing apricots in early spring, which alters its sorrowful connotation in Li Qingzhao's song lyric to a positive one. At the end of the song lyric, she asks for a poetic inscription on the painting from her husband to recall their joyful outing. Based on the inscription she made on the painting, Gu Taiqing created the painting and inscribed the song lyric on it in semi-cursive script in the autumn of 1837: "Painted and inscribed on the nineteenth day of the eighth month in the autumn of the *dingyou* year during the reign of Daoguang" 道光丁酉秋八月十九寫並題. Therefore, they probably took the trip several months before that in spring.

In contrast to the cheerful tone of Gu Taiqing's song lyric, Yihui's *shi* poem inscribed on the painting in semi-cursive script as a response to his talented concubine's request manifests a sense of vicissitude, as if it is foreshadowing his death the following year. In this "Song of the Painted Apricot: Inscribed on Taiqing's Large Painting" 畫杏歌·題太清所作巨幅, Yihui first reiterates that Taiqing's painting reminds him of their spring outing and, in the face of autumn's desolate landscape, cheers his spirits. He then praises her skillful depiction of the painted apricot tree, which has grasped its springtime essence: "For what reason is it so filled with the vital energy of spring?" 春氣洋洋何以故.

[331] *Shuyu ci zhu* 漱玉詞注, 3.

[332] Egan, *The Burden of Female Talent*, 327-8.

Nonetheless, in the second half of the poem, the buoyant tone is soon overtaken by his lamentations about the unpredictable nature of fortune:

The painter was pleased with herself and told me:	畫師自喜向我云，
"I really did not spend today in vain."	今日真為不空度。
I heard that Zou Xiaoshan during the Qianlong reign	我聞乾隆年中鄒小山，
Once painted a huge tree with gorgeous flowers between the palace walls.	曾寫盤谷一樹行宮間，[333]
Emperor Gaozong liked it and inscribed imperial poems on it every year.	高宗愛之歲有御題詠，
And now, in the wind in the pines, on the mossy wall, wither their ruddy faces.	至今松風苔壁凋紅顏。
The rise and fall of everything in the world is like this,	世間萬事興廢有如此，
Thus, we know that fine flowers, fine paintings, and fine poems,	乃知好花好畫好詩，
Satisfy for no more than a moment.	得意不過片時看。[334]

By recalling the changing fortune of the flowers painted by the High Qing painter Zou Yigui 鄒一桂 (style name Xiaoshan, 1686–1772) from receiving Emperor Qianlong's yearly imperial poetic inscriptions to being deserted in the palace during the Daoguang reign (r. 1820–1850), Yihui bemoans the uncertainty of life. This feeling of disillusionment is probably related to the personal frustrations he had recently experienced in his career and

[333] This line is "曾寫盤谷一樹春光妍" in *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 629.

[334] This line is "得意不過片時間," ibid.

health. Moreover, as a royal member of the imperial family, Yihui was born in the same year that Emperor Qianlong passed away and he later witnessed the death of Emperor Jiaqing. Witnessing the mural falling into decay in the palace, the prince had likely sensed the Qing court's decline from its golden age, which led to his underlying sorrow about the dynasty.

At the height of their blissful marriage, Yihui was not the only one who was occasionally troubled by melancholy. In comparison to her aspirational and delighted voice in the previous two song lyrics, Gu Taiqing relays her grief in another song lyric to the tune of "Feelings Hard to Forget" 意難忘, subtitled "Self-Inscribed on the Painting of the Twin Purities of Plums and Bamboo" 自題梅竹雙清圖, on her painting in the same year:

Delicate fragrance is all along the path.	一徑幽香。
Beside luxuriant tall bamboo,	傍猗猗修竹，
Sparse shadows [of plum blossoms] sway.	疏影徬徨。
They slant horizontally in the inner courtyard,	横斜深院宇，
Coolly elegant by the little pond.	冷艷小池塘。
Right after snow	纔雪後，
Their fragrance emanates.	乍芬芳。
Holding a wine cup, I never speak.	儘無語持觴。
Close to midnight,	向夜闌、
I walk under eaves in search for these lines,	巡檐索句，
So much contemplation has been devoted.	特費思量。
Missing each other, we cannot speak our innermost feelings.	相思難話衷腸。

Thinking of the fair lady in the bare valley,	想佳人空谷，
She must suffer from the same heartbreak.	一樣情傷。
Within curtained windows, lamps are dim;	簾櫳燈黯淡，
Outside bamboo fences, moonlight is faint.	籬落月昏黃。
So many things—	多少事，
Feelings hard to forget.	意難忘。
As if I can bear it no more.	似不自禁當。
More frightening still—	更怕他、
In new sorrow and old dreams,	新愁舊夢，
I whiled away my years.	虛度年光。[335]

The song lyric begins with the author's description of the exquisite plum blossom trees and bamboo groves in the courtyard. Her textual depiction conjures up the visual image and fragrance of the two plants leaning together on a lonely night. The combination of the two plants is reminiscent of the plum blossoms and bamboo outside her window in the *Portrait of Listening to the Snow* examined above, further demonstrating her attachment to these two images. The poetic images of "sparse shadow" (*shuying* 疏影) and "slant horizontally" (*hengxie* 橫斜) allude to Lin Bu's classic line, examined in Chapter 2, which was later developed by Jiang Kui into a trope in the song lyric tradition.[336] The spatial orientation then

[335] *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 235.

[336] See Jiang Kui's song lyrics, "Anxiang" 暗香 and "Shuying" 疏影, *Jiang Baishi ci jianzhu* 姜白石詞箋註, 3.125-133.

shifts from the exterior courtyard to the author's own room to focus on her thoughts and inner torments.

In the second stanza, the phrase "the fair lady in the bare valley" (*jiaren konggu* 佳人空谷) alludes to Du Fu's poem, "The Fair Lady" 佳人. In this poem, a fair lady states that she was born into a good family, but since her natal family members were killed during the An Lushan Rebellion, she ended up living in poverty and suffered from an unhappy marriage. Recollecting her life experiences, the lady sighs for life's highs and lows: "The age hates those fallen in fortune, / all things blow with a candle in the wind" 世情惡衰歇，萬事隨轉燭.[337] The lady's association with bamboo in the last line of Du Fu's poem connects to the theme of the plant in Gu Taiqing's painting: "The weather is cold, her azure sleeves are thin, / at twilight she rests by tall bamboo" 天寒翠袖薄，日暮倚修竹.[338] Moreover, the lady's diminished circumstances clearly mirror the female painter-poet's own family history, which brought about the unforgettable hardship for her marriage with Yihui. Therefore, the "new sorrow and old dreams" (*xinchou jiumeng* 新愁舊夢) weighing on her mind in the last six lines suggest her past plights and current disguised identity that are at the source of her constant woe.

Yihui wrote a matching song lyric on his concubine's painting to the same tune, subtitled "Inscribed on Taiqing's Painting of the Twin Purities of Plums and Bamboo" 題太清梅竹雙清圖. After depicting her painting in the first stanza, in the second stanza Yihui considers his concubine from his perspective and empathizes with her sorrow:

[337] Translated by Stephen Owen, *The Poetry of Du Fu*, 7.15.

[338] Ibid.

When two people share a heart, they are	
as fragrant as an orchid.	同心其臭如蘭。
They can pick up the flower and smile,	儘拈來微笑，
And once enlightened, forget about words.	悟處忘言。
The fair lady's emerald sleeves are gauzy,	佳人翠袖薄，
The sylph's stone bed is cold.	仙子石床寒。
After several cups of wine,	杯酒後，
Her spirit is at the edge of a dream.	夢魂邊。
As if she secretly pities her fragrant years.	似暗惜芳年。
It evokes their yearning for each other,	惹相思，
And a spare affection,	閒情一片，
Which is hard to convey in the painting.	畫裏難傳。[339]

In the first three lines, Yihui successively employs Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist allusions to signify his spiritual affinity with his concubine. The meaning of the "same heart" and "picking up flowers" as the mutual understanding between two individuals in the first two lines have been scrutinized in Xi Peilan's case in Chapter 3. In the third line, "forget about words" (*wangyan* 忘言) alludes to the line in the Daoist canon, *Zhuangzi* 莊子: "Words are for catching ideas; once you've caught the idea, you can forget about the words. Where can I find a person who knows how to forget about words so that I can have a

[339] *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 694.

few words with him?" 言者所以在意，得意而忘言。吾安得忘言之人而與之言哉.[340] Because of Master Zhuang's longing for one "who knows how to forget about words," the word then refers to the empathy achieved by two like-minded individuals without communicating through words. After establishing their spiritual bonds, Yihui echoes Gu Taiqing's allusion to "The Fair Lady" and acutely discerns that she is mourning her traumatic youth. In the last line, the prince intriguingly points out that the image alone is not sufficient to transmit the female painter-poet's emotion, which needs to be supplemented with the textual explication of their painting-poems.

In the three song lyrics on her portraits and paintings written in 1837, Gu Taiqing represents her aspirations to immortality, the happiness of a spring outing, and the depression resulting from past trauma. She significantly transformed the convention of poetic and artistic images, including plum blossoms, bamboo, and snow, by signaling her virtue, religious thoughts, and the hidden tension between her true image and false identity. Through the unusual act of requesting poetic inscriptions on her portrait from the Jiangnan area, where the women's culture was at its most flourishing, the female painter-poet manifests a stronger ambition than previous women to develop her social connections and establish her fame. In hindsight, the phrase "new sorrow and old dreams" in the last song lyric tragically foreshadows another turning point her life would take the following year, which enhances the parallel between herself and the fair lady. As she was to write in a line later from outside the royal residence while reviewing the old poems she had exchanged

[340] Translated by Victor H. Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, 277.

with her late husband: “In a shabby lane, several houses, / How is it different from the feeling [when the fair lady was] in a bare valley” 陋巷數椽屋，何異空谷情.[341]

Beyond the Mansion of Prince Rong

On July 7, 1838, Yihui suddenly passed away due to illness and three months later, Gu Taiqing was ordered by her mother-in-law to move out from the mansion with her four children. She had to sell her golden phoenix hairpin in order to purchase a small residence in Yangma Ying 養馬營 where she lived temporarily. One year later, she moved again to Zhuanta Hutong 磚塔胡同.[342] Based on her *shi* poems, although she still occasionally visited the Southern Valley to attend her husband’s memorial services and the Mansion of Prince Rong to serve her mother-in-law when the old lady was sick, she never returned to the mansion permanently. When her grandson Pumei 溥楣 (1844–1894) inherited the noble title, State Duke of the First Rank (*feng’en zhenguo gong* 奉恩鎮國公), in 1857, the Mansion of Prince Rong had been given to Prince Chun, Yixuan 奕譞 (1840–1891), by imperial order and her marital family was moved to another residence around Dafo Monastery 大佛寺.[343] Therefore, Gu Taiqing relocated to a residence away from the Tower

[341] Gu, “Zi xianfuzi hongshi hou, yi bu weishi. Dongchuan jiandian yigao, juanzhong shi duo changhe. Chumu ganhuai, jiexi nanwang, sui fu shuzi. Fei gan you suoyuan, liaoji yusheng zhi buxing ye, jianshi Zhao Chu lianger” 自先夫子薨逝後，意不為詩。冬窗檢點遺稾，卷中詩多唱和。觸目感懷，結習難忘，遂賦數字。非敢有所怨，聊記予生之不幸也，兼示釗初兩兒, *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 103.

[342] For a specific timeline of her life events, see Jin and Jin, *Gu Taiqing ji jiaojian*, 775-6.

[343] *Gu Taiqing ji jiaojian*, 781.

of Celestial Wandering in the Mansion of Prince Rong, where she had appreciated paintings and exchanged poems with her late husband.

Normally, one of the primary reasons for a concubine being expelled from a polygamous household was an adversarial principal wife, as in the story of Xiaoqing.[344] But Gu Taiqing maintained an amiable relationship with Miaohua until the lady passed away in 1830. Another popular theory for her banishment is the scandal involving her and Gong Zizhen 龔自珍 (1792–1841), with some of his poems interpreted as evidence that they had a love affair; some modern scholars have, however, disagreed with this theory. For example, Zhang Juling has noted that Gong Zizhen's controversial poems provide a record of the connection between Gu Taiqing and the female members of the Gong household. Gong Zizhen's sister, Gong Zizhang 龔自璋, belonged to the same poetry club as Gu Taiqing's female friends in Hangzhou and she developed a friendship with Shen Shanbao. Therefore, Gu Taiqing was probably introduced to Gong Zizhang through Shen Shanbao when they visited Beijing and Gu then interacted with her and the Gong family in the same manner as with her other female friends and their households.[345]

As Gu Taiqing's descendants, Jin Qicong claimed that the reason for her misfortune is related to her problematic family background, which her mother-in-law could not accept even after fourteen years had passed. Based on the *shi* poems Gu Taiqing wrote after her husband's death, she had serious conflicts with Miaohua's son, Zaijun 載鈞 (1818–1857), who inherited Yihui's title as the legitimate son and cancelled many of Yihui's previous

[344] For a discussion of the story of Xiaoqing, see Widmer, "Xiaoqing's Literary Legacy and the Place of the Woman Writer in Late Imperial China."

[345] Zhang, *Kuangdai cainü Gu Taiqing*, 185-93.

projects. But Jin has indicated that these poems merely served as an emotional outlet for the writer to vent her resentment at having been expelled from the mansion. On top of the discord that had been accumulating since her marriage and the management of the Mansion of Prince Rong, Yihui passed away on the same day as her oldest son Zaizhao's 載釗 (1825–1881) birthday. At the time, the coincidence was considered an ominous sign that the concubine's son was going to bring harm to the legitimate son, so Yihui's mother had to ask her and her children to move out for Zaijun's protection.[346]

During her life outside the Mansion of Prince Rong, painting-poetry was still an indispensable medium for Gu Taiqing to connect with her family members, friends, and royal relatives. For instance, she once painted flowering crabapples and inscribed four quatrains at the request of Zaiquan 載銓 (courtesy name Yunlin 筠鄰, 1794–1854), Prince Ding of the Second Rank (*ding junwang* 定郡王).[347] Zaiquan played a role in mediating the conflict between Gu Taiqing and her marital family after she had been widowed, and her painting-poems, along with other poems written for him, express her gratitude to him and their connection in the royal clan. Other than self-representation and the expression of her sorrow, the female painter-poet's main motive for composing painting-poems had shifted to communicating with her children and sustaining her homosocial bonds with her *Qiuhong yinshe* 秋紅吟社 (Poetry club of autumn red), which was founded by her female friends to give her emotional support after she left the Mansion of Prince Rong.

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[346] Jin, "Yuanben *Tianyouge ji* kaozheng" 原本《天遊閣集》考證, 820-6. Liu Sufen has offered a more detailed discussion of Gu Taiqing's conflict with Zaijun due to their cultural differences. See Liu, "Wenhua yu jiazu," 56-8.

[347] See Gu, "Yunlin Zhuren yi si zheshan zhu hua haitang xian ti si jueju lai ji ci yuanyun" 筠鄰主人以四摺扇囑畫海棠先題四絕句來即次原韻, *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 162.

The woman writer was now composing more song lyrics on paintings than before for her (and Miaohua's) children. In addition to inscribing her oldest son Zaizhao's painting, she inscribed two painting-poems for Miaohua's second daughter, Zhongwen 仲文, at the latter's request. After Mengwen married a Mongolian feudal lord, Chedeng Bazar 車登巴咱爾 (1817–1852), the son-in-law also requested her poetic inscriptions on fan paintings.[348] These inter-artistic correspondences show that Gu Taiqing maintained a close familial relationship with Miaohua's daughters through painting-poetry. When her great-grandson Yuqian 毓乾 was born in 1864, she inscribed a song lyric to the tune "The Scenery is Beautiful" 風光好, subtitled "Playfully Inscribed On the Painting of Many Boys on the First Day of *Jiazi* in the Tongzhi Reign" 同治甲子元日戲題多兒圖 to express her happiness as an old woman: "Whose household specially dipped the painting brush, / to paint so many boys? / The good omen happily falls in the year of *jiazi*. / The joy is boundless" 誰家特染丹青筆，多男子。吉兆欣逢甲子年。樂無邊.[349]

As Grace Fong has pointed out, Gu Taiqing's occasional song lyrics adapted the tradition initiated by Su Shi and his literati coterie in the Northern Song for their "female literary and social context."[350] As a major component of her occasional song lyrics, the painting-poems she exchanged with her female friends in *Qiuhong yinshe* are also consistent with Fong's observation. For example, Shen Shanbao inscribed her self-portrait with "Self-

[348] See, for example, her song lyric, "Qingshan xiang songyin: Fanwang xingzhuang xu Chedeng Zanba'er yi saishang jing tuanshan zhuti" 青山相送迎：藩王杏莊婿車登巴咱爾以塞上景團扇屬題, *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 275.

[349] *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 296.

[350] Fong, "Engendering the Lyric," 136.

Inscribed on the *Portrait of Looking for Poetic Lines in the Plum Forest*" 自題梅林覓句圖 to display her talent as a woman: "I dare to be called an erudite scholar in the golden boudoir, / And identify myself as a jade butterfly in a past life" 敢向金閨稱博士，且從玉蝶認前身.[351] Gu Taiqing followed her to inscribe a song lyric to the tune of "Returning from Viewing Flowers" 看花回, subtitled "Inscribed on Sister Xiangpei's *Portrait of Looking for Poetic Lines in the Plum Blossom Forest*" 題湘佩妹梅林覓句小照, on the same portrait to applaud her friend's incomparable prowess: "Ice serves as your spirit and jade your origin, / Your extraordinary gift was given by heaven" 冰作精神玉作胎，天付奇才.[352]

As her female friends had to follow their husbands to go to official posts away from Beijing, they frequently sent *shi* and *ci* painting-poems to convey their longing for each other. In one of her painting-poems, "Self-Inscribed on the Painted Fan to Send to Renlan" 自題畫扇寄紉蘭, written for Li Renlan, who was in Henan Province 河南省 at the time, she expresses her sadness at being separated from her friend: "Listlessly, we gazed and missed each other across one thousand *li*, / in late spring, you happily unfold my poem written in early spring" 悵望相思千里隔，暮春欣展早春詩.[353] The last painting-poem Gu Taiqing was ever to compose was written in 1864, when she was sixty-six years old. She made it at the request of her female friend Xiang Pingshan 項屏山 and her son for their

[351] *Gu Taiqing ji jiaojian*, 694.

[352] *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 280.

[353] Ibid., 115.

landscape fan painting. She gradually lost her eyesight in the last decade of her life and ceased communicating through painting-poetry.

Conclusion

Some previous scholars have shed a negative light on the large quantity of Gu Taiqing's painting-poems, criticizing her limited poetic scope as an elite Manchu woman.[354] By closely examining her painting-poems composed at the different stages of her life, I have shown that the woman painter-poet created a space in her painting-poetry for self-representation and social networking, particularly from 1837 onwards. After assimilating the inter-artistic tradition of her marital family, she established her subjectivity and her stature as an accomplished woman artist. Gu's excellence in painting-poetry demonstrates that she rose well above her obscured identity and marginal status in the royal circle caused by her problematic family history. Gu Taiqing serves as an exemplar of Ming-Qing women's culture and her painting-poetry in the *shi* and *ci* forms demonstrate the maturation of women's painting-poetry by the late Qing.

[354] See, for example, Xia Weiming 夏緯明, "Qingdai nü ciren Gu Taiqing" 清代女詞人顧太清, 98-103.

Conclusion

Over the course of its four chapters, this dissertation has surveyed the history of women's painting-poetry, examined the popular thematic concerns in Ming-Qing women's painting-poems, and traced the development of women's painting-poetry from the late Ming to the late Qing through three case studies of three women painter-poets. Compared to other poetic modes, the inter-artistic nature of painting-poetry offered women writers an ideal vehicle to showcase their literary and artistic prowess in late imperial China, a period that featured the combination of textual and visual representations. As previous scholarship has shown, writing poetry gave women a means to express themselves; yet their engagement in painting opened up even more space for them to expand their self-/representations and social networking, as evidenced by their painting-poems and extant source paintings.

Ronald Egan has observed that the iconic female song lyricist, Li Qingzhao, was promoted to be a "multitalented lady" in the Ming-Qing period during the rise of women's literary and artistic culture.[355] As examined in Chapter 1, Cao Zhenxiu also redefines the image of exemplary women in her painting-poems by depicting women's participation in a wide range of activities. Against the backdrop of burgeoning women's culture, Ming-Qing women's extensive production of painting-poetry is a valuable textual source that also brings in cross-media visual materials, allowing for a thorough evaluation of women's talents and subjectivities in the connections between text and image. Binbin Yang has brought up the useful concept of a "semiotic continuum" whereby text and image are "echoing and reinforcing each other and sometimes creating a dynamic interplay that

[355] Egan, *The Burden of Female Talent*, 247.

enriches and complicates the messages of the painting."[356] Moreover, when an image is not available, viewers may reconstruct it based on textual accounts in this "semiotic continuum."[357] Painting-poetry and its source paintings clearly create such a space for a "semiotic continuum" to investigate women's voices in response to paintings even if the source paintings are not extant.

However, as shown in my study, when the source paintings are available in some cases, women's self-/representations are often at their most powerful due to the complementary textual and visual indicators in their poems and paintings. Although several Western and pre-modern Chinese critics have questioned the interchangeability between poetry and painting due to their parameters and distinct modes of expression, painting-poems together with their extant source paintings as a "semiotic continuum" fully takes advantage of the strengths of the two arts for individual self-expression.[358] Alfreda Murck has employed Zheng Xia's 鄭俠 (1041–1119) admonition to Emperor Shenzong of Song (r. 1067–1085) with his painting of refugees to exhibit that image may triumph over text to illustrate "a quantity of detail with an immediacy that words lack."[359] In addition to direct visual representation, the different genres of painting may significantly broaden the traditional poetic thematic concerns because a painting-poem normally follows the theme of its source painting. For instance, the Qing female writer Wang Ling 王玲 inscribed a group

[356] Yang, *Heroines of the Qing*, 51.

[357] Ibid., 54.

[358] For the incompatibility between painting and poetry, see, for example, Lessing, *Laocoon* and Zhang Dai 張岱 (1597–ca. 1684), "Yu Bao Yanjie" 與包嚴介.

[359] Murck, *Poetry and Painting in Song China*, 39.

of eight poems on the painting of the netherworld, entitled "People of the Past Painted Eight Views in the Netherworld, I Playfully Inscribed Eight Poems on Them"昔人有作冥中八景者戲擬八首.[360] Following the eight views depicted in the painting, the female writer made vicarious travels to the underworld and described her personal responses to each of the scenes in her poems. This kind of vicarious experience can also be found in women's poems on landscape paintings, in which women as viewers and sometimes creators of paintings obtained more freedom to spiritually roam the regions restricted by their gender codes and physical limits.

While painting enriched the thematic concerns of poetry, the latter adds emotional depth to painting in return. As Yihui remarks in his song lyric on Gu Taiqing's painting of plums and bamboo, their empathy and affections are "hard to convey in the painting" (*huali nanchuan* 畫裏難傳). In the case of Gu Taiqing, *The Portrait of Listening to the Snow* presents a direct illustration of her appearance, virtue, and cultural pursuits through the image and its coded setting, whereas the female painter-poet articulates her innermost aspiration in the song lyric: "I wanted to preserve my true appearance for the human world." In this way, only a full investigation of her portrait and song lyric inscribed on it can make us perceive the messages the female painter-poet intended to relay.

Although a painting-poem follows the theme of the source painting, writers may link the image to their real lives and represent their sentiments inside and outside the painting. For instance, Li Yin often expresses her concern that her painting cannot capture the charm of plum blossoms in her poems. In her "Inscribed on the Painting of Touring the Eaves and

[360] *Xinglou yincao* 杏樓吟草, 5a-b.

Searching for Laughs” 題巡檐索笑圖, Zhang Zao 張藻 (1709–1780) states that the painted plum blossoms cannot surpass the real ones she herself has planted: “There are many [plum blossoms] planted with my own hands in my hometown, / I am afraid that the painting can hardly be compared with them” 故園多手植，圖畫恕難如.[361] Therefore, rather than merely document and describe the source painting, painting-poetry is an accumulation of textual responses to paintings related to the writer’s subjectivities.

As the same painting may generate a variety of reactions from poets, painting-poetry was utilized as a predominant medium for social networking in late imperial China thanks to the vogue of circulating paintings for poems within the circles of cultural elites. Ming-Qing women’s instrumental usage of painting-poetry gained them membership in the cultural community and enabled them to construct their own social connections. As shown in Xi Peilan’s case, the female painter-poet adopted her painting-poetry to network with Yuan Mei’s group of female disciples and her local women’s community in the High Qing. In addition to her own song lyric inscribed on it, Gu Taiqing also requested poems on her *Portrait of Listening to the Snow* from Wang Duan to initiate cross-regional communications with the talented women in the Jiangnan area in the late Qing. Although Gu normally interacted with her female friends and their households, she refused the request made by Wang Duan’s father-in-law, Chen Wenshu 陳文述 (1771–1843), to endorse the poetry collection he had made with works by his female disciples later because she “despised his behavior” 鄙其為人 of accepting female disciples in the style of Yuan Mei.[362] Her negative view, in contrast with Xi Peilan’s active participation in Yuan Mei’s

[361] *Peiyuantang shiji* 培遠堂詩集, 4.16b.

[362] *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*, 116.

community, reflect women writers' dynamic reactions to the controversial mixed-sex poetry societies in the Qing.

Finally, Liang Desheng's painting of her late granddaughter filled with poetic inscriptions suggests that painting-poetry was also a site for mourning among the cultural elites in the Qing. Xi Peilan's poetry collection contains many poems on women's portraits to commemorate them. When her own son passed away, she also requested a poem from Qu Bingyun on her painting of her child's rebirth.[363] Likewise, as mentioned in Chapter 4, Yihui inscribed poems on Zhou Chen's painting when his young son passed away. The social practice of painting-poetry as a possible ritual to mourn the deceased may merit further research.

Based on poets' many subjective responses to a source painting, painting-poetry also offers materials for investigating gender differences. As examined in Chapter 1, Zheng Yunduan criticizes Emperor Xuanzong in her "Inscribed on the Painting of Riding with Emperor Ming of Tang" for sacrificing Consort Yang in exchange for his own safety: "How come the day that he escaped west, / Was not a time to saddle up together?" Another male poet in the Yuan, Song Wu 宋無 (1260–1340), produced a poem under the same title, "Painting of Riding with Emperor Ming of Tang" 明皇並轡圖:

Sanlang sank into drunkenness and Yuhuan followed, 三郎沈醉玉環隨，
Instead of getting into the golden chariot, he asked for horses to ride. 不上金輿索馬騎。
When he was old and returned alone to the Southern Palace, 老大獨歸南內裏，
His flowing charm was no longer the same as

[363] See Qu, "Daohua zhuti lingsi A An chongsheng tu" 道華囑題令嗣阿安重生圖, *Yunyulou ji*, 2763.

the time when they saddled up together. 風流無復並鞍時。[364]

While Zheng Yunduan and Song Wu depict the image in the painting in a similar manner in the first two lines, Song elicits the emperor's request to ride a horse with his consort in a drunken state. The added detail displays his "flowing charm" (*fengliu* 風流) and creates a contrast with his loss of power in the last two lines. The Southern Palace (*nannei* 南內) refers to the Xingqing Palace 興慶宮 in the capital city Chang'an 長安 (modern-day Xi'an 西安), where Emperor Xuanzong enjoyed the height of his political dominance and later lived in his retirement after the An Lushan Rebellion. In comparison to Zheng's sympathy for Consort Yang's tragic death, Song's attention centers on Emperor Xuanzong's change of fortune without mentioning the consort's whereabouts. Although other social and personal factors can also play a role in a poet's interpretation of a painting, the greater likelihood of shared values in relation to women's collective experiences and perspectives is the motivation for this research into women's literary and artistic production in pre-modern China.

I have shown how Ming-Qing women consciously produced a large number of painting-poems to make use of the inter-artistic nature of the poetic subgenre to represent their subjectivities, build familial and social networks, and perpetuate their images and reputations as talented women in this dissertation. The growing gender awareness and expertise in their painting-poetry demonstrate that a female subculture of painting-poetry was, in accordance with Elaine Showalter's theory, forming during the late imperial period. After Gu Taiqing's painting-poetry, women writers continued to compose painting-poems in

[364] *Quan Yuan shi* 全元詩, 19.369.

the late Qing and the Republican Period. For example, in "Inscribed on the Painting of Ten Thousand *Li* of Rivers and Mountains, In Response to a Japanese Friend's Request" 題千里江山圖，應日人之索, the revolutionary and feminist Qiu Jin 秋瑾 (1875–1907) expresses her wish to save the country from the Qing regime and from foreign invasion: "How can I bear to see the painting change its color, / or let the rivers and mountains suffer from the ravage and turn to ashes?" 忍看圖畫移顏色，肯使江山付劫灰.[365] This poem was written during one of her trips between China and Japan to advocate for women's rights and look for solutions to save the country. Qiu Jin's painting-poem shows that a group of women pioneers in the late Qing were no longer satisfied with the "cultural androgyny" in their writings or the participation in cultural communities. Instead, they began to proactively fulfill their desire to attain men's freedom and partake in political actions. Representative of the last generation of Qing gentry ladies, Qiu Jin's painting-poem is indicative of her negotiation between classical poetic form and newly emergent thoughts. With the fall of the Qing, women painters and writers continued to develop the female subculture of painting-poetry in the Republican Period, which can be studied in future research.

[365] This poem is also known as "Huanghai zhou zhong Riren suo ju bing jian Ri E zhanzheng ditu" 黃海舟中日人索句并見日俄戰爭地圖. *Qiujin Shici ji* 秋瑾詩詞集, 5749.

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Figures

Figure 0.1-2 Wang Shen, *Misty River, Layered Peaks*, 1088. Scroll; ink and color on silk, 45 × 166 cm. Shanghai Museum, Shanghai.

Figure 0.3 Mi Youren, *Cloudy Mountains*, 1130. Handscroll; ink and color on silk, 45.5 × 646.8 cm. Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland. J. H. Wade Fund.

Figure 0.4 Zhao Ji (Emperor Huizong of Song), *Mountain Birds on a Wax-Plum Tree*, Song Dynasty. Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk, 82 × 52.8cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Figure 0.5 Zhao Ji (Emperor Huizong of Song), *Golden Pheasant and Cotton Rose Flowers*, Song Dynasty. Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk, 81.5 × 53.6 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.

Figure 0.6 Xu Wei, *Ink Grapes*, Ming Dynasty. Scroll; ink on paper, 64.5 × 165.4 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.

Figure 0.7 Zheng Xie, *Bamboo and Stone*, Qing Dynasty. Scroll; ink on paper, 71.5 × 130.5 cm. Jilin Provincial Museum, Changchun.

Figure 1.1-3 Cao Zhenxiu and Gai Qi, *Famous Women*, 1799. Album of sixteen leaves; ink on paper, 24.8 × 16.8cm. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Purchase, Bequests of Edna H. Sachs and Flora E. Whiting, by exchange; Fletcher Fund, by exchange; Gifts of Mrs. Harry Payne Bingham and Mrs. Henry J. Bernheim, by exchange; and funds from various donors, by exchange, 2016.

Figure 2.1-2 Li Yin, *Flowers and Birds*, detail, 1642. Handscroll; ink on paper, 24.6 × 640 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.

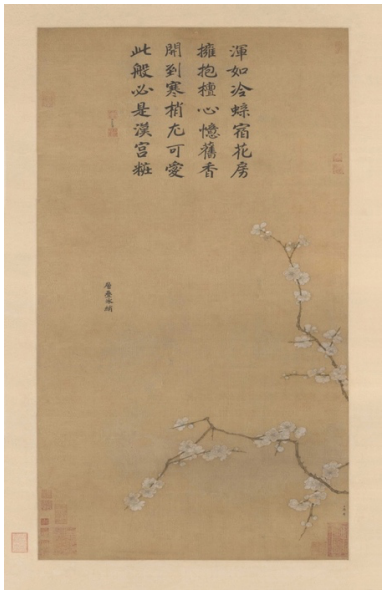

Figure 2.3 Ma Lin, *Layer upon Layer of Icy Tips*, 1216. Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk, 101.7 × 49.6 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.

Figure 2.4 Wang Mian, *Ink Plum*, Yuan Dynasty. Scroll; ink on paper, 50.9 × 31.9 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.

Figure 2.5 Li Yin, *Flowers of the Four Seasons*, detail, 1649. Handscroll; ink on satin, 25.4 × 581 cm. Collection of the Honolulu Museum of Art, Honolulu. Partial gift of Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell Hutchinson, 1994 (7855.1).

Figure 2.6 Li Yin, *Plum Blossoms and Sparrows*, 1658. Fan; ink on paper, 16.6 × 52 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

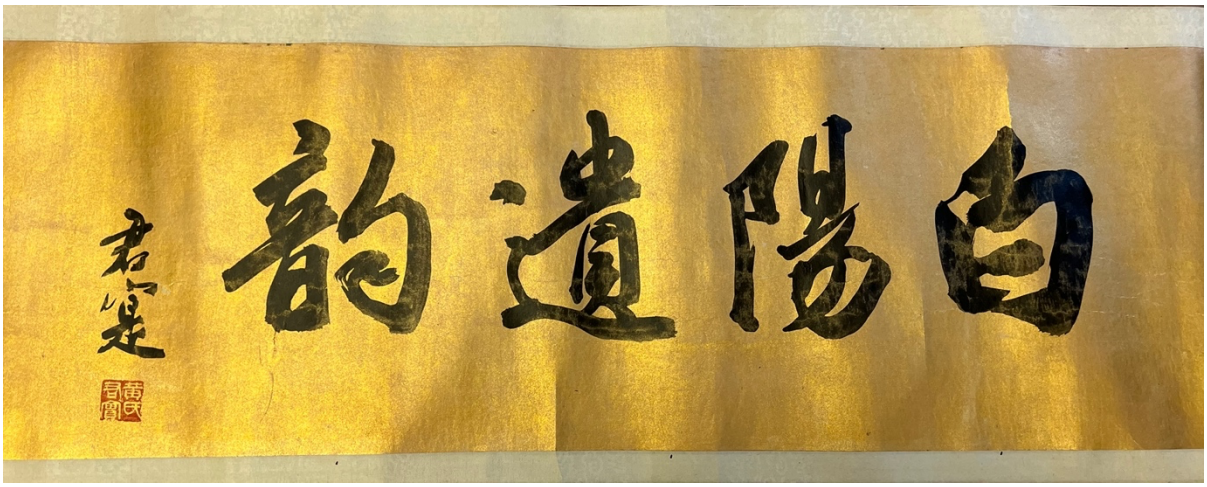

Figure 2.7 Huang Junshi, “Frontispiece,” in Li Yin, *Flowers of the Four Seasons*, detail, 1649. Handscroll; ink on satin, 25.4 × 581 cm. Collection of the Honolulu Museum of Art, Honolulu. Partial gift of Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell Hutchinson, 1994 (7855.1).

Figure 3.1-3 You Zhao and Wang Gong, *The Thirteen Female Disciples of Garden Sui Seek Instruction at Lake Tower*, 1796. Scroll; ink and color on silk, 41 × 308.4 cm. Shanghai Museum, Shanghai.

Figure 3.4 Xi Peilan, *Portrait of Lady Wanxian*, Qing Dynasty. Source: Qu Bingyun, *Yunyulou ji*, "Author Portrait and Eulogy." National Library of China.

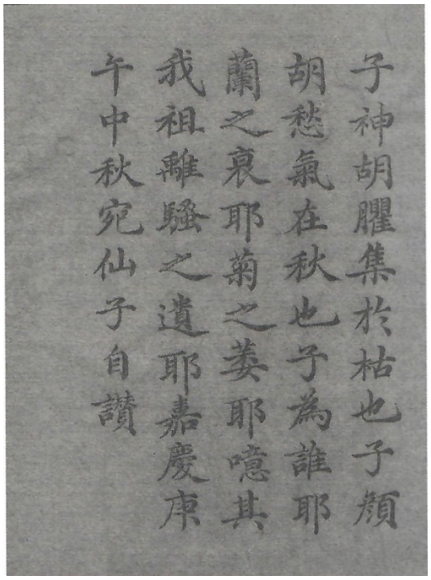

Figure 3.5 Qu Bingyun, "Eulogy for My Portrait," Qing Dynasty. Source: Qu Bingyun, *Yunyulou ji*, "Author Portrait and Eulogy." National Library of China.

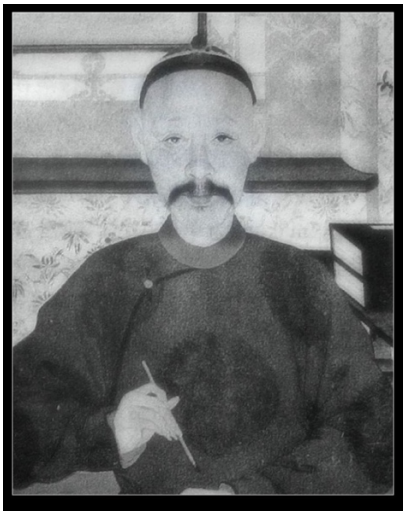

Figure 4.1 Anonymous, *The Portrait of Holding the Writing Brush*, ca. 1820. Source: Zhang Zhang, *Gu Taiqing Yihui shici heji*.

Figure 4.2 Anonymous, *The Portrait of Precept Master Zhang Jiaozhi*, 1820. White Cloud Monastery, Beijing.

Figure 4.3 Pan Jiezi, *The Portrait of Listening to the Snow*, 1837. Source: Jin Qicong and Jin Shi, *Gu Taiqing ji jiaojian*.

Figure 4.4 Anonymous, *Twelve Beauties*, detail, Qing Dynasty. Ink and color on silk, 184 × 98 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.

Figure 4.5 Leng Mei, *Weary of Reading in the Spring Boudoir*, 1724. Ink and color on silk, 103 × 175 cm. Tianjin Museum.

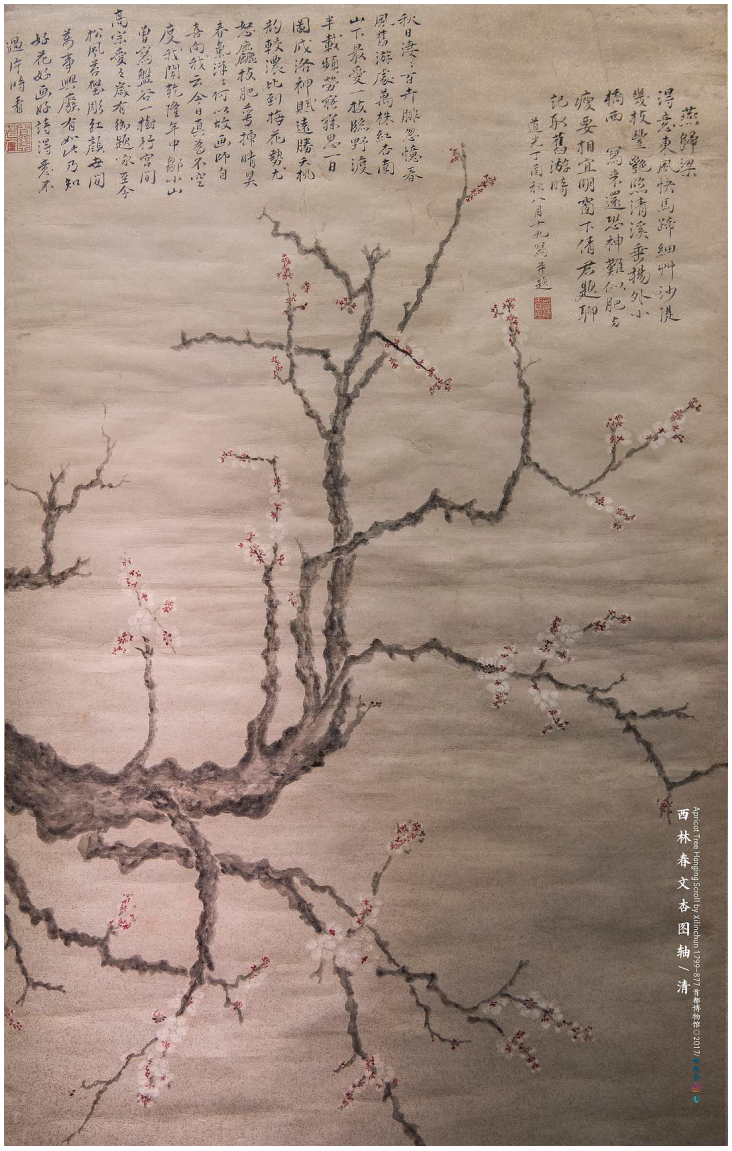

Figure 4.6 Gu Taiqing, *Apricot Tree*, 1837. Ink and color on silk. Capital Museum, Beijing.