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**THE ALLURE OF THE DRESSING CASE:
A STUDY OF YANG WEIZHEN'S (1296-1370)
AND WANG CIHUI'S (1593-1642) XIANGLIANTI
(FRAGRANT-DRESSING-CASE STYLE) POETRY**

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ABSTRACT

Both criticized for the “demonic” quality of their poetry, the famous late Yuan literatus Yang Weizhen (1296-1370) and the less known late Ming poet Wang Cihui (1593-1642) are two influential authors of *xianglianti* (fragrant-dressing-case style) poetry, a traditional category of Chinese verse centred on the sensual, aesthetic, and erotic aspects of love and women and whose name derives from Han Wo’s (844-923) *Xianglian ji* (Fragrant Dressing Case Collection). This dissertation is a study of post-Han-Wo *xianglianti* poetry, with a narrowed focus on two of its major practitioners. It explores how Yang Weizhen and Wang Cihui inserted themselves within the literary path opened by the *Xianglian ji*, further developing and vitalizing the *xianglianti* tradition. In my analysis of *xianglianti* poetry and related prefatory and commentarial materials, I contend that *qing* (love and related emotions), *se* (sensual beauty), and *fengliu* (unconventionality and amorousness), the three concepts forming the thematic framework of the entire thesis, are crucial for understanding the two poets’ *xianglianti* production. Chapter One closely examines the literary label *xianglianti*, using its earliest definitions as a starting point to discuss its relationship to similar poetic categories, its connection with Han Wo’s *Xianglian ji*, and its morally problematic nature. Chapter Two applies the concept of *fengliu* to Yang Weizhen and Wang Cihui and lays the basis to argue that *xianglianti* poetry contributed to the construction and reinforcement of their *fengliu* identity. Chapter Three applies the label “Yuan miniature *Xianglian ji*” to Yang Weizhen’s two *xianglianti* sets, exploring their Yuan elements, their strong intertextual nature, and the poet’s role in the promotion of the genre among his literary circle. Chapter Four examines Wang Cihui’s *Yiyu ji* (Doubtful

Rain Collection), showing how the poet personalized the genre by ostensibly using it as an autobiographical medium to record his amorous experiences.

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INTRODUCTION

Yang Weizhen 楊維禎 (1296-1370)¹, one of the most famous and influential literati of the Yuan-Ming transition, and the far less known late Ming (1368-1644) poet Wang Cihui 王次回 (1593-1642),² were both criticised for the “demonic” (*yao* 妖) quality of their writing. In his *Yang yi zhai shihua* 養一齋詩話 (Poetry Talks of the Studio of Cultivating Unity), the late Qing scholar Pan Deyu 潘德輿 (1785-1839) briefly discussed the two poets together, comparing their respective poetry in terms of demon-like boldness and crowning Wang Cihui with the morally derogatory title of “demon among demons” (*yao zhong zhi yao* 妖中之妖):

The major poet of the late Yuan, Yang Weizhen, had indeed entered [the realm of] demons. [...] Wang Cihui's collection *Doubtful Rain* vividly describes lascivious thoughts and causes one's heart to become unsettled and one's vital energy to dissipate. I feel that Yang Weizhen only flaunts their appearance, yet there is still the sense that he has not reached the extreme with his baffling deceptions. Wang Cihui can indeed be regarded as a demon among demons, and that is all.

元末之詩宗楊鐵崖，乃入於妖。[...] 王彥泓《疑雨》一集，以淫靡之思，刻劃入骨，使人心流氣蕩，覺鐵崖徒炫其貌，惑人伎倆，猶有未盡致者，彥泓乃足為妖中之妖耳。³

In his use of the word *yao* in association with Yang Weizhen, Pan Deyu had probably in mind “Wen yao” 文妖 (The Literary Demon), a short essay written as an attack on Yang Weizhen by the fourteenth century literatus Wang Yi 王彝 (?-1374):

¹ In some pre-modern sources the character *zhen* 禎 appears instead of *zhen* 禎 as the last character of the poet's *ming* 名 (given name). For a study of the two name variants see Li Qian, “Yang Lianfu ming ‘zhen’ ‘zhen’ liang zi kao”.

² Cihui was the *zi* 字 (courtesy name) of Wang Yanhong 王彥泓. Since the poet is more popularly known by his *zi*, I chose to refer to him as Wang Cihui throughout the entire dissertation.

³ Pan Deyu, *Yang yi zhai shihua*, 6.2093-2094

All under Heaven when we talk about demons, it is foxes, and that is all. However, there are demons in [the realm of] literature, some even surpassing foxes. As for foxes, they immediately turn into women, and all the men in the world who have the misfortune to be seduced by them would erroneously say that they are women and would treat them according to the principle of husband and wife. Certainly they see their colourfully made-up, devastatingly graceful appearance, and it is for this reason that there is nowhere that demons cannot reach. Thereupon, they say that they are real women. Although they are thought to be human, they are not human. They are thought to be women, yet they are not women. They probably use the trick of the way of the household to create an illusion. This is the reason why foxes are demons. As for literature, it is the place where the way resides. How could it turn into a demon? Whenever someone from West of Zhe talks about literature, he must mention Master Yang. I examined Yang's writings. With lascivious words and strange expressions he rips apart humaneness and uprighteousness, goes against name and substance, and muddles the way of the early sages into chaos. Yet with a devastatingly graceful, colourfully made-up [appearance] they cunningly create illusions, hiding [their true nature] to make themselves attractive. If these foxes are women, it is then likely, indeed, that men of this world are seduced by them. Thereupon, I say: the writings of Yang Weizhen of Kuaiji are foxes, they are literary demons. Alas! Fox demons go as far as killing a person's body, while demons in literature all along cause the younger generations to rush in crowds and vie to imitate them. This is enough to reckon that the disaster brought upon this culture of ours is not small. Literary writings can turn into demons! However, demons are not literature to begin with. In this world there are almost certainly men who are not deceived by them [referred to literary demons], why should one worry?

天下之所謂妖者，狐而已矣。然而文有妖焉，又有過於狐者。夫狐也，俄而為女婦，而世之男子有不幸而惑焉者，皆悞謂為女婦，而相與以室家之道。則固見其黛綠朱白、柔曼傾衍之容，而所以妖者無乎而不至，故謂之真女婦也。雖然以為人也，則非人，以為女婦也，則非女婦，蓋室家之道之狡獪以幻化者也。此狐之所以妖也。文者，道之所在，抑曷為而妖哉。浙之西有言文者，必曰楊先生。余觀楊之文，以淫辭怪語裂仁義、反名實，濁亂先聖之道。顧乃柔曼傾衍，黛綠朱白，而狡獪幻化，奄焉以自媚，是狐而女婦，則宜乎世之男子者之惑之也。余故曰：會稽楊維禎之文，狐也，文妖也。噫！狐之妖，至於殺人之身，而文之妖，往往使後生小子群趨而競習焉，其足以為斯文禍非淺小。文而可妖哉。然妖固非文也，世蓋有男子而弗惑者，何憂焉。⁴

⁴ Wang Yi, *Wang Changzong ji*, 3.10b-11a.

In this piece Wang Yi creates a parallelism between the legendary fox spirits, shape-shifting creatures able to turn into beautiful women in order to seduce men, and Yang Weizhen's seductive writings. Both have a seductive surface and share the power to lead men astray, causing them to deteriorate - in terms of health, when it comes to fox demons, and morally, when it comes to the writings of the late Yuan literatus. Wang Yi closed his short essay on a strong note, asserting his immunity from the seductive power of the so-called literary demons.

Reading Pan Deyu's remark along with Wang Yi's essay, the careful reader will probably notice that the use of "demon" as a term of literary criticism is not the only lexical link between the two texts. There is another word which occurs in both Pan Deyu's and Wang Yi's piece of literary criticism: *yin* 淫 (which in Pan Deyu's statement appears within the adjectival compound *yinmi* 淫靡), a term with obvious moral connotations, which can be translated as "lustful", "lascivious", "licentious", "indecent", or "obscene". While Yang Weizhen was heavily criticized by Wang Yi for his "lascivious words" (*yinci* 淫辭), Pan Deyu accused Wang Cihui of giving voice to "lascivious thoughts" (*yinmi zhi si* 淫靡之思). Why did the two poets attract such negative criticism? What was supposedly indecent about their writing? The answer lies in a particular type of poetry that they both practised, a subgenre of *shi* poetry traditionally known as *xianglianti* 香奩體 (fragrant dressing case style).⁵ *Xianglianti* is a thematic category of pre-modern Chinese poetry, revolving around the sensual and aesthetic exploration of the theme of love and women. The label itself derives its name from Han Wo's 韓偓 (844-923) *Xianglian ji* 香奩集 (Fragrant Dressing Case Collection),

⁵ In her study on "Wen yao", Liu Xia argues that Wang Yi's essay was specifically written to criticize Yang Weizhen's *xianglianti* poetry. See Liu Xia, "Wang Yi wenyao shuo kaolun", 145.

the earliest extant *shi* poetry collection attributed to a single poet to be centred on the themes of love and women.

Within the context of Confucian ideology, love and women – more precisely, women narrowly intended as romantic partners, objects of desire, and sources of aesthetic pleasure – were perceived as trivial and potentially dangerous subject matters, not worthy of too much attention from respectable men of letters.⁶ Because of its intimate connection with the morally problematic sphere of love and desire, amorous-erotic poetry (including *xianglianti* poetry) often attracted negative criticism in pre-modern times. Yet morally charged attacks did not prevent such poetry from continuing to be practised and flourishing throughout the centuries.

Aware of the challenges which he was posing to the orthodox view of literature, Han Wo created a collection celebrating female beauty and charm, mutual longing, and desire. With the monothematic quality of his *Xianglian ji*, the late Tang poet boldly asserted that love and women could be a major source of poetic inspiration and be worthy of being at the very centre of a *shi* poetry collection.

Despite a general neglect by Western scholarship, the *Xianglian ji* occupies an important position within the pre-modern tradition of amorous-erotic poetry and, more broadly, the history of the development of the theme of love and women in traditional Chinese literature. While the only Western language study on Han Wo's poetry is Upton's 1980 PhD dissertation⁷, Chinese scholars have long ago recognized the importance of Han Wo's collection within the history of traditional Chinese poetry. More recently, a number of Chinese scholars has paid closer attention to the influence of the *Xianglian ji* on later poetry and to the poetic category of *xianglianti* in

⁶ Hsieh, *Love and Women*, 3-11.

⁷ See Upton, "The Poetry of Han Wo".

connection with Han Wo's collection. Two recent articles, one co-authored by Liu Wanchuan 劉萬川 and Cao Xianghua 曹向華⁸ and another written jointly by Xiong Xiao 熊嘯 and Shen Yu 沈妤⁹, look at *xianglianti* as a specific poetic category and briefly discuss the development of this type of poetry. Aiming to show how amorous-erotic poetry continued to survive throughout the centuries despite its morally problematic nature, Liu and Cao identified the late Southern Song and the late Yuan as two major phases in the development of *xianglianti* poetry. Xiong and Shen provided instead a broader picture of the development of *xianglianti* poetry from the Song all the way down to the Qing dynasty. Due to their brevity, both articles lack a detailed and in-depth analysis of individual poems and only provide a general overview of its development. Nonetheless, they have been of great importance for the development of my dissertation topic and provided me with a valuable starting point for further research.

Inspired by the research path traced by Liu and Cao's and Xiong and Shen's recent articles on the development of *xianglianti* poetry, the present dissertation is a study of post-Han-Wo, late imperial *xianglianti* poetry, with a narrowed focus on two of its major practitioners, the "literary demons" Yang Weizhen and Wang Cihui. Using the concepts of *se* 色 (sensual beauty), *qing* 情 (emotions related to the sphere of love and desire), and *fengliu* 風流 (elegant unconventionality and amorousness) as a thematic framework for analysis, my study explores how Yang Weizhen and Wang Cihui inserted themselves within the literary path opened by the *Xianglian ji*, further developing and vitalizing the *xianglianti* tradition.

⁸ See Liu and Cao, "Cong Xianglian ji dao 'xianglian ti'".

⁹ See Xiong and Shen, "Lun Tang yihou 'xianglianti' shizuo de fazhan liubian".

Two major thematic threads can be identified within Han Wo's *Xianglian ji*: the sensual portrayal of female beauty and charm and the intimate exploration of private emotions related to the sphere of love and desire. For convenience, I chose to use the Chinese terms *se* and *qing* and their rough English equivalents "beauty" and "emotion" to refer to these two major aspects of the collection. *Se* and *qing* do not form a dichotomy within the collection, but often coexist and merge with each other within the limited space of a single poem.¹⁰

These two aspects permeate not only Han Wo's *Xianglian ji*, but also later *xianglianti* poetry, including Yang Weizhen's and Wang Cihui's. Since the same thematic threads run through Yang Weizhen's and Wang Cihui's *xianglianti* poetry, *se* and *qing* can provide a feasible general thematic framework for the present study. Throughout my study I often make reference to both *se* and *qing* when taking a closer look at the label *xianglianti* and when analysing selected examples of *xianglianti* poetry. It would, therefore, be useful to spend a few words on the meaning of these two traditional Chinese terms and on how I chose to use them in the present context.

In its broad sense the word *se* refers to the visual surface quality of reality, in Paul Rouzer's words "to the sensuous appearance of things, the attractive summation of shifting colors and forms."¹¹ Although female beauty is comprised within the term *se*, it is not its only meaning. For this reason, I use *se* to refer to the beauty of the various surfaces celebrated through *xianglianti* poetry: not only jade-white skin, painted eyebrows, willow waists, and slender fingers (some of the most celebrated features

¹⁰ I have already briefly discussed these two aspects of the *Xianglian ji* in my MA dissertation. Its last two chapters (chapter three and chapter four) explore the themes of "beauty" (*se*) and "emotions" (*qing*) in Han Wo's collection, paying particular attention to the dynamic portrayal of beauty, the use of multisensory images, and the representation of mutual feelings. See Botti, "A Poetic World of Beauty and Emotions", 20-31.

¹¹ Rouzer, *Writing Another's Dream*, 75.

of the female body throughout the history of traditional Chinese poetry), but also fine garments and adornments, decorated objects, and lavish environments.

Qing is a key cultural term in the history of pre-modern Chinese literature and thought. Although it is often treated as the approximate equivalent of the English word “emotion”, the term *qing* has a wider semantic range than its English counterpart, including meanings unrelated to the emotional sphere, such as “basic facts of a matter” and “underlying and basic dynamic factors”. There is even an ongoing scholarly debate on whether *qing* had already acquired the meaning of “emotion” in classical times.¹² While I use the word *se* in its broader sense, I chose, instead, to use *qing* in a much narrower sense. In my study I use *qing* in a similar way to Grace Fong’s study of Zhu Yizun’s 朱彝尊 (1629–1709) love lyrics, treating it as “a word connoting romantic love, desire, passion, sexuality - margins of gendered emotions considered improper for exploration and exposition in high literature”.¹³ When using the word “emotion” as an approximate English equivalent of *qing*, I specifically intend to refer to the range of emotions associated with romantic love and desire.

Apart from *xianglianti* poetry and its poetic world of *se* and *qing*, there is another element which brings Yang Weizhen and Wang Cihui close to each other and to Han Wo, further bridging the centuries of distance among them: their identity as *fengliu wenren* 風流文人 (unconventional, unfettered, and amorously charming literati). Throughout my thesis, I contend that the three poets used *xianglianti* poetry to reinforce and create their *fengliu* identity. For this reason, the concept of *fengliu* is applied together with *se* and *qing* within the thematic framework of my dissertation. In

¹² Eifring, “Introduction: Emotions”, 2-5.

¹³ Fong, “Inscribing Desire”, 439.

Chapter Two I will take a closer look at this complex and polysemous concept, showing how it can be applied to describe Han Wo, Yang Weizhen, and Wang Cihui.

With his “Xulian ji” 續奩集 (Supplementary Dressing Case Collection), a set of twenty poems explicitly written in imitation and continuation of Han Wo’s *Xianglian ji*, Yang Weizhen created his Late Yuan miniature version of Han Wo’s *Xianglian ji*. This set of poems is presented as a representative example of Yuan dynasty *xianglianti* poetry in the fifteenth century anthology *Yuanshi tiyao* 元詩體要 (Major Categories of Yuan Poetry). My definition “a late Yuan miniature version of Han Wo’s *Xianglian ji*” can also be applied to his other set of *xianglianti* poems, the eight poems known under the collective title of “Xianglian bayong” 香奩八詠 (Eight Fragrant Dressing Case Poems), and the variations on the same eight themes created by some of his contemporaries.

Although Wang Cihui himself did not use the label *xianglianti* or *xianglian* to describe or categorize his poetry, his *Yiyu ji* 疑雨集 (Doubtful Rain Collection) - or, more precisely, the corpus of amorous-erotic poetry which constitutes the majority of the collection - has often been classified as belonging to the *xianglianti* category or recognized as a direct heir of Han Wo’s *Xianglian ji*. In a letter to Zhong Laiyin 鐘來因 written in 1984, the twentieth-century scholar Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書 praised Wang Cihui’s poetry as “the most outstanding work within the tradition of Han Wo’s [Fragrant] *Dressing Case*”.¹⁴ Several other modern scholars have similarly used the label *xianglianti* to classify Wang Cihui’s amorous-erotic poetry.¹⁵ Moreover, the recognition of traces of the legacy of Han Wo’s *Xianglian ji* within Wang Cihui’s *Yiyu ji*

¹⁴ Zhong Laiyin, “Qian Zhongshu zhi Zhong Laiyin xin”, 115. The two scholars briefly discussed Wang Cihui’s poetry in some of the letters they exchanged between each other.

¹⁵ See, for example, Zheng Qingmao, “Wang Cihui yanjiu”, 64-65; Xiong Xiao and Shen Yu, “Lun Tang yihou xianglianti”, 89; and Wu Guoping, “Cong xianglian shi dao shenyun shuo”, 60.

had already started in the Qing dynasty, as shown by the following comments, respectively by Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582–1664), Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716-1797), and Wu Leifa 吳雷發 (eighteenth century):

“The majority of his poetry belongs to the category of seductive allure; its style is similar to that of Han Wo.” 詩多艷體，格調似韓繳光；¹⁶

“The *Doubtful Rain Collection* by our dynasty’s¹⁷ [poet] Wang Cihui is a masterpiece of fragrant-dressing case [poetry].” 本朝王次回疑雨集，香奩絕調；¹⁸

“As for the fragrant dressing case and seductive allure style, it was with Wang Cihui’s *Doubtful Rain Collection* that the extreme was reached.”
香奩艷體，至王次回疑雨集而極。¹⁹

The *Yiyun ji* 疑雲集 (*Doubtful Cloud Collection*), a collection of largely amorous-erotic *shi* and *ci* whose existence was not known before the late Qing, is also attributed to Wang Cihui. After discovering that its hundred and two *ci* lyrics are all included in Yu Tingying’s 俞廷瑛 (fl. 1878) *Qionghua ciji* 瓊華詞集 (*Collection of Fine Jade Ci Lyrics*) and that around two hundred of its *shi* are also found, with only minor variations, in *Qionghua shiji* 瓊華詩集 (*Collection of Fine Jade Shi Poems*), another collection by the same nineteenth century poet, Geng Chuanyou came to the conclusion that the *Yiyun ji* is not Wang Cihui’s original creation, but is instead a spurious work (*weishu* 偽書).

¹⁶ Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan*, 011-699.

¹⁷ Even though he was a Ming dynasty poet, Wang Cihui was sometimes erroneously treated as a Qing poet since his *Yiyu ji* was woodblock-printed only in the early Qing.

¹⁸ Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua*, 15.

¹⁹ Wu Leifa, *Xiangtian tansou*, 84 (1:2.9b).

Due to the dubious attribution of this second collection, in my study I only examine poems collected in the *Yiyu ji*.²⁰

While Yang Weizhen undertook a small scale *xianglianti* project during his late years, *xianglianti* poetry accompanied Wang Cihui throughout the majority of his life. With his *Yiyu ji*, he created an intimately personalized large scale *Xianglian ji*. When using the phrase “large scale *Xianglian ji*” to define Wang Cihui’s *Yiyu ji* in relation to Han Wo’s collection and in comparison with Yang Weizhen’s above-mentioned sets of *xianglianti* poems, I am aware of using a misnomer. Considered against the *Xianglian ji*, the *Yiyu ji* as a whole goes far beyond the limited thematic range of Han Wo’s collection. The poems included in the *Yiyu ji* are not exclusively limited to the *xianglianti* category. Along with amorous-erotic poems, Geng Chuanyou has identified two other major groups of poems figuring in the collection: “mourning poems” (*daowang shi* 悼亡詩)²¹ and “poems on stirred emotions” (*ganhuai shi* 感懷詩).²² That being said, I still intend to look at Wang Cihui’s *Yiyu ji* as a “large scale *Xianglian ji*” due to the high prevalence of *xianglianti* poetry within the collection and the importance that the late Ming poet attached to this particular type of poetry.

Both Yang Weizhen and Wang Cihui have been increasingly attracting scholarly attention in the past decade. Liu Meihua’s *Yang Weizhen shixue yanjiu* 楊維禎詩學研究 (A Study of Yang Weizhen’s Poetics) (1983) and Huang Rensheng’s *Yang Weizhen yu Yuanmo Mingchu wenxue sichao* 楊維禎與元末明初文學思潮 (Yang Weizhen and the

²⁰ For an investigation of the spurious nature of the *Yiyun ji*, see Geng Chuanyou, “Wang Cihui Yiyun ji bian wei”.

²¹ According to Martin Huang, Wang Cihui was one of the most innovative authors of mourning poetry; see Huang, “Remembering Female Relatives”, 28. For more information on Wang Cihui’s mourning poetry, see Geng Chuanyou, “Yi ge bei wenxueshi yiwang de zhongyao zuojia”, 117-123; and Hu Xu, *Daowang shi shi*, 302-313.

²² For more information on Wang Cihui’s “poems on stirred emotions”, see Geng Chuanyou “Yi ge bei wenxueshi yiwang de zhongyao zuojia”, 124-128.

Literary Thought of the Late Yuan and Early Ming) (2005), the most comprehensive book-length Chinese language studies on Yang Weizhen's contribution to traditional Chinese literature, both briefly introduce the late Yuan poet's *xianglianti* production together with his *gongci* 宮詞 (palace poems), when presenting the major thematic categories within his vast and varied poetic corpus.²³ Since *xianglianti* poetry constitutes only a small part of Yang Weizhen's entire poetic production, Liu Meihua and Huang Rensheng only provide a general introduction to this category of poetry. The most in-depth recent studies on Yang Weizhen's poetry are two English language PhD dissertations, Huicong Zhang's "Imitation and Innovation" (2009) and Hing Fong Camilla Lai's "Yang Weizhen's Iron Style Poems on History" (2010). Zhang's thesis explores "the dynamic between continuity and change"²⁴ in traditional Chinese literature through the case study of Yang Weizhen's revival and new development of *yuefu* 樂府 (ballad) poetry. Although her study touches upon the theme of women and romantic love when considering the *yuefu* poems to the title "Xihu zhuzhi ci" 西湖竹枝詞 (Bamboo-branch Songs of the West Lake) which were composed by a wide group of poets of the Southern Yangtze area under the encouragement of Yang Weizhen, Yang Weizhen's *xianglianti* poems are not considered. Lai's thesis focuses on Yang Weizhen's poems on historical themes and historical figures and argues that *tieti* 鐵體 (iron style) or *tieyati* 鐵崖體 (iron cliff style) was the distinctive poetic style developed by the late Yuan poet and that his poems were the result of the complex interaction between his imitation of past models, his own creativity, and his personal life experiences. Since the corpus selected by Lai for her study consists of poetry on

²³ See Liu Meihua, *Yang Weizhen shixue yanjiu*, 80-83 and Huang Rensheng, *Yang Weizhen yu Yuanmo Mingchu*, 231-232.

²⁴ Zhang, Introduction to "Imitation and Innovation", iii.

historical events or figures, Yang Weizhen's *xianglianti* production is not examined, but only mentioned en passant within the broader context of the discussion of the different styles encompassed by Yang Weizhen's own unique poetic style.²⁵

Despite having been enthusiastically praised by famous Qing dynasty poets such as Yuan Mei²⁶ and Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 (1629–1709)²⁷ and having enjoyed considerable popularity both in the Qing dynasty and in the Early Republican Era,²⁸ in the last and current century Wang Cihui's poetry has received only some of the scholarly attention it deserves. Most histories of traditional Chinese literature, published both in China and in the West, do not even mention his name. Up to the present day, the only Chinese-language scholarly studies of considerable length on Wang Cihui's life and poetry are Zheng Qingmao's 鄭清茂 long article "Wang Cihui yanjiu" 王次回研究 (first published in 1965 and later revised and republished in 1984 as an introduction to his annotated edition of Wang Cihui's poetry) and Geng Chuanyou's 耿傳友 2005 PhD dissertation "Yi ge bei wenxueshi yiwang de zhongyao zuojia: Wang Cihui ji qi shige yanjiu" 一個被文學史遺忘的重要作家—王次回及其詩歌研究 (An Important Writer Neglected by Literary History: A Study of Wang Cihui and His Poetry).²⁹ In the past few years, more Chinese scholars have followed Geng Chuanyou's footsteps and devoted their attention to the study of Wang Cihui's poetry.³⁰ The following articles all testify to

²⁵ Lai, "Yang Weizhen's Iron Style Poems", 169 and 219-220.

²⁶ See Yuan Mei, "Zai yu Shen Da Zongbo shu" 再與沈大宗伯書 (Another Letter Written to Shen Deqian), in Yuan Mei, *Xiaocang shan fang wenji*, 17.283–85; and Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua*, 15 and 632.

²⁷ Zhu Yizun, *Jingzhi ju shihua*, 570-71 (19.7b-8a).

²⁸ Geng Chuanyou, "Yi ge bei wenxueshi yiwang de zhongyao zuojia", 2-5.

²⁹ Among the first scholarly studies which paved the way to Geng Chuanyou's thesis on Wang Cihui also figure Zhong Laiyin's 鐘來因 "Wan Yanhong tankao" 王彥泓探考 (1985) and Huang Shizhong's 黃世中 "Wang Cihui Yiyun, Yiyu shi tankao" 王次回 "疑雲""疑雨"詩探考 (1988).

³⁰ Both before and after the completion of his PhD dissertation, Geng Chuanyou has published articles on different aspects of Wang Cihui's poetry, such as "Wang Yanhong Yiyu ji chengshu ji banben kaoshu" 王彥泓《疑雨集》成書及版本考述 (A Study of the Textual History and Editions of Wang Yanhong's *Doubtful Rain Collection*) (2013), a study on the textual history and different editions of the *Yiyu ji*.

the growing interest in Wang Cihui and his poetry within the Chinese academia in the past few years: Qiu Jiangning's 邱江寧 "Lun Wang Cihui yantishi de chansheng ji yingxiang" 論王次回艷體詩的產生及影響 (2011); Zhang Hongsheng's 張宏生 "Qinggan tiyan yu zimian jingying: Nalan ci yu Wang Cihui shi" 情感體驗與字面經營—納蘭詞與王次回詩 (2012); Pan Lei's 潘磊 "Lun Wang Cihui Yiyu ji dui Nalan Xingde ci de wenxue yingxiang" 論王次回《疑雨集》對納蘭性德詞的文學影響 (2015); and Luo Xinquan's 駱新泉 series of four short articles collectively titled "Wang Yanhong yanqing shi qinggan shuli" 王彥泓艷情詩情感梳理 (2015-2017). A quick look at the above listed titles reveals that a particular topic stands out within recent scholarly contributions to the study of Wang Cihui's poetry: the late Ming poet's influence on the *ci* production of the Manchu lyricist Nalan Xingde 納蘭性德 (1655-1685), one of the major figures of the seventeenth century revival of *ci* poetry. By examining the influence of Wang Cihui's poetry on the poems written by one of the major *ci* lyricists of the Qing dynasty, contemporary scholars have further acknowledged the significant contribution made by Wang Cihui's *Yiyu ji* towards the development of amorous-erotic traditional Chinese poetry, even beyond the genre boundaries of *shi*.

The first and only English language study on Wang Cihui's poetry, Xiaorong Li's article "I Sliced My Flesh into Paper and Ground My Liver into Ink", only appeared in 2013. Li's article, which is also the first attempt to translate a small selection of Wang Cihui's poetry into English, seeks to establish a connection between Wang Cihui's personal failure in public life with his sensualist approach towards the portrayal of his private life events, including spells of illness and amorous experiences.

Although scholars have shown a growing interest in both Yang Weizhen and Wang Cihui in the past few years, there is still the need for more in-depth research on their

contribution to the *xianglianti* tradition. With its specific focus on Yang Weizhen and Wang Cihui, my study of the early development of *xianglianti* poetry in late Imperial Chinese literature will also contribute to the study of the two individual poets.

Because of the thematic centrality of women in *xianglianti* poetry, the present study can be inserted within the broader thematic area of images of women and femininity in traditional Chinese literature. In the preface to her edited volume *Images of Women in Chinese Literature* Li Yu-Ning identified the study of women in Chinese literature as “a relatively new and potentially enormous field”.³¹ In the past few decades, gender has been increasingly used not only as a category of historical analysis,³² but also as a category of literary analysis by scholars who focus on pre-modern China. In the chapter “Women in Literature” of the *Columbia History of Chinese Literature* Anne Birrell looks at the continuity of traditional Chinese literature from the critical perspective of gender theory, focusing on the representation of women by male authors and briefly looking at women’s self-representation. In her survey of images of women in Chinese literature, she identified the following major types of male-authored representation of women: women as social constructs, idealized goddesses, ludic constructs, mediators of pleasure, abstract concepts, and role models.³³ The type of poetry at the centre of my study represents women as ludic constructs, mediators of pleasure, and objects of aesthetic and/or erotic contemplation.

There are several studies which have looked at the representation of women in traditional Chinese literature in relation to the social and historical context of the time.

³¹ Li, Preface to *Images of Women in Chinese Literature*, xvii.

³² For a thorough discussion on the use of gender as an analytic category for the study of history, see Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis”.

³³ Birrell, “Women in Literature”, 194-202.

In “The Images of Women in Early Chinese Poetry” Anne Marie Hsiung looks at the representation of women in the *Shijing* 詩經 (The Classic of Poetry), the Han dynasty (206 BC - 220 AD) *yuefu* corpus, and the *Yutai xinyong* 玉臺新詠 (New Songs from a Jade Terrace). Hsiung observes how the vitality and strength of women voices and the emphasis on feminine virtue gradually disappeared to leave space to objectified portrayals of women, intended to be enjoyed by a male readership. She sees the objectification of women and the weakening of their self-identity as a consequence of “the increasing infusion of ideology imposed by male-centered society”.³⁴ Although I do not deny that representations of women are often influenced by culturally and historically specific social attitudes towards gender, Hsiung’s view seems rather simplistic. The three types of poetry she considers not only present different attitudes towards women, but, more importantly, reflect different aesthetic approaches towards poetry. An important study which examines literary representations of women in relation to the male dominated society of their time is Paul Rouzer’s *Articulated Ladies*. Rouzer looks at the representation of women and desire in a selection of early Chinese male-authored works in relation to social and political dynamics of power. Rouzer argues that the “articulated women” provided male writers with a means to express their homosocial, political desires. In the chapter “The Career of the Palace Lady” of Anne Birrell’s *Games Poets Play*, a study of the *Yutai xinyong* which applies the concept of the avant-garde to palace style poetry and considers its representation of palace ladies from the perspective of sexual politics, the poems are read as representations of the career success and failure characteristic of the life of palace entertainers.

³⁴ Hsiung, “The Images of Women in Early Chinese Poetry”, 90.

In looking at the fascination with the feminine in *xianglianti* poetry, I do not intend to focus on how these representations reflect social attitudes towards women. My main aim is to consider the images of women created by male poets through *xianglianti* poetry in terms of aesthetics, imagery, and poetic conventions. I am interested in how *xianglianti* poetry celebrated femininity as a source of aesthetic and erotic pleasure and recognized the aesthetic potential of depicting private amorous experiences in verse.

My study is largely based on close reading and textual analysis of relevant primary sources: not only poems (mainly belonging to or closely connected with the poetic category of *xianglianti*), but also related prefaces, long explanatory titles (of which we find several examples in Wang Cihui's *Yiyu ji*), and selected critical comments excerpted from pre-modern works of literary criticism. Prefaces occupy a very important place within my dissertation. In both Chapter Three and Chapter Four I devote considerable space to the analysis of selected prefatory materials to Yang Weizhen's *xianglianti* corpus and Wang Cihui's *Yiyu ji*. I believe that in the context of literary studies prefaces always deserve careful attention, since a close engagement with their content can not only potentially provide us with important information on the composition and circulation of a text, but also help us shed light on how a particular literary work was perceived, or at least intended to be perceived, at the time. In a context where printing was both increasingly widespread and commercialized as that of late Yuan and, even more, early Qing China, prefaces can also be understood and examined as part of a marketing strategy, as textual devices designed to attract potential buyers.

As the literary theorist Gérard Genette observed for the larger category of paratexts,³⁵ prefaces are "a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that - whether well or poorly understood and achieved - is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it (more pertinent, of course, in the eyes of the author and his allies)".³⁶

Sharing Genette's view on the importance of prefaces, in my study I often use prefaces as a starting point to discuss the intended or perceived function of a text and obtain more information about the background and motivation behind its composition, circulation, and publication.

The special consideration I pay to prefaces is nothing new within the field of traditional Chinese literature. Other scholars have devoted considerable attention to paratextual materials and their role in shaping (or attempting to shape) the reception of a given text or, more broadly, even of a whole literary genre. David Pattinson's "The Market for Letter Collections" (a study on the publication of up-market collections of *chidu* 尺牘 letters in the Early Qing) and Anne McLaren's "Constructing New Reading Publics in Late Ming China" (a discussion of the broadening of the reading public of vernacular fiction and of "the emergence of an apologia for vernacular print",³⁷ as revealed through related prefaces and commentaries of the time) are among the recent scholarly works which give prominence to the examination of paratextual materials, especially prefaces. With their strong focus on the commercialized publishing context of late imperial China and their consideration of the possible

³⁵ The word "paratext" is a term coined by Genette himself to refer to the heterogeneous group of written and graphic materials mediating the presentation and reception of a text. Titles, prefaces, postfaces, annotations, and illustrations all belong to the broad category of paratexts. For Genette's seminal discussion on the function of paratexts see, Genette, *Paratexts*.

³⁶ Genette, *Paratexts*, 2.

³⁷ McLaren, "Constructing New Reading Publics", 153.

commercial reasons behind the legitimation of minor literary genres, these studies inspired me to look at prefaces as potential marketing devices for the promotion of printed books.

In examining Yang Weizhen's and Wang Cihui's *xianglianti* poetry I adopted a strongly intertextual approach. Due to its highly conventionalized nature and its thematically narrow scope, *xianglianti* poetry perfectly lends itself to intertextual analysis. When considering individual poems, I often tried to look for *loci similes*, in other words, points of similarities with other texts, both within and beyond the author's own corpus. In looking at the interaction between tradition and innovation in Yang Weizhen's and Wang Cihui's *xianglianti* poetry, I did not limit myself to the relationship between these significant examples of post-Han-Wo *xianglianti* poetry and Han Wo's *Xianglian ji*. I also sought to identify other possible sources of inspiration and poetic models adopted by the two poets, or, in many cases, I simply pointed to similarities in terms of imagery and diction with other *xianglianti* poems or other works belonging to the amorous-erotic pre-modern Chinese literary tradition. In the case of the late Yuan sets of poems by the title "Xianglian bayong", by looking at the seven sets alongside each other, I was able to explore the intimate intertextual relationship among the poems and argue for their collective, social nature. As for Wang Cihui's *Yiyu ji*, my search for intertextual links within the collection allowed me to notice certain recurring details within the late Ming poet's *xianglianti* corpus, such as the poet's penchant for and direct praise of female sorrow, anger, and unadorned beauty, or the unusual mention of love bites and similar marks imprinted on the skin. I interpret these recurring motifs as a possible strategy which the author consciously

adopted to personalize his collection, together with the use of titles and self-annotations emphasizing the autobiographical nature of some of his poems.

My dissertation consists of four main sections. Chapter One closely examines the traditional poetic category of *xianglianti*, using its earliest definitions as a starting point to discuss its major features. My discussion mainly revolves around three interrelated areas: its relationship to similar literary labels, such as *yanti* 艷體 (style of seductive allure), *gongti* 宮體 (palace style), and *yutaiti* 玉臺體 (jade terrace style); its stylistical and thematic connection with Han Wo's *Xianglian ji*; and its morally problematic nature. Chapter Two applies the concept of *fengliu* to Yang Weizhen and Wang Cihui and lays the basis to argue that *xianglianti* poetry contributed to the construction and reinforcement of their *fengliu* identity. The first two chapters can be treated as the essential background to the second half of the dissertation, since they allow a more thorough understanding of Yang Weizhen's and Wang Cihui's *xianglianti* production, which is at the centre of the last two chapters. Chapter Three applies the label "Yuan miniature *Xianglian ji*" to Yang Weizhen's two *xianglianti* sets, namely the set of twenty poems titled "Xulian ji" and the set of eight poems "Xianglian bayong", exploring their distinctively Yuan elements, their strong intertextual nature, and the poet's role in the promotion of the genre among his literary circle. Chapter Four explores Wang Cihui's life-long fascination with *xianglianti* poetry, by examining the *xianglianti* corpus within his *Yiyu ji*, showing how the poet personalized the genre by ostensibly using it as an autobiographical medium to record his amorous experiences.

Unless otherwise stated, translations of selected poems and prose pieces quoted throughout the dissertation are my own. A considerable amount of the materials examined in my dissertation is hereby translated for the first time. My hope is that my

translation of largely previously untranslated materials will aid and encourage more scholars to further explore Han Wo's *Xianglian ji* and its later legacy.

CHAPTER ONE

Skirts and Make-up and Feelings of the Boudoir: Towards a Definition of *Xianglianti*

Xianglianti (fragrant dressing case style) is one of the numerous poetic categories within the vast sea of pre-modern Chinese literature. When considered from the perspective of a modern-day reader unfamiliar with the pre-modern Chinese poetic tradition and with the connotations carried by the individual words forming the phrase *xianglian* (fragrant dressing case), *xianglianti* might be perceived as a non-self-explanatory label. Moreover, within the pre-modern tradition of literary criticism we are confronted with a lack of detailed and thorough definitions of the exact meaning of this label. The obvious question to be asked is what exactly *xianglianti* refers to. What are the identifying features of *xianglianti* poetry? Is the denomination *xianglianti* strictly stylistic or is it also thematic? Does it refer to frivolous verses of “skirts and make-up” (*juqun zhifen* 裾裙脂粉) or does it describe emotionally charged poetry on the “feelings of the boudoir” (*guige zhi qing* 閨閣之情)?³⁸

The present chapter aims to provide a tentative answer to these questions by taking a closer look at the literary label *xianglianti* within the broader context of traditional Chinese poetry and criticism. Besides examining this particular label, it will also consider other closely related poetic categories, so as to provide a more comprehensive picture and deepen our understanding of the major features of this type of traditional poetry. Before delving into the definition of this specific poetic

³⁸ The phrases “skirts and make-up” and “feelings of the boudoir” are both taken from the two major pre-modern definitions of *xianglianti* poetry, respectively the one provided in the Song dynasty work of poetry criticism *Canglang shihua* and the one found in the Ming dynasty anthology of Yuan poetry *Yuanshi tiyao*. Both works and their respective definition of *xianglianti* are dealt with in more detail in the present chapter.

category, it would be useful to briefly look at the individual words which form the phrase *xianglianti*: *xiang* 香 (fragrant), *lian* 奩 (dressing case), and *ti* 體 (style).

Xiang, meaning “incense” and, more generally, “fragrance” when it functions as a noun, and translatable as “perfumed”, “scented”, and “fragrant” when used as an adjective, is a highly evocative sensory word. It evokes the olfactory pleasures produced by flowers, incense, and other aromatic substances, such as sandalwood and aloeswood. It is often associated with a world of wealth, luxury, and glamour. Courtesans and the higher strata of society lived immersed in fragrances. In his study of Tang dynasty exotics, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand*, Edward Schafer reconstructed in words the alluringly scented olfactory world of the Tang upper classes: “[t]he body was perfumed, the bath was scented, the costume was hung with sachets. The home was sweet-smelling, the office was fragrant, the temple was redolent of a thousand sweet-smelling balms and essences.”³⁹ The same description can be equally applied to other periods of Chinese dynastic history. As it will be shown in later chapters, many post-Tang poems centred on the theme of love and women make references to the use of aromatics. The considerable number of references to fragrances and aromatics in pre-modern Chinese poetry suggests their widespread use, at least within upper-class and urban contexts. Zhou Jiazhou’s 周嘉胄 (1582-1658) *Xiangcheng* 香乘 (The Fragrance Vehicle) and other similar compilations, known as *xiangpu* 香譜 (fragrance manuals), also testify to the importance given to fragrances in pre-modern China.

Although its literary usage is not exclusively limited to the womanly sphere, the word *xiang* often carries a strong feminine connotation. In her study on the

³⁹ Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand*, 155.

representation of women in two collections belonging to the *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 (A New Account of Tales of the World) tradition of remarkable anecdotes, Nanxiu Qian identifies *xiang*, which she translates as “scent”, as one of the “pivotal elements associated unmistakably with the female body”⁴⁰ and as an alluring feminine feature to be appreciated both erotically and aesthetically. As an example, among the many enticing qualities attributed to the legendary beauty Xi Shi 西施 also figures the peculiar scent of her body (*yixiang* 異香).⁴¹ Women’s scent, whether natural or artificial, was often celebrated as an enhancer of female attractiveness.⁴²

The character *lian*, which can be translated as “vanity case”, “dressing case”, and also “mirror case”, is a word associated with women’s private life in the boudoir. Whether with or without a mounted mirror, this type of container was used for storing essential tools of female beautification, such as combs, make-up, jewellery, and hair-adornments. This essential object in a woman’s daily life often appears in poetic representations of boudoir scenes. It represented and at the same contained essential elements of what the ancient Romans termed the *mundus muliebris* (whose meaning can be interpreted as both “a woman’s grooming” and “a woman’s world”).⁴³ By synecdochal logic, the word *lian* could be used to refer not only to the container itself, but also to its contents, the act of self-beautification, and, by further extension, even to the boudoir, the private locus of female self-adornment, and to women themselves. Within the compound *xianglianti*, both *xiang* and *lian* can be regarded as gender-

⁴⁰ Qian, “Milk and Scent”, 187.

⁴¹ Qian, “Milk and Scent”, 211.

⁴² Qian, “Milk and Scent”, 211.

⁴³ The phrase *mundus muliebris* plays on the double meaning of the noun *mundus*, meaning both “adornment” and “world”. See Olson, *Dress and the Roman Woman*, 8.

associated words, whose function is to reveal the centrality of the feminine in *xianglianti* poetry.

From the connotations of *xiang* and *lian*, it can be inferred that the thematic emphasis of this particular type of poetry is not on the broad category of women, but more specifically on the appreciation of women as objects of aesthetic, sensual, and even erotic pleasure. For this reason, equating *xianglianti* poetry with the broad and general thematic category of “poetry on women” would be an inaccurate and misleading choice. Within the Chinese poetic tradition we find poems about women which do not focus on the alluring aspects of femininity and do not touch upon the complex range of emotions related to love and desire. Poems celebrating the moral virtue of chaste widows and virtuous mothers cannot certainly be classified as belonging to the *xianglianti* category, as their main aim is to celebrate the women’s chastity and integrity, rather than to provide aesthetic and erotic pleasure to the reader by means of creating seductive portrayals of beautiful and amorous women. For this reason, whenever I make reference to women, the feminine, femininity, and other similar gender-related concepts when discussing *xianglianti* poetry, I always implicitly refer to their aesthetic and erotic potential. The feminine sphere at the centre of *xianglianti* poetry should, therefore, be more accurately qualified as the sensual-feminine, the aesthetic-feminine, and the amorous-erotic-feminine.

The term *ti* is a major concept of traditional Chinese literary criticism. Both Stephen Owen and Lena Rydholm have discussed the polysemous nature of the word *ti* within the context of traditional Chinese literary theory and criticism, emphasising its differences and similarities with the modern Western concepts of literary genre and

style.⁴⁴ Yan Yu's 嚴羽 (1191–1241) *Canglang shihua* 滄浪詩話 (Poetry Talks of Canglang), a highly representative and influential work in the pre-modern tradition of poetry manuals and works of poetry criticism, testifies to the wide range of literary categories which can be named *ti*. From its chapter “Shi ti” 詩體 (poetic styles), it is evident that *ti* encompasses the concepts of subgenre, poetic form, and style, more precisely “normative style”, rather than the particular style of a specific poem.⁴⁵

The earliest definition of *xianglianti* is to be found in Yan Yu's *Canglang shihua*. More precisely, the definition appears within the second chapter of Yan Yu's remarks on poetry, the already mentioned “Shi ti”, which, as its title suggests, consists of a long list of different categories of poetry, many of which are accompanied by very brief and sketchy definitions. The entry for *xianglianti* reads as follows: “the fragrant-dressing-case style refers to the poetry of Han Wo; it is all words of skirts and make-up. There is the *Fragrant Dressing Case Collection*.” 香奩體，韓偓之詩，皆裾裙脂粉之語，有《香奩集》。⁴⁶

From the above definition, it is clear that the literary label *xianglianti* derives its name from Han Wo's (844-923) *Xianglian ji* and was originally used to refer specifically to the poems belonging to the late Tang collection. Although there are several arguments against the attribution of the *Xianglian ji* to Han Wo, some of which even question the single authorship of the collection,⁴⁷ the *Xianglian ji* has been generally regarded as the earliest extant collection by a single poet to have a strong unifying

⁴⁴ See Rydholm, “The Theory of Ancient Chinese Genres”, 53-92; Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, 393 and 592; and Owen, “Genres in Motion”, 1392.

⁴⁵ Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, 592.

⁴⁶ Yan Yu, *Canglang shihua*, 64.

⁴⁷ For arguments against the single authorship of the collection see, Xu Fuguan, “Han Wo shi yu Xianglian ji lunkao”, 407-420; Zhang Xingwu, “Xianglian ji fei Han Wo suo zuo zai kaoding”, 10-12; and Liu Peng, “Xianglian ji guishu wenti kaoshu”, 59-60.

focus on the themes of love and women.⁴⁸ In identifying the poems of Han Wo's *Xianglian ji* as forming a category of their own, Yan Yu certainly recognized a certain thematic and stylistic homogeneity within Han Wo's collection.

By using the expression “words of skirts and make-up” 裾裙脂粉之語, Yan Yu seems to single out one specific aspect of the poems belonging to the *Xianglian ji*, more precisely their attention to female surface beauty, especially when enhanced by make-up and refined garments and ornaments. If we look at Yan Yu's definition within the *se* 色 and *qing* 情 thematic framework which I chose to apply to *xianglianti* poetry in the present study, the expression “words of skirts and make-up” brings attention to the world of *se*, to the sensuous aspects of femininity. Although Han Wo often conveys a woman's charm by focusing on her actions and demeanour, rather than directly appreciating her looks, in several poems where he describes a woman's appearance he often does so paying attention to her make-up, garments, and hair adornments, such as “clothes in the palace fashion” (*gongyang yishang* 宮樣衣裳) and “parrot shaped crystal hairpins” (*shuijing yingwu chai* 水精鸚鵡釵).⁴⁹

While Yan Yu's definition of *xianglianti* emphasises the sensuous aspects of femininity, another pre-modern definition of the same literary label gives prominence to the emotional sphere of *qing*, underlining the centrality of private, female-associated emotions in *xianglianti* poetry (i.e. emotions related to love and desire) by means of the expression “the feelings of the boudoir” (*guige zhi qing* 閨閣之情):

“Men of the Tang used this style to deal with the feelings of the inner chambers. It equates to the category of alluring songs. It is similar to the jade-terrace style. As for our

⁴⁸ Yuan Fang, “Xianglian ji xin ping”, 42.

⁴⁹ Both details are taken from the lines of a quatrain titled “Xiangde” 想得 (Thinking). See Chen Jilong, *Han Wo shi zhu*, 376.

contemporaries, although many of them imitate this style, few of them do so by making their poetry emerge from their affections, without going further than proper behaviour and morality. Thereupon, I selected and arranged the following poems to the left”

唐人用此體言閨閣之情，乃艷詞也，與玉臺體相似。今人倣之者雖多，要之發乎情止乎禮義者則少。故取而列於左云。⁵⁰

The above quoted definition is taken from the *Yuanshi tiyao* 元詩體要 (Major Categories of Yuan Poetry), a Ming dynasty anthology of Yuan dynasty poetry compiled by the fifteenth century literatus Song Xu 宋緒. As the title of the anthology suggests, the poems collected in the *Yuanshi tiyao* are organized according to thirty-six different categories (*ti* 體), ranging from thematic categories to actual poetic forms and thus showing the polysemous nature of the term *ti* in the context of pre-modern Chinese literary criticism. Each group of poems is preceded by a short description of the main features of the category they belong to. Despite being very brief and far from exhaustive, the definition of *xianglianti* found in the *Yuanshi tiyao* provides us with more information about this particular poetic category than the one in *Canglang shihua*. First of all, Song Xu tries to convey a better idea of the nature of *xianglianti* poetry by inserting it within a broader category, that of *yan* 艷詞 (poems of seductive allure),⁵¹ and by pointing out its similarities with another poetic label, that of *yutaiti* 玉臺體 (jade-terrace style). Secondly, the definition provided by the *Yuanshi tiyao* shows us that the use of the literary label *xianglianti* was not exclusively limited to the poems included in the *Xianglian ji*. It was also used more broadly to refer to later poems which were more or less thematically and stylistically indebted to Han Wo’s collection,

⁵⁰ Song Xu, *Yuanshi tiyao*, 8.1a.

⁵¹ In translating *yan* 艷 as “seductive allure”, I follow Anna Shields’s translation choice. In her study of the poetry on amorous-erotic subject matter by the mid Tang poet Yuan Zhen’s 元稹 (779-831), Shield translates the term *yan* 艷詩 as “poetry of seductive allure”. See Shields, “Defining Experience”, 61.

as exemplified by the forty-eight poems which Song Xu selected as representative examples of *xianglianti* poetry written during the Yuan dynasty: four poems titled “Xianglian si shou” 香奩四首 (Four Fragrant Dressing Case Poems) and a set of eight poems under the collective title “Xianglian bayong” all by Huang Boyang 黃伯暘 (n.d.);⁵² another “Xianglian bayong” sets by Qian Shu 錢樞 (n.d.);⁵³ a set of eight *ci* lyrics by Wang Guoqi 王国器 (1284 – ca. 1366) under the collective title of “Xianglian tasuo xing ba que” 香奩踏莎行八闕 (Eight Songs to the Tune “Tasuo Xing”) which share the same individual titles of the “Xianglian bayong” sets;⁵⁴ and a set of twenty poems by Yang Weizhen, “Xulian ershi shou” 續奩二十首 (Twenty Supplementary Dressing Case Poems), accompanied by their preface.⁵⁵

Lastly, Song Xu also points to the morally problematic nature of *xianglianti* poetry. He quotes the authority of the “Great Preface” (*Daxu* 大序) to the *Shijing* 詩經 (The Classic of Poetry) to state that only few of the poets who wrote in the fragrant dressing case style made “their poetry emerge from affections, without going further than proper behaviour and morality”.⁵⁶ Interestingly, the twenty *xianglianti* poems by Yang Weizhen which are listed in the *Yuanshi tiyao* and were, therefore, deemed to be morally acceptable by Song Xu, were perceived as shameful and obscene by some

⁵² Song Xu, *Yuanshi tiyao*, 8.1a-b and 8.1b-3b. According to *Quan Yuanshi*, there is no biographical information available on Huang Boyang. His only extant poems are the twelve *xianglianti* poems anthologized in *Yuanshi tiyao*. See Yang Lian, *Quan Yuanshi*, vol. 65, 270.

⁵³ Song Xu, *Yuanshi tiyao*, 8.3b-5b. Same as for Huang Boyang, there is no biographical information available on Qian Shu. His only extant poems are the “Xianglian bayong” poems anthologized in *Yuanshi tiyao*. See Yang Lian, *Quan Yuanshi*, vol. 65, 273.

⁵⁴ Song Xu, *Yuanshi tiyao*, 8.6a-8a. In *Yuanshi tiyao* Wang Guoqi is referred to by his *zi*, Delian 德璉.

⁵⁵ Song Xu, *Yuanshi tiyao*, 8.8a-11b.

⁵⁶ Song Xu’s statement is modelled on the following comment on the nature of the so-called *bianfeng* 變風 (the mutated Airs), poems allegedly written by the “historians of the states” (*guoshi* 國史) during times of moral decline: “Thereupon, the mutated Airs emerge from affections, without going further than proper behaviour and morality” 故變風發乎情，止乎禮義。See Fu Lipu, *Shijing Maozhuan*, 65. As pointed out by Stephen Owen, the mutated Airs were not “manifestations of moral decline, but [...] responses by virtuous men to the problem of moral decline”. See Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, 47.

contemporaries of the compiler of the anthology. An example is the mid-Ming scholar Lu Rong 陸容 (1436 – 1494), whose negative judgement of Yang Weizhen's *xianglianti* corpus will be discussed in Chapter Three.

Despite its brief and sketchy nature, Song Xu's definition of *xianglianti* poetry raises several interesting points about the specific poetic category at the centre of my study. For this reason, this definition can be aptly used as a starting point to explore in further depth some of the main features of *xianglianti* poetry. I would now like to expand on my above comments on Song Xu's own definition of *xianglianti* and take a closer look at the following aspects of this poetic category: its similarities with other literary labels – more precisely, *yanti* 艷體 (style of seductive allure), *yutaiti* 玉臺體 (jade terrace style), and *gongti* 宮體 (palace style); its relationship to the *Xianglian ji*; and its morally problematic nature. The last two of these aspects, especially the question of moral acceptability, will also be dealt with in further detail in the next three chapters, with an obvious focus on Yang Weizhen's and Wang Cihui's own *xianglianti* corpus.

***Xianglianti* and Other Related Labels**

In stating that *xianglianti* could be classified as *yanci* and is also similar to *yutaiti*, Song Xu uses categorization and comparison with the probable intent of clarification, yet, as a result, he opens a further series of unanswered questions about the specific nature of this particular type of poetry. Unfortunately, he does not explain in what ways these categories are similar among each other. Moreover, within the *Yuanshi tiyao* we do not find even a brief definition of either *yanci* or *yutaiti*. Since Song Xu

linked these two poetic categories with *xianglianti*, it is appropriate to take a closer look at this established connection in the present study.

Although *yutaiti* is not used as a major category in Song Xu's anthology of Yuan poetry, Yan Yu lists it as a major poetic style in the already mentioned "Shi ti" chapter of *Canglang shihua*, where it is briefly defined as follows:

The jade-terrace style: the Han, Wei, and Six Dynasties poems of the *Jade Terrace Collection*, to which Xu Ling 徐陵 (507-583) wrote a preface, all have this style. Some only call the ones that weave seductive allure jade terrace style, yet this is actually not the case. 玉臺體，《玉臺集》乃徐陵所序，漢、魏、六朝之詩皆有之，或者但謂織豔者為玉臺體，其實則不然。⁵⁷

Yan Yu's definition of *yutaiti* testifies to the existence of slightly divergent opinions on what exactly constitutes this type of poetry. In Yan Yu's view, the label *yutaiti* could be applied to the entire corpus of the Liang 梁 dynasty (502-557) anthology *Yutai xinyong* 玉臺新詠 (New Songs from a Jade Terrace), the earliest extant anthology of *shi* poetry on the theme of love and women, which he refers to by using the alternative title *Yutai ji* 玉臺集 (Jade Terrace Collection). Some others, instead, applied the label *yutaiti* only to a selection of the poems belonging to the *Yutai xinyong*, more precisely to those poems which "weave seductive allure" (*zhiyan* 織豔). When considering the definition of *yutaiti* found in *Canglang shihua* along with Song Xu's association of *yutaiti* with *xianglianti*, one is left to wonder how Song Xu himself viewed this particular poetic label. The main question would be whether, when pointing to its similarity with *xianglianti*, Song Xu used the word *yutaiti* in a similar way to Yan Yu's or chose, instead, to use it in its narrower sense.

⁵⁷ Yan Yu, *Canglang shihua*, 64.

Whichever the definition of *yutaiti* that Song Xu had in mind, there is no doubt that the label is related to the type of poetry collected in the *Yutai xinyong*. Traditionally believed to have been compiled by Xu Ling 徐陵 (507-583) between 541 and 545 in the context of the literary coterie of crown prince Xiao Gang 蕭綱 (503-551), later Emperor Jianwen 簡文 (r. 549-551) of Liang, the *Yutai xinyong* consists of more than six hundred poems, whose dates span from the second century BC to the years right before the compilation of the anthology.⁵⁸ Despite the wide chronological scope of the anthology, the majority of the poems of the *Yutai xinyong* were written between 420-545, a period which saw the gradual development of *gongti shi* 宮體詩 (palace style poetry), the ornate poetic style which fully flourished at the literary salon of crown prince Xiao Gang.⁵⁹ What unifies all the poems collected in the *Yutai xinyong* is their shared focus on the theme of love and women. The long preface which Xu Ling wrote to the *Yutai xinyong*, a highly ornate prose piece offering the reader a preview of the seductive scenes portrayed by the poems of the anthology, emphasizes the specialized nature of the collection.⁶⁰ After a long, alluringly detailed catalogue of beauties (*liren* 麗人) of the past and present, Xu Ling introduces his anthology, stating the motives behind its compilation:

[The palace beauties] take no delight in idle time, they only pay attention to new verses.
[Poetry] can probably act as a substitute for the flower of oblivion and slightly dispel the disease of melancholy. Yet, famous pieces of former eras and skilful compositions of today

⁵⁸ There are some controversies surrounding the compilation of the *Yutai xinyong*. Zhang Peiheng 章培恆 used Han Wo's preface to the *Xianglian ji* (in which the late Tang poet seems to treat Xu Ling only as the author of the preface to the Liang dynasty anthology and not also as its compiler) and other materials to support his theory that Xu Ling was not the compiler of the anthology. See Zhang Peiheng "Yutai xinyong de bianzhe", 17-18.

⁵⁹ With a selection of seventy-six poems, Xiao Gang is the most represented poet in the anthology.

⁶⁰ For a detailed analysis and discussion of Xu Ling's preface to the *Yutai xinyong* see Birrell, *Games Poets Play*, 279-303.

are variously distributed in Unicorn Gallery or scattered in Hong City. Unless I compile these pieces into a book, [the palace beauties] will have no means to peruse them. Thereupon, I wrote burning the midnight oil, wielding my brush till dawn. I selected songs of seductive allure for a total of ten *juan*. They have never brought dishonour to the Odes and Hymns, nor overflown [the limits set by] the poets of the “Airs”. Like the separation between the Jing and Wei,⁶¹ such is [my method of selecting songs of seductive allure], and that is all.⁶²

無怡神於暇景，惟屬意於新詩。庶得代彼皋蘇，微蠲愁疾。但往世名篇，當今巧製，分諸麟閣，散在鴻都。不籍篇章，無由披覽。於是，然脂暝寫，弄筆晨書，撰錄艷歌，凡爲十卷。曾無忝於雅頌，亦靡濫於風人，涇渭之間，若斯而已。⁶³

From the above excerpt, we learn that the *Yutai Xinyong* was allegedly conceived as a source of diversion and entertainment for a female readership, a readership formed by the same alluringly beautiful and culturally refined concubines and palace ladies whose charm is celebrated throughout the lines of the preface and the verses of the majority of the poems included in the anthology.⁶⁴ After presenting poetry as a possible remedy against sorrowful languor, Xu Ling emphasizes the importance of his role as a compiler. His merit lies in the great effort he placed into collecting and selecting a wide range of “songs of seductive allure” for the pleasure of his intended readers. In her critical reading of the preface, Birrell concisely evaluated the contributions made by Xu Ling by means of the compilation of the *Yutai xinyong*:

⁶¹ Xu Ling metaphorically presents the higher tradition of the *Shijing* and the lower tradition of the poems he anthologized in the *Yutai xinyong* as the Jing and Wei, a clear river and a muddy one which run along their separate courses, after flowing together for hundreds of miles, with the clear waters of the Jing remaining unspoiled by the contact with the turbid Wei. See Birrell, *Games Poets Play*, 298.

⁶² When translating this excerpt of Xu Ling’s preface to the *Yutai xinyong*, I also consulted Birrell’s translation of the piece. See, Birrell, *Games Poets Play*, 290.

⁶³ Xu Ling, *Yutai xinyong*, vol. 1, 12-13.

⁶⁴ Not all the poems included in the *Yutai xinyong* are about women of the palace. Within the corpus belonging to the early *yuefu* tradition and its later imitations, we also find poems about commoners, such as mulberry pickers and lotus gatherers.

[Xu Ling] rescued many poets and poems from oblivion [...]; established a monument to the theme of love and the genres of lyric verse; presented a literary historical text that traced the evolution of love poetry from its classical origins to his own day; and preserved the experimental, modernist style of Palace Style poetry for posterity”.⁶⁵

When making reference to the poetry collected in the *Yutai xinyong*, Xu Ling does not use a general word for poetic compositions, such as *shi* 詩 or 歌 *ge*, but uses the more specific term *yange* 艷歌 (songs of seductive allure), which Birrell chose to narrowly render as “love-songs”.⁶⁶ Although *yange* originally referred to a type of folk song from the area of the ancient state of Chu 楚,⁶⁷ I believe that the meaning given by Xu Ling to the compound *yange* is very close to that of *yanci*, the type of poetry which is mentioned in the *Yuanshi tiyao* along with *xianglianti*.⁶⁸ With regards to *yanci*, it needs to be specified that in the context of the *Yuanshi tiyao* the word *ci* does not refer to the specific poetic form of *ci* (song lyric), but is instead used as a general term for poetic compositions. Both *yange* and *yanci* can, thereupon, be regarded as synonyms of *yanshi* 艷詩 (poetry of seductive allure), also referred to as *yantishi* 艷體詩 (seductive-allure-style poetry), a broad poetic label referring to poetry on the themes of female beauty and sensual love.

The word *yan* 艷 can play a crucial role in our understanding of the main features of *xianglianti* poetry. In associating *xianglianti* with *yanci*, Song Xu recognized the “seductive allure” typical of *xianglianti* poetry. The term *yan* refers to the alluring

⁶⁵ Birrell, *Games Poets Play*, 297.

⁶⁶ Birrell, *Games Poets Play*, 290. In footnote number nine to the ninth chapter of her *Games Poets Play*, Birrell states that she interprets the word *yan* within the compound *yange* as “the amatory theme represented through the female”. See Birrell, *Games Poets Play*, 401.

⁶⁷ Yan Ming and Xiong Xiao, “Zhongguo gudai yanshi bian”, 175.

⁶⁸ Yan Ming and Xiong Xiao advance the hypothesis that Xu Ling’s use of *yange* as a collective term for the poems included in the *Yutai xinyong* might be regarded as evidence of the interchangeability of the word *yange* with the word *yanshi* during the mid-sixth century. See Yan Ming and Xiong Xiao, “Zhongguo gudai yanshi bian”, 176.

qualities of things, including language. When used in association with women, it points to their sensual, aesthetic, and erotic appeal; it portrays women as sources of aesthetic and amorous-erotic contemplation, as objects of male desire.

Seductive allure can be regarded as the link connecting the *Xianglian ji* and post-*Xianglian ji xianglianti* poetry with the poems on palace ladies and court entertainers of the *gongti* tradition, many examples of which have been handed down through the *Yutai xinyong*. The association of the label *xianglianti* with that of *yutaiti* in the *Yuanshi tiyao* provides us with a clue to the widely recognized close relationship existing between the *Xianglian ji* and the *Yutai xinyong*, a relationship which has been acknowledged throughout the centuries. For example, in his brief general evaluation of Han Wo's poetry, the late Qing scholar Weng Fanggang 翁方綱 (1733-1818) traced the origins of *xianglianti* poetry back to the *Yutai xinyong*:

The style of Han Wo's *Fragrant Dressing Case* originates from the *Jade Terrace*. Although the vigour of his style does not reach the level of Li Shangyin 李商隱 (813–858), Han Wo's writing is clear and limpid and surpassed Pi Rixiu 皮日休 (834–883) and Lu Guimeng 陸龜蒙 (?–881) by far.

韓致堯香奩之體，溯自玉臺。雖風骨不及玉溪生，然致堯筆力清澈，過於皮、陸遠矣。⁶⁹

Modern-day scholars have repeatedly recognized the link existing between the *Xianglian ji* and the *Yutai xinyong*. In his short study on the significant contribution made by the *Xianglian ji* to the development of pre-modern Chinese love poetry (愛情詩 *aiqing shi*), Yuan Fang briefly discussed the relationship between *gongti shi* and the

⁶⁹ Weng Fanggang, *Shizhou shihua*, 2.76.

poetry of the *Xianglian ji*, pointing out the major differences and similarities between the two and showing how the latter was not a mere imitation of the *Yutai xinyong*.⁷⁰

The close relationship between the Liang dynasty anthology and the late Tang collection was first hinted at by Han Wo himself. In the preface to the *Xianglian ji*, Han Wo himself explicitly linked his collection to the earlier *gongti* tradition: “Pondering about the palace style, I did not dare to call myself someone as assiduous in writing as Yu Xin 庾信 (513-581).⁷¹ Yet, I sneer at the *Jade Terrace*. Why was there the need to ask Xu Ling to write the preface?” 遐思宮體，未敢稱庾信攻文，卻諛玉臺，何必倩徐陵作序。⁷²

While the intended main purpose of the above quoted excerpt was probably to indirectly praise the literary quality of Han Wo’s self-preface through the derision of Xu Ling’s preface to the *Yutai xinyong*, the passage confirms the existing literary link between the poems on female charm of the *gongti* tradition and Han Wo’s *Xianglian ji*. When reading the *Xianglian ji* along with the *Yutai xinyong*, one cannot fail to notice evident similarities among the two works. The *gongti* poems on court ladies exerted a certain influence on the language and imagery of many of the poems included in the *Xianglian ji*. Han Wo’s “Zhou qin” 晝寢 (Taking a Daytime Nap)⁷³ an alluring portrayal of a woman getting ready for a daytime rest, rich in multisensory details, such as the smoothness and fragrance of the woman’s body, is a clear example of the influence of the *gongti* poems on beauties on the *Xianglian ji* in its resemblance to “Yong neiren zhou mian” 詠內人晝眠 (On a Wife Sleeping in Daytime), a poem by Xiao Gang on the

⁷⁰ Yuan Fang, “Xianglian ji xinpings”, 42-45.

⁷¹ Together with Xu Ling, Yu Xin was one of the major members of Xiao Gang’s literary salon and a major writer and promoter of palace style poetry. The important role played by Xu Ling and Yu Xin in the development of palace style poetry is also revealed by the label *Xu Yu ti* 徐庾體 (Xu and Yu’s style) an expression used as a synonym for *gongti*.

⁷² Han Wo, “Xianglian ji zixu”, in Xu Zhuo, *Quan Tang shi lu*, 93.21a.

⁷³ Chen Jilong, *Han Wo shi zhu*, 373-374.

same motif.⁷⁴ In the same way that the *Yutai xinyong* established a clearly defined literary path for the aesthetic and erotic exploration of the feminine in *shi* poetry, Han Wo's *Xianglian ji* soon became a model and a source of inspiration to authors interested in the composition of seductively alluring poetry on the theme of love and women.

Xianglianti* Poetry and Its Relationship with the *Xianglian ji

When mentioning the composition of *xianglianti* poetry during the Yuan dynasty, Song Xu did not refer to the general act of writing poetry, but made, instead, a more specific word choice by using the verb *fang* 倣 (to imitate), thus emphasizing the fact that post-Han-Wo *xianglianti* poetry was conceived as imitative of an earlier tradition. Yuan dynasty poets were certainly not the first to consciously write *xianglianti* poetry and insert themselves within the path traced by the *Xianglian ji*. During the Song dynasty, the literary label *xianglianti* can be found not only within the context of literary theory (as previously seen, in the brief definition found in the section on poetic categories within Yan Yu's *Canglang shihua*), but also in the context of actual poetic practice.

Within the corpus of the late Southern Song *Jianghu shipai* 江湖詩派 (Rivers and Lakes School of Poetry) poets, the following compositions stand out as explicitly self-labelled *xianglianti* poems: Chen Qi's 陳起 (fl. late thirteenth century) "Fen de chun qin xiao xianglianti" 分得春禽効香奩體 (I was assigned [the topic of] spring birds [and

⁷⁴ Xu Ling, *Yutai xinyong*, vol. 2, 314.

wrote on it] imitating the fragrant-dressing-case style);⁷⁵ Chen Yunping’s 陳允平 (fl. 1275) “Xiao xianglianti” 香奩體 (Fragrant-dressing-case Style [Poem]);⁷⁶ He Yinglong’s 何應龍 (fl. late thirteenth century) “Xiao xianglianti” 效香奩體 (In Imitation of the Fragrant-dressing-case Style);⁷⁷ Ye Yin’s 葉茵 (1199 - ?) five poems titled “Xianglianti” 香奩體 (Fragrant-dressing-case style [Poems]);⁷⁸ and Xie Wujing’s 謝無競 (n. d.) “Xiao xianglianti” 效香奩體 (In imitation of the fragrant-dressing-case style).⁷⁹ Zhang Zhilong’s 張至龍 (fl. 1255) “Ni Han Wo ti” 擬韓偓體 (In imitation of Han Wo’s style)⁸⁰ can also be added to the list of the *Jianghu shipai* poems which were explicitly conceived by their authors as *xianglianti*, since from the text of the poem it is evident that the phrase “Han Wo’s style” was clearly used to specifically refer to the style of Han Wo’s *Xianglian ji*.

Since the above-mentioned poets have all been identified as belonging to a specific group of poets known under the collective name of *Jianghu shipai*, it is worth spending a few words on the main features of this particular school of poetry. The name *Jianghu shipai* refers to a group of minor poets active at the end of the Southern Song dynasty, more specifically during the period 1209-1276. The name given to this group of poets originates from *Jianghu shiji* 江湖詩集 (Rivers and Lakes Collection) an anthology edited and published by Chen Qi, a book merchant active in Hangzhou whose poems are also included in the collection. Mostly disengaged from politics, these poets modelled their poetic craft on the poetry of the Late Tang, especially that of Jia Dao 賈

⁷⁵ Chen Qi, *Jianghu houji*, 24.11b.

⁷⁶ Chen Qi, *Jianghu xiaoji*, 17.3a-4a.

⁷⁷ Chen Qi, *Jianghu xiaoji*, 25.2b-3a.

⁷⁸ Chen Qi, *Jianghu xiaoji*, 42.7b-8b.

⁷⁹ Fu Xuancong, *Quan Song shi*, vol. 72, 45350. “Xiao xianglianti” is the only extant poem by Xie Wujing.

⁸⁰ Chen Qi, *Jianghu xiaoji*, 18.6a.

島 (779-843), Yao He 姚合 (ca. 779-ca. 849), and Xu Hun 許渾 (791-858).⁸¹ Within the broader context of the adoption of late Tang poetic models, some of the *Jianghu shipai* poets also followed Han Wo. More precisely, they looked at the Han Wo of the *Xianglian ji* as a model of artfully crafted verses on love and women, as testified by my previously listed self-labelled *xianglianti* poems written by members of the *Jianghu shipai*. While previous scholarship on the *Jianghu shipai* had largely ignored the role played by the *Xianglian ji* within this Southern Song school of poetry, Zhang Wei 張巍, in an article published in 2006, fully acknowledged Han Wo's influence on (at least some of) the poets belonging to the group.⁸² The *Jianghu shipai* poets reconfirmed the suitability of *shi* poetry for the exploration of private emotions related to the sphere of love. Despite being active at the time of full development of *ci* as the perfect medium for the treatment of love and women, they consciously chose to follow the *Xianglian ji* tradition not only in terms of themes, imagery, and diction, but also with regards to poetic form, by writing verses on these themes using the *shi* form.

Returning to the self-labelled *xianglianti* compositions within the *Jianghu shipai* corpus, one cannot fail to notice the self-declared imitative nature of the majority of these poems. The character *xiao* 效 (to imitate, in imitation of) appears in the title of Chen Qi's, He Yinglong's, and Xie Wujing's poems, while Zhang Zhilong similarly uses the character *ni* 擬 (to imitate) in the title of his poem. It might therefore be assumed that even the poems simply titled "Xianglianti" (those by Chen Yunping and Ye Yin) were also conceived as works of literary imitation, whose aim was to capture the essence of the *xianglianti* mode of writing.

⁸¹ For a detailed study on the *Jianghu shipai* poets and their poetry, see Zhang Hongsheng, *Jianghu shipai yanjiu*.

⁸² See Zhang Wei, "Han Wo yu Jianghu shipai".

In line with Han Wo's *Xianglian ji*, the sensual-aesthetic feminine is explored in the self-labelled *xianglianti* corpus of the *Jianghu shipai* poets. Some of the poems emphasize feelings of love and longing (the sphere of *qing*), while others have a stronger focus on sensual allure (the sphere of *se*). Chen Yunping's poem, the longest within the group, celebrates the beauty of surfaces by creating a richly detailed boudoir scene, consisting of a succession of sensory (mainly visual) impressions. Throughout the lines of the poem Chen Yunping gradually leads the reader from a fragrance-filled inner courtyard to the private space of the boudoir, where through ornate description he almost creates a small compendium of womanly objects which often recur in *xianglianti* poetry:

The sound of rain by the rhino-horn pillow,

The moonlight by the ivory bed.

In her palm two parrots,

On the screen two phoenixes.

In the stone box a precious sword is stored,

A golden key opens the jade box.

The pheasant-tail of the fan is round in the clear light,

By the mandarin duck on the dressing case she tries the morning make-up.

The rosy raw silk robe is tight,

On the cloud brocade pendants jingle.

The hair-locks combed, the golden cicada towers up straight,

The hairpin crosswise, the jade sparrow soars.

The sleeves, water-and-sky-green, flutter,

The skirt, turmeric-yellow, is splashed.

雨聲犀角枕，
月色象牙牀
掌上雙鸚鵡，
屏間兩鳳皇。
石函藏寶劍，
金鑰啟瑤箱。
扇雉團清影，
匳鴛試曉妝。
霞綃衣窄索，
雲錦佩玎璫。
鬢攏金蟬蠹，
釵橫玉燕翔。
袂飄天水碧，
裙濺鬱金黃。⁸³

A question to be asked when looking at these *xianglianti* poems is how closely they took Han Wo's *Xianglian ji* as their poetic model and what exact aspects of the collection they chose to imitate. Earlier in the chapter I stated that Zhang Zhilong uses the expression *Han Wo ti* 韓偓體 (the style of Han Wo) in the title of his quatrain as a synonym for *xianglianti*. I hereby quote the text of Zhang Zhilong's poem to support my statement and to use it as a starting point to look at the relationship between the *xianglianti* poetry of the *Jianghu shipai* poets and Han Wo's *Xianglian ji*:

⁸³ Chen Qi, *Jianghu xiaoji*, 17.3b.

“In Imitation of Han Wo’s style”

An “achoo” made the two luan birds tremble

Practising the melody of a new song, she did not get the right tune.

After she has offered the night incense, her lover calls her to sleep.

Immediately she puts aside the needle and thread, her back facing the silver lamp.

《擬韓偓體》

一聲阿鵲顫鸞雙，

學調新詞未得腔。

拜了夜香郎喚睡，

旋收鍼綫背銀釭。⁸⁴

Zhang Zhilong’s poem opens with a very curious image: the effect of a woman’s sudden sneeze on her hair adornments, a pair of luan-bird-shaped hairpins. The sneeze is conveyed through the onomatopoeia *aque* 阿鵲, the Chinese equivalent of the English word “achoo”. Although this is not the first instance of the mention of the act of sneezing or of the use of the word *aque* in traditional Chinese poetry,⁸⁵ sneezing is still a relatively rare and surprising element, especially in verses written in the *shi* form. The act of sneezing adds a slightly comical element to the entire poem, as Qian Zhongshu similarly observed with regards to “Yuan pen” 願嚏 (Wishing for a Sneeze), a

⁸⁴ Chen Qi, *Jianghu xiaoji*, 18.6a.

⁸⁵ The earliest poetic reference to sneezing dates back to as far as the *Shijing*; more precisely, it appears in “Zhong feng” 終風, one of the *Guofeng* 國風 (Airs of the States) poems. In this poem a connection between sneezing and longing is established: “Awake I cannot sleep / I long for him and sneeze” 寤言不寐，願言則嚏。See Fu Lipu, *Shijing Maozhu*, 149. As for the onomatopoeia *aque*, it appears in several Song dynasty poems. For a survey of the increased presence of references to sneezing in poetry during the Song dynasty, see Wang Pengcheng, “Penti ru ju Songdai sheng”.

poem by Mei Yaochen 梅堯臣 (1002-1060) on the theme of sneezing.⁸⁶ In the specific context of Zhang Zhilong's poem, what is comical is the contrast between the elegant hair decoration on the woman's head, the pair of *luan* bird shaped hairpins, and the *su* 俗 (vulgar) element of the sneeze. Since Zhang Zhilong's poem is written in imitation of Han Wo and sneezing does not frequently appear in traditional Chinese poetry, one would expect to find at least one mention of sneezing within the *Xianglian ji*, yet this is actually not the case. Sneezing adds liveliness and realism to the poem and sets a light-hearted tone to the entire composition. In his literary goal to imitate Han Wo's unique style, Zhang Zhilong had probably in mind those poems of the *Xianglian ji* which construct lively and life-like vignettes of womanly daily life. A perfect example of such lively portrayals of femininity is "Qiuqian" 鞦韆 (The Swing), a lively portrayal of a woman playing on a swing:

"The Swing"

By the pond, resting at night under the Qingming rain

Moving around the hall free from dust, getting close to the flower bed.

The rope made of multicoloured silk threads hangs from the wall.

Using the utmost of her force, she can stare at her neighbor's orchard.

Getting off [the swing] she cannot regulate her lovable heavy breath

Reclining on the vermilion balustrade, she remains silent for a long time.

She does not utter a word and is moved by the sorrow caused by longing

Turning her eyes, she looks at the sky and lets out her tongue in amazement.

《鞦韆》

池塘夜歇清明雨，

⁸⁶ Qian Zhongshu, *Song shi xuan zhu*, 17.

繞院無塵近花塢。
五絲繩系出牆遲，
力盡才憐見鄰圃。
下來嬌喘未能調，
斜倚朱闌久無語。
無語兼動所思愁，
轉眼看天一長吐。⁸⁷

In Zhang Zhilong's quatrain, the sneezing scene is followed by a series of different actions (learning how to sing a new song, burning incense at night, and putting away needle and thread), all occupying a line each. The quick succession of a variety of actions performed by the same woman is a feature shared by many of the poems belonging to the *Xianglian ji*. Han Wo seemed to enjoy capturing in poems what might be defined as "female beauty in motion". Within the *Xianglian ji* there are a number of instances of lively representations of feminine charm, capturing fleeting moments, graceful gestures, and rapid movements within women's daily lives. Together with the already mentioned "Qiuqian", some other examples of beauty in motion within Han Wo's collection are: "Oujian" 偶見 (Seen by Chance), a quatrain describing a cheerful girl getting off the swing, untying her skirt, asking for wine, and then leaving the scene with a smile and toying with a plum, after the arrival of a guest⁸⁸, "Yong shou" 詠手 (On a Hand), where almost every individual line follows a different action performed by a woman's "jade bamboo shoots" (*yu sunya* 玉筍芽), a metaphor for her white,

⁸⁷ Chen Jilong, *Han Wo shi zhu*, 433.

⁸⁸ Chen Jilong, *Han Wo shi zhu*, 379.

slender fingers;⁸⁹ “Song ji” 鬆髻 (A Loosened Hair Knot), a poem which captures the moment when a lady’s “hair-knot loosens at the base, the jade hairpins hang down” 髻根鬆慢玉釵垂, while she is pointing at blossoms on a tree;⁹⁰ and “Niaonuo” 裊娜 (Slim and Graceful), a highly sensual poem in which Han Wo adds vitality to the portrayal of a glamorous entertainer by describing the sudden opening of her cherry shaped mouth: writing a song lyric, the cherry [of her mouth] suddenly appears split open / Wine cups are passed around, cardamom fragrance is smelled in the distance 著詞暫見櫻桃破，飛盞遙聞荳蔻香。⁹¹

Even though Zhang Zhilong’s quatrain is not written in such a close and direct imitation of the *Xianglian ji* that its exact source(s) of inspiration can be identified, the poem would definitely fit well with the verses included in the late Tang collection. Zhang Zhilong’s “Ni Han Wo ti” and other self-classified *xianglianti* poems within the *Jianghu shipai* corpus clearly demonstrate that the label *xianglianti* did not necessarily imply an extremely close connection with the actual *Xianglian ji*. A poem was not required to be closely modelled on or to draw its direct inspiration from specific poems included in the *Xianglian ji* in order to be classified as *xianglianti*. At the same time, this does obviously not mean that poems bearing the label *xianglianti* never show a close or direct relationship with the *Xianglian ji*. Among self-labelled *xianglianti* poems there are some which echo or directly quote specific lines belonging to the late Tang collection. For example, in the case of He Yinglong’s “Xiao xianglianti” I was able to find a specific echo of the *Xianglian ji* in its final line:

⁸⁹ Chen Jilong, *Han Wo shi zhu*, 365-366.

⁹⁰ Chen Jilong, *Han Wo shi zhu*, 367.

⁹¹ Chen Jilong, *Han Wo shi zhu*, 410.

“In Imitation of the Fragrant-dressing-case Style”

Cloud curtains, layer upon layers, the rain has not stopped,

A tender chill first reaches the jade curtain hook.

A cup of evening wine, nobody to share it with,

Bashfully carrying two blossoms she descends from the small tower.

《效香奩體》

雲幙重重雨未收，

嫩寒先到玉簾鉤。

一杯晚酒無人共，

羞帶雙花下小樓。⁹²

When reading the last line of He Yinglong’s quatrain, the reader familiar with the *Xianglian ji* would probably instantly recall the ending of one of Han Wo’s “Wuti” 無題 (Untitled) poems: “Her hands hold two cardamom blossoms / Clearly acting as a neighbour to the East” 手持雙豆蔻，的的為東鄰。⁹³ If we read the final line of He Yinglong’s poem as a variation on the ending of Han Wo’s poem, the motive behind the woman’s action (carrying two blossoms) becomes even more evident. The two blossoms are used as a love token to give to her love interest, so that she will no longer have to spend the night alone, without anyone to share her wine cup with.

If we read self-labelled *xianglianti* poetry through an intertextual lens and try to identify possible direct sources of poetic influence, it becomes evident that the authors of such poetry did not limit themselves to the restricted corpus of the *Xianglian ji* when looking for inspiration for their compositions. There are even cases of *xianglianti* poems in which other texts, rather than any specific poem of the *Xianglian ji*, appear to

⁹² Chen Qi, *Jianghu xiaoji*, 25.2b-3a.

⁹³ Chen Jilong, *Han Wo shizhu*, 416.

have exerted a stronger and more direct influence on the poem's imagery and diction. For example, the first poem of Ye Yin's set of five *xianglianti* quatrains was almost certainly inspired by a famous *ci* lyric written by the Southern Tang emperor Li Yu 李煜 (937–978). Let us look at the two poems, one after another, to observe their similarities:

“Fragrant-dressing-case Style [Poem]” Number One

Longing, alone I face the small moonlit window.

Trying to cut a spring dress, I take advantage of the clear sky at dusk.

Still I think that this feeling is as small as a silk thread,

I wish to cut it, yet it does not break – what is to be done about this feeling?

《香奩體》其一

相思獨向小窗明，

試剪春衣趁晚晴。

還覺此情絲樣小，

欲裁不斷奈何情。⁹⁴

Li Yu's “To the Tune: Crows Call at Night”

Without a word, alone I climb the West Pavilion.

The moon is like a hook.

In the lonely inner garden of *wutong* trees is locked late autumn.

Cut, it doesn't break.

Tidied, tangled again –

This separation grief.

It's altogether a different kind of flavour in the heart.

李煜 《烏夜啼》

無言獨上西樓，

⁹⁴ Chen Qi, *Jianghu xiaoji*, 42.7b-8a.

月如鉤。
寂寞梧桐深院，
鎖深秋。
剪不斷，
理還亂，
是離愁。
別是一般滋味，
在心頭。⁹⁵

When read together the two poems reveal more than one common feature. Not only are both poems scenes of solitary introspection under the moonlight (see the opening line of Ye Yin's quatrain and the first two lines of Li Yu's *ci* lyric), but they also share the metaphorical association between deep feelings and uncuttable threads. While Li Yu uses words which can be associated with the activity of sewing and embroidering – *jian* 剪 (to cut), *li* 理 (to tidy), *luan* 亂 (to tangle) – , he does not explicitly mention tangled threads when he describes the sorrow caused by separation as something which cannot be cut and is difficult to put in order. Ye Yin further elaborates on Li Yu's reflection on the impossibility to cut away deep feelings and makes the metaphorical association between threads and feelings more explicit by directly comparing the longing felt by the female persona at the centre of his poem to a tiny silk thread (*xian* 絲) which she cannot cut. Another example of the presence of other literary echoes rather than the *Xianglian ji* in *xianglianti* poetry can be found within the same poetic set by Ye Yin:

“Fragrant Dressing Case Style” Poem number two

⁹⁵ Zhang and Huang, *Quan Tang Wudai ci*, 4.450.

A female butterfly and a male bee embroidered on an apricot branch,
In this moment my heart understands its meaning.

I idly embroider [these designs] on a perfumed sachet,
And send it to the Eastern wind as a gift for the one I long for.

《香奩體》其二

雌蝶雄蜂綴杏枝，

此時此意妾心知。

等閑繡在香囊上，

寄與東風贈所思。⁹⁶

The opening line of the above poem – “a female butterfly and a male bee embroidered on an apricot branch” 雌蝶雄蜂綴杏枝 – resonates with the echo of one of Li Shangyin’s poems by the title “Liu zhi” 柳枝 (Willow Branch) by means of the image of the two winged insects of the opposite sex:

By the flower pistils and honeycombs,
A male bee and a female butterfly.
Living at the same time but not of the same kind,
How can they still long for each other?”⁹⁷

花房與蜜脾，

蜂雄蛺蝶雌。

同時不同類，

哪復更相思。⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Chen Qi, *Jianghu xiaoji*, 42.8a.

⁹⁷ Liu, *The Poetry of Li Shang-yin*, 139.

⁹⁸ Li Shangyin, *Li Shangyin shige ji jie*, vol. 1, 113.

When read along with Li Shangyin's poem, the significance of the image of the male bee and the female butterfly within the emotional context of love and longing becomes even more apparent. The two insects, which could be read as a metaphor for lovers of different social conditions, are here used by the female persona as a means to visualize and convey her feelings. They become a symbol for herself and her lover and of the deep longing that she feels for him. It is no coincidence that she chooses to embroider the very image of the two insects on a perfumed sachet (*xiangnang* 香囊), an object commonly used as a love token, to send to her loved one.⁹⁹

Looking at *xianglianti* poetry beyond the *Jianghu shipai* corpus, one can find other instances of poems written in self-declared imitation of Han Wo's *Xianglian ji* which appear to have a more intimate relationship with other works on love and women rather than with the *Xianglian ji* itself. A good example is "Wu suo xiao Han Wo" 五索效韩偓 (Five Requests: In Imitation of Han Wo), a set of five poems composed by the late Yuan – early Ming poet Xu Ben 徐夔 (1335-1380), one of the four fourteenth century poets from Suzhou known under the collective name of "Four Outstanding Men of Wu" (*Wu zhong si jie* 吳中四傑).¹⁰⁰ As the title already hints, the set of poems is conceived as a series of requests made by a female persona to her lover. Each individual poem ends with the phrase "from you, I request" (*cong lang suo* 从郎索), followed by the specific object that the woman would like to have: a mirror stand (*jingtai* 鏡臺), a gauze fan (*luoshan* 羅扇), a broom made of *luan* bird feathers (*luanzhou* 鸞帚), a new set of strings (*xin xuan* 新弦) for her *pipa*, and deer musk

⁹⁹ For the use of perfumed sachets as love tokens see, Yan Yan, "Gudai xiangnan de xingzhi", 19; and Zhang Chouping, "Gudai xiaoshuo zhong aiqing xinwu", 177-178.

¹⁰⁰ The other three are the poets Gao Qi 高啟 (1336-1373), Yang Ji 楊基 (ca 1334-1383), and Zhang Yu 張羽 (1333-1385).

(*shexiang* 麝香) to fill an embroidered pouch.¹⁰¹ Since the five poems are all very similar to one another, the first poem of the group can be examined in closer detail as representative of the entire set:

By nature I am fond of combing my hair and applying make-up,

I style my locks and evenly apply [make-up] on my cheeks.

My hand holds the hundred gods mirror,

A thousand times I look at my reflection.

Unfortunately my hands have no strength

From you, my darling, I request a mirror stand.

爲性好梳裹，

料鬢更均腮。

手把百神鏡，

千回自照來。

可憐手無力，

從郎索鏡臺。¹⁰²

The entire poem builds up towards the final request, explicitly voiced in the very last line. The reasons behind the request are stated clearly throughout the poem: in this case, the woman's fondness for self-adornment, the heavy weight of the mirror, and the weakness of her hands when holding the mirror. In its structure and word choice, in its structure and diction the entire set reveals its direct indebtedness to "Shi suo" 十索 (Ten Requests) a set of *yuefu* poems, of which only four are extant,

¹⁰¹ Xu Ben, *Beiguo ji*, 1.4a-4b.

¹⁰² Xu Ben, *Beiguo ji*, 1.4a.

attributed to a Sui 隋 dynasty (581–618) courtesan known by the name of Ding Liuniang 丁六娘. The poems attributed to the courtesan all end with the phrase *cong lang suo* 从郎索 (from you, I request), followed by her desired object.¹⁰³ From its very first line, the first poem of Xu Ben’s set establishes a stronger link with the set by Ding Liuniang: its opening – “by nature I am fond of combing my hair and applying make-up” – echoes the first line of the second poem of the Sui dynasty set – “by nature I love scenery” 爲性愛風光.¹⁰⁴

As shown by the examples provided above, including Xu Ben’s set of poetic requests, the label *xianglianti* comprises both poems which echo and imitate specific verses of the *Xianglian ji* and poems which do not seem to have a strong and direct intertextual link with the late Tang collection. We might say that the *Jianghu shipai* poets set the example for later poets wanting to write in the fragrant dressing case style, showing that a poem did not have to be intimately linked to the *Xianglian ji* by means of direct imitation or borrowing in order to be classified as *xianglianti*. In order to be labelled as *xianglianti*, a poem had to deal with the theme of love and women and had to be in line with the general mood and style of Han Wo’s *Xianglian ji*. It had to approach women erotically and aesthetically, using beautiful imagery and elegant diction. It had to capture the sensual allure of female beauty, womanly objects (e.g. hairpins, jewels, fans), and related environments (e.g. the boudoir, the inner garden) and reveal the deepest private emotions felt by women themselves and their male lovers. In other words, poets wanting to write in the *xianglianti* tradition had to explore the feminine through the thematic framework of *se* and *qing* and only focus on

¹⁰³ Guo Maoqian, *Yuefu shiji*, vol. 4, 79.1114.

¹⁰⁴ Guo Maoqian, *Yuefu shiji*, vol. 4, 79.1114.

those aspects of women's life and experiences which could be easily presented under an aesthetic and erotic light.

The Morally Problematic Nature of *Xianglianti* Poetry

In his definition of *xianglianti*, Song Xu did not criticize the poetic category per se, but lamented the fact that many authors of such poetry crossed the boundaries of propriety. Song Xu's comment is a clear clue to the morally problematic nature of *xianglianti* poetry. Throughout the centuries Han Wo's *Xianglian ji* has, in fact, been treated not only as a revered model of poetry on love and women but also as an object of sharp criticism. Negative criticism was often expressed in moralistic terms. Here are a few examples, arranged in chronological order, of the morally charged negative criticism directed at Han Wo's *Xianglian ji*:

1. Fang Hui's 方回 (1227-1305) *Yingkui lüsui* 瀛奎律髓 (Essence of the Regulated Poems from Immortal Constellations):¹⁰⁵

a. Comment on Han Wo's "Wu geng" 五更 (The Fifth Watch): "The first four lines are too lowly, too licentious. The last four lines are where the poem starts being a *shi* poem." 前四句太猥、太褻，後四句始是詩。¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ These are just two examples of the several negative comments on individual poems of the *Xianglian ji* that can be found in Fang Hui's *Yingkui lüsui*.

¹⁰⁶ Fang Hui, *Yingkui lüsui*, vol. 1, 7.288. A poem voicing a male lover's melancholic longing, "Wu geng" is, indeed, one of Han Wo's most erotic compositions:

"The Fifth Watch"

In the past we once met on the turmeric-fragrant bed,
At midnight hiding myself I entered the inner room.
In my bosom I did not know that the golden inlaid flower-shaped hair ornaments had fallen,
In the darkness I could only feel the fragrance of the embroidered shoes.
At the time of departure the soul was broken,
From then on whenever we came across each other, our eyes were even wilder.

b. Comment on a poem by Han Wo titled “Mashang jian” 馬上見 (Seen on Horseback):

“[Han Wo] did not feel ashamed of words propagating licentiousness. Would not this be [a sign of] the decline of the Tang?” 誨淫之言, 不以爲恥, 非唐之衰而然乎?¹⁰⁷

2. Chu Renhuo’s 褚人穫 (1635-1682) “Flowery Words Melt the Soul” 綺語銷魂 in his *Jianhu ji* 堅瓠集 (Strong Gourd Collection):

There are three *shi* poetry [collections] which melt one’s soul. The *Fragrant Dressing Case Collection* is one of them. As for melting one’s soul, it means to ruin one’s heart’s intention. [...] It is irredeemably licentious and wicked. Reading it surely increases licentious thoughts. Thereupon, one should be cautioned and take them as flowery words.

詩有銷魂者三, 香奩集其一也。夫銷魂者即壞心田之謂也。[……] 淫惡不悛也。閱之必增益淫邪之念。故當以綺語爲戒。¹⁰⁸

3. Shen Deqian’s 沈德潛 (1673-1769) *Shuo shi zuiyu* 說詩碎語 (Discussing Poetry with Words of a One Year Old Child):

Starting from the poetry compositions of the Liang and Chen, half of them dealt with erotic feelings, and with the *Fragrant Dressing Case* of the end of the Tang [poetry] increasingly went

Time swiftly disappears, melancholy remains,
Throughout my whole life what I have gained is loneliness and desolation.

五更
往年曾約鬱金床
半夜潛身入洞房
懷裏不知金鈿落
暗中唯覺綉鞋香
此時欲別魂俱斷
自後相逢眼更狂
光景旋消惆悵在
一生贏得是淒涼

The above poem is quoted from Chen Jilong, *Han Wo shi zhu*, 345. In criticizing the first two couplets of “Wu geng” as “lowly” and “licentious”, Fang Hui certainly noticed the dramatic change in tone taking place within the poem; while its first half focuses on the passionate remembrance of a past amorous encounter and creates a sensual, erotically charged atmosphere, the second half is dominated by feelings of melancholy and despair over the impossibility of repeating the experience.

¹⁰⁷ Fang Hui, *Yingkuai lüsui*, vol. 1, 7.280.

¹⁰⁸ Chu Renhuo, *Jianhu buji*, 6.10b.

closer to licentiousness and lost the aim of “[expressing] fondness of sensual beauty without being licentious”.¹⁰⁹ As it deviated from this aim, day by day it became estranged from the “doctrine of names” [orthodox teachings].

自梁陳篇什，半屬艷情，而唐末香奩，益近褻嫚，失好色不淫之旨矣。此旨一差，日遠名教。¹¹⁰

4. Ji Yun’s 紀昀 (1724-1805) “Shu Han Zhiguang Xianglian ji hou” 書韓繳堯香奩集後 (Written as a Postface to Han Wo’s *Fragrant Dressing Case Collection*): “As for the collection *Fragrant Dressing Case*, its poems are all lascivious and alluring. It can be said to contain all kinds of encouragements and not even a single admonishment.” 香奩一集，詞皆淫艷，可謂百勸而並無一諷矣。¹¹¹

When looking at the above quoted comments, it is interesting to see how the characters *xie* 褻 and *yin* 淫, both sharing the meanings of “lustful”, “lascivious”, “licentious”, and “obscene” repeatedly appear in the negative judgement of *xianglianti* poetry. The same adjectives were also applied to later *xianglianti* poetry.¹¹²

Considering the negative criticism received by Han Wo’s collection throughout the centuries, the fact that later *xianglianti* poetry encountered a similar response should not be of any surprise. The Qianlong 乾隆 Emperor (r. 1736-1795), known for his rigid moralistic attitude towards literature, attacked later imitators of Han Wo’s *xianglianti*

¹⁰⁹ “[Express] fondness of sensual beauty without being licentious” (*haose bu yin* 好色不淫) is a direct quote from a statement on the nature of the “Guofeng” poems of the *Shijing* found within the biography of Qu Yuan in Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 (ca. 145 or 135-86 BC) *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Scribe): “The Airs of the States [express] fondness of sensual beauty, but are not licentious” 國風好色不淫. See Sima Qian, *Shiji*, vol. 8, 84.2482. The comment found in the *Shiji* echoes, in turn, a famous statement attributed to Confucius on the nature of “Guanju” 關雎 (The Crying Osprey), the first poem of the *Shijing*: “‘The Crying Osprey’ [expresses] pleasure without being licentious and sadness without being harmful”. 關雎，樂而不淫，哀而不傷 (*Lunyu* 3.20). See Liu Baonan, *Lunyu*, vol. 1, 3.116.

¹¹⁰ Shen Deqian, *Shuo shi zuiyu*, 2.250.

¹¹¹ Ji Yun, *Jixiaolan wenji*, 252.

¹¹² See, for example, Lu Rong’s judgement of Yang Weizhen’s *xianglianti* production, examined in Chapter Three.

poetry in one of his imperial edicts (*shengyu* 聖諭) on the compilation of the *Siku*

Quanshu:

After *New Song from a Jade Terrace*, men of the Tang from Han Wo's generation wrote beautiful compositions which were named 'fragrant dressing case style', it gradually entered frivolousness and ornateness. As for those who consciously imitated these wrongdoings, the style of their poetry is even lowlier.

自《玉臺新詠》以後，唐人韓偓輩，務作綺麗之詞，號為香奩體，漸入浮靡。尤而效之者，詩格更為卑下。¹¹³

As authors of *xianglianti* poetry, who consciously inserted themselves in an already morally problematic poetic tradition, Yang Weizhen and Wang Cihui similarly became victims of morally charged criticism. As previously seen in the Introduction, both poets were called "literary demons" because of their supposedly obscene poetry.

Negative comments on the nature of the *Xianglian ji* and *xianglianti* poetry, such as the ones listed above, can be better understood if situated against the broader background of the complex and tense relationship between traditional Chinese poetic orthodoxy and the amorous-erotic sphere. The supposed aim of *shi* poetry was to reveal the author's intent and moral stance, as expressed by the famous statement *shi yan zhi* 詩言志 (poetry expresses intent), one of the canonical definitions of poetry.¹¹⁴ As a consequence, poetry was required to be serious in content and morally edifying, in order for it to be considered a worthy pursuit for scholar-officials. As Grace Fong points out in her study of Zhu Yizun's love lyrics, "poetry that takes as its theme love and sexual desire was never regarded as high-minded in the orthodox tradition unless

¹¹³ Yong Rong et al., *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao*, 29.b

¹¹⁴ The dictum *shi yan zhi* is recorded in the "Shun dian" 舜典 (Canon of Shun) section of the *Shangshu* 尚書 (Hallowed Documents). See Kong Yingda, *Shangshu zhengyi*, 3.44. For a discussion of this canonical statement on the nature of poetry, see Owen, *Readings*, 26-29.

it could be read allegorically".¹¹⁵ For this reason, many pre-modern authors and admirers of poetry dealing with the morally problematic sphere of *se* and *qing* held an ambivalent attitude towards it and felt the need to find different ways to legitimize and justify its promotion and transmission.

Allegorical interpretation was one of the major strategies adopted by poets, editors, and literary critics to elevate the status of erotic poetry. Deeper moral and political meanings were often sought beneath an erotically suggestive surface. Images of deserted beauties, longing for their absent lovers and lamenting their loneliness and abandonment, could be used as a way to indirectly express a male poet's frustrations of a moral and political nature. Commonly referred to as *meiren xiangcao* 美人香草 (beautiful person and fragrant herbs), this was a well rooted allegorical technique in the pre-modern Chinese poetic tradition. This allegorical practice can be traced back to Qu Yuan 屈原 (fourth century B.C.) who used physical beauty and flowers to represent moral virtues, hence the denomination *meiren xiangcao*. This particular allegorical technique of adopting a female persona to express male thoughts belongs to the literary practice of *jituo* 寄托 ("self-allegorization", literally "lodging meaning [in unrelated objects]")¹¹⁶. Despite the presence within the history of traditional Chinese poetry of examples of what Bell-Samei defines as "self-consciously allegorical use of the female persona"¹¹⁷, the *meiren xiangcao* allegorical framework was often imposed by literary critics, editors, and commentators as a way to elevate and legitimize the sensual and the amorous-erotic. Although the *Xianglian ji* was not written with an

¹¹⁵ Fong, "Inscribing Desire", 447.

¹¹⁶ My translation of the term *jituo* is the same as the one by Susan Mann. See Mann, *The Talented Women of the Zhang Family*, 129.

¹¹⁷ Samei, *Gendered Persona*, 9. In the chapter "'A Thousand, Ten Thousand Resentments': The Story of a Convention" Maija Bell Samei traces the convention of the use of the persona of the abandoned woman by male poets to give voice to political complaints. See Bell Samei, *Gendered Persona*, 46-84.

allegorical purpose, this strategy was also applied to Han Wo's collection. Starting from the Qing dynasty and all the way down to the end of the Empire, some literary critics attempted to legitimize the collection through allegorization, trying to find a deeper meaning behind the alluring surface of its poems. For example, the nineteenth century literatus Ding Shaoyi 丁紹儀 (1815-1884) read the *Xianglian ji* as the indirect expression of Han Wo's frustration and indignation over the collapse of the Tang dynasty:

Han Wo witnessed the end of the Tang. He was unable to brandish a spear and pull back the sun. Full of loyal anger, having nowhere to vent, he had no choice but to entrust it to boys and girls in the boudoir. In this world [people] only treat [the *Fragrant Dressing Case Collection*] as fragrant-dressing-case [poetry]. They have certainly not investigated in depth its meaning, and that is all. 韓致堯遭唐末造，力不能揮戈挽日。一腔忠憤，無所於泄，不得已托之閨房兒女。世徒以香奩目之，蓋未深究厥旨耳。¹¹⁸

The culmination of the allegorizing attempts towards Han Wo's collection came on the eve of the fall of the Qing with Zhen Jun's 震鈞 (1857-1920) *Xianglian ji fawei* 香簾集發微 (Elucidation of the Subtleties of the Fragrant Dressing Case Collection), an allegorical commentary to each individual poem of the *Xianglian ji*. The entire commentary revolves around the assumption that Han Wo's collection shares with Qu Yuan's "Lisao" 離騷 (Encountering Sorrow) the allegorical expression of the author's "love for the ruler" (*aijun* 愛君), the only difference being that, while Qu Yuan uses the beautiful person (*meiren* 美人) as an allegory for the ruler, Han Wo chooses it as his allegorical alter-ego.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Ding Shaoyi, *Ting qiusheng guan cihua*, 1.2576.

¹¹⁹ Zhen Jun, *Xianglian ji fawei*, 1a.

Another strategy for the legitimization of amorous-erotic poetry consisted of presenting such compositions under a non-allegorical, yet didactic, light. More precisely, poems which were undoubtedly erotic and resisted allegorical interpretation could be presented as works meant to impart a moral teaching by means of negative example. An adopter of this strategy was the mid-Tang poet Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779-831). In a letter to his friend Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846), he presented and simultaneously defended his own *yanshi* 艷詩 by defining them as “those [poems] which instruct and transform by means of provoking” (*yi gan jiaohua zhe* 以干教化者).¹²⁰ As argued by Shields, “Yuan Zhen attempted to integrate his romantic poems into his corpus by defending them as didactic pieces-poems that could stimulate moral reform by their negative example”.¹²¹

Another strategy would be to simply refrain from using *shi* when writing poems on the sensual aspects of love and women and use instead the lower forms of *ci* and *sanqu* (from the Yuan dynasty onwards), both regarded as more appropriate vehicles for amorous-erotic content. With the full development of the literati *ci* lyric and its own distinctive aesthetics by the Northern Song, the song lyric started to be regarded as the perfect form for the exploration of love in all its complex and subtle nuances.¹²² Having *ci* available as a fully developed poetic form for the expression of longing and desire, Song dynasty and later poets who chose nonetheless to continue entrusting these private emotions to *shi* poetry consciously put themselves in a rather difficult position.

¹²⁰ Yuan Zhen, “Xu shi ji Letian shu” 敘詩寄樂天書 (A letter sent to Bai Juyi to talk about poetry), in *Yuan Zhen ji jiaozhu*, vol. 2, 855.

¹²¹ Shields, “Defining Experience”, 61.

¹²² Lin, “The Formation of a Distinct Generic Identity for Tz’u”, 16-19.

As an alternative strategy, authors who wrote amorous-erotic verse in the *shi* form and refused to assign an allegorical or didactic function to their work, could still legitimize their choice by dismissing such poetry as a literary exercise only meant to display one's poetic craft, as a mere *divertissement*, a work of imitation, or an immature product of youth. This could be achieved by means of prefaces or titles.

All these considerations on the morally problematic nature of the thematic sphere of *se* and *qing* and its tense relationship with poetic orthodoxy should be kept in mind when reading the next three chapters, especially the specific sections of Chapter Three and Chapter Four which are devoted to the analysis of selected prefatory and commentarial materials to my selected authors' (Yang Weizhen and Wang Cihui) *xianglianti* poetry.

CHAPTER TWO

Xianglianti Poetry and *Fengliu* Identity

As authors of *xianglianti* poetry, Yang Weizhen and Wang Cihui chose to follow a morally problematic literary path, one that posed a challenge to the orthodox view of *shi* poetry. Their poetic forefather Han Wo was fully aware of the “unorthodox” nature of his *Xianglian ji*. His awareness was voiced as a concern in the apologetic ending of the preface he wrote to the collection: “If someone blames it for straying away from [the path of] the Classics, I also hope to cover up its weakness by means of its literary merits.” 如有責其不經，亦望以功掩過。¹²³ Yang Weizhen and Wang Cihui were also aware of one of the very likely consequences of composing *shi* poetry on love and women: morally charged, negative criticism, which could possibly go beyond the nature of their work and extend to their own moral conduct. They knew that their artistic choice would attract a certain amount of literary attacks from both their contemporaries and successors.

The attacks by Wang Yi and Pan Deyu which I presented in the Introduction are, in fact, only two instances of the negative comments directed at the two poets throughout the centuries. Despite having both been labelled as “demonic” by Pan Deyu, the two poets diverged significantly in their attitude towards the prospect of facing harsh criticism for their poetry. As Xiaorong Li pointed out, “[c]ompared with his predecessors and contemporaries who practiced in the same topical genre, Wang Cihui was much more self-reflexive, outspoken, and bolder in challenging the orthodox morality and poetics that would be used to judge his life and works”.¹²⁴ He did not feel

¹²³ Han Wo, “Xianglian ji zixu”, in Xu Zhuo, *Quan Tang shi lu*, 93.21b.

¹²⁴ Li, “I Sliced My Flesh”, 49.

guilty or uneasy about the frivolous, problematic nature of his poetry, as the third couplet of one of his “Wuti” 無題 (untitled) poems clearly witnesses: “Why shall I fear slandering lips accusing me of being skillfull in shell-and-brocade-like ornate [verses]? / I am still willing to let my poetic bones sink into Hell”¹²⁵ 豈憚讒唇工具錦, 尚甘詩骨墮泥犁.¹²⁶ Although Wang Cihui does not specify the type of poetry condemned by “slandering lips” (*chanchun* 讒唇), punishment in Hell is closely connected to the production of amorous-erotic poetry. By the late Ming, a clear connection between writing verses on amorous-erotic subjects and punishment in Hell had already been firmly established.¹²⁷

While Wang Cihui had a bold and fearless attitude, Yang Weizhen revealed, instead, a certain degree of uneasiness towards his *xianglianti* production. Following Han Wo’s example, he ended the preface to his “Xulian ji” (a text which I will discuss and examine in more detail in Chapter Three) on an apologetic note, wanting us readers to believe that self-reproach was the main reason behind his choice to add a preface to the set of poems after they gained popularity. “Thereupon I wrote this to acknowledge my faults” 因書此以識吾過,¹²⁸ states Yang Weizhen, his faults being the composition and transmission of *xianglianti* poetry.

Yang Weizhen apologized for his poetry and distanced himself from the content of his “beautiful words” (*juanli yu* 娟麗語). Through the rhetorical question “how could they do any harm to my heart of iron and stone?” 又何損吾鐵石心腸也哉 he

¹²⁵ The term *nili* 泥犁 is the Chinese transliteration of the Sanskrit word *niraya* निरय, which refers to the underworld as a place of damnation.

¹²⁶ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 182.

¹²⁷ For other anecdotes connecting supposedly licentious poetry with punishment in Hell see Qian Zhongshu’s essay “Wenren ru diyu” 文人入地獄 (Literati Entering Hell) in Qian Zhongshu, *Guanzhui bian* vol. 2, 687-688. For an English translation of Qian Zhongshu’s essay see Egan, “Poets in Hell” in *Limited Views*, 358-362.

¹²⁸ Yang Weizhen, *Tieya yibian zhu*, 8.9a-9b.

separated the frivolous, erotic content of his *xianglianti* poems from his own moral seriousness and integrity. Why did Yang Weizhen feel the need to separate himself from his *xianglianti* compositions, by tracing a clear line between the content of his poems and his stern moral principles? Considering my previous discussion of the moral controversies surrounding *shi* compositions on the theme of love and women, a plausible reason is the weight of the dictum *shi yan zhi* and the related perceived strong connection between author and poetic text. Although the intimate relationship between author and text, where the latter is a reflection of the life and ideals of the former, had been repeatedly challenged throughout the centuries, the authority of the “Great Preface” to the *Shijing* still continued to weigh down on poets and literary critics. It is probably because of the pervasive influence of Confucian poetic orthodoxy that many pre-modern poets and critics felt compelled to argue against the necessary existence of a reflective link between author and text.¹²⁹

Although I do not think that poetry should always be treated as a reflection of a poet’s life experiences or a perfect mirror of his interiority, I believe that it cannot be entirely separated from the author – after all, it is a product of the poet’s mind. More precisely, poetry can play a significant role in constructing, projecting, and reinforcing a certain persona. With regards to *xianglianti* poetry, I contend that the special attention that Yang Weizhen and Wang Cihui devoted to this morally problematic type of poetry contributed to the reinforcement and creation of what I call their “*fengliu* identity”.

¹²⁹ For a discussion on different pre-modern Chinese views on the relationship between the life of the author and their work, see Qian Zhongshu’s essay in Qian Zhongshu, *Guanzhui bian* vol. 4, 1387-1391. For an English translation see Egan, “Personal Conduct and Literary Style” in *Limited Views*, 41-46.

The present chapter examines the concept of *fengliu* 風流 in relation to the two authors at the centre of my study and lays the basis for the exploration of the link between the production of *xianglianti* poetry and the construction of a *fengliu* identity. It also applies the label *fengliu* to Han Wo and seeks to establish a further link among the three poets by means of this concept.

Tracing a detailed biography of Yang Weizhen¹³⁰ and Wang Cihui¹³¹ is well beyond the scope of the present chapter, as my interest lies more narrowly and specifically in their *fengliu* personae, in the specific self-images that they consciously projected, rather than in their life experiences as a whole. Moreover, their life has already been the object of thorough academic studies by Chinese scholars. My intention is, therefore, to emphasize those features of their literary production, life choices, and social activities that contributed towards the shaping of their identity as *fengliu wenren*, unconventional and unfettered men of letters devoted to literary and other pleasures, including amorous pursuits and the enjoyment of the company of courtesans. In other words, I am interested in Yang Weizhen's and Wang Cihui's self-fashioning, borrowing Stephen Greenblatt's words, in their "deliberate shaping in the formation and expression of identity",¹³² in their "achievement of [...] a distinctive

¹³⁰ For a detailed biographical study on Yang Weizhen see Sun Xiaoli, *Yang Weizhen nianpu*. For a brief English language biographical account on Yang Weizhen see Goodrich, *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 1547-1553.

¹³¹ For the most detailed biographical accounts on Wang Cihui, see Geng Chuanyou, "Yi ge bei wenxue shi yiwang de zhongyao zuojia", 15-27 and 45-68; Huang Shizhong, "Wang Cihui Yiyun, Yiyu shi tankao", 74-77; Zheng Qingmao, "Wang Cihui yanjiu", 15-61; and Zhong Laiyin, "Wang Yanhong tankao", 66-70.

¹³² Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 1. Stephen Greenblatt theorized the concept of self-fashioning within the specific social and cultural context of sixteenth-century Renaissance England. For a discussion of the same concept within a pre-modern Chinese context, see Berg, "Female Self-Fashioning". Berg's discussion is also inspired by Greenblatt's study.

personality, a characteristic address to the world, a consistent mode of perceiving and behaving”.¹³³

Drifting with the Wind: The Polysemous Concept of *Fengliu*

The term *fengliu* is a complex cultural concept with a wide range of meanings, many of which often coexist simultaneously. Within the context of English-language scholarship on pre-modern Chinese literature and culture there seems to be no commonly agreed translation of the word *fengliu*. Here I list only some examples of the various English renderings of the term which I have come across in my academic reading: “limpidity and refinement”,¹³⁴ “aesthetic elegance”,¹³⁵ “urbanity”,¹³⁶ “debonair manner”,¹³⁷ “unfettered-ness”,¹³⁸ “amorousness”,¹³⁹ and “gallantry”.¹⁴⁰ In *A Handbook of Chinese Cultural Terms* the following definitions are listed under the entry for *fengliu*: “1. refined and tasteful; 2. unconventional in spirit and life style; 3. romantic; amorous; licentious”.¹⁴¹ In Paul Kroll’s *A Student’s Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese* the two-character compound is defined and translated as follows: “term of much importance and positive regard in describing the behavior of certain persons: natural dignity with flair, a gentleman’s polished indifference to polish, *sprezzatura*, cultivated manners, stylish manner, stylishly cultivated, stylishly refined,

¹³³ Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 2.

¹³⁴ Li, “*Shishuo xinyu* and the Emergence of Aesthetic Self-Consciousness”, 257.

¹³⁵ Gerritsen, “Searching for Gentility”, 192.

¹³⁶ Sieber, “Rhetoric, Romance, and Intertextuality”, 50.

¹³⁷ Chennault, “Lofty Gates”, 273.

¹³⁸ He, “Productive Space”, 8.

¹³⁹ Owen, *The Late Tang*, 468. Earlier in the same book Owen defines *fengliu* as “an untranslatable term that combines sensuality, melancholy, and swashbuckling panache”. See Owen, *The Late Tang*, 12.

¹⁴⁰ Owen, *The Late Tang*, 468.

¹⁴¹ Gao, Wang, and Weightman, *A Handbook of Chinese Cultural Terms*, 64.

panache and urbanity, flowing charm, ‘a drifter with the wind’”,¹⁴² to which Kroll adds the note “do not translate as ‘romantic’”.¹⁴³

The great variety of English-language renderings of *fengliu* testifies to the complexity and polysemous nature of the term. Originally referring to the flowing movement (*liu* 流) of the wind (*feng* 風), from the third to the thirteenth century the word *fengliu* underwent a significant evolution, acquiring multiple meanings and connotations, many of which continued to be used in later eras.¹⁴⁴

The earliest instances of the term used as a compound, with a meaning different from its literal one, date back to the Han dynasty, when it was used to indicate customs and mores. The term later began to be used to characterize people and their behaviour. Starting from the Wei and Jin periods, *fengliu* described a person of great refinement and literary talent who, at the same time, had a Daoist-inspired unconventional lifestyle. The literary and artistic works produced by such people were also labelled as *fengliu*. This union of refinement, artistic talent, and unrestraint, closely connected with the aesthetic concept of *kuang* 狂 (eccentricity, wildness), was fully embodied by the Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove (*Zhulin qixian* 竹林七賢) and the many other Wei and Jin intellectuals who populate the anecdotes recorded in Liu Yiqing’s 劉義慶 (403-444) *Shishuo xinyu*. Liu Yiqing’s collection of anecdotes is, in

¹⁴² Kroll, *A Student’s Dictionary*, 115.

¹⁴³ Kroll, *A Student’s Dictionary*, 115.

¹⁴⁴ My short survey of the major meanings of *fengliu* in the following paragraphs is mainly based on Peipei Qiu’s own treatment of the topic, which is inserted within the broader context of the relationship between *fūryū*, a major aesthetic concept in traditional Japanese culture and the Chinese *fengliu*. See Qiu, *Basho and the Dao*, 95-126. Other sources which I consulted for my brief overview are Feng Youlan’s (Fung Yu-lan) discussion of Jin dynasty Neo-Taoism and the *fengliu* spirit, and the abstract of an unpublished paper on the meaning of *fengliu* by Richard John Lynn; see Fung, *A Short History*, 231-240; and Lynn, “The Range of Meanings of Fengliu in Early Chinese Texts”, paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, San Diego, March 2000. <http://www.asian-studies.org/absts/2000abst/japan/J-91.htm>

fact, a crucial text for the understanding of the major features of the so-called Wei Jin *fengliu*.

While amorous flair was not a characterizing trait of the Wei Jin *fengliu*, in later eras the term started to be increasingly associated with love, desire, and beautiful women. The association of the term with *qing* and *se* began during the Southern Dynasties, when *fengliu* started to connote amorous charm. This use of *fengliu* is exemplified by the opening couplet of a poem by Xiao Gang titled “Meinü pian” 美女篇 (A Composition on a Beautiful Woman), one of the many poems on beauties anthologised in the *Yutai xinyong*: “A beauty passionate to the outmost, most famous for her amorous charm” 佳麗盡關情，風流最有名。¹⁴⁵ The beauties of the palace, the intended readership of the *Yutai xinyong*, are also characterized as *fengliu* (amorously charming) in Xu Ling’s preface.¹⁴⁶

The amorous connotation of *fengliu* became widespread in the ninth century, along with the full blooming of an unprecedented “discursive culture of romance”.¹⁴⁷ In the late Tang amorous experiences and their celebration through literary creation became an important part of the self-image constructed by many poets of the time, the most prominent example being Du Mu 杜牧 (803-852), whose “*fengliu* image was closely associated with his frequent visits to the courtesan quarter, where he had affairs and wrote poems on the subject of flirtation, passion, and love.”¹⁴⁸ Because of the popularity of his poems on courtesans (some of which might actually be spurious) and

¹⁴⁵ Xu Ling, *Yutai xinyong*, vol. 2, 309.

¹⁴⁶ Xu Ling, *Yutai xinyong*, vol. 1, 11.

¹⁴⁷ I borrow the phrase “discursive culture of romance” from Stephen Owen, who used it to refer to the strong focus on the theme of love characteristic of a great number of ninth century poems, tales, and anecdotes. See Owen, “What Did Liuzhi Hear”, 86; and Owen, *The End of the Chinese 'Middle Ages'*, 130. Hong Yue’s PhD thesis explored in further detail the special fascination with romance of ninth century writers. See Yue, “The Discourse of Romantic Love”.

¹⁴⁸ Yue, “Romantic Identity”, 35.

the circulation of *biji* anecdotes on his pleasure-seeking, Du Mu's name evoked passionate love affairs with beautiful courtesans, unrestrained revelries, and melancholy remembrance of past romances. By the Song dynasty, the late Tang poet had become the embodiment of what might be termed the late Tang *fengliu*.¹⁴⁹

Despite the different connotations carried by the word *fengliu* according to the specific historical and literary context, I believe that, when the word is used to refer to a person, his qualities, and behaviour, there is a unifying element which ties together all its different meanings: a strong sense of individuality and unconventionality. In order to be labelled as *fengliu*, one had to stand out from the crowd, be it for elegance, eccentricity, or amorous charm. Because of the unfettered, hedonistic personas that they projected through their supposedly unrestrained behaviour, both Yang Weizhen and Wang Cihui can be described as *fengliu*. When applying the label *fengliu* to Yang Weizhen and Wang Cihui, I consider their real-life association with courtesans and the prominence they gave to the writing of sensual verses on love and women as integral parts of their *fengliu* identity. In other words, when referred to the authors at the centre of my study, my use of the term *fengliu* comprises the word's later association with romance. The same goes even more for Han Wo (restrictedly intended as the Han Wo of the *Xianglian ji*), whose unconventionality precisely consists of his amorous refinement and the intensity of his feelings, rather than a more broadly intended unconventional lifestyle. In the following sections, I will look at the three poets individually, pointing out their respective *fengliu* features. The individual analysis of

¹⁴⁹ Wangling Jinghua's monograph on the relationship between courtesan culture and ninth century poetry contains a detailed discussion on the creation and reinforcement of Du Mu's *fengliu* persona; see Wangling, *Gechun yishi xian yu kan*, 192-237.

the poets' *fengliu* identity is then followed by a comparison among the three and an attempt to look at the ways in which their poetry is connected to their *fengliu* persona.

The Fortunate Man of Breeze and Moonlight: Yang Weizhen's *Fengliu* Identity

"[I] only adore the *fengliu* Old Iron Immortal" 只愛風流老鐵仙¹⁵⁰ recites the second line of a quatrain inscribed by Gu Jinzhong 顧瑾中 (fl. fourteenth century) on *Taohua youniao* 桃花幽鳥 (Bird and Peach Blossoms), a painting of a bird on a blossoming branch by the Songjiang artist Zhang Zhong 張中 (fl. mid-fourteenth century), a friend and student of Yang Weizhen. The inscription is a praise of Yang Weizhen, who also inscribed a poem on the very same scroll.¹⁵¹ The Old Iron Immortal is, in fact, none other than Yang Weizhen himself. This Daoist flavoured pseudonym was one of the many *hao* (literary names) which the late Yuan poet adopted throughout his life. Although Gu Jinzhong might have simply used the word *fengliu* to refer to the refined unconventionality of Yang Weizhen's own inscription, this particular characterization of the late Yuan poet might prompt us to ask the following questions: what features of Yang Weizhen's life and work can justify his description as *fengliu*? How and which of the different connotations implied by the term are embodied by the late Yuan poet? Could Gu Jinzhong's use of the label *fengliu* possibly go beyond the specific context of the painting inscription and more broadly describe Yang Weizhen as a person?

The poem he inscribed on Zhang Zhong's painting and his extravagant calligraphic style are certainly not Yang Weizhen's only *fengliu* features. Throughout his life, Yang

¹⁵⁰ Guoli Zhongyang bowuyuan, *Gugong shuhua lu*, vol. 2, 5.215.

¹⁵¹ Ai-lian Liu's doctoral dissertation on Yang Weizhen's painting inscriptions discusses in detail the nineteen inscriptions on Zhang Zhong's painting. See Liu, "Yang Weizhen", 116-139.

Weizhen constructed his self-image as a *fengliu* literatus by various means. Using the expression *fengliu wenren*, which she explains as “nonconformist”,¹⁵² to describe Yang Weizhen’s social identity and public persona during his later years, Sufeng Xu argues that the late Yuan poet can be regarded as one of the major predecessors of the late Ming *shanren* 山人 (men of the mountains), eccentric literati who withdrew from office and devoted themselves to a life of worldly pleasures, such as poetry composition, wine drinking, and the company of courtesans.¹⁵³

However true it might be, this assertion should not lead us to assume that Yang Weizhen wholly disdained public office and spent his whole life immersed in idle pleasures without engaging in more serious pursuits. According to historical records, he spent five years of his youth studying assiduously for the civil service examinations, specializing in the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals). He lived confined in the private library which his father Yang Hong 楊宏 (1265-1339) had purposely built for him on Tieya Hill 鐵崖山 and subsequently chose to take the *hao* Tieya to commemorate this important phase in his life. The years of hard study bore their fruit in 1327 when he passed the *jinshi* examination.¹⁵⁴

Yang Weizhen’s early specialisation in the *Chunqiu*, one of the Confucian classics and a foundational work of Chinese historiography (in Yang Weizhen’s own words “the forefather of histories for ten thousand generations” 萬代史宗),¹⁵⁵ is reflected in his long-lasting interest in historical matters. The list of Yang Weizhen's major writings compiled by Lai includes the following works on history: *Chunqiu hetu zhushuo* 春秋合

¹⁵² Xu, “Lotus Flowers”, 58.

¹⁵³ Xu, “Lotus Flowers”, 53-61.

¹⁵⁴ Bao Zunpeng, *Ming shi*, 285.7308.

¹⁵⁵ The quote is taken from Yang Weizhen’s “Zhengtong bian”. See Li Xiusheng, *Quan Yuan wen*, 1335.486.

題著說 (Discussion of Combined Questions on the Spring and Autumn Annals), a no longer extant commentarial work on the *Chunqiu*, meant as preparation for the civil service examination; *Shiyi shiyi* 史義拾遺 (Supplementary to Omissions in the Historical Annotations), a collection of moralising commentaries on ancient historical events; and the essay “Zhengtong bian” 正統辯 (Polemic on Legitimate Succession), a political essay on the issue of dynastic legitimacy, in which Yang Weizhen argued that the legitimate right to rule was transferred from the Northern and Southern Song dynasties directly to the Yuan, without passing through the Liao 遼 (907-1125) and Jin 金 (1115-1234) dynasties.¹⁵⁶ “Zhengtong bian” was praised by Lu Rong together with another work on history by Yang Weizhen, the no longer extant *Shiyue* 史鉞 (The Axe of History),¹⁵⁷ and contrasted with his *xianlianti* poetry.¹⁵⁸ Yang Weizhen’s interest in history also permeated much of his poetry writing. “Poetry on history” (*yongshi shi* 詠史詩), namely poems on historical events and historical figures, many of which are of a didactic nature, has been widely recognized as one of the major categories within Yang Weizhen’s poetic oeuvre.¹⁵⁹

After obtaining the coveted *jinshi* degree, Yang Weizhen was intermittently in and out of office until his definite retirement in 1359. He started his career in the imperial bureaucracy with an appointment to County Magistrate (*yin* 尹) of Tiantai 天台 prefecture, Zhejiang province, a post he was dismissed from after only a few years due

¹⁵⁶ Lai, “Yang Weizhen’s Iron Style Poems on History”, 32-35. For a translation and detailed discussion of Yang Weizhen’s “Zhengtong bain”, see Davis, “Historiography as Politics”.

¹⁵⁷ There are several records of *Shiyue* as one of Yang Weizhen’s major works. See Huang Rensheng, *Yang Weizhen yu Yuanmo Mingchu*, 412.

¹⁵⁸ Lu Rong’s comments are briefly discussed in Chapter Three.

¹⁵⁹ Lai’s dissertation focuses specifically on this poetic category. See, Lai, “Yang Weizhen’s Iron Style Poems on History”. Huang Rensheng also lists “poetry on history” as one of the main categories to classify Yang Weizhen’s poetry; see Huang Rensheng, *Yang Weizhen yu Yuanmo Mingchu*, 234. According to their calculations, there are more than four hundred poems within Yang Weizhen’s corpus which can be labelled as “poetry on history”.

to conflicts with a group of corrupt local officials known as the Eight Vultures (*badio* 八鷗).¹⁶⁰ After four years out of office, he re-entered officialdom in 1334, albeit on a lower post, that of Saltern Commander (*changyan siling* 場鹽司令) of Qianqing 錢清, Zhejiang province. After the death of his parents in 1339, he was once again out of office (even after the end of the mourning period) and spent around ten years tutoring in Jiangnan and increasingly devoting his time to poetry writing. The last official posts he held were Supervisor for Four Affairs (*siwu tiju* 四務提舉) in Hangzhou (1350) and Subordinate Judicial Official in Route Command (*zong guanfu tuiguan* 總管府推官) of Jiande 建德, Zhejiang (1356). In 1358 he was also appointed to the role of Supervisor for Confucian Schools (*Ruxue tiju* 儒學提舉) of Jiangxi 江西, but he was unable to assume the post due to military disorders in the Jiangnan area.¹⁶¹

His fragmentary and unremarkable political career was counterbalanced by significant social popularity and great success in the cultural and literary scene of the Wu Yue 吳越 region (modern day Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces). Having spent extended periods of his life free from the constraints of public office, Yang Weizhen had the chance to completely devote himself to a variety of artistic and leisurely pursuits, such as calligraphy, painting, poetry (not only *shi*, but also the lower genre of *sanqu*)¹⁶², and music. During the second half of his life, especially after his definitive retirement from office in 1359, Yang Weizhen led an increasingly hedonistic lifestyle, surrounding himself with professional female entertainers, like-minded friends, and copious amounts of wine. As argued by John Timothy Wixted, his life experience can

¹⁶⁰ These corrupt officials are referred to as Eight Vultures in the epitaph which Song Lian wrote for Yang Weizhen; see Song Lian, "Yang Lianfu Weizhen muzhiming", in Jiao Hong, *Guochao xianzheng lu*, 115.16a

¹⁶¹ Bao Zunpeng, *Ming shi*, 285.7308.

¹⁶² For more information on Yang Weizhen's *sanqu*, see Huang Rensheng, *Yang Weizhen yu Yuanmo Mingchu*, 138-147.

be seen as a reflection of “the development of the idea of the *wen-jen* as an ‘independent artist,’ free of political responsibility, devoted to literature and art, and often unfettered by societal convention”.¹⁶³

Yang Weizhen’s unrestrained and hedonistic lifestyle captured the attention of both contemporary and later writers. According to “Yang Lianfu Weizhen muzhiming” 楊廉夫維禎墓志銘 (Yang Lianfu Weizhen’s Funerary Inscription), the epitaph written for the poet by his friend Song Lian 宋濂 (1310-1381), Yang Weizhen’s hedonism intensified during the later part of his life: “During his late years he became increasingly broad-minded. He built the Xuan Garden and the Peng Terrace in the upper part of Songjiang.¹⁶⁴ There was no day spent without guests, and there was no guest who did not become heavily drunk.” 晚年益曠達，築玄圃蓬臺於松江之上，無日無賓，無賓不沉醉。¹⁶⁵ Together with the pleasure of wine, Yang Weizhen enjoyed the company of women skilled in the art of entertaining. After retiring from office to Songjiang, near modern day Shanghai,¹⁶⁶ he lived in the company of four concubines: Zhuzhi 竹枝 (Bamboo Branch), Liuzhi 柳枝 (Willow Branch), Taohua 桃花 (Peach Blossom), and Xinghua 杏花 (Apricot Blossom); all of them were well versed in song and music and often accompanied him when he roamed the waters of the Wu and Yue regions on his “spring waters abode” (*chunshui zhai* 春水宅),¹⁶⁷ his pleasure boat. In his *Guitian shihua* 歸田詩話 (Poetry Talks of Returning to the Fields), a

¹⁶³ Wixted, “Poetry of the Fourteenth Century”, 390.

¹⁶⁴ The names chosen by Yang Weizhen for the garden and terrace that he built in Songjiang are strongly infused with Daoist connotations. Both names originally referred to the two most famous legendary abodes of Daoist immortals. The Xuan garden was the name of the second highest peak of Mount Kunlun 崑崙, a Daoist sacred mountain presided by Queen Mother of the West, believed to be the pivot of the universe; the Peng terrace takes its name from Penglai 蓬萊, a mythical island in the Eastern Sea inhabited by immortals.

¹⁶⁵ Song Lian, “Yang Lianfu Weizhen muzhiming”, in Jiao Hong, *Guochao xianzheng lu*, 115.18a.

¹⁶⁶ Yang Weizhen started his full retirement in Songjiang in 1359.

¹⁶⁷ The name of Yang Weizhen’s pleasure boat appears in his “Fengyue furen xu” 風月福人序 (Preface to the Fortunate Man of Breeze and Moonlight). See Yang Weizhen, *Dongweizi wenji*, 9.8b

collection of anecdotes by the late Yuan - early Ming author Qu You 瞿佑 (1347-1433), who was himself a friend of the poet, we found a record of Yang Weizhen's pleasure boat trips in the company of his concubines:

In his late years, Yang Weizhen lived in Songjiang. He had four concubines: Bamboo Branch, Willow Branch, Peach Blossom, and Almond Blossom. They could all sing and play musical instruments. Travelling on a big painted boat, they went wherever they pleased. The rich and powerful families vied to welcome them [as guests]. Among his contemporaries circulated a poem which recited: "Bamboo Branch, Willow Branch, Peach and Almond Blossom, they play wind instruments and string instruments, sing, dance and play the *pipa*. It is pitiful that Master Yang has become a wandering musician of the Jiangnan area".

楊廉夫晚年居松江，有四妾：竹枝柳枝桃花杏花，皆能聲樂。乘大畫舫，恣意所之，豪門巨室，爭相迎致。時人有詩云：竹枝柳枝桃花杏花，吹彈歌舞撥琵琶。可憐一解楊夫子，變作江南散樂家。¹⁶⁸

Qu You's record, including the quoted poem about Yang Weizhen and his concubines, testifies not only to the poet's popularity in Songjiang, but also to his interest and skill in music. The poet played a variety of instruments, including the iron flute (*tiedi* 鐵笛) which features in one of his other literary pseudonyms, *Tiedi Daoren* (The Iron Flute Daoist).¹⁶⁹ In *A History of Japanese Literature*, Jin'ichi Konishi identified the following elements as the major external manifestations of the concept of *fengliu*: the enjoyment of "zither, poetry, wine, and singing girls [. . .] [which] may be

¹⁶⁸ Qu You, *Guitian shihua*, 2.1275. For my translation I also consulted Huicong Zhang's rendering of the same passage. See Zhang, "Imitation and Innovation", 13.

¹⁶⁹ According to Yang Weizhen's autobiographical sketch "Tiedi daoren zizhuan" 鐵笛道人自傳 (The Autobiography of Iron Flute Daoist) his iron flute was made out of an ancient sword (*gu moxie* 古莫邪) and produced "a wonderful sound, out of this world" 奇聲絕人世. See Yang Weizhen, "Tiedi daoren zizhuan" in Jiao Hong, *Guochao xianzheng lu*, 115.20b (5070).

rephrased as music, literature, merrymaking, and the company of women.”¹⁷⁰ It is interesting to observe how all the elements listed by Konishi are also important parts of Yang Weizhen’s *fengliu* persona.

The enjoyment of music, poetry writing, heavy drinking, and the company of professional entertainers (including courtesans turned concubines) were certainly not uncommon among literati, hence many of them could be described as *fengliu* in this regard. However, Yang Weizhen further distinguished himself from others through his total devotion to these pursuits and frequent displays of eccentric behaviour. The poet had some very extravagant habits which surprised and fascinated his contemporaries. A good example of one of Yang Weizhen’s peculiar habits is his fondness for the “shoe cup” (鞋杯 *xiebei*). The so-called “shoe cup” consisted of using a woman’s shoe as a cup holder during drinking parties. This rather bizarre practice caused the disgust of his cleanliness obsessed friend, the painter and calligrapher Ni Zan 倪瓚 (1301-1374):

Yang Lianfu indulged in sensual pleasures. One day together with Ni Yuanzhen¹⁷¹ he had a drinking get-together at a friend’s place. Lianfu removed a courtesan’s shoe and placed a wine cup inside it. He made the guests pass it around to drink and named it “shoe cup”. Yuanzhen had always had an obsession for cleanliness. When he saw this he was greatly enraged. He turned over the table and stood up. He shouted several times “this is filthy!” and left.

楊廉夫耽好聲色。一日與元鎮會飲友人家，廉夫脫妓鞋置酒杯其中，使坐客傳飲，名曰鞋杯。元鎮素有潔疾，見之大怒，翻案而起，連呼齷齪而去。¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Konishi, *A History of Japanese Literature*, 129. The section of *A History of Japanese Literature* I refer to specifically deals with the aesthetic concept of *fūryū* 風流 in traditional Japanese culture and its Chinese origins.

¹⁷¹ Yuanzhen 元鎮 was the *zi* of Ni Zan.

¹⁷² Ni Zan, *Qingbigu quanji*, 11.6b.

According to Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀 (1329- c.1410), who also found this practice “disgusting” (*keyan* 可厭), this was not an isolated episode of eccentric behaviour. In his *biji* 筆記 (jotted notes) collection *Nancun chuogeng lu* 南村輟耕錄 (Records of Stopping Ploughing in the Southern Village), he recounts how using women’s shoes to hold wine cups had apparently become one of Yang Weizhen’s curious habits: “every time at a banquet when he saw a singing-girl or a dancer who had small bound feet, he would remove her shoe and carry a cup in it to bring in wine. He called this “golden lotus cup”. 每於筵間見歌兒舞女有纏足纖小者，則脫其鞵載盞以行酒，謂之金蓮盃。¹⁷³

Another eccentric behaviour adopted by Yang Weizhen was his self-fashioning as a water roaming Daoist immortal. The word *daoren* 道人 (daoist) appears in several of his *hao* 號 (literary names): Tiedi daoren 鐵笛道人 (Iron Flute Daoist), Tiexin daoren 鐵心道人 (Iron Heart Daoist), Tieguan daoren 鐵冠道人 (Iron Crown Daoist), Tielong daoren 鐵龍道人 (Iron Dragon Daoist), and Meihua daoren 梅花道人 (Plum Blossom Daoist). He also used Daoist appellatives to name the garden and terrace he built in Songjiang (the Xuan garden and the Peng terrace).¹⁷⁴ He also assumed a Daoist appearance by wearing a Daoist garment called Huayang headdress (*huayang jin* 華陽巾) and a “feathered robe” (*yuyi* 羽衣) which made him look like “a banished immortal” (*zhe xianren* 謫仙人).¹⁷⁵ Because of the unfetteredness associated with Daoism and the Daoist roots of the term *fengliu*, Yang Weizhen’s self-fashioning as a Daoist immortal can also be treated as another significant component of the poet’s *fengliu* persona.

¹⁷³ Tao Zongyi, *Nancun chuogeng lu*, 23.6.

¹⁷⁴ See note no. 47.

¹⁷⁵ Song Lian, “Yang Lianfu Weizhen muzhiming”, in Jiao Hong, *Guochao xianzheng lu*, 115.18a.

The materials that I have briefly examined so far as evidence of Yang Weizhen's *fengliu* persona are all the work of other writers. Through his own writing, Yang Weizhen also explicitly presented himself as a pleasure-seeking man of letters. He lived leisurely and behaved eccentrically and wanted to leave a record to posterity of his elegantly unrestrained lifestyle. He engaged on multiple sides on the creation of his own *fengliu* public persona. An example of Yang Weizhen's self portrayal as a *fengliu wenren*, is his "Fengyue furen xu" 風月福人序 (Preface to the Fortunate Man of Breeze and Moonlight), in which the late Yuan poet offered a first-hand record of the leisurely lifestyle he led in Songjiang during his old age:

In his late years Bai Juyi retired to Luoyang. He enjoyed his old age with *qin*, songs, wine, and poetic compositions. There were Deng Tong, Wei Chu, Yuan Zhen, and Liu Yuxi as companions for poetic exchanges, Man, Su, Rong, and Man¹⁷⁶ to provide entertainment, and wine. There was also the Lord of Jin¹⁷⁷ acting as the master of the elegant way. For more than ten years he was leisurely and carefree in the common world. He did not fall into the trap of the Sweet Dew incident [835] and called himself a fortunate man. Yet, among his poems there is one which goes: "illness has been living together with me, Bai Juyi / spring followed Fan Su and ended at once".¹⁷⁸ In his bosom there was still some discontent. I have not reached the age of seventy yet; it has been nearly twenty years, since I retired from office within the Nine Peaks and Three Lakes.¹⁷⁹ In my leisurely and carefree life, I have surpassed Bai Juyi. I have Li Wufeng 李五峯 (1285-1350), Zhang Juqu

¹⁷⁶ The four were all concubines of Bai Juyi's.

¹⁷⁷ Jin gong 晉公 (The Lord of Jin) is Pei Du 裴度 (765-839), a contemporary of Bai Juyi who owned a grand mansion in Luoyang which became a major gathering place for the intellectual elite of the city. Within Bai Juyi's poetic corpus we find a number of poems addressed to Pei Du; some of their titles refer to Pei Du as "Director of the Chancellery Pei, Duke of Jin" 裴侍中晉公. See Bai Juyi, *Bai Juyi ji*, vol. 2, 666 and 674. According to his biography in the *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (Old Book of Tang), Pei Du often enjoyed poetry, music, and banqueting in the company of Bai Juyi and Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772-842) (another major Mid Tang poet, mentioned in Yang Weizhen's preface as one of Bai Juyi's major poetic companions); see Liu Xu, *Jiu Tang shu*, vol. 14, 1070.4432.

¹⁷⁸ The line is taken from Bai Juyi's "Chun jin ri yan ba gangshi du ling" 春盡日、宴罷感事獨吟 (On a Day at the End of Spring Moved by Things After a Banquet Chanting Alone) and refers to Bai Juyi's feelings of regret over his choice to abandon his beloved concubine Fan Su. See Bai Juyi, *Bai Juyi ji*, vol. 3, 797.

¹⁷⁹ Jiufeng Sanmao 九峯三泖 (The Nine Peaks and Three Lakes) is the name of a scenic area in Songjiang.

張句曲 (1283-1350), Zhou Yiqi 周易癡 (1341–1368) , and Qian Sifu 錢思復 as companions for poetic exchanges, and Peach Leaf, Willow Branch, Snowball Blossom, and Kingfisher Feather as female entertainers for singing and merrymaking. I only lack the Lord of Jin as a host of the flowers and moonlight of water gardens and towering mansions, and that is all. However, the lords of the East such as Li Yuezhou 李越州, Zhang Wuxing 張吳興, Han Songjiang 韓松江, and Zhong Haiyan 鍾海鹽 [had] singing entertainers and [held] lavish banquets. I have never failed to sit on the mat to their right and I have never lacked a host of water gardens and towering mansions. When the scenery was fine, I would sail my “spring water abode” to travel within Wu and Yue. As interested parties invited me, I imitated the old events of the boat of the water immortals of men of the past. I drifted along the lake and the raven-black and kingfisher-blue. The ones who were watching me called me Immortal Sir Iron Dragon, yet I did not know if The Old Man of the Fragrant Mountain¹⁸⁰ had this [experience] or not. One of my guests, young scholar Hai, congratulated me as the blessed man of rivers and mountains and of breeze and moonlight. He also made my portrait in old age, and inscribed it with the eight characters.

白樂天晚年歸休洛中，娛老者琴歌酒賦。有鄧同、韋楚、元、劉爲倡和友，蠻、素、容、滿爲樂酒具，又有晉公爲雅道主。優游庶境，十有餘年，身不陷甘露禍轍，自謂福人。然其詩有“病與樂天相伴住，春隨樊子一時歸”，則其懷抱猶有惡者。吾未七十，休官在九峯三泖間，殆且二十年。優游光景，過於樂天，有李五峯、張句曲、周易癡、錢思復爲唱和友，桃葉、柳枝、瓊花、翠羽爲歌飲妓，第池台花月主者乏晉公耳。然東諸侯如李越州、張吳興、韓松江、鍾海鹽聲伎高讌，余未嘗不居其右席，則池台主者未嘗乏也。風月好時，駕春水宅赴吳越間，好事者招致，效昔人水仙舫故事，蕩漾湖光烏翠，望之者噀鐵龍仙伯，顧未知香山老人有此無也。客有小海生，賀余爲江山風月福人，且貌余老像，以八字字之。¹⁸¹

All the major *fengliu* elements that characterized the second half of Yang Weizhen’s life appear in his “Fengyue furen xu”: his devotion to music, poetry, and wine; his enjoyment of the company of professional female entertainers; his Daoist inspired behaviour; and, more broadly, his refined eccentricity. The record confirms

¹⁸⁰ Xiangshan Laoren 香山老人 (The Old Man of the Fragrant Mountain) is one of the several *hao* adopted by Bai Juyi.

¹⁸¹ Yang Weizhen, *Dong weizi wenji*, 9.8b

contemporary anecdotes on Yang Weizhen's unrestrained and pleasure-oriented lifestyle. It also testifies to Yang Weizhen's strong interest in self-fashioning. In choosing Bai Juyi as his model, he did not focus on his literary output, but instead based his choice on the way the Tang poet spent his old age. In Bai Juyi's leisure-filled retirement in the company of professional entertainers turned concubines, Yang Weizhen found a perfect model to follow and surpass.

A Fickle Du Mu of Jiangnan: Wang Cihui's *Fengliu* Identity

In the preface he wrote to the *Yiyu ji*, Yan Shengsun 嚴繩孫 (1623 -1702) situated Wang Cihui in the wider social context of the life of pleasures commonly associated with the area known as Jiangnan 江南. Jiangnan, literally meaning "South of the river" (the river being the Yangtze) is an area roughly corresponding to the modern day provinces of Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Anhui (also including the city of Shanghai), which had a long lasting reputation for luxury, pleasure-seeking, beautiful courtesans, and eccentric men of letters. More than a geographical and administrative region, it was a cultural region. As Dorothy Ko aptly observed, "[i]t was less a physical area with unequivocal boundaries than an economic way of life and a cultural identity. [...] [T]he very name of Jiangnan, a popular poetic allusion, conjured up images of abundance, hedonism, and sensual beauty".¹⁸² Such images appear in Yan Shengsun's lively description of the social and cultural background in which Wang Cihui's *xianglianti* poetry was able to flourish and become popular:

¹⁸² Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 20-21.

In Jinsha during the days of peace, wealthy mansions faced one another. The wealthy and fashionable youths of the time banqueted with fine meats and fish delicacies. Possessing great talent and feelings, every day they entertained each other with the sensual pleasures of sight and sound. Such activities as swishing sleeves and hanging hairpins, hosting guests for the night and sending them off, had all become frequent habits. As for writing compositions, they had a nimble poetic creativity. Their talent was also enough to match it. Thereupon, among the gentlemen of the day who were good at writing poetry there were probably many like this. As for the direction of their [poetic] trends, they all went along the same track.

金沙當承平之日，甲第相望。一時裙屐子弟，席華膳，擅才情，平居以聲色徵逐。拂袖挂釵，留髭送客之事，習為故常。至於擊剗刻燭，才亦足以副之。故當日能詩之士，蓋多其人，而風尚所歸，並同一轍。¹⁸³

Through his sketch of the luxury and extravagance of the young wealthy inhabitants of Jinsha (an alternative name of Jintan 金壇, Wang Cihui's native place, located in modern day Jiangsu province) during times of peace, Yan Shengsun presents Wang Cihui as a representative member of a commonly shared way of life centred on the pursuit of sensual pleasures and the enjoyment of poetry, a lifestyle which could be labelled as *fengliu*. As pointed out by Qiu Jiangning 邱江寧, Yan Shengsun sought to find the social reasons behind the development of Wang Cihui's erotic poetry, the major ones being the stability and peace of Jiangnan during his lifetime and the culture of luxury and consumption typical of the area.¹⁸⁴

The hedonistic lifestyle of the wealthy and fashionable youth of Jiangnan is encapsulated by the expression *shengse* 聲色 (sensual pleasures), a word which appears in Yan Shengsun's preface. This compound, literally meaning "sound" and "visual surfaces", can be defined in both a narrow and wider sense. Within its narrow sense, *sheng* stands for "lascivious music", while *se* refers to "the beauty of

¹⁸³ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 3.

¹⁸⁴ Qiu Jiangning, "Lun Wang Cihui yantishi de chansheng ji yingxiang", 192-193.

women”.¹⁸⁵ With regards to female beauty, Yan Shengsun evoked the enjoyment of the company of beautiful women (or more precisely of courtesans and female entertainers) through the phrase “swishing sleeves and hanging hairpins” (*fuxiu guachai* 拂袖掛釵). This expression is probably derived from the following lines of Sima Xiangru’s 司馬相如 (179 – 117 BC) “Meiren fu” 美人賦 (*Fu* on the Beautiful Person): “she hanged her jade hairpin to my cap, and brushed her gauze sleeves against my robe” 玉釵掛臣冠，羅袖拂臣衣。¹⁸⁶ Since in Sima Xiangru’s poem the two actions are both performed by a beautiful woman with the aim of seduction,¹⁸⁷ the expression implies the presence of seductive beauties. By extension, in the particular context of Yan Shengsun’s preface, it refers to the enjoyment of the company of courtesans and female entertainers, the professionals of the art of seduction.¹⁸⁸

Shengse can also be intended as an umbrella term referring to a greater variety of sensual pleasures or, even more generally, to what is perceived through the senses. In his introduction to elements of sound and sight in the court poetry of the Yongming 永明 era (483-493), Meow Hui Goh lists “rich food, strong fragrances, and ornate

¹⁸⁵ The *Hanyu dacidian* 漢語大詞典 (Great Dictionary of the Chinese Language) defines *shengse* as “lascivious music and female beauty” (淫靡的音樂與美色).

¹⁸⁶ Sima Xiangru, *Sima Xiangru ji jiaozhu*, 130.

¹⁸⁷ The action of hanging one’s hairpin on a man’s cap performed by a woman as a seductive gesture is also found in Song Yu’s “Feng fu” 諷賦 (*Fu* on Persuasion): “[she] hanged her kingfisher-feather hairpin on the tassels of my cap” 以其翡翠之釵掛臣冠纓. See Zhang Qiao, *Guwen yuan*, 2.7b.

¹⁸⁸ It is interesting to observe how in his poem “Youxie” 有謝 (An Apology) Wang Cihui used the same allusion to the scene of seduction in Sima Xiangru’s “Meiren fu”:

Her hairpin hung on my cap, her sleeves brushing my robe.
 Before the wine-cup, she initially did not reveal any veiled complaint.
 I also know from a single glance, that her feelings are not shallow.
 If this had happened the year before, how could I have dared refuse?
 釵掛臣冠袖拂衣，
 尊前元未露微詞。
 也知一顧情非淺，
 若在前年詎敢辭。

The above poem is quoted from Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 129.

decoration” as examples of the “potentially dangerous sensual pleasures”¹⁸⁹ which can all be grouped under the word *shengse*. In the context of the preface to the *Yiyu ji*, *shengse* refers to sensual pleasures, not limited to those enjoyed through the senses of sound and sight, as it explicitly includes food delicacies; it also carries a moralistic overtone. In Yan Shengsun’s eyes, Wang Cihui’s poetry could be treated as a reflection of the life of sensual pleasures enjoyed by the wealthy youths of late Ming Jiangnan, an aspect which I will further discuss in Chapter Four, when I examine selected prefatory and commentarial materials to the *Yiyu ji*. Xiarong Li’s observation that Wang Cihui “was very much the product of his own time”¹⁹⁰ and could be inserted within the larger counterculture of the late Ming *shanren* is perfectly in line with what described in Yan Shengsun’s preface.¹⁹¹

In her portrayal of Wang Cihui, Xiaorong Li also presents him “as a ‘loser’ who failed in the civil service examinations but sought in writing poetry an alternative path of self-realization”.¹⁹² Although he could be described as a *shanren* in the broader sense of the word (a generic term for unrestrained literati), Wang Cihui was certainly not entirely free from societal pressures throughout his life. Born into a scholar-official family, he tried to maintain the family prestige by attempting to climb the ladder to officialdom. However, he was not successful. The only post he obtained was the unranked minor post of Assistant Instructor (*xundao* 訓導) of Huating 華亭 to which, according to Geng Chuanyou’s calculation, he was appointed through recommendation only six years before his death.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ Goh, *Sound and Sight*, 1.

¹⁹⁰ Li, “I Sliced My Flesh”, 47.

¹⁹¹ For a detailed discussion on the counterculture of the *shanren* literati in the late Ming and their interactions with courtesans see Xu, “Lotus Flowers”, 39-98.

¹⁹² Li, “I Sliced My Flesh”, 31.

¹⁹³ Geng Chuanyou, “Yi ge bei wenxueshi yiwang de zhongyao zuojia”, 49-51.

Due to his unsuccessful public life, biographical information on Wang Cihui is rather sparse and sketchy. Amongst the scholars who devoted their attention to Wang Cihui and his poetry, Zheng Qingmao, Huang Shizhong, and Geng Chuanyou tried to gather all the available biographical information on the late Ming poet and reconstruct his life, mainly relying on his poems and their respective titles and annotations.¹⁹⁴ Since Wang Cihui's poetry is the main source of information on his life, his reconstructed biographies are usually largely occupied by the various romantic relationship he entertained. In the past two years Lu Xinquan has devoted his attention to reconstructing Wang Cihui's relationships, the result being a series of four short articles, each focusing on some of the women the poet was involved with: his wife, Miss He 賀氏, on whom, rather than *xianglianti* compositions, he mainly wrote poems documenting her illness and mourning her death, and his three concubines A Yun 阿雲, A Yao 阿姚, and Miss Lu 陸氏 (no. 1); the unnamed woman known as *geren* 箇人 (that person) and several servants (no. 2); A Suo 阿鎖 and other courtesans (*geji* 歌妓) (no. 3); and women whose identity and social status cannot be determined (no. 4).¹⁹⁵ Although my study, more precisely Chapter Four, also discusses the presence of real women in the verses of the *Yiyu ji*, my approach differs substantially from Luo Xinquan's. Rather than trying to painstakingly reconstruct the major events in Wang Cihui's romantic life, I concentrate on the autobiographical practices and strategies of authentication adopted by the poet throughout his *xianglianti* corpus.¹⁹⁶

Wang Cihui projected a *fengliu* persona through his verses, by giving considerable prominence to love and women as a poetic subject throughout the majority of his life

¹⁹⁴ See footnote no. 131.

¹⁹⁵ See Luo Xinquan, "Wang Yanhong yanqing shi qinggan shuli".

¹⁹⁶ See Chapter Four, section 4.2c, "Inscribing Private Memories in *Xianglianti* Poetry".

and by using titles and self-annotations to explicitly claim some of the private experiences recorded in his verses as his very own. He also made sure to portray himself as an amorous, sometimes eccentric, lover and poet.¹⁹⁷ Wang Cihui's repeated use of *kuang* 狂 as a self-identifying adjective can be treated as an evident sign of his conscious self-fashioning as an unfettered *fengliu* poet. He combined unrestrained eccentricity and amorousness in the persona he tried to project through his verses.¹⁹⁸ Not only did he repeatedly celebrate the beauty of women throughout his verses, but also claimed great expertise on the matter, boastfully presenting himself as a first-class connoisseur of female beauty: "among the ones appreciating the flowers, I must rank myself in the first class"¹⁹⁹ 須占看花第一籌。²⁰⁰

His conscious projection of a *fengliu* persona can also be seen in his choice of Du Mu as a literary alter-ego. In several of his poems, Wang Cihui presents himself as a late Ming Du Mu, an example being the following couplet: "a fickle Du Mu of Jiangnan / Facing flowers, down and out, drunk and unable to hold myself up". 薄倖江南杜牧之，花前落魄醉難支。²⁰¹ In these two lines, not only did Wang Cihui compare himself to Du Mu, but also explicitly echoed "Qianhuai" 遣懷 (Getting Things Off My Chest), one of the most well-known quatrains attributed to Du Mu, consisting of a melancholy recollection of times spent in the pleasure quarters of Yangzhou. "Fickle" (*boqing* 薄倖), used by Wang Cihui as the qualifying adjective for Du Mu, is indeed the very same reputation that the late Tang poet allegedly gained in the "blue mansions" (*qinglou* 青

¹⁹⁷ These and other aspects of Wang Cihui's poetry will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

¹⁹⁸ In her short discussion of Wang Cihui's *kuang* identity, Xiaorong Li observed that the late Ming poet "was not alone in being *kuang*, but he played a vigorous role in combining the way of being *kuang* and the writing of *xiangyan* poetry"; see Li, "I Sliced My Flesh", 48. Geng Chuanyou also discussed and provided numerous examples of Wang Cihui's use of the word *kuang*; see Geng Chuanyou, "Yi ge bei wenxueshi yiwang de zhongyao zuojia", 74-75.

¹⁹⁹ Translated by Xiaorong Li. See Li, "I Sliced My Flesh", 43.

²⁰⁰ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 61.

²⁰¹ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 60.

樓), as the final line of his famous quatrain recites: “all I gained was a fickle name in the blue mansions” 贏得青樓薄倖名.²⁰² The compound *luopo* 落魄 (down and out) is, instead, an echo of the opening line of “Qianhuai”: “down and out in Jiangnan, laden with wine I travelled” 落魄江南載酒行.²⁰³ While, in quoting the very same poem, Xiarong Li argued that the late Ming poet’s “explicit identification with Du reveals his bitterness over his own failure”,²⁰⁴ his self-comparison with Du Mu could be equally understood within the context of Wang Cihui’s attempt at constructing and reinforcing his own *fengliu* identity through his poetic production. As I have previously stated, by the Song dynasty, Du Mu’s name had become a synonym of *fengliu*. Other poets before Wang Cihui had used references to the late Tang poet in order to surround themselves with an aura of amorousness and melancholy.²⁰⁵ I believe that Wang Cihui used Du Mu and his famous quatrain to point to the extensiveness of his own romantic escapades with courtesans, further hinted at by the “flowers” (*hua* 花) appearing in the second line of his poem - flowers being a common metaphor for women of pleasure.

The Disdainer of “Worthless Husks”: Han Wo’s *Fengliu* Identity

Within the context of *xianglianti* poetry, the concept of *fengliu* can also be used as a thread to connect Yang Weizhen and Wang Cihui to Han Wo, the father of *xianglianti* poetry and their shared literary model. When applying the label *fengliu* to Han Wo, I

²⁰² Peng Dingqiu, *Quan Tang shi*, vol. 8, 524.5998.

²⁰³ Peng Dingqiu, *Quan Tang shi*, vol. 8, 524.5998.

²⁰⁴ Li, “I Sliced My Flesh”, 41.

²⁰⁵ For more examples of references to Du Mu in Song dynasty poetry, see Wangling, *Gechun yishi xian yu kan*, 230-234.

solely consider the amorous poetic persona that was constructed by means of the *Xianglian ji* and its preface. I do not take into account his public persona as a loyal scholar-official - what Beth Upton refers to as “Han Wo the orthodox Confucian scholar-statesman”.²⁰⁶

Born in the Wannian 萬年 district of the capital Chang’an 長安, after obtaining his *jinshi* degree in 889,²⁰⁷ Han Wo enjoyed a successful career in the imperial bureaucracy. Before being driven away from the court in 903 by Zhu Quanzhong 朱全忠 (852-912), the usurper of the Tang throne who later founded the Later Liang dynasty (907-923), he held various prestigious posts, including Left Grand Master of Remonstrance (*zuo jianyi daifu* 左諫議大夫), Hanlin Academician (*Hanlin xueshi* 翰林學士), and Secretariat Drafter (*zhongshu sheren* 中書舍人).²⁰⁸ His rise to high office despite the turbulent times he lived in sets him wide apart from Yang Weizhen and Wang Cihui in terms of life experiences.

His official biography in the *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 (New Book of Tang)²⁰⁹ and other traditional historical records all present Han Wo in a very positive light, painting a picture of a paragon of loyalty and righteousness through a series of anecdotes emphasising his morally upright nature and his devotion to Emperor Zhaozong 昭宗 (r. 888-904). The great trust he gained from Zhaozong is revealed by the alleged last dialogue between sovereign and subject before Han Wo’s definitive departure from the capital. As recorded in *Xin Tangshu*, “holding his hand, the Emperor said in tears:

²⁰⁶ Upton, “The Poetry of Han Wo”, 10. The first half of the present section on Han Wo is based on the first chapter of my MA dissertation, “A Controversial Collection: Authorship, Authenticity, and the Problematic Nature of the *Xianglian ji*”. See Botti, “A Poetic World of Beauty and Emotions”, 9-13.

²⁰⁷ The date of Han Wo’s *jinshi* examination is taken from Ma Duanlin, *Wenxian Tongkao*, 1626. The official biography in the *Xin Tangshu* does not provide the exact date of the examination.

²⁰⁸ Ouyang Xiu, *Xin Tangshu*, 5387-5390.

²⁰⁹ Ouyang Xiu, *Xin Tangshu*, 5387-5390.

‘There is nobody by my side’” ‘帝執其手流涕曰：我左右無人矣。²¹⁰ According to the editors of the *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 (General Catalogue of the Complete Library of the Four Branches of Literature) Han Wo “truly was a perfect man of the end of the Tang dynasty” 實為唐未完人，²¹¹ a judgement which was clearly based on such historical records.

The persona which emerges from the sensual verses of the *Xianglian ji* is, instead, significantly removed from the idealized image of the virtuous statesman. According to its preface, the poems collected in the *Xianglian ji* were composed during the poet’s youth, more precisely between 860 and 880 and were subsequently lost when the poet had to temporarily flee Chang’an after Huang Chao’s 黃巢 (d. 884) rebel troops occupied the capital.²¹² Thanks to the popularity they enjoyed, Han Wo was able to recover many of his poems from friends and acquaintances who had committed them to memory, and he later decided to compile them into a collection, namely his *Xianglian ji*.²¹³

Through the *Xianglian ji* Han Wo consciously chose to present himself as a refined lover, a man of amorous charm, an admirer of feminine beauty, and a highly sentimental poet. This particular persona can be described as *fengliu*, as someone who distinguished himself in his pursuit of *qing*.

This sharp contrast is probably one of the main factors which led to the questioning of the authenticity of the *Xianglian ji* in both pre-modern and modern times. The Northern Song polymath Shen Gua 沈括 (1031-1095) was the first to claim that the

²¹⁰ Ouyang Xiu, *Xin Tangshu*, 5390.

²¹¹ Yong Rong et al., *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao*, 4.81.

²¹² Xu Fuguan identifies “the great usurper” (*da dao* 大盜) mentioned in the preface as the salt smuggler and rebel leader Huang Chao who occupied Chang’an from 880 till 883. See Xu Fuguan, “Han Wo shi yu *Xianglian ji*”, 410.

²¹³ Han Wo, “*Xianglian ji zixu*”, in Xu Zhuo, *Quan Tang shi lu*, 93.20b-21a.

Xianglian ji was not the work of Han Wo. If we are to believe what he wrote in his *Mengxi bitan* 夢溪筆談 (Brush Talks of the Dream Pool), the tenth century poet He Ning 和凝 (898-955) revealed in the preface to his no longer extant *Youyi ji* 游藝集 (Wandering in the Arts Collection) that he was the author of a work titled *Xianglian ji*. Shen Gua interpreted this as evidence that the *Xianglian ji* was a forgery by He Ning:

He Ning has [within his literary oeuvre] a compilation of poetry compositions of seductive allure titled *Fragrant Dressing Case Collection*. He Ning was later esteemed and used Han Wo's name as his own. The [collection] circulating nowadays as *Fragrant Dressing Case Collection* was composed by He Ning. [...] He Ning was in the government. In order to avoid criticism he avoided using his name, yet he also wanted the later generations to know [that he was the author of the *Fragrant Dressing Case*], thereupon he confirmed this in the preface to *Wandering in the Arts*. This was He Ning's intention.²¹⁴

和魯公凝有艷詞一編，名《香奩集》。凝後貴，乃嫁其名爲韓偓，今世傳韓偓《香奩集》，乃凝所爲也。[...] 凝在政府，避議論，諱其名又欲後人知，故於《游藝集序》實之，此凝之意也。²¹⁵

Being the only record of a connection existing between He Ning and the *Xianglian ji*, Shen Gua's claim is certainly questionable. Moreover, even if He Ning's literary oeuvre did include a collection titled *Xianglian ji*, this does not necessarily mean that He Ning's and Han Wo's *Xianglian ji* were the same work. There is the plausible option that the two collections simply shared the same title. This would not have been the only case of homonymous literary works throughout the history of Chinese literature. As Liu Peng 劉鵬 pointed out in his study on the question of authorship of the *Xianglian ji*,

²¹⁴ For my translation, I also consulted Upton's rendering of the same passage; see Upton, "The Poetry of Han Wo", 18.

²¹⁵ Shen Gua, *Mengxi bitan*, 534-535.

Xianglian ji was also the alternative title of *Yangchun ji* 阳春集 (Sunny Spring Collection), a collection of *ci* lyrics by Feng Yansi 馮延巳 (903-960), a contemporary of He Ning.²¹⁶

Despite resting on a weak foundation, Shen Gua's claim initiated a long-lasting debate on the authenticity of the collection which continues up to the present day. During the Northern Song the name of another tenth century scholar-official was associated with the *Xianglian ji*. As recorded in Ma Dualin's 馬端臨 (1254-1323) *Wenxian tongkao* 文獻通考 (Comprehensive Study of Literary and Documentary Sources), according to Ye Mengde 葉夢得 (1077-1148), who expressed his disbelief at this theory, some of his contemporaries thought that the *Xianglian ji* was the work of Han Xizai 韓熙載 (902-970). This claim rests on an even weaker foundation as Ye Mengde does not elaborate any further on the reason behind this alternative attribution.²¹⁷

The presence within Wu Rong's 吳融 (d. 903, a contemporary of Han Wo) corpus of a set of three *wuti* 無題 (untitled) compositions which match a set of untitled poems included in the *Xianglian ji* has been advanced by both pre-modern critics and modern scholars as a solid proof in favour of the authenticity of the authorship of the collection or, at least, of some of its poems.²¹⁸ The *wuti* poems within the *Xianglian ji* are accompanied by a preface providing details of the social occasion when the poems

²¹⁶ Liu Peng, "Xianglian ji guishu wenti", 57. In his study on the authorship of the *Xianglian ji*, Liu Peng rejects the attribution to He Ning and argues that the collection was not the work of a single author but rather an anthology of erotic poetry compiled under Emperor Renzong 仁宗 (r. 1010-1063) in the years before the compilation of the *Xin Tangshu* (1044-1060) – the main reason being the absence of records of the collection prior to Ouyang Xiu's official history of the Tang.

²¹⁷ Ma Duanlin, *Wenxian tongkao*, 1627

²¹⁸ For Wu Rong's untitled poems, "He Han Zhiguang shilang wuti san shou shisi yun" 和韓致光侍郎無題三首十四韻 (Three Untitled Poems in Fourteen Rhymes Harmonizing with Officiant Gentleman Han Wo), see Peng Dingqiu, *Quan Tang shi*, vol. 10, 685.7868-7869.

were composed. Wu Rong is mentioned in the preface as one of the participants in the poetry game that led to the composition of the *wuti* poems.²¹⁹ Even Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 (1904-1982), who firmly believes that the *Xianglian ji* was not compiled by Han Wo and contains a number of spurious poems, accepted that the *wuti* poems and their preface are Han Wo's original work.²²⁰

As for the preface to the *Xianglian ji*, Xu Fuguan and other scholars rejected it as spurious. In his study on the authenticity of the *Xianglian ji*, Xu Fuguan discusses in great length the reasons why the preface can be regarded as a forgery, the major ones being the following: the absence of a preface in Han Wo's other poetry collection; the presence of textual variants from one edition to another; the presence of differences in Han Wo's own appellatives and titles between the various editions, some of which are contrary to common Tang practice; the discrepancy in style between the preface to the *Xianglian ji* and the other extant prose pieces by Han Wo, the preface being the only work attributed to the late Tang author written in a mixture of *sanwen* 散文 (free prose) and *pianwen* 駢文 (parallel prose).²²¹

The last-listed reason is also used by Upton to argue for the spurious nature of the preface. Having examined Han Wo's entire extant prose corpus, as recorded in *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 (The Complete Prose of the Tang) - seventeen pieces in total, including eleven letters and two *fu* compositions - , Upton came to the conclusion that the preface to the *Xianglian ji* "was written by someone who was more familiar with Han's reputation as a gay blade and writer of effeminate, erotic verse, than with Han's

²¹⁹ Chen Jilong, *Han Wo shi zhu*, 415.

²²⁰ Xu Fuguan, "Han Wo shi yu Xianglian ji".

²²¹ Xu Fuguan, "Han Wo shi yu Xianglian ji", 408-411.

prose style”.²²² However, she does not provide any further details as to how the preface considerably differs from the rest of Han Wo’s prose in terms of style.

Additional reasons advanced by Xu Fuguan are a series of perceived oddities and contradictions between the content of the preface and Han Wo’s life and times. For example, he states that the practice of inscribing poetry on walls²²³ – mentioned in the preface as a way to show the great popularity enjoyed by Han Wo’s poems during his youth - does not match the turbulent historical times when Han Wo lived.²²⁴

I do not exclude the possibility that the preface was written by a later author feigning to be Han Wo and that the collection itself was not compiled by its author. However, the authenticity or spuriousness of the preface is not a major concern for the present study. Whoever its author was, my interest lays in the role played by the preface in the construction and reinforcement of Han Wo’s *fengliu* persona.

The preface to the *Xianglian ji* invites the reader to treat the entire collection autobiographically and read it as a reflection of the most intimate moments of the author’s youth. In the opening of the preface, Han Wo presents himself as someone completely absorbed by his memories of love: “I indulge in verses and lines. Certainly, it has been so for years. Indeed, I am aware that this is not what scholar-officials do. The inability to forget feelings is what heaven bestowed [me] with”. 余溺於章句，信有年矣，誠知非大夫所為，不能忘情，天所賦也。²²⁵ In using the expression “the inability to forget feelings” (*bu neng wang qing* 不能忘情) Han Wo possibly alluded to the explanation given by Wang Rong 王戎 (234-305), one of the Seven Worthies of

²²² Upton, “The Poetry of Han Wo”, 21.

²²³ “On the whitewashed walls and peppered walls [my poems were written] in inclined lines of small characters”. 粉牆椒壁斜行小字. See Han Wo, “Xianglian ji zixu”, in Xu Zhuo, *Quan Tangshi lu*, 93.21a.

²²⁴ Xu Fuguan, “Han Wo shi yu Xianglian ji”, 409.

²²⁵ Han Wo, “Xianglian ji zixu”, in Xu Zhuo, *Quan Tangshi lu*, 93.20b.

the Bamboo Grove, for the extreme grief he felt after his son's death. According to the *Shishuo xinyu*, when questioned about the excessiveness of his grieving, Wang Rong replied: "Sages forget feelings; the lowest beings do not attain feelings; the place where feelings are concentrated is exactly located among people like us"²²⁶ 聖人忘情，最下不及情，情之所鍾，正在我輩。²²⁷ While Wang Rong used the word *qing* to indicate the broad range of human emotions, Han Wo used the same term in a much narrower sense, namely to refer to emotions related, but not limited, to romantic love and desire. In creating a parallel with Wang Rong and in presenting the inability to forget feelings as part of his natural disposition, Han Wo presented his *Xianglian ji* as a form of authentic self-expression, as emotionally genuine poetry revealing his deepest feelings and his most private experiences. The fact that Han Wo's use of *qing* should be interpreted in its narrower sense is confirmed by the following lines, constituting the end of the preface, in which the poet explicitly makes reference to his past amorous experiences:

In willow lanes and blue mansions²²⁸ I did not taste worthless husks. Inside golden boudoirs and ornate doorways I began to be involved in refined romances (*fengliu*). If you chew multicoloured *lingzhi* mushrooms, their fragrance will penetrate the nine openings of the body. If you swallow the sweet dew from Mount Sanwei,²²⁹ the seven affects will be stirred by spring desires. If someone blames it for straying away from [the path of] the Classics, I also hope to cover up its weakness by means of its literary merits.

柳巷青樓，未嚼糠粃。金閨繡戶，始預風流。咀五色之靈芝，香生九竅。咽三危之瑞露，春動七情。如有責其不經，亦望以功掩過。²³⁰

²²⁶ My translation is a slightly modified version of Mather's. See Mather, *Shih-shuo Hsin-yu*, 324.

²²⁷ Liu Yiqing, *Shishuo xinyu*, vol. 2, 349.

²²⁸ The compounds "willow lanes" (*liuxiang* 柳巷) and "blue mansions" (*qinglou* 青樓) both refer to the courtesan quarters. "Worthless husks" (*kangbi* 糠粃) probably stand for low-class, unrefined courtesans.

²²⁹ The dew from Mount Sanwei, a mountain range located along the Western border of the Empire, was listed as one of the "fine waters" (*shui zhi meizhe* 水之美者) in the *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (Mister Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals). See Lü Buwei, *Lüshi Chunqiu*, 746.

²³⁰ Han Wo, "Xianglian ji zixu", in Xu Zhuo, *Quan Tangshi lu*, 93.21a-21b.

Within the above excerpt we find the term *fengliu*, which in this context undoubtedly carries an amorous connotation, since it refers to Han Wo's romantic escapades. The end of the preface further elaborates on Han Wo's *fengliu* nature. The poet's *fengliu* disposition is not an indiscriminate desire for every possible woman, but is instead a selective amorousness directed towards refined women, i.e. high-end courtesans, or even possibly elite women with whom the poet had secret trysts. In his brief reference to the beginning of his amorous experiences, he purposely takes his distance from "worthless husks" (*kangbi* 糠秕), an expression which I believe to be used in this particular context by the author as a metaphor for low-end, unrefined courtesans. By stating that he "did not taste worthless husks", the poet implies that he was only involved with beautiful and sophisticated women, a concept further emphasized by situating his early romantic endeavours within the luxurious settings of "golden boudoirs and ornate doorways" (*jingui xiuhu* 金閨繡戶). The refinement of his amorous experiences is well matched by the beauty of the verses collected in the *Xianglian ji*, an aspect emphasized through the association of their effect on the mind of the reader with the effect of multi-coloured *lingzhi* mushrooms and sweet dew from Mount Sanwei (two rare delicacies associated with the world of Daoist immortals) on the human body. There is, indeed, a perfect correspondence between Han Wo the refined amorous youth and the sensual, emotionally charged verses of the *Xianglian ji*.

The preface is not the only place where Han Wo paints a *fengliu* self-portrait. In the second half of his "Xi shang you zeng" 席上有贈 (Presented at a Banquet), a poem written in praise of a female entertainer met at a banquet, Han Wo fully displays his *fengliu* nature:

Her hair locks falling on her fragrant neck: clouds covering a lotus root,

Powder applied on her orchid bosom: snow pressing on a plum blossom.

Do not say there is no one as *fengliu* as Song Yu,

I am willing to devote myself with all my efforts to the dressing table.

鬢垂香頸雲遮藕，

粉著蘭胸雪壓梅。

莫道風流無宋玉，

好將心力事妝臺。²³¹

In the late Tang, guests attending banquets were commonly requested to compose impromptu verses celebrating the beauty and skills of the women entertaining them, especially when these were the private entertainers of wealthy officials.²³² It is possible that the above quoted poem was one such composition. What interests me the most is the fact that in this poem Han Wo not only celebrates the woman's beauty, offering a sensual close-up of her body to us readers, but also takes the chance to openly assert his superiority as a lover, by comparing himself to Song Yu 宋玉 (late third century B.C.). Song Yu, Qu Yuan's famous disciple, the attributed author of several famous *fu* 賦 compositions dealing with or touching upon the theme of desire, is here intended to stand for a refined and desirable lover. After presenting himself as an ideal lover, Han Wo expresses his willingness to devote all his efforts to the "dressing table" (*zhuangtai* 妝臺), a metonym for the beautiful woman herself. While in the banquet poem on the entertainer the main focus is still the appreciation of female beauty, in the following quatrain the late Tang poet uses the entire composition to boast about his talent and accomplishments in the field of love:

²³¹ Chen Jilong, *Han Wo shizhu*, 359.

²³² Yue, "Romantic Identity", 44-45.

“Self-praise”

People praise me as *fengliu*, I think highly of my talent.

Three times I stole the peaches and I reached the Chalcedony Terrace.

Up till the present day on my robe and collar there is still rouge.

I was passionately bitten by banished immortals!

《自負》

人許風流自負才，

偷桃三度到瑤臺。

至今衣領胭脂在，

曾被謫仙痛咬來。²³³

Throughout the entire poem Han Wo sings his own praises and boldly celebrates his romantic endeavours through a series of Daoist-inspired images: the theft of the peaches of immortality, the Chalcedony Terrace, and banished immortals. In the context of the poem the three Daoist images all carry an amorous-erotic connotation. The first half of the second line – “three times I stole the peaches” – is an allusion to the story of Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 (fl. 140–130 BC) stealing Xi Wangmu’s 西王母 (Queen Mother of the West) peaches of immortality. Although Han Wo does not specify the immortal nature of the peaches – they are simply referred to as *tao* 桃 (peaches) – the fact that they were stolen three times and the presence of other Daoist images within the same poem are clues to the fact that they are not ordinary fruits, but the fruits of immortality growing in Xi Wangmu’s garden.²³⁴ The Chalcedony

²³³ Chen Jilong, *Han Wo shi zhu*, 429.

²³⁴ In the collection of legendary tales on Emperor Wu *Han Wu gushi* 漢武故事 (Tales of Emperor Wu of Han), a dwarf (who turns out to be a spirit envoy of the Queen Mother of the West) presented to the

Terrace refers to a legendary residence of immortals, located in the Kunlun Mountains 崑崙山. Immortals themselves are mentioned in the final line of the poem as the ones responsible for the marks of rouge on the poet's robe and collar. This sensual detail makes it evident that these are more specifically female immortals (*xiannü* 仙女), here used as an allusion to courtesans. During the Tang dynasty the word *xian* 仙 (immortal) was often used to refer to bewitching women, amorous Daoist nuns, and courtesans.²³⁵ The image of the “banished immortals” leaving marks of rouge on the poet's garments is a perfect example of “the transformation of courtesans into immortals” (*jinü xianhua* 妓女仙化), a phenomenon which frequently appears in mid Tang and late Tang literature, not only in poetry, but also in prose, more precisely in those *chuanqi* 傳奇 tales which deal with the theme of love and romance.²³⁶ Since in the final line of the poem the courtesans responsible for the marks of rouge on the poet's robe and collar are presented as banished immortals, I reckon that “stealing the peaches” and “reaching the Chalcedony Terrace” should both be treated as elegant, Daoist-inspired metaphors for love trysts and romantic escapades.

A Brief Comparison of the Three *Fengliu* Poets

As I have shown in the present chapter, for all the three authors a link can be established between their poetry and their *fengliu* persona. In Yang Weizhen's case, the sensual nature of his *xianglianti* verses and the effort he put into the transmission and promotion of this type of poetry reinforced the self-image of refined

emperor tells him that Dongfang Shuo stole the peaches of immortality three times and was consequently banished by Xi Wangmu. See Ban Gu, *Han Wu gushi*, 5b.

²³⁵ Chen Yinke, *Yuan Bai shi*, 100-101.

²³⁶ Zhan Dan, “Xian ji heliu xianxiang tan yin”, 11.

unfetteredness which he projected through the lifestyle he chose to adopt in his late years. As we know from records both by his contemporaries and by Yang Weizhen himself, after retiring from office, the poet lived in Songjiang in the company of professional female entertainers skilled in music and song. He also frequently organized and attended lavish banquets and boat parties, during which he often exhibited an eccentric and unrestrained behaviour. My view of the impact of Yang Weizhen's poetry on his *fengliu* persona is also shared by Yao Shuyi 幺書儀, who in her study of Yuan dynasty literati lists Yang Weizhen's passion for "poetry of seductive allure" as the main reason, together with his fondness of female entertainers, behind his reputation as a pleasure indulging literatus.²³⁷

Even though Yang Weizhen distanced himself from the content of his "Xulian ji" (an aspect which will be discussed in Chapter Three in the context of the analysis of the preface to the "Xulian ji" set), the very fact that he chose to write such compositions in old age, accompanied them with prefaces, and encouraged other poets to produce similar compositions reveals that he attached a certain importance to love and women as a poetic subject. The frivolous and mildly erotic content of his *xianglianti* poems is perfectly in line with Yang Weizhen's self-fashioned image of an unrestrained, hedonistic literatus. They could be easily perceived as a reflection of his indulgence in sensual pleasures and his fondness for the company of courtesans. The poems were complimentary with the way he spent his retirement.

The relationship between Wang Cihui's poetry and his *fengliu* persona is more direct than that of Yang Weizhen's. The late Ming poet actively used his poetry as a means to present himself as an amorous man. While Yang Weizhen seemed to have mostly

²³⁷ Yao Shuyi, *Yuandai wenren xintai*, 291.

treated *xianglianti* poetry as a literary divertimento and as a means to display his mastery of the world of *se* and *qing*, Wang Cihui used the genre as an autobiographical medium to record his own love experiences. Although we cannot ascertain the genuinity of the facts recorded by Wang Cihui's compositions, what matters is that the poet himself consciously invited the the reader to perceive his work as intimately connected with his life. In various poems he emphasized, by means of titles and self-annotations, the real existence of the beauties celebrated in his verses, encouraging an autobiographical reading of the entire collection and, consequently, presenting himself as the male personas appearing in his verses. Compared to Yang Weizhen, Wang Cihui created a stronger connection between himself and Han Wo in terms of *fengliu*. Both Han Wo and Wang Cihui boldly presented themselves as refined and passionate lovers and claimed the experiences recorded in their verses as their very own.

When reading the next two chapters, which individually examine Yang Weizhen's and Wang Cihui's respective *xianglianti* production, we should bear in mind the observations made in the present chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

Yang Weizhen and His Late Yuan Miniature *Xianglian ji*

During his late years, leisurely spent in Songjiang, Yang Weizhen composed two poetic sets (both introduced by a short preface) which attracted a certain amount of attention: a group of twenty poems collectively titled “Xulian ji” and eight poems grouped under the title of “Xianglian bayong” or “Xianglian bati” 香奩八題 (Eight Fragrant Dressing Case Themes). In his *Shuyuan Zaji* 菽園雜記 (Miscellaneous Notes from the Bean Garden), the fifteenth-century scholar Lu Rong briefly discussed the two sets in the same breath, singling them out from Yang Weizhen’s literary corpus for their licentious nature:

As for Yang Tieya, at the beginning of the [Ming] dynasty his fame was renowned in the South East. Those who followed him were extreme in their respect and trust. Observing his “Polemic on Legitimate Succession”, “The Axe of History”, and other similar works, they are all good. As for the two collections ‘Fragrant Dressing Case’²³⁸ and ‘Supplementary Dressing Case’, they all consist of obscene and licentious words. At first I suspected that they were literary works from his youth or that they originated from the arbitrary record of his students and disciples and that was all. Later I got hold of the printed edition and saw his self-preface and even how he positioned himself close to [the tradition of] Tao Qian’s “Fu on Stilling the Passions”. Only then did I know what his intention had been all along.

楊鐵崖國初名重東南，從游者極其尊信。觀其正統辯史鉞等作，皆善已。若香奩續奩二集，則皆淫褻之詞。子始疑其少年之作，或出於門人子弟濫為筆錄耳。後得印本，見其自序，至以陶元亮賦閒情自附，乃知其素所留意也。²³⁹

²³⁸ In this context, *Xianglian* “Fragrant Dressing Case” does not refer to Han Wo’s collection, but to another set of *xianglianti* poems by Yang Weizhen, “Xianglian ba yong” (Eight Fragrant Dressing Case Themes), a set of eight poems also known by the alternative title of *Xianglianji*.

²³⁹ Lu Rong, *Shuyuan zaji*, 9.12a.

It is no coincidence that Lu Rong criticized the two sets together, as they share similarities in terms of theme and style, along with the word *lian* 奩 (dressing case) which appears in their respective titles. Both sets can be categorized as *xianglianti*. In the *Yuanshi tiyao* the set of twenty poems is anthologized in its entirety with the collective title “Xulian ershi shou” 續簪二十首 (Twenty Supplementary Dressing Case Poems) under the poetic category of *xianglianti*. This is not the case for the other set. However, three sets by the title “Xianglian bayong”, respectively written by Huang Boyang, Qian Shu, and Wang Guoqi, are listed in the *Yuanshi tiyao* as examples of *xianglianti* poetry.²⁴⁰ As I will later show in the present chapter, these three sets are closely connected to Yang Weizhen’s by means of intertextual links. It is, therefore, safe to assume that Yang Weizhen’s “Xianglian bayong” was also regarded by Song Xu, the compiler of the *Yuanshi tiyao*, as belonging to the same poetic category.

In the light of my previous discussion of the morally problematic nature of *xianglianti* poetry, Lu Rong’s negative judgement of the two sets does not strike me as unusual. However, this does not imply that everyone agreed with Lu Rong’s view. A proof for my claim is the fact that the very same “Xulian ji”, denigrated by Lu Rong, was presented in the *Yuanshi tiyao* as one of the few examples of Yuan dynasty *xianglianti* poetry that “emerge[d] from affections, without going further than proper behaviour and morality”. It can, therefore, be assumed that the standards for what constituted licentiousness in amorous-erotic poetry had a considerable degree of subjectivity. It is interesting to notice how the composition of these two supposedly licentious “late Yuan miniature *Xianglian ji*” coincides with the full establishment of Yang Weizhen’s *fengliu* persona during the later part of his life. The supposed licentious nature of Yang

²⁴⁰ Song Xu, *Yuanshi tiyao*, 8.1a-11b.

Weizhen's *xianglianti* production is one of several issues examined in the present chapter within the analysis of Yang Weizhen's preface to the "Xulian ji".

The present chapter focuses on Yang Weizhen's *xianglianti* production, showing how the poet took a ludic approach towards this type of poetry, finding in its composition a source of artistic pleasure. The late Yuan poet is presented as a significant and influential practitioner of *xianglianti* poetry. After providing an overview of the two sets and an analysis of their respective prefaces, I will examine some of their individual poems in more detail, focusing my discussion on imitation and intertextuality.

A General Overview of Yang Weizhen's "Xulian ji"

Yang Weizhen's "Xulian ji" consists of twenty heptasyllabic *jueju* 絕句 (quatrains), each portraying a different aspect of a young woman's life. It alternates snippets of daily life and leisure activities with more significant events and key moments in the development of a romance. This is already evident from the titles of the individual poems, here listed in order of appearance:

1. "Xueqin" 學琴 (Practising the *Qin*)
2. "Xueshu" 學書 (Practising Calligraphy)
3. "Yange" 演歌 (Performing a Song)
4. "Xiwu" 習舞 (Practising a Dance)
5. "Shangtou" 上頭 (Pinning the Hair)
6. "Ranjia" 染甲 (Painting the Nails)
7. "Zhaohua" 照畫 (Painting a Self-portrait)
8. "Lixiu" 理繡 (Tidying up the Embroidery)
9. "Chuyu" 出浴 (After a Bath)
10. "Ganshui" 甘睡 (Sweet Sleep)

11. “Xiangjian” 相見 (Seeing Him)
12. “Xiangsi” 相思 (Thinking of Him)
13. “Dixin” 的信 (Truthful News)
14. “Sihui” 私會 (Secret Encounter)
15. “Chengpei” 成配 (Becoming a Couple)
16. “Xi'er” 洗兒 (Bathing the Child)
17. “Qiuqian” 鞦韆 (The Swing)
18. “Taju” 蹋鞠 (The Game of *Taju*)
19. “Diaoyu” 釣魚 (Fishing)
20. “Zouma” 走馬 (Riding a Horse)

Throughout the set Yang Weizhen offers a collection of snippets of a courtesan's life. The approach adopted by the poet towards the portrayal of her activities oscillates among the mildly erotic and voyeuristic, the ludic and comical, and the minutely descriptive. These different modes and approaches often intermingle with one another within the restricted space of a single poem.

Although it is nowhere explicitly stated that the twenty poems are all concerned with the same female character, we are led to assume so by the presence of a loose chronological structure which ties the quatrains together. The poems from number eleven to fifteen create a narrative substructure within the set. More precisely, each of them corresponds to a specific stage in the development of a romantic relationship, which culminates with the beginning of married life, encapsulated by the love-making scene at the centre of “Chengpei”. “Chengpei” can be regarded as a chronological marker within the “Xulian ji”, as it marks a major change in the life of the female character at the centre of the set, namely marriage. A similar function is performed by the fifth poem, “Shangtou”, and the sixteenth, “Xi'er”. The former, centred on the rite

of putting the hair up for the first time, marks the reaching of marriageable age for the young woman. The latter marks instead her motherhood by depicting the bathing rite which traditionally took place during the first month of life of a child. As Xi Xiaoli 席曉麗 suggested in her dissertation on Yang Weizhen's *yuefu*, because of the presence of a loose love narrative which ties the poems together, the "Xulian ji" is reminiscent of sets of *sanqu* 散曲 (individual songs) on amorous-erotic themes.²⁴¹ Although I cannot go as far as to claim that Yang Weizhen was influenced by a set of *sanqu* in particular, it is interesting to notice the structural and thematic affinities between Yang Weizhen's twenty poems and Xu Yan's 徐琰 "Qinglou shiyong" 青樓十詠 (Ten Songs on the Blue Mansions), a set of ten *xiaoling* 小令 (single song), each presenting a separate stage of a romantic encounter between a man and a courtesan. It starts with their first meeting and ends with their farewell, the scenes in between including a banquet, the woman taking a bath, love making, and a passionate declaration of mutual love. While "Qinglou shiyong" is entirely focused on the unfolding of a romantic relationship with a courtesan, the "Xulian ji" has a more complex narrative and is not limited to merely amorous matters. It also possesses a longer time frame, as we can see from temporal markers within the set.

Looking at the individual poems within the larger context of the set, we can clearly see how Yang Weizhen took advantage of the *zushi* 組詩 (poetic set) macrostructure in order to expand the limited boundaries of such a short poetic form as *jueju*. This is in line with what Shen Zufen 沈祖棻 observed for the practice of *zushi* compositions during the Tang dynasty: by using a *zushi* macrostructure to create connections among individual *jueju* poems, poets found a very effective way to expand the expressive

²⁴¹ Xi Xiaoli, "Shilun Yang Weizhen de yuefu shi", 30

potentiality of such a short poetic form.²⁴² The expressive potentiality of the short *jueju* form is also expanded by the strong links established with Han Wo's *Xianglian ji*.

A General Overview of the “Xianglian bayong” Sets

Yang Weizhen's other miniature collection of *xianglianti* poetry is a set of eight poems under the title “Xianglian bayong” (Eight Fragrant Dressing Case Poems), also known by the alternative title “Xianglian bati”. The set might have also been known as “Xianglian ji”, since, when criticizing it in his *Shuyuan zaji*, Lu Rong refers to it using this title.²⁴³ The individual titles of the poems are the following: “Jinpen mufa” 金盆沐髮 (Washing Her Hair in the Gold Basin), “Fangchen chunji” 芳塵春跡 (Spring Traces on the Fragrant Powder), “Yuelian yunmian” 月奩勻面 (Applying Cosmetics by the Moonlit Dressing Case), “Yujia tihen” 玉頰啼痕 (Traces of Tears on the Jade White Cheeks), “Xiuchuang ningsi” 繡床凝思 (Deep Thoughts by the Embroidery Frame), “Yunchuang qiumeng” 雲窗秋夢 (Autumn Dream by the Cloud Window), “Daimei pinse” 黛眉顰色 (The Frowning Beauty of Kohl Painted Eyebrows), and “Jinqian buhuan” 金錢卜歡 (Practicing Divination with Coins). The poetic set should be inserted within a larger corpus of “Xianglian bayong” or “Xianglian bati” sets written by other late Yuan-early Ming poets. To my knowledge, the late Yuan-early Ming poets whose “Xianglian bayong” sets have been handed down in their entirety to the present day are the following: Yang Weizhen, Bei Qiong 貝瓊 (1314-1378),²⁴⁴ Huang Boyang 黃伯暘 (n.d.),

²⁴² Shen Zufen, *Tang ren qijue shi qianshi*, 158-159.

²⁴³ Lu Rong, *Shuyuan zaji*, 9.12a.

²⁴⁴ Bei Qiong, *Qing jiang shi ji*, 9.3b-5b.

Ling Yunhan 凌雲翰 (1323-1388),²⁴⁵ Qian Shu 錢樞 (n.d.), Shen Xi 沈禧 (fl. ca. 1366),²⁴⁶ and Wang Guoqi 王國器 (1284 – ca. 1366). The sets by the last two poets, Shen Xi and Wang Guoqi, are written in the *ci* form, while all the others belong to the *shi* genre. The existence of *ci* lyrics written on exactly the same eight themes is a proof of the close relationship between *xianglianti* poetry and the *ci* tradition and of the blurred boundaries between the two.²⁴⁷

The individual titles within the different sets are essentially the same with only minor character variations: “Huachen chunji” 花塵春跡 (Fallen Flowers and Traces of Spring) instead of “Fangchen chunji” in Bei Qiong’s and Ling Yunhan’s sets; “Xiangjia tihen” 香頰啼痕 (Traces of Tears on the Fragrant Cheeks) instead of “Yujia tihen” in Bei Qiong’s, Ling Yunhan’s, and Shen Xi’s sets; and “Shuipen mufa” 水盆沐髮 (Washing Her Hair in the Water Basin) instead of “Jinpen mufa”, “Xiangchen chunji” 香塵春迹 (Fragrant Powder and Traces of Spring) instead of “Fangchen chunji”, “Cuixiu tihen” 翠袖啼痕 (Traces of Tears on the Emerald Sleeves) instead of “Yujia tihen”, and “Shuangchu qiusheng” 霜杵秋聲 (The Sound of Autumn of the Frosty Pestle) within Huang Boyang’s set. Most of the “Xianglian bayong” individual poems focus on the more or less direct appreciation of specific parts of the female body: tiny feet and willowy waist (in “Huachen chunji”), long silky dark hair (in “Jinpen mufa”), made-up face (in “Yuelian yunmian”), knitted kohl-painted eyebrows (in “Daimei pinse”), and tearful eyes and tear stained cheeks (in “Yujia tihen”).

²⁴⁵ Ling Yunhan, *Zhexuan ji*, 2.63b-65b.

²⁴⁶ Tang Guizhang, *Quan Jin Yuan ci*, vol. 2, 1043-1045.

²⁴⁷ Shen Xi and Wang Guoqi are not the only known authors of *ci* on the “Xianglian bayong” themes. In the High Qing, the female poet Zhang Lingyi 張令儀 (fl. late seventeenth-early eighteenth centuries) wrote a set of eight lyrics to the tune “Tasuo xing” which share the same individual titles of the late Yuan “Xianglian bayong” sets. The tune pattern is also the same used by Shen Xi and Wang Guoqi. See Zhang Lingyi, *Duchuang shiyu*, 5b-7a.

In her analysis of the poems on palace ladies of the *Yutai xinyong*, Birrell observed how “tears and frowns predominate in images of facial expression”.²⁴⁸ The same comment can be applied to the “Xianglian bayong” poems. It might be argued that female sorrow was traditionally regarded as having a strong aesthetic potential, due to its frequent appearance as a main theme in the *Yutai xinyong*, the *Xianglian ji*, and works belonging to the *xianglianti* tradition. In the poetic representation of contained female sorrow poets seemed to have found a perfect place to make the world of *qing* and that of *se* merge into each other. Going back to the Liang dynasty *gongti* tradition, within the *Yutai xinyong* there is a considerable number of poems centred on the figure of the abandoned woman, pining away in the loneliness of her boudoir.²⁴⁹ In approaching sorrow, Xiao Gang and the poets of his literary coterie mostly adopted “a descriptive rather than an expressive mode”.²⁵⁰ The woman’s suffering is generally shown through its external manifestations, such as the ruining of her make-up under a stream of tears or the sorrowful contraction of her eyebrows. Consciously conceived as a collection intimately related to the *gongti* tradition of poetry on palace ladies and court entertainers,²⁵¹ the *Xianglian ji* similarly pays attention to female sorrow and is generally pervaded by a melancholy mood. Although in the *Xianglian ji* the expressive mode often prevails over the descriptive, visual manifestations of female sorrow can still be found within Han Wo’s collection, such as the “peach blossom face gleaming with tears” 桃花臉裏汪汪淚 of a woman who, having restrained her emotions for long, finally lets her tears fall on the pillow late at night²⁵², or the beauty who, afflicted

²⁴⁸ Birrell, “Erotic Decor”, 279.

²⁴⁹ On the figure of the melancholy palace lady in the *Yutai xinyong* see Birrell, *Games Poets Play*, 69-80

²⁵⁰ Li, *Women’s Poetry of Late Imperial China*, 26.

²⁵¹ As seen in Chapter One, in the preface to the *Xianglian ji* Han Wo explicitly links his collection to the *gongti* tradition.

²⁵² Chen Jilong, *Han Wo shi zhu*, “Xinqiu” 新秋 (New Autumn), 351.

by “melancholy matters” (*chouchang shi* 惆悵事), “smooths her tear-stained rouge in secret” 背人勻卻淚胭脂.²⁵³ It is, therefore, not surprising that female sorrow occupies a prevalent position also within the “Xianglian bayong” sets. In line with the *Yutai xinyong* tradition and Han Wo’s *Xianglian ji*, the authors of the “Xianglian bayong” sets regarded female sorrow as an aesthetically appealing poetic subject.

The other three remaining titles focus on actions and activities which trigger deep emotions in the woman who is performing them: practicing divination with coins (in “Jinqian buhuan”), dreaming (in “Yunchuang qiumeng”), and embroidering (in “Xiuchuang ningsi”). All the poems approach the realm of femininity erotically and aesthetically, paying great attention to sensual details and external manifestations of emotions.

“Beautiful Words in the Air”: An Analysis of Yang Weizhen’s Preface to the “Xulian ji”

The “Xulian ji” is accompanied by a short preface which bears the author’s own signature: “The Plum Blossom Dream Old man, Mister Yang Weizhen” 梅花夢叟楊維禎氏 in *Tieya yibian* 鐵崖逸編 (Iron Cliff’s Recovered Poems)²⁵⁴ and “The Peach Blossom Dream Old Man, Mister Yang Zhen” 桃花夢叟楊禎氏 in *Fugu shiji* 復古詩集 (Poetry Collection of Returning to the Past).²⁵⁵ Meihua meng 梅花夢 (Plum Blossom Dream) and Taohua meng 桃花夢 (Peach Blossom Dream) are among the many *hao* adopted by Yang Weizhen. As pointed out by Lai, Yang Weizhen’s literary names

²⁵³ Chen Jilong, *Han Wo shi zhu*, “Song ji” 鬆髻 (A Loosened Hair Knot), 367.

²⁵⁴ Yang Weizhen, *Tieya yibian zhu*, 8.9b.

²⁵⁵ Yang Weizhen, *Fugu shiji*, 6.1a-1b.

“changed according to his ideas, self-image, sentiments and life experiences”.²⁵⁶ The characters *mei* 梅 (plum) and *meng* 夢 (dream) appear in more than one of his literary names, such as Yangbian Mei 楊邊梅 (The Plum by the Willow), Meihua Daoren 梅花道人 (The Plum Blossom Daoist), Mengwai Mengren 夢外夢人 (The Dreamer out of the Dream), and Wumeng Daoren 無夢道人 (The Daoist Without Dreams).²⁵⁷

Despite its short length, Yang Weizhen’s self-preface is worth being examined in close detail, as it explicitly performs one of the major functions of prefatory materials: in Genette’s words, “to ensure for the text a destiny consistent with the author’s purpose”.²⁵⁸ The preface is here considered as a form of evidence of the widely perceived problematic nature of *xianglianti* poetry and of Yang Weizhen’s awareness of it. It is treated as the poet’s own commentary on the nature of his set of twenty poems and as the expression of his general view on the relationship between poetry and morality. Since the preface also brings attention to the publication and circulation in printed form of the poems, the text is also briefly discussed within the broader context of publishing. Let us now look at the text of the preface:

Tao Yuanliang²⁵⁹ in composing “Stilling the Passions” produced the words of an attendant; yet it did not harm his moral integrity as a recluse. In composing a continuation to Han Wo’s *Dressing Case*, I also wrote beautiful words. How could they do any harm to my heart of iron and stone? The monk Fayun urged Luzhi²⁶⁰ not to write erotic songs and little *ci* lyrics. Luzhi said: “They are words in the air and that is all. For this reason, [they] will not make me fall into one of the unfortunate destinies.”²⁶¹ With regards to the “Supplementary Dressing Case”, I

²⁵⁶ Lai, “Yang Weizhen’s Iron Style Poems on History”, 26.

²⁵⁷ For a list of the numerous literary names adopted by Yang Weizhen throughout his life, see Sun Xiaoli, *Yang Weizhen nianpu*, 1.

²⁵⁸ Genette, *Paratexts*, 407.

²⁵⁹ Yuanliang 元亮 was the *zi* 字 (style name) of the Jin 晉 dynasty (265-420) poet Tao Qian 陶潛 (365-427) also known as Tao Yuanming 陶淵明.

²⁶⁰ Luzhi was the *zi* of the Northern Song 北宋 (960-1127) poet Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045-1105).

²⁶¹ *Edao* 惡道 (unfortunate destinies), a synonym of *equ* 惡趣, is the Chinese equivalent of the Sanskrit word *durgati* or *apaya*, a Buddhist term which refers to the three types of unfortunate rebirths occurring as a consequence of one’s evil deeds: animals, hungry ghosts, and hell denizens. Sometimes a

also say that [these poems] are merely words in the air. Unexpectedly, they have been transmitted by ten thousand mouths. After the war, the scholar of Longzhou²⁶² was still able to recite them by heart. He gave them to a shop in town to print and had them published. Thereupon I write this in order to acknowledge my faults. Now Master Daolin is present. I clasp my hands together and say: “If I fall into one of the unfortunate destinies, I will ask you, master, to let me repent.” A self-preface by the Plum Blossom Dream Old man, Mister Yang Weizhen.

陶元亮賦《閒情》，出誓御之辭，不害其為處士節也。余賦韓偓續奩，亦作娟麗語，又何損吾鐵石心腸也哉？法雲道人勸魯直勿作艷歌小辭。魯直曰空中語耳，不致坐此墮落惡道。余於續奩亦曰空中語耳。不料為萬口播傳，兵火後龍洲生尚能口記，又付之市肆梓而行之。因書此以識吾過。時道林法師在座，余合手曰若墮惡道，請師懺悔。梅花夢叟楊楨氏自序。²⁶³

In the opening of the preface, Yang Weizhen expresses his views on the relationship between the content of poetry and the moral character of its author. In contrast with the traditional view expressed by the statement *shi yan zhi*, which presumes an intimate relationship between *shi* poetry and the moral intent of its author, Yang Weizhen seems to perceive poetry and morality as independent and unrelated realms. He believes not only that his set of twenty *xianglianti* poems does not reflect his interiority, but also that it cannot do any harm to “his heart of steel and stone” (*tieshi xinchang* 鐵石心腸). To strengthen his point, he draws a comparison between his continuation of Han Wo’s *Xianglian ji* and Tao Qian’s 陶潛 (365-427) “Xianqing fu” (Fu on Stilling the Passion). In “Xianqing fu” Tao Qian voices his desire for an extremely beautiful and equally virtuous lady by expressing ten fanciful wishes. He wishes to be the collar (*ling* 領) of her dress (*yi* 衣), the girdle (*dai* 帶) of her skirt (*chang* 裳), the

fourth destiny, rebirth as a demigod, is added to the list. See Buswell, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, 57-58 and 274.

²⁶² The scholar of Longzhou (Longzhou sheng 龍洲生) refers to Zhang Wan, the compiler of *Fugu shiji*. The preface to *Fugu shiji* bears the signature “The student scholar of Longzhou Zhang Wan” 門人龍洲生章琬. See Zhang Wan, “Jilu Tiewa xiansheng Fugu shiji xu”, in Zou Zhifang, *Yang Weizhen shiji*, 540.

²⁶³ Yang Weizhen, *Tiewa yibian zhu*, 8.9a-9b.

gloss (*ze* 澤) on her hair (*fa* 發), and other objects which come to be in contact with her body, unfortunately only temporarily, as the poet regretfully acknowledges.²⁶⁴

As Yang Weizhen points out, this *fu* composition explicitly dealing with desire did not compromise Tao Qian's moral integrity and reputation. On this matter, we can briefly take into consideration the preface to *Tao Yuanming ji* 陶淵明集 (Tao Yuanming's Collection), the collection of Tao Qian's writings compiled by the Liang 梁 dynasty (502-557) crown prince Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501 – 531). In the preface to the collection Xiao Tong openly expresses his dislike for Tao Qian's "Xianqing fu":

"Fu on Stilling the Passions" is the only minor blemish in the white jade. It is what Yang Xiong called "a hundred encouragements and one admonition".²⁶⁵ After all there is no indirect criticism, why did he have to take up his brush [to write "Fu on Stilling the Passions"]? What a pity! It is acceptable to neglect it.

白璧微瑕者，惟在閑情一賦，揚雄所謂勸百而諷一者，卒無諷諫，何必搖其筆端，惜哉。亡是可也。²⁶⁶

This "minor blemish in the white jade" (*baibi weixia* 白璧微瑕) did not affect Xiao Tong's overall opinion of Tao Qian as a writer and man of virtue. In the same text, right before the open criticism of "Xianqing fu", Xiao Tong passionately declares his admiration for Tao Qian's writings and moral character: "I am addicted to his writings, I cannot let go of them. I admire his virtue and I regret not being his contemporary". 余愛嗜其文，不能釋手，尚想其德，恨不同時。²⁶⁷ Xiao Tong's remarks can be taken as

²⁶⁴ Xiao Tong, *Tao Yuanming ji*, 152-158. For an English translation of Tao Qian's poem see Hightower, "The Fu of T'ao Ch'ien", 57-64.

²⁶⁵ Xiao Tong here quotes the Western Han (206 BC – 9 AD) writer Yang Xiong's 揚雄 (53 BC-18 AD) criticism of contemporary *fu* compositions whose excessive literary ornamentation prevented their moral message to be conveyed. For a study on Yang Xiong's views on the function of *fu* see Gong, *Studies on the Han Fu*, 183-226.

²⁶⁶ Xiao Tong, "Tao Yuanming ji xu", in *Tao Yuanming ji*, 10.

²⁶⁷ Xiao Tong, "Tao Yuanming ji xu", in *Tao Yuanming ji*, 10.

evidence that Tao Qian was traditionally regarded as “a paragon of morality”²⁶⁸, despite having written “Xianqing fu”.

Although Yang Weizhen for comparative purposes places his set of poems on the same level of Tao Qian’s erotic *fu* composition, there is a major difference between the two literary works. The most significant discrepancy between Yang Weizhen’s “Xulian ji” and Tao Qian’s “Xianqing fu” is the (at least stated) intention behind their composition. Although erotic in tone, the ultimate function of Tao Qian’s *fu* was supposedly to make its author and reader overcome their carnal urges, in line with the earlier tradition of *fu* compositions on the topos of controlling sexual desire.²⁶⁹

This significant discrepancy between the two literary works was underlined by Lu Rong in his *Shuyuan Zaji*. As previously seen, although he admired Yang Weizhen, the mid-Ming scholar strongly criticized his *xianlianti* production. Surprised to find out that the “Xulian ji” was the work of Yang Weizhen, Lu Rong was shocked by the late Yuan poet’s attempt to compare his twenty poems to Tao Qian’s “Xianqing fu” and thought that the comparison was highly inappropriate:

In “Fu on Quieting the Passions” there is a line which says: “I repudiate the meeting of “Creeping Grass”,²⁷⁰ I recite the lingering songs of “Shaonan”.²⁷¹ This is definitely a

²⁶⁸ Yim, “Between Self-Indulgence”, 35.

²⁶⁹ In his preface to “Xianqing fu” Tao Qian explicitly inserted his composition within the literary path opened by the Eastern Han (25-220 AD) writers Zhang Heng 張衡 (78-139) and Cai Yong 蔡邕 (132-192), the respective authors of “Dingqing fu” 定情賦 (Fu on Stabilizing the Passions) and “Jingqing fu” 靜情賦 (Fu on Quieting the Passions). See Lu Qinli, *Tao Yuanming ji*, 153. For a study of the theme of controlling sexual desire in the *fu* tradition see Lim, “Between Self-Indulgence”.

²⁷⁰ “The meeting of ‘Creeping Grass’” refers to the “Guofeng” poem “Ye you mancao” 野有蔓草 (There is Creeping Grass in the Wilderness) which centres on a meeting between a man and a woman. For the *Shijing* poem, see Fu Lipu, *Shijing*, 336.

²⁷¹ The “Shaonan” 召南 are a group of poems within the “Guofeng” section of the *Shijing*. Tao Qian might have intended to more specifically refer to the following comment contained in the preface to the one titled “Xing lu” 行露 (Dew on the Path): “The manners of a period of decay and disorder were passing away, and the lessons of integrity and sincerity were rising to influence. Oppressive men could not do violence to well-principled women.” 衰亂之俗微，貞信之教興，彊暴之男不能侵陵貞女也。 Translation by James Legge, see Legge, *The Chinese Classics* 4, “Prolegomena”, 39. For the original text

composition which emerges from affections and does not go further than proper behaviour and morality. Yang Weizhen's compositions are far removed from this. He was not ashamed [of his poems] and positioned himself close to ["Fu on Quieting the Passions"]. How could he be so brazen?

《閒情賦》有云尤《蔓草》之為會，誦《召南》之餘歌。蓋發乎情止乎禮義者也。鐵崖之作去此遠矣。不以為愧而以之自附，何其悍哉。²⁷²

While Tao Qian's composition might be seen as having a moral purpose, Yang Weizhen's set of poems is entirely free of moral messages and was simply written for the sake of artistic enjoyment. Yang Weizhen did not attempt to present his work under any allegorical lens or try to assign a moral function to it.

He presented his set as a homage to Han Wo's *Xianglian ji*, a literary divertimento, an experiment in poetic imitation, an ensemble of "beautiful words" (*juanli yu* 娟麗語).

While the poems collected in the *Xianglian ji* could be seen as the fruit of the poet's need to give voice to his feelings (in the opening of the preface to the *Xianglian ji* the act of writing is connected with Han Wo's natural "inability to forget feelings" 不能忘情²⁷³), on the contrary, Yang Weizhen's poetic set is presented as a collection of "words in the air" (*kongzhong yu* 空中語), not necessarily reflective of the poet's life experiences.

"Words in the air" is a key term in Yang Weizhen's discussion on the nature of his poetic set. As we learn from the preface to the set of poems, the expression is taken from a famous anecdote about the Northern Song 北宋 (960-1127) poet Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045-1105). Huang Tingjian is mainly known for his highly allusive *shi*

of the preface to the poem, see Fu Lipu, *Shijing*, 113. This possible reference was identified by Robert Hightower in his study of Tao Qian's *fu*; see Hightower, "The Fu of T'ao Ch'ien", 188.

²⁷² Lu Rong, *Shuyuan zaji*, 9.12a.

²⁷³ Han Wo, "Xianglian ji zixu", in Xu Zhuo, *Quan Tangshi lu*, 93.20b.

compositions, yet his literary oeuvre also includes a considerable number of erotic *ci* 詞 (song lyrics), characterized by highly colloquial diction and a relatively bold treatment of love and desire.²⁷⁴

In his preface to the *ci* collection of the Northern Song lyricist Yan Jidao 晏幾道 (1030 ca. - 1110 ca.), Huang Tingjian recalls an episode from his own youth related to the composition of erotic *ci* lyrics: “When I was young I occasionally wrote *yuefu*²⁷⁵ compositions, to accompany drinking and other amusements. The monk Faxiu alone blamed me [saying]: ‘You used brush and ink to incite lust. According to our law you will go down to the Hell where tongues are ploughed’”. 余少時間作樂府，以使酒玩世。道人法秀獨罪余以筆墨勸淫，於我法中當下犁舌之獄。²⁷⁶

Huang Tingjian’s answer in defence of his poetry, “they are words in the air and that is all” 空中語耳, is not recorded in his own account of the fact. Yang Weizhen might have used as his source for this answer the *Lengzhai yehua* 冷齋夜話 (Night Talks of the Cold Studio), a collection of *biji* writings by the Northern Song Buddhist monk Huihong 惠洪 (1071-1128):

One day the master [Faxiu] said to Luzhi, “There is no harm in writing as many *shi* poems as you like, but you should stop composing erotic songs and little *ci* lyrics.” Luzhi laughed and said: “They are words in the air and that is all. [Writing songs] does not equal to killing or stealing. In the end I will not fall into one of the unfortunate destinies because of it.” The master replied: “If you use evil words to seduce people into lustful thoughts, causing them to violate the rules of propriety and overstep prohibitions, [your words] will be a source of crime and evil. I am afraid you will not merely be punished with an unfortunate destiny.” Luzhi nodded and from then on never wrote song lyrics again.

²⁷⁴ Egan, "The Problem of the Repute of Tz'u", 197.

²⁷⁵ In this context the word *yuefu* 樂府 is used to refer to *ci* lyrics.

²⁷⁶ Huang Tingjian, "Xiaoshan ji xu" 小山集序, in *Shangu ji*, 16.23a. For an English translation of the entire preface see Egan, "The Problem of the Repute of Tz'u", 221-222.

師嘗謂魯直曰：詩多作無害，艷歌小詞可罷之。魯直笑曰：空中語耳，非殺非偷，終不至坐此墮惡道。師曰：若以邪言蕩人淫心，使彼逾禮越禁，為罪惡之由，吾恐非止墮惡道而已。魯直頷之，自是不復作詞曲。²⁷⁷

In defending his erotic *ci* lyrics, Huang Tingjian downplays their importance by dismissing them as “words in the air”, unrelated to his life experiences. He also points out that writing licentious songs cannot be equated to grave sins such as killing or stealing. However, the Buddhist monk Faxiu draws the poet’s attention to another problematic aspect of erotic poetry: the negative influence it might exert on the mind of its readers. No matter whether the poems reflect their author’s life experiences and moral values, they still have the potential to lead the reader down a wrong path. They can be “a source of crime and wrong” (*zuie zhi you* 罪惡之由).

Buddhist tables of merits and demerits are a proof of the fact that the production of erotic materials, be it literature, songs, or images, was regarded as highly sinful in a Buddhist context. In a Yuan dynasty Buddhist table of merits and demerits examined by Van Gulik in his *Sexual Life in Ancient China* it is stated that producing and spreading erotic materials brings a thousand demerits, which is exactly the same amount of demerits as killing a person, violating a chaste woman, and committing an offence against one’s parents or ancestors. As Van Gulik observed, “apparently the idea is that those may kill a man’s mind, which is as bad as killing him”.²⁷⁸ Yang Weizhen’s preface to the “Xulian ji” can, therefore, be better understood if read within the wider context of the Buddhist view of erotic literature.

²⁷⁷ Huihong, *Lengzhai yehua*, 10.2b. For an English translation of the full anecdote see Egan, “The Problem of the Repute of Tz’u”, 202.

²⁷⁸ Van Gulik, *Sexual Life*, 250. For an excerpt taken from the table of merits and demerits condemning the production of erotic material, see Van Gulik, *Sexual Life*, 249-250.

Yang Weizhen's concern seems to be exactly the negative influence that his poems might have on the mind of the reader. This concern prompted him to defend and, at the same time, apologize for his poetry. In the second half of the preface, he partly defended himself by expressing his surprise at the popularity enjoyed by his *xianglianti* poems. Furthermore, he exonerated himself by pointing out that Zhang Wan was responsible for their printing.

One of Yang Weizhen's many poetry students, Zhang Wan was the compiler of *Fugu shiji*, one of the major collections of Yang Weizhen's poetry. As recorded in the preface which Zhang Wan wrote in 1364 to accompany the collection, *Fugu shiji* originally consisted of three hundred poems taken from *Tieya gu yuefu* - a collection of Yang Weizhen's ancient-style *yuefu*, compiled by another of his students, Wu Fu 吳復 (1300-1348) - and two hundred additional poems.²⁷⁹ Both "Xulian ji" and "Xianglian bayong" belong to the latter group.

Despite forming only a very small part of *Fugu shiji*, and an even smaller percentage of his entire poetic oeuvre,²⁸⁰ Yang Weizhen's *xianglianti* poems are certainly not inconspicuous. Not only both sets are accompanied by a preface providing details about their genesis and circulation, but they are also brought into the spotlight at the end of Zhang Wan's preface to *Fugu shiji*. Before providing the year of compilation and his signature, Zhang Wan ends his preface with a mention of the *xianglianti* sets: "all the fragrant-dressing-case style [poems] are also appended." 香奩諸體亦附見云。²⁸¹

²⁷⁹ The original version of the collection probably underwent heavy editing in later centuries as currently available editions of *Fugu shiji* only include a hundred and thirty-five poems. See Huang Rensheng, *Yang Weizhen yu Yuanmo Mingchu wenxue sichao*, 220.

²⁸⁰ According to Huang Rensheng's calculations, Yang Weizhen's extant poems amount to at least 1,443, of which 1,227 are *yuefu* poems. See Huang Rensheng, *Yang Weizhen yu Yuanmo Mingchu wenxue sichao*, 225 and 229.

²⁸¹ Zhang Wan, "Jilu Tieya xiansheng Fugu shiji xu", in Zou Zhifang, *Yang Weizhen shiji*, 540.

Yang Weizhen's *xianglianti* sets belong to the broad category of *jintishi* 近體詩 (recent-style poetry), in other words tonally regulated poetry, which formed a minor part of the poet's entire oeuvre. In deciding to include regulated verse in his collection of Yang Weizhen's poetry, Zhang Wan followed the example set by Gu Ying 顧瑛 (1310-1369), a wealthy and influential patron of poets and painters who was close friends with Yang Weizhen.²⁸² In 1348 Gu Ying sponsored the publication of a new edition of *Tieya guyuefu* to which he added not only some of Yang Weizhen's newly composed *gu yuefu* but also some regulated poems which Yang Weizhen had placed aside. In the postface he wrote to his edition of *Tieya gu yuefu*, Gu Ying explains the following: "As for the regulated poems at the end of the scrolls, although they were discarded by the master, they are what the scholars of this time deeply appreciate." 卷末律詩，雖先生所棄，而世之學者所深膾炙者也。²⁸³

Both Gu Ying and Zhang Wan emphasize how they went against Yang Weizhen's will with their decision to print and circulate his recent-style poetry on a wider scale, its popularity being the main justification behind their choice.²⁸⁴ Although speculative, there is the chance that Yang Weizhen himself secretly supported (or was even behind) Gu Ying's and Zhang Wan's choice to publish his professedly disdained regulated verse alongside his ancient-style poetry. Gu Ying's and Zhang Wan's emphasis on Yang Weizhen's recent-style poetry and its popularity in the paratexts they wrote for their respective collections of Yang Weizhen's poetry can be understood as part of a strategy to attract potential readers and buyers. It might be argued that the inclusion of Yang Weizhen's regulated poetry was one of the key selling points of both Gu Ying's

²⁸² For Gu Ying's patronage of the arts, see Sensabaugh, "Guests at Jade Mountain".

²⁸³ Gu Ying, "Tieya xiansheng gu yuefu houxu", in Zou Zhifang, *Yang Weizhen shiji*, 449.

²⁸⁴ Zou Zhifang, *Yang Weizhen shiji*, 448-449 (Gu Ying's postface) and 450 (Zhang Wan's preface).

new edition of *Tieya gu yuefu* and Zhang Wan's *Fugu shiji*. As for the specific case of Yang Weizhen's two *xianglianti* sets, their brief mention at the end of Zhang Wan's preface was probably meant to arouse curiosity in the reading public, inviting one to leaf through the collection and discover the newest additions to Yang Weizhen's poetic oeuvre.

Returning to the preface to the "Xulian ji", because of its mention of the printing and publication of the twenty poems, it seems that it was added to the set at a much later stage. It is unclear whether the set was first printed separately by Zhang Wan and included later in *Fugu shiji* together with Yang Weizhen's preface or whether Yang Weizhen wrote the preface for a subsequent reprint of *Fugu shiji*. The preface paradoxically gives importance to a work which is presented by its author as nothing more than aesthetically pleasing yet trifling poetry.

The above considerations make one question even more whether Yang Weizhen's apologetic preface to "Xulian ji" voiced a sincere concern or was instead written half-mockingly, out of literary convention. Whatever the case might be, it still testifies to the author's awareness of the problematic nature of amorous-erotic poetry and inserts itself within the broader discourse of the apologia of the erotic in traditional Chinese literary criticism.

“The Talent of Spring Fragrance”: An Analysis of Yang Weizhen’s Preface to His “Xianglian bayong”

As with his set “Xulian ji”, Yang Weizhen wrote a preface to accompany his “Xianglian bayong” poems.²⁸⁵ This paratext is worth examining in closer detail, since it not only provides us with valuable information on the context behind the composition of the poems, but it also allows us to have a glimpse at their social nature. The preface can be used as a starting point to explore the intertextual network of mutual imitation created by Yang Weizhen and his other contemporaries who chose to write their own “Xianglian bayong” set. From the very first line of the preface we are made aware of the fact that Yang Weizhen’s “Xianglian bayong” was not an isolated case.

As for the “Eight fragrant dressing case poems” of the Wujian poetry society, those who are without the talent of spring fragrance are mostly troubled by the topics. Even though they have compositions [on these topics], when a lowly woman tries to imitate the make-up of the palace style, in the end she still carries a lowly form and is ugly. Later I obtained “The Lingering Sounds of the Jade Tree” and regarded them as the best; yet among the song lyrics and *yuefu* compositions there was absolutely none which could be singled out. One day, Master Yun’an [Wang Guoqi] sent me his “Eight songs to the tune Tasuo xing”. I read them and felt positively surprised. The gentleman is a disciple of Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫 (1254 – 1322).²⁸⁶ This year he is already eighty-three *sui*, yet, being strong and straightforward, he produced words which are elegant and beautiful. These [poems] are almost as if written by a divine immortal on the moon! With due respect I gave them to Cui’er to put them in music and sing them. I also expressed my judgement on them and gave them to the scholar of Longzhou who added them to my eight *shi* poems and later had them printed. By means of them one can see the moonlight of the old times of the princely descendant of the imperial house. Even though one can say that there are rebellion and bloodshed, we are certainly safe and sound. A preface by the Old Man Brocade Nest Yang Weizhen, written in the early auspicious days of the third month of spring of the Bingwu year of the Zhizheng era [1366].

²⁸⁵ There are a few textual variants between the two major versions of the preface; the most significant ones are pointed out within my analysis of the text.

²⁸⁶ Wang Guoqi was also Zhao Mengfu’s son-in-law.

吳間詩社《香奩八詠》，無春芳才情者，多為題所困。縱有篇辭，鄙婦學妝院體，終帶鄙狀可醜也。晚得《玉樹餘音》為甲，而長短句，樂府絕無可拈出者。一日雲庵王先生寄示《踏莎行八闕》，讀之驚喜。先生蓋松雪翁門人，今年八十又三矣，而堅強清爽出語娟麗，此殆為月中仙人也。謹付翠兒度腔歌之，又評付龍洲生附八詩後繡梓，以見王孫門舊時月色，雖曰喪亂固無恙也。至正丙午春三月初吉，錦窈老人楊維禎序。²⁸⁷

To our disadvantage, we do not possess enough textual evidence to know exactly who established specific requirements in terms of style and imagery for the *bayong* compositions and what these requirements were. We are also unable to determine whether the eight specific individual themes first appeared grouped together as a set during Yang Weizhen's life or if they were already an established poetic theme by that time. Despite all these uncertainties and unresolved questions, thanks to the information provided by Yang Weizhen's preface, one can argue that the Wujian poetry society probably played a key role in this shared poetic exploration of different aspects of the realm of femininity.

With regards to the Wujian poetry society we are once again faced with a lack of information. We do not know when and how the group was formed and who and how many its actual members were. In another version of the preface the society is named Yunjian 雲間. Yunjian was an alternative name for Songjiang, the place where Yang Weizhen spent the final years of his life. In both cases, the name of the society refers to its geographical location in the South Eastern part of the Empire.

As one can learn from Li Dongyang's 李東陽 (1447-1516) *Lutang shihua* 麓堂詩話 (Poetry Talks of the Hall at the Foot of the Hill), the establishment of poetry societies

²⁸⁷ Yang Weizhen, *Tieya yibian zhu*, 7.19a-b.

was a particularly thriving phenomenon in the Wu and Yue areas of South Eastern China during the late Yuan and the early Ming:

Toward the end of the Yuan and the beginning of our dynasty, people of the south east held poetry societies in high esteem. Each one had a strong figure as its leader, who would engage poets as examiners. At the end of the year, they would set a theme for those who could compose poetry in all the various districts. The deadline to collect the scrolls would be in the following spring. They would conduct a private evaluation and announce the name list of the successful candidates. Then they would print the excellent ones, roughly like the imperial examination system. The only [detailed information] that has been handed down to the present day is about the Moon Spring Poetry Society of Master Wu of Pujiang.²⁸⁸

元季國初，東南人士重詩社，每一有力者為主，聘詩人為考官，隔歲封題於諸郡之能詩者，期以明春集卷。私試開榜次名，仍刻其優者，略如科舉之法。今世所傳，惟浦江吳氏月泉吟社。²⁸⁹

When using the English term “society” to render the Chinese word *she* 社 we need to bear in mind that the groups of literati classified under this umbrella term varied considerably. Many of these literary organizations were of a temporary and highly informal nature. The famous Yuequan yinshe 月泉吟社 (Moon Spring Chanting Society), mentioned by Li Dongyang, was actually a temporary group, established simply for the sole purpose of holding a large scale one-off poetry competition.²⁹⁰ Chen Baoliang regards the term *shishe* as a synonym of *wenyan* 文宴 (literary banquet) and *yaji* 雅集 (elegant gathering), in other words leisurely gatherings of literati centred on, but not limited to, the writing of poetry.²⁹¹ In his introduction to the development of literary societies in China, Michel Hockx raises the above-mentioned

²⁸⁸ For my translation I also consulted Richard John Lynn’s translation of the same passage. See, Lynn, “Traditional Chinese Poetry Societies”, 100.

²⁸⁹ Li Dongyang, *Lutang shihua*, 8b-9a.

²⁹⁰ For a study of the Moon Spring Society see Lynn, “Traditional Chinese Poetry Societies”.

²⁹¹ Chen Baoliang, *Zhongguo de she yu hui*, 268-269.

issues and discusses how translating *she* as “society” might lead to certain misinterpretations about the actual nature of these literary groups. He therefore suggests “poetry party” and “poetry competitions” as additional translations of the term *shishe*.²⁹²

Multiple sources attest to Yang Weizhen’s active involvement in many leisurely gatherings and collective literary activities. Wang Shizhen’s 王世貞 (1526-1590) *Yiyuan zhiyan* 藝苑卮言 (Goblet Words in the Realm of Art), similarly to *Lutang shihua*, testifies to the popularity of poetry societies in the Zhejiang area and also mentions Yang Weizhen as a major figure in the organization of literary activities:

“[During the former dynasty [the Yuan], the net of the law loosened up and men did not have to become officials. In the Zhejiang area every year there were poetry societies/competitions. One or two these invited one or two famous poets such as Lianfu [Yang Weizhen] presided over them and printed the best poems as models.”²⁹³

當勝國時，法網寬，人不必仕宦。浙中每歲有詩社，一二名宿如廉夫輩主之，刻其尤者爲式。²⁹⁴

It is highly likely that the *bayong* compositions originated in the context of a poetry competition or, even more simply, as a literary game of collective imitation. It might be assumed that after the informal poetry competition organised by the Wujian poetry society had taken place, Yang Weizhen published his own poems together with Wang Guoqi’s lyrics with the specific intention to provide a poetic model on how to capture in verse the most sensual and aesthetic aspects of women’s experiences using both the *shi* and *ci* form. The publication and circulation of Yang Weizhen’s, Wang Guoqi’s, and

²⁹² Hockx, *Questions of Style*, 16-21.

²⁹³ For my translation I also consulted Richard John Lynn’s translation of the same text; see Lynn, “Traditional Chinese Poetry Societies”, 100.

²⁹⁴ Wang Shizhen, *Yiyuan zhiyan*, 6.1b-2a.

possibly other poets' sets, probably led to the appearance of new "Xianglian bayong" sets. Thanks to a subtitle to Shen Xi's own "Xianglian bayong" set, we know that his eight lyrics were written "following the rhymes of Wang Delian of Yunjian" 追次雲間王德璉韻.²⁹⁵ In other words, Shen Xi's poems were written as matching pieces to Wang Guoqi's. Bei Qiong's own set was explicitly presented as a work of poetic imitation through the use of the word *ni* 擬 (to imitate, in imitation of) within its title, "Ni xianglian bayong" 擬香奩八詠 (In Imitation of the Eight Fragrant Dressing Case Poems).²⁹⁶ Since Bei Qiong was one of Yang Weizhen's closest students, it is highly probable that his set was modelled on Yang Weizhen's.

In the preface to his "Xianglian bayong", Yang Weizhen does not provide exhaustive details about his own set, but chooses instead to shift the focus towards the criticism and appraisal of other sets on the same eight themes by other fellow poets. In criticizing the poems of some of the members of the Wujian society and praising Wang Guoqi's set of song lyrics, Yang Weizhen's intention might have been to indirectly praise the artistic quality of his own set. Had he not held his own set in high esteem, he would not have asked his disciple Zhang Wan to print it alongside Wang Guoqi's. Although Yang Weizhen did not directly commend his own set, we might assume that he regarded it as an example of high quality *shi* poetry on the eight selected themes and therefore worthy of accompanying Wang Guoqi's beautiful song lyrics.

Yang Weizhen's major criticism towards some of the members of the Yunjian poetry society is their lack of an essential element which he calls "the talent of spring fragrance" (*chunfang caiqing* 春芳才情), a factor seen as necessary for the composition of good quality *xianglianti* poetry. From the preface, it becomes evident

²⁹⁵ Tang Guizhang, *Quan Jin Yuan ci*, vol. 2, 1043.

²⁹⁶ Bei Qiong, *Qingjiang ji*, 9.3b.

that “the talent of spring fragrance” does not refer to a poet’s mastery of language and technique, but to his own interiority and emotional experience. It is an inner talent which cannot be mastered through assiduous study and the careful application of rules. The exact meaning of the phrase “the talent of spring fragrance” can be open to interpretation. Throughout the history of Chinese erotic poetry, springtime has been traditionally associated with feelings of love and longing. In keeping with the erotic connotations of spring, I propose to read “the talent of spring fragrance” within an amorous-erotic framework. I am therefore inclined to interpret the phrase as referring to a poet’s amorous predisposition and experiences. Although in translating the term as “licentious experience and talent”²⁹⁷ Lai acknowledges the strong link existing between the spring season and love and desire, I believe that by choosing the adjective “licentious” she adds a negative connotation which was not originally intended by Yang Weizhen.

The “talent of spring fragrance” is the source of poetic inspiration, the fountain of literary creativity for those poets who intend to venture into the realm of love and women. Yang Weizhen’s choice of emphasizing this inner predisposition should be inserted within the broader context of his poetry aesthetics, in particular his theory of *shi* poetry, human nature (*xing* 性), and feelings (*qing* 情). In line with the tradition of the “Great Preface”, Yang Weizhen saw a strong link between interiority and poetry writing. In “Yan Shao shi xu” 剡韶詩序 (Preface to Yan Shao’s [fl. Zhizheng era (1341–1368)] Poetry) the poet illustrated how human nature, feelings, and poetry are all intimately connected: “poetry is rooted in feelings and human nature. There is human nature and therefore there are feelings; there are feelings and therefore there is

²⁹⁷ Lai, “Yang Weizhen’s Iron Style Poems on History”, 62.

poetry [. . .] It has never happened that what was described in poetry emerged independently of feelings” 詩本情性，有性此有情，有情此有詩也。[. . .] 詩之狀未有不依情而出也。²⁹⁸ Since poetry writing cannot be separated from feelings, even compositions on a set theme, highly regulated in terms of vocabulary and imagery, are still rooted in the poet’s interiority. As a consequence, if the topic does not truly touch the poet’s heartstrings, the composition will somehow reflect the lack of emotional involvement of its author, no matter how hard he tries.²⁹⁹

In voicing his criticism, Yang Weizhen compares by analogy poetry writing to female self-beautification. The ones who lack “the talent of spring fragrance” are similar to an ugly woman of low social status who tries to improve her appearance by applying make-up. No matter how closely she imitates the elegant style of the palace women, she cannot hide her lack of gracefulness and refinement behind kohl, powder, and rouge. Yang Weizhen’s analogy brings to mind the famous anecdote of Xi Shi’s ugly neighbour. The story goes that Xi Shi was even more attractive when, suddenly struck by pain caused by her heart illness, she would press her bosom and knit her eyebrows. Her ugly neighbour, performed the same actions in the hope to obtain the same beautifying effect, but the result was (obviously) unsuccessful.³⁰⁰ Interestingly, the preface to the *Xianglian ji* contains a reference to the above mentioned anecdote. In the attempt to legitimize his collection, Han Wo acknowledged his success in inheriting and innovating the *Yutai xinyong* tradition of poems on beautiful women by using the following statement: “Roughly I obtained the beautiful demeanour of [Xi Shi] pressing

²⁹⁸ Yang Weizhen, *Dong Weizi wenji*, 7.4a-b.

²⁹⁹ For a brief discussion of Yang Weizhen’s theory of poetry and feelings see Zhang, “Imitation and Innovation”, 41-49.

³⁰⁰ For the story about Xi Shi’s ugly neighbour see Wang Fuzhi, *Zhuangzi jie*, 127.

her bosom” 羸得捧心之態。³⁰¹ Although I am not suggesting that Yang Weizhen modelled his metaphor on the above quoted statement from Han Wo’s preface, it is interesting to observe how both poets created an analogy between poetry and female beauty when praising the artistic quality of their compositions.

In Yang Weizhen’s mind the beauty of language must be accompanied by an emotional resonance with the topic. Keeping in line with the Yuan poet’s own metaphor, the technical mastery of poetry and the use of aesthetically pleasing vocabulary are only the cosmetics which adorn the deeper beauty of emotional genuineness. Without “the talent of spring fragrance”, ornate words are nothing more than rouge and powder applied on an ugly face. Yang Weizhen’s emphasis on emotional genuineness does not equate to a disdain for formal beauty. In praising Wang Guoqi’ *ci* lyrics, Yang Weizhen highlights the beauty and elegance of their language, pointing out how Wang Guoqi “produced words which are elegant and beautiful” 出語娟麗. The adjective compound *juanli* might be regarded as a key term in Yang Weizhen’s *xianglianti* aesthetics. As previously discussed, the same term was used by him to describe his other set of *xianglianti* poetry, the miniature collection “Xulian ji”. The repeated use of this term might be seen as a clue to the fact that the beauty of language is a highly valued element in *xianglianti* poetry. The choice of elegant, aesthetically pleasing words and imagery is fundamental to high quality *xianglianti* poetry. The content, its emotional resonance with the author’s interiority, and the way it is conveyed in words are all important elements for the composition of *xianglianti* poetry.

³⁰¹ Han Wo, “Xianglian ji zixu”, in Xu Zhuo, *Quan Tangshi lu*, 93.21a.

The last few lines of Yang Weizhen's preface can lead us to speculate on one of the intended functions of *xianglianti* poetry: the creation of an aesthetically pleasing diversion from the harshness of reality. Ornate poems, abundant in sensual details, depicting the glamourized daily life of palace ladies or high end courtesans could provide a valve for escapism to the reader troubled by the harsh reality of difficult historical and personal times. The reader could immerse himself in a world of beautiful surfaces and deep yet delicate emotions (in other words the union of *qing* and *se*) and obtain a temporary sense of safety in a world of political chaos where "rebellion and bloodshed" (*sangluan* 喪亂) were a reality.

Yuan Dynasty Elements in Yang Weizhen's "Xulian ji" and "Xianglian bayong"

When presenting Yang Weizhen's two *xianglianti* sets in relation to Han Wo's collection of amorous-erotic verse, I chose to define both of them as "late Yuan miniature *Xianglian ji*". This definition is especially appropriate for the "Xulian ji", which was explicitly conceived by Yang Weizhen as a small-scale continuation of the *Xianglian ji*, as he clearly stated in the preface he later wrote to accompany the set. The "Xulian ji" has a particularly intimate connection to Han Wo's amorous-erotic corpus. For this reason, Yang Weizhen's borrowing and imitation of Han Wo's poetry are at the centre of my literary analysis of the "Xulian ji". As for the words "late Yuan", when choosing to use this temporal marker within my description of Yang Weizhen's *xianglianti* sets, my intention was to refer not only to the actual historical period when the poems came into being, but also to the historical setting chosen by the author as a backdrop for his poetic sets. I believe that Yang Weizhen consciously chose to give a

contemporary, Yuan dynasty setting to his own miniature versions of Han Wo's *Xianglian ji*. He did so in a rather subtle way, which could easily go unnoticed at a first read. The broad temporal setting of the two sets - the Yuan dynasty, if not specifically Yang Weizhen's very own times - is revealed in both works through single small details: a type of dance known as "the sixteen heavenly demons" (*shiliu tianmo* 十六天魔) and a tall headdress called *gu* cap (罽冠 *guguan*). Both the dance and the headdress are deeply rooted in a Yuan dynasty, Mongol context and can be regarded as markedly Yuan elements, which give Yang Weizhen's set a contemporary (that is, contemporary to his own times) flavour.

a. The Dance of the Sixteen Demons

The dance of the sixteen demons appears in the opening line of the fourth quatrain of the "Xulian ji", a poem on the topic of dancing, as its title already reveals:

"Practicing a Dance"

The teaching of the sixteen demons already completed,

She turns backwards the lotus palm, bitterly resenting its clumsiness.

Deep at night she does not care the performance has stopped,

She still moves stepping on the shadow in front of the lamp.

《習舞》

十六天魔教已成，

背反蓮掌苦嫌生。

夜深不管排場歇，

尚向燈前躡影行。³⁰²

³⁰² Zou Zhifang, *Yang Weizhen shiji*, 363.

Rather than writing a more generic poem on the activity of dancing, Yang Weizhen chose to represent a specific type of dance which was popular during his times.

Originating from the Western regions of the Hexi 河西 corridor³⁰³ and rooted in the tantric rituals of Tibetan Buddhism, the dance of the sixteen demons enjoyed great popularity at the Yuan imperial court, especially under emperor Shun 順帝 (r. 1333-1370), the last sovereign of the Mongol dynasty, who was himself a practitioner of Tibetan tantric Buddhism and favoured Tibetan lamas.³⁰⁴

From the various descriptions of the dance which can be found in late Yuan and early Ming anecdotes, historical records, and poems the dance seemed to be characterized by a strong seductive appeal, as it was performed by beautiful women wearing lavishly adorned costumes. According to Ye Ziqi's 葉子奇 (1327–1390) *Caomu zi* 草木子 (The Master of Plants and Trees), "their [the Mongols of the Yuan dynasty] customs included the dance of the sixteen demons, which probably consisted of sixteen beautiful women lavishly adorned with strings of pearls and gemstones dancing to images of the Bodhissatvas". 其俗有十六天魔舞，蓋以珠璣盛飾美女十六人，為佛菩薩相而舞。³⁰⁵

The *Yuan shi* 元史 (History of the Yuan) contains an elaborate account of how the dance was performed at the court of Emperor Shundi 順帝 (r. 1333-1368), including a

³⁰³ One of Zhu Youdun's 朱有燾 (1379-1439) poems on the dance of the sixteen demons touches upon the origin of the dance, tracing it to Buddhist practices of the Hexi area: "Twisting and twirling with lotus palms dance the heavenly demons / Two times eight charming beauties vie with Chang'e of the Moon / Originally a song from West of the River that venerated Buddha / They bring it into the palace and sing it before the mat". 背番蓮掌舞天魔，二八嬌娃賽月娥。本是河西參佛曲，把來宮苑席前歌。 My translation of the poem is a slightly modified version of Idema and West's translation, see Idema and West, *Chinese Theatre*, 183. Zhu Youdun's poem is taken from Zhang Haipeng, *Gongci xiaozuan*, 8.

³⁰⁴ For a study on the origins of the dance of the sixteen demons see Li Guotao, "Shiliu tianmo wu".

³⁰⁵ Ye Ziqi, *Caomu zi*, 3.37b.

list of the various garments and objects used by the dancers to impersonate the heavenly demons:

At the time the Emperor neglected the affairs of the government and indulged in revelries. He used sixteen palace ladies, [including] Sansheng, Miaoyue, and Wenshu, to play music and dance. It was called the sixteen heavenly demons. Their hair hung from their heads in several braids and they wore Buddhist ivory crowns. Their bodies were covered with strings of gemstones, long and short large bright red skirts adorned with gold thread, gold-speckled jackets, shoulder stoles, heavenly robes with closed sleeves, and shoes and stockings with silk ribbons. Each of them carried an instrument made of a human skull container.³⁰⁶ One of them carried a scepter³⁰⁷ and bell to make music.

時帝怠於政事，荒於游宴，以宮女三聖奴、妙樂奴、文殊奴等一十六人按舞，名為十六天魔，首垂髮數辮，戴象牙佛冠，身被纓絡、大紅綃金長短裙、金雜襖、雲肩、合袖天衣、綬帶鞋襪，各執加巴刺般之器，內一人執鈴杵奏樂。³⁰⁸

In the same way that the teachings of Tibetan esoteric Buddhism spread well beyond the Yuan imperial court and gradually reached commoners,³⁰⁹ the popularity of the dance of the sixteen demons was probably not confined to the Emperor and his entourage. From a record of a pleasure boat trip in which Yang Weizhen participated, we know that the late Yuan poet himself had directly witnessed an improvised performance of the dance:

I played “Clear River Lay”, the sound was vigorous and extremely vibrant. As the flute stopped, Lu Heng 陸恒 played my three-stringed *qin*, and Gu Sun 顧遜 also started to pluck the

³⁰⁶ The word *jabalaban* 加巴刺般 corresponds to the Sanskrit *kapala* कपाल and refers to a bowl or a cup made from a human skull, often used as a ritual vessel in tantric Buddhist rituals. See Li Guotao, “Shiliu tianmo wu”, 61-62.

³⁰⁷ The sceptre is the Tibetan *dorje* (Sanskrit *vajra* वज्र), one of the chief ritual objects of Tibetan Buddhism, also known as the lamas sceptre.

³⁰⁸ Song Lian, *Yuan shi*, 43.918-919. Another reference to the practice of the dance of the sixteen demons at the court of Emperor Shun can be found within the biography of the “treacherous minister” (*jian chen* 姦臣) Hama 哈麻. See Song Lian, *Yuan shi*, vol. 15, 205.4583.

³⁰⁹ Shen, “Tibetan Buddhism in Mongol-Yuan”, 547-548.

fourteen strings [of the *qin*] by himself and ordered Miss Zhulian 珠簾³¹⁰ to do the dance of the sixteen demons with Sun Huan 孫煥.

予為作《清江引》一弄，聲勁亮甚。笛闕陸君恒楔予三絃琴，顧君遜亦自起彈十四絃，命珠簾氏與孫君煥交作十六魔舞。³¹¹

Yang Weizhen's record could be taken as evidence of the fact that the dance of the sixteen heavenly demons was also performed by courtesans for pure entertainment, outside of a Buddhist ritualistic context. It also creates a stronger personal link between Yang Weizhen's own experiences with professional entertainers and the content of his poem on the dance of the sixteen heavenly demons. Apart from containing a distinctively Yuan element, the fourth poem of the "Xulian ji" is also very relevant to our reading and understanding of the whole set, as it provides a clue about the woman's identity and social status. The fact that she is learning how to perform a dance reveals her belonging to the world of entertainment; the woman in question is a courtesan, a professional entertainer well versed in the arts of song, music, and dance, as well as the arts of seduction. This is also confirmed by other poems within the set, especially "Yan ge", in which the young woman receives gold cash coins (*jinqian* 金錢) for singing in harmony with the "phoenix nest [flute]" (*fenghuang chao* 鳳凰巢).³¹²

³¹⁰ Zhulian 珠簾 is identified as a professional entertainer (*ji* 妓) within the same passage.

³¹¹ Zhu Cunli, *Shanhu munan*, 2.31a.

³¹² Zou Zhifang, *Yang Weizhen shiji*, 362.

b. The *Gugu* Cap

With regards to the “Xianglian bayong” set, its markedly Yuan element appears at the end of its first poem, “Jinpen mufa”, a lavishly detailed description of a woman washing and styling her long dark hair:

At Huaqing on a spring morning she is permitted [to bathe] in the hot springs
the hair bun loosened up, her dark hair scatters around in a wave.
Kingfisher-green rain jumps disorderly on the moon beneath the flowers,
The black cloud [of her hair] is half rolled up in the sky reflected in the mirror.
The bronze immortal plate is cold as she adds sweet dew,
The jade maid basin is emptied as she arranges the kingfisher feathers and inlaid hair ornaments
She combs the cloud of her hair into a one-*chi* tall hair loop,
For the first time she wears a *gu* cap in front of the jade mirror stand.

華清春晝賜溫泉，
綰脫青絲散一編。
翠雨亂跳花底月，
黑雲半捲鏡中天。
銅仙盤冷添甘露，
玉女盆傾拾翠鈿。
攏得雲鬟高一尺，
罍冠新上玉臺前。³¹³

³¹³ Zou Zhifang, *Yang Weizhen shiji*, 351.

The opening line of the poem, with its reference to the Huaqing 華清 pools, might lead the reader to assume that the woman washing and combing her hair is the renowned Tang dynasty beauty Yang Guifei 楊貴妃 (719-756), the favourite concubine of Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 713-756). As narrated in “Changhen ge” 長恨歌 (The Song of Everlasting Regret), Bai Juyi’s famous narrative poem centred on the tragically-ending love between Xuanzong and Yang Guifei, it was when the beauty first bathed at Huaqing palace that Xuanzong was captivated by her. When reading the bathing scene in “Changhen ge” alongside Yang Weizhen’s poem on hair-washing, one cannot fail to notice the close similarity between their opening lines. Bai Juyi’s line “in the coolness of springtime, she was permitted to bathe in the Huaqing pools”³¹⁴ 春寒賜浴華清池³¹⁵ is closely echoed by Yang Weizhen’s line “at Huaqing on a spring morning she is permitted [to bathe in] the hot springs” 華清春晝賜溫泉. Jumping to the conclusion that Yang Weizhen’s poem is about Yang Guifei is even more natural when taking into account the special fascination that Xuanzong’s favourite concubine, and more broadly the Kaiyuan-Tianbao 開元天寶 (713-756) period, seems to have exerted on Yang Weizhen and his contemporaries. Within the corpus of Yang Weizhen’s poetry, there are, in fact, several poems about the Tang dynasty beauty, an example being his set of *gongci* poems, two of which explicitly make reference to famous anecdotes about the Tang beauty, mainly the time she suffered from a toothache and the time she stole her brother-in-law’s flute.³¹⁶ In Qu You’s *Guitian shihua* there is a record of a collective

³¹⁴ Translation by Paul Kroll, with only a minor amendment (I used pinyin instead of Wade-Giles to transcribe the place name Huaqing 華清); see Kroll, “Po Chü-i’s ‘Song of Lasting Regret’”, 97.

³¹⁵ Bai Juyi, *Bai Juyi ji*, 238.

³¹⁶ The fourth poem of the set mentions the beauty’s toothache together with the litchee, a fruit she was very fond of: “A warm breeze on the palaces and pavillions the day at first is long / The tribute from the South has just arrived, the lychees are fragrant. / In the Western mansion Yuyuan [Yang Guifei] just

activity of poetry composition centred on the theme of Yang Guifei, more precisely on her stocking. The theme was set by a poetry society simply referred to as *shishe* 詩社 and Yang Weizhen's poem on the topic was praised as the best.³¹⁷

Despite the expectations built up by its opening line, the woman at the centre of Yang Weizhen's poem is not Yang Guifei, but a Yuan dynasty beauty. This is only revealed at the very end of the poem by means of the headdress that the woman wears after styling her hair into a tall loop. The headpiece in question, referred to as *guguan* by Yang Weizhen, but also known as *gugu* 罍罍 and by several other names in Chinese, is a tall cylindrical cap, often wrapped in silk and decorated with feathers, pearls and precious stones. Known as *boghtaq* in Mongolian, it was a garment worn by married Mongol noblewomen, hence a symbol of high social status.³¹⁸ Although it would be justifiable to assume that the woman in Yang Weizhen's poem is a member of the Mongol elite, I contend that she could equally be a lower-rank woman, more precisely a professional entertainer. To support this other possibility for the identity of the woman wearing the Mongol headdress, I rely on another poem by Yang Weizhen, one of his "bamboo branch songs" in which the same headdress appears; its final couplet goes "the *gugu* cap is a *chi* tall, [she] can sing the yellow oriole [song] and dance the goose [dance]" 罍罍冠子高一尺，能唱黃鶯舞雁兒。³¹⁹

has a toothache / In the gold cage she shares [a lychee] with the white parrot." 薰風殿閣日初長，南貢新來荔子香。西邸阿環方病齒，金籠分賜雪衣娘。 See Zou Zhifang, *Yang Weizhen shiji*, 360.

The ninth poem of the set does not directly mention Yang Guifei, yet it makes reference to the stealing of Prince Ning's flute, an episode associated with the concubine: "She was warned not to steal Brother Ning's flute / The parrot heartlessly criticizes her". 丁寧莫竊寧哥笛，鸚姆無情說短長。 See Zou Zhifang, *Yang Weizhen shiji*, 361.

³¹⁷ Qu You, *Guitian shihua*. For another poem by Yang Weizhen on the theme of Yang Guifei's stocking, see Zou Zhifang, *Yang Weizhen shiji*, 339.

³¹⁸ Donkin, *Beyond Price*, 227-228 and Denney, "Mongol Dress", 80.

³¹⁹ Zou Zhifang, *Yang Weizhen shiji*, 122.

After the above discussion of the distinctively Yuan elements within Yang Weizhen's two *xianglianti* sets, I will proceed with my analysis of the poet's *xianglianti* corpus mainly focusing on the following aspects: imitation and intertextuality. More precisely, my analysis of the twenty-poems of the *Xulian ji* will focus on the relationship between the set and Han Wo's *Xianglian ji*. It will look at how Yang Weizhen created a strong link between his set of twenty poems and Han Wo's *Xianglian ji*, at the same time not limiting himself to the late Tang poet's collection when searching for inspiration.

An Experiment in Imitation: Yang Weizhen's "Xulian ji"

In constructing a loose love narrative in twenty poems, Yang Weizhen chose Han Wo's *Xianglian ji* as a major source of inspiration. He conceived his set as a small-scale continuation of Han Wo's collection, not only in name but also in practice, as he wove strong intertextual links between the two works. Some of the quatrains of the "Xulian ji" borrow entire lines from Han Wo and two of them, "Chuyu" and "Chengpei", even go as far as to consist entirely of verses which were originally written by the late Tang poet, with only minor variations. The "Xulian ji" should be, therefore, taken as an experiment in poetic imitation and a homage to the forefather of *xianglianti* poetry. While Han Wo is undoubtedly the most prominent poetic model followed by Yang Weizhen in the "Xulian ji", this does not mean that he is the only direct source of inspiration for the late Yuan poet. Yang Weizhen did not restrict himself to the *Xianglian ji* when searching for poetic inspiration on the theme of love and women. In the present section I examine in detail the close relationship between the "Xulian ji" and the *Xianglian ji*. Within my analysis of the set, I will also show how some of its

poems can be closely linked to other compositions outside of the limited corpus of the *Xianglian ji*.

Yang Weizhen's direct imitation of Han Wo is mainly concentrated within the short love narrative which unfolds from the eleventh to the fifteenth poem of the set; of the five poems forming this subgroup, four are directly connected to verses by the late Tang poet: "Xiangjian" (poem number 11), "Xiangsi" (number 12), "Dixin" (number 13), and "Chengpei" (number 15). Those poems within the "Xulian ji" which possess a stronger, more explicit focus on love and amorous desire are mostly directly modelled on the *Xianglian ji*; to this group belong the above listed four poems and "Chuyu" (poem number 9). As a consequence, Yang Weizhen's treatment of the theme of *qing* is strongly influenced by and intimately connected with Han Wo's approach towards the same subject. Both Yang Weizhen and Han Wo explore not only the emotional but also the physical aspects of the experience of love, not shying away from representing the carnality of desire and providing the reader with sensual glimpses of the female body. To give a more concrete idea of how Yang Weizhen explores the theme of love in relation to the *Xianglian ji*, I would here like to take a closer look at the love narrative within the "Xulian ji", which begins with the following quatrain:

"Seeing Each Other"

The creamy congealment of her scapula, her shoulders made of polished jade

I am only surprised that red silk covers the white lotuses

Why does the moon conceal a nature of fire?

Crazy lover, all night I will be burning [with desire] for you.

《相見》

酥凝背甲玉搓肩

只訝紅綃覆白蓮

底事太陰藏火性

狂夫夜夜為君然³²⁰

A quatrain on an encounter between lovers, “Xiangjian” is modelled on “Oujian beimian shixi jian meng” 偶見背面是夕兼夢 (By Chance I Saw her from the Back and on the Same Night I Dreamt of Her)³²¹, one of the various *Xianglian ji* poems on the theme of a chance encounter with a beautiful woman.³²² The first two verses are almost identical to the opening couplet of Han Wo’s poem; the poet’s eyes linger on the white soft skin of the woman’s shoulders and on her tiny feet covered in red silk. The visual appreciation of the female body is followed in the final couplet by a fervent declaration of desire, centred on the association between sexual passion and fire. Han Wo (or the male persona at the centre of his poem on the chance encounter) also directly voices his desire and presents it as a burning fire:

Tonight clearly entering dreams

At that time melancholy, unable to sleep

The ripples of your eyes towards me, extremely seductive/alluring

My heart’s fire especially burns for you

³²⁰ Zou Zhifang, *Yang Weizhen shiji*, 363.

³²¹ Chen Jilong, *Han Wo shi zhu*, 402.

³²² For other poems on what might be called the *oujian* 偶見 (seen by chance) theme within the *Xianglian ji* see “Mashang jian” 馬上見 (Seen from Horseback) in Chen Jilong, *Han Wo shi zhu*, 334; “Yao jian” 遙見 (Seen from Afar) in Chen Jilong, *Han Wo shi zhu*, 350; the set of poems “Fu oujian san jue” 復偶見三絕 (Three Quatrains on the Theme Once Again Seen by Chance) in Chen Jilong, *Han Wo shi zhu*, 396 ; and the two poems entitled “Oujian” 偶見 (Seen by Chance) in Chen Jilong, *Han Wo shi zhu*, 379 and 412.

Do not say that in human life it is a difficult opportunity

To have immortals among the *luan* birds and phoenixes of the Qin mansions.³²³

此夜分明來入夢

當時惆悵不成眠

眼波向我無端艷

心火因君特地然

莫道人生難際會，

秦樓鸞鳳有神仙。³²⁴

The major difference between Yang Weizhen's and Han Wo's direct speech is that the latter takes place in the poet's sleep, in a dream caused by the earlier glimpse he took of the beautiful woman. This is also emphasized through the title, which explains how the poet came to dream at night of the same woman whom he had seen in the daytime. In Yang Weizhen's poem everything seems, instead, to take place in real life. By doing without the oneiric setting originally present in Han Wo's poem, Yang Weizhen thus created a bolder poem with regards to the expression of desire.

The love narrative of the "Xulian ji" continues with a poem on the inevitable feelings of longing felt during a temporary separation after an encounter. While "Xiangjian" explores desire in its carnal aspect, merging the surface world of *se* with the inner world of *qing*, "Xiangsi" is entirely centred on the emotional aspects of love:

"Longing"

Her deep feelings are never-ending, secretly following him

Under a white moon and a clear breeze, she is painfully longing

³²³ "Qin mansions" (*qinlou* 秦樓) refers to the courtesan quarters, while the *luan* birds and phoenixes probably refers to the courtesans themselves.

³²⁴ Cheng Jilong, *Han Wo shi zhu*, 402.

She is not like the girl to the East, foolishly intoxicated with wine,

With the sky as a curtain, the ground as a mat, completely unaware of everything.

《相思》

深情長是暗相隨

月白風清苦苦思

不似東姑癡醉酒

幙天席地了無知³²⁵

“Xiangsi” resounds with echoes from Han Wo’s “Chouchang” 惆悵 (Melancholy),³²⁶
a poem on the tearful parting between a “lyric composer” (*ciren* 詞人) and a “supreme
beauty” (*juese* 絕色):

“Melancholy”

My own feelings will everlastingly remain, secretly following you.

My living soul follows you, yet how could you be aware of it?

The quilt is no longer warm, vainly soaked with tears,

The legs of the hairpin are about to be parted, yet I am still half in doubt.

The bright moon and the clear breeze make it difficult to be content,

A poet and a supreme beauty feel much more pain at separation.

Wouldn’t it be better to drink wine and link together a thousand intoxications,

With the ground as a mat, the sky as a curtain, aware of nothing at all?³²⁷

《惆悵》

³²⁵ Zou Zhifang, *Yang Weizhen shiji*, 364.

³²⁶ Chen Jilong, *Han Wo shi zhu*, 375-376. For a translation and commentary of Han Wo’s poem see Upton, “The Poetry of Han Wo”, 140-145.

³²⁷ For an analysis and another translation of the same poem, see Upton, “The Poetry of Han Wo”, 140-145.

身情長在暗相隨，
生魄隨君君豈知。
被頭不暖空沾淚，
釵股欲分猶半疑。
朗月清風難愜意，
詞人絕色多傷離。
何如飲酒連千醉，
席地幕天無所知。³²⁸

Although melancholy itself is not mentioned in “Xiangsi”, the emotion pervades Yang Weizhen’s quatrain by means of the connection he established with the *Xianglian ji* poem quoted above. The first and final line of Yang Weizhen’s and Han Wo’s poem are almost exactly alike. The similarity between the two compositions does not end here. Breeze and moonlight, the two natural elements which create the background to the woman’s longing, also appear in Han Wo’s poem: “With bright moonlight and clear breeze it is difficult to feel content” 朗月清風難愜意。³²⁹ In both compositions, the moonlight and the breeze are used to accentuate, by contrast, the inner turmoil caused by parting. In “Xiangsi”, the deep emotions felt by the young woman are also contrasted with the carefree nature of “the girl to the East” (*donggu* 東姑), inebriated by wine and without a worry in this world. The connection between drunkenness and emotional oblivion is also present in “Chouchang”, albeit in a rather different way; it is

³²⁸ Chen Jilong, *Han Wo shizhu*, 375-376.

³²⁹ Chen Jilong, *Han Wo shi zhu*, 376.

the two lovers who resort to drinking so as to temporarily drive away the heavy melancholy weighing on them.

Following the conventional development of a love relationship, the encounter between the two lovers which had taken place in “Xiangjian” is followed by the exchange of letters and love tokens:

“Truthful News”

Usually crafty words are difficult to be trusted

Subtle words after drunkenness are almost close to the truth

Last night she sent two cardamom blossoms

She started to know how to be a true neighbour to the East

《的信》

平時詭語難為信，

醉後微言卻近真。

昨夜寄將雙豆蔻，

始知的的為東鄰。³³⁰

In “Dixin” we see how the female character takes an active part in the love relationship, by acting as a “neighbour to the East” (*donglin* 東鄰). The phrase is an allusion to “Dengtuzi haose fu” 登徒子好色賦 (*Fu* on Master Dengtu the Lecher), one of the famous *fu* compositions attributed to Song Yu, in which the poet narrates how the beautiful daughter of his neighbour to the East had been trying to seduce him for

³³⁰ Zou Zhifang, *Yang Weizhen shiji*, 364.

three years by climbing the wall to peep at him.³³¹ Calling a woman “a neighbour to the East” is hence a way to emphasize her seductiveness and her active pursuit of romance. The last two lines of Yang Weizhen’s poem, which include the allusion to the neighbour to the East, are partly borrowed from the last couplet of the first of Han Wo’s series of “wuti” 無題 (untitled) poems: “Her hands hold two cardamom blossoms / she clearly is a neighbour to the East” 手持雙豆蔻，的的為東鄰。³³² Cardamom blossoms (*doukou* 豆蔻) possess a variety of connotations within traditional Chinese literature; in both Yang Weizhen’s and Han Wo’s poems they should be taken as symbols of love longing.³³³ The association of the flower with romantic love explains the reason behind the girl’s gesture: the need to reveal her feelings to the one she loves. If we use our imagination to find possible links between the individual poems within Yang Weizhen’s love narrative, we can speculate that the exchange of love letters and tokens led to the arrangement of a secret romantic encounter between the two lovers, which takes place in the following poem, the fourteenth poem of the set:

“Secret Tryst”

The moon sets, blossoms cast shadows, the night is long measured in the water-clock,

Suspecting their meeting is a dream of Gaotang,

In the depth of the night she secretly holds a silver lamp to shed light,

Yet she also fears that the silly servant might peek at the light.

《私會》

月落花陰夜漏長，

³³¹ For Song Yu’s *fu* see Xiao Tong, *Wenxuan*, vol. 1, 19.400-401. For a translation see Knechtges, *Wen Xuan*, vol. 3, 349-355. The figure of the beautiful Eastern neighbour peeking over the wall for three years also appears in Sima Xiangru’s “Meiren fu”, where she is one of the two women who unsuccessfully tried to seduce the poet. See Sima Xiangru, *Sima Xiangru ji jiaozhu*, 127.

³³² Chen Jilong, *Han Wo shizhu*, 416.

³³³ For an overview of the symbolism of cardamom blossoms see Yu Xiangshun, “Doukou xiao kao”, 29.

相逢疑是夢高唐。
夜深偷把銀缸照，
猶恐憨奴瞰隙光。³³⁴

In the above poem Yang Weizhen captures the atmosphere of fearful excitement during a night-time tryst, as the girl holds a lamp, fearing that her servant might spy on them. The poem differs from the others belonging to the short love narrative within the set in that it does not take Han Wo as its major source of inspiration. The poem rings instead with an echo from the last two lines of Yan Jidao's *ci* "Zhegu tian" 鷓鴣天 (To the Tune Partridge Sky): "Tonight I will use up the lamp to shed light, fearing that our encounter is still taking place in a dream" 今宵剩把銀缸照，猶恐相逢是夢中。³³⁵ When considering "Sihui" alongside Yan Jidao's *ci*, a connection between the dream in line two and the act of shedding light in line three becomes apparent. The resemblance with Yan Jidao's *ci* invites the following extra reading of the function of the lamp: such is the lovers' joy in meeting each other that they almost think their encounter cannot be real; a lamp must thus be used to make light and dispel any possible doubt that their encounter is only happening in a dream. In voicing the hyperbolic suspicion that the secret tryst is nothing but a dream, Yang Weizhen inserts the allusion of the Goddess of Wu Mountain 巫山 by means of the phrase "dreaming of Gaotang" (*meng Gaotang* 夢高唐). According to "Gaotang fu" 高唐賦 (*Fu* on Gaotang), another *fu* composition traditionally (yet erroneously) attributed to Song Yu, a Chu king fell asleep after a visit to the Gaotang Shrine on Wu Mountain and dreamt

³³⁴ Zou Zhifang, *Yang Weizhen shiji*, 364.

³³⁵ Yan Jidao, *Er Yan ci jianzhu*, 310.

of an amorous encounter with the goddess of Mount Wu.³³⁶ The mention of Gaotang, Mount Wu, and related images (such as clouds and rain, the natural phenomena associated with the goddess) is one of the most widely used traditional Chinese allusions to refer elegantly to sexual encounters.³³⁷ The short love narrative within the “Xulian ji” culminates with the love-making scene at the centre of the fifteenth poem of the set:

“Becoming a Couple”

The hillocks of her eyebrows dark and faint, facing the waning lamp,

The cloud of her hair-knot half loosens on the pillow edge.

Her four limbs joined with his, charmingly about to weep

She presses the fine silk, crumbling it to pieces.

《成配》

眉山暗淡向殘燈，

一半雲鬟撒枕稜。

四體著人嬌欲泣，

自家揉碎研繚綾。³³⁸

This poem, unambiguously describing carnal pleasure with a strong visual focus on the woman, is not the original creation of Yang Weizhen’s poetic mind. It is almost entirely identical to “Ban shui” 半睡 (Half Asleep), probably the most erotic work

³³⁶ For Song Yu’s *fu* see Xiao Tong, *Wenxuan*, vol. 1, 19.393-397. For an English translation see Knechtges, *Wen Xuan or Selections of Refined Literature*, vol. 3, 325–339.

³³⁷ For a discussion of the use of direct allusions to the Goddess of Wu Mountain in *Mudan ting*, see Tan, “Shared Words”, 1458-1461.

³³⁸ Zou Zhifang, *Yang Weizhen shiji*, 364. For another translation of the same poem see Yoshikawa, *A Hundred Years*, 81.

within Han Wo's entire poetic oeuvre. Despite its strong focus on the carnality of love and desire, the poem is not included in the *Xianglian ji*, but belongs instead to Han Wo's major collection, his *Han Hanlin ji*. Yang Weizhen probably rightly thought that "Banshui" would have fitted well with the other poems of the *Xianglian ji* and, therefore, decided to insert it with a different title and only minor character variations within his "Xulian ji".

After having examined the love narrative within the "Xulian ji", I would now like to move my focus to the other compositions within the set, those poems which are mainly centred on the description of specific activities performed by the young woman. Three of these fifteen poems (poems 1-10 and poems 16-20) have a strong connection with Han Wo's *Xianglian ji*: "Chuyu", "Shangtou", and "Qiuqian". The first of the three, a sensual poem on a woman taking a bath, unaware of the presence of a hidden voyeur, consists of the last two couplets of Han Wo's "Yong yu" 詠浴 (On a Bath) with only two minor differences in word choice. Similarly to "Chengpei", "Chuyu" is entirely made of verses by Han Wo.

"Shangtou" and "Qiuqian" do not borrow entire lines or phrases from Han Wo, yet they are clearly modelled on the *Xianglian ji*. "Shangtou" is centred on the hair pinning ritual which marked the formal beginning of a woman's maturity and her attainment of marriageable age, referred to within the opening line as "the time of the hairpin" (*jiqi* 笄期). A quatrain on the same theme is also found in the *Xianglian ji* under the title "Xin shangtou" 新上頭 (Putting the Hair Up for the First Time). Although Yang Weizhen does not directly borrow any of Han Wo's diction, he imitates the structure of the *Xianglian ji* poem on the same theme. Both Yang Weizhen's and Han Wo's quatrain begin with the image of the girl arranging her hair into a new style and close with her

asking others for approval. “Qiuqian” is a dynamic portrayal of female gracefulness, capturing the swift motion of a swing swaying up in the air:

“The Swing”

Outside the Qiyun mansion, by the red woven ropes,
Who is this immortal who has flown off the clouds?
Just blown by the wind she is raised up and gazes without limit,
A pair of golden lotuses plunges into the sky.

《鞦韆》

齊雲樓外紅絡索，
是誰飛下雲中仙。
剛風吹起望不極，
一對金蓮倒插天。³³⁹

In his lively description of a girl gracefully playing on the swing, Yang Weizhen uses the swing as a means to voyeuristically approach the female body. Its swaying motion allows the poet and the reader to focus their gaze on the woman’s “golden lotuses” (jinlian 金蓮), a common name for women’s tiny bound feet, raised up in the air.

As seen in Chapter One, within Han Wo’s *Xianglian ji* we find a poem with the same title, in which a woman plays on a swing during Qingming jie 清明節 (Pure and Bright Festival), trying to fly as high as possible in order to catch a glimpse of her neighbour’s garden.³⁴⁰ The motif of the swing can be found in several other poems of the *Xianglian ji*. For example, “Oujian” 偶見 (Seen by Chance), a poem on the chance encounter with a flirtatiously bashful girl, opens with the image of the young woman playing on a

³³⁹ Zou Zhifang, *Yang Weizhen shiji*, 364.

³⁴⁰ Chen Jilong, *Han Wo shi zhu*, 433.

swing: “tired after playing on the swing, she untied her gauze skirt” 鞦韆打困解羅裙。³⁴¹ In “Xiangde” 想得 (Thoughts), the motif of the swing appears within the description of another charmingly shy woman, deeply immersed in her thoughts while standing in a garden at night during the Cold Food Festival: “thinking about that person, she stands with her hands hanging down / lovable and bashful, she is not willing to go on the swing” 想得那人垂手立，嬌羞不肯上鞦韆。³⁴²

In composing his lively quatrain on the theme of the swing, Yang Weizhen was probably inspired by Han Wo’s poem by the same title and by the presence of the swing motif within several poems of the *Xianglian ji*. He might have also been influenced more broadly by the late Tang poet’s penchant for the portrayal of what might be defined as “beauty in motion”.³⁴³ As we have seen in Chapter One, within the *Xianglian ji* there are a number of lively poetic representations of feminine charm, which capture women’s daily lives through the representation of a series of graceful gestures and rapid movements.

The activities selected by Yang Weizhen to be portrayed in his “Xulian ji” do not all appear within the *Xianglian ji*. Within Han Wo’s collection we find no mention of painting a self-portrait, nail painting, child-bathing, the game of *taju*, fishing, and horse riding, activities which all figure in Yang Weizhen’s set. This clearly shows that Yang Weizhen looked both within and beyond the *Xianglian ji* corpus for inspiration, not only in terms of imagery and diction (as previously shown in my analysis of “Sihui” and

³⁴¹ Chen Jilong, *Han Wo shi zhu*, 379.

³⁴² Chen Jilong, *Han Wo shi zhu*, 376. The swing also appears in the following poems of the *Xianglian ji*: “Ye shen” 夜深 (Deep at Night), line three: “late at night hanging askew, the swing ropes” 夜深斜搭秋千索; “Xiao Cui Guofu ti” 效崔國輔體 (In Imitation of Cui Guofu’s Style) poem number one, line four: “the wind moves the swing ropes” 風動鞦韆索; and “Guiyuan” 閨怨 (Boudoir Lament), line three: “By the just broken swing the person is lonely” 初坼秋千人寂寞. See Chen Jilong, *Han Wo shi zhu*, 354, 380, and 409.

³⁴³ See Chapter Two, 51-52.

its close relationship with Yan Jidao's *ci* to the tune "Zhegu tian"), but also with regards to the themes chosen for each individual poem within the set. Some of the themes found in the "Xulian ji" might have been chosen by the poet because of their popularity or relevance in his own times, in the same way that he chose to make reference to the dance of the sixteen demons within "Xi wu", the quatrain on dancing. One such case is the sixth poem of the set, "Ran jia", which sensually depicts a woman painting her nails red:

"Painting Her Nails"

At night, she pounds geckos and golden phoenix stamens.

Her ten fingernails are all transformed into red crow beaks.

At leisure they play a tune on the jade *qin* lute:

Several petals of peach blossoms floating upon flowing waters.³⁴⁴

《染甲》

夜搗守宮金鳳蕊，

十尖盡換紅鴉髻。

閒來一曲鼓瑤琴，

數點桃花汎流水。³⁴⁵

A poem of strong visual appeal, "Ran jia" is entirely focused on the aesthetic appreciation of a woman's red-dyed nails strumming the strings of a *qin*. The first line of the poem describes the preparation of the nail dye. As pointed out in Lou Buchan's annotation to the poem,³⁴⁶ the verse resembles the second line of "Gongwa ge" 宮娃

³⁴⁴ For other translations of the same poem see Yoshikawa, *A Hundred Years*, 81 and Chaves, *The Columbia Book of Later Chinese Poetry*, 65.

³⁴⁵ Zou Zhifang, *Yang Weizhen shiji*, 363.

³⁴⁶ Yang Weizhen, *Tieya yibian zhu*, 8.10b.

歌 (Song of a Palace Girl), a poem by the late Tang poet Li He 李賀 (790–816), an influential figure within the late Tang revival of the Liang dynasty palace style poetry tradition: “in the flowery bedroom at night she pounds red geckos” 花房夜搗紅守宮.³⁴⁷ With regards to the use of geckos (*shougong* 守宮, literally meaning “guardian of the palace”) as an ingredient for making red dyes, a record about this practice can be found in Zhang Hua’s 張華 (3rd century AD) *Bowu zhi* 博物志 (Treatise on the Broad Learning of Things). According to the record, whose main purpose is to explain the reason behind the use of the name “guardian of the palace” for this animal, the small reptile was fed with cinnabar till its entire body turned red and then pounded with a pestle to produce a red dye which was supposed to disappear from a woman’s skin only after she had intercourse.³⁴⁸ The gecko dye was hence supposed to ensure the chastity of wives, concubines, and women of the palace. Although not related to nail painting in itself, the gecko dye might have been alluded to by Yang Weizhen in order to echo Li He’s “Gongwa ge” and to further emphasize the red colour of the nail dye. In Yang Weizhen’s quatrain, together with geckos, the young woman also pounds the stamens of the flower *Impatiens balsamina*, known by the names of *jinfeng* 金鳳 (literally “golden phoenix”) and *fengxianhua* 鳳仙花 (literally “phoenix immortal flower”). Its use to produce a dye for painting the nails is widely documented in pre-modern Chinese sources. An example is the *biji* entry “Jinfeng ran jia” 金鳳染甲 (Painting the nails with the golden phoenix flower) in Zhou Mi’s 周密 (1232–1298) *Guixin zashi* 癸辛雜識 (Miscellaneous Records of Guixin):

³⁴⁷ Li He, *Li He quanji*, 142.

³⁴⁸ Zhang Hua, *Bowu zhi*, 4.51. For a translation of the passage see Greatrex, *The Bowu Zhi*, 86. Greatrex also lists other sources which contain references to the use of geckos to ensure women’s chastity; see Greatrex, *The Bowu Zhi*, 208.

The red variant of the phoenix immortal flower is pounded and crushed into pieces using its leaves. A small amount of alum is added to it. [Women] first wash their fingernails clean, then they apply the mixture to their nails. They wrap thin pieces of silk [around their nails] and leave them on for the night. At first, the colour of the dye is weak, but after dying [the nails] three to five times, its colour is similar to that of rouge. It cannot be washed away and it can last up to ten days.

鳳仙花紅者用葉搗碎，入明礬少許在內，先洗淨指甲，然後以此付甲上，用片帛纏定過夜。初染色淡，連染三五次，其色若胭脂，洗滌不去，可經旬。³⁴⁹

The activity of nail painting seems to have been one of the customs traditionally associated with Qixi 七夕, a festival falling on the seventh day of the seventh month which celebrates the annual reunion between the two legendary lovers known as the cowherd (*niulang* 牛郎) and the weaver girl (*zhinü* 織女).³⁵⁰ Due to its association with the festival, the activity of nail painting might therefore be seen not only as an aesthetically pleasing activity which offers poets a pretext for admiring a woman's hands, but also as an activity carrying romantic overtones.

While nail painting does not appear in Han Wo's *Xianglian ji*, the appreciation of a woman's painted nails was not unique to Yang Weizhen. In fact, several late Yuan poets found it to be a subject worth of poetic celebration. There is a fair possibility that Yang Weizhen was influenced by some of his contemporaries in choosing nail painting as one of the major womanly activities to portray within his miniature *Xianglian ji*.

Among the extant poems by Zheng Yunduan 鄭允端 (1327—1356), one of the major Yuan dynasty female poets, there is one titled "Hong zhijia" 紅指甲 (Red Fingernails).

³⁴⁹ Zhou Mi, *Guixin zashi*, 134-135.

³⁵⁰ In the Qing dynasty *huaben* 話本 (novella) collection *Xihu erji* 西湖二集 (Second Collection of the Western Lake) we find a reference to this practice: "According to the local customs of Hangzhou, every year on the Evening of Begging for Skills of the the seventh month [women] had to pound the phoenix immortal blossoms, extract the juice from them, and dye their nails red". 杭州風俗，每到七月乞巧之夕，要將鳳仙花搗汁，染成紅指甲。 See Zhou Qingyuan, *Xihu erji*, 86.

In this poem nearly each verse corresponds to an action performed by a woman's slender fingers, whose nails have been painted red. Its closing couplet brings full attention to the red-dyed nails, metaphorically transformed into fallen blossoms: "as she is told that the gold hairpin was inserted askew / falling red petals fly upwards to the top of the cloud of her hair-bun" 報道金釵斜插處，落紅飛上髻雲端。³⁵¹ If we take Yuan dynasty *sanqu* lyrics into account, we can find several late Yuan poets who wrote on the motif of painted nails, as it is clearly revealed by the titles of the following compositions: Xu Zaisi's 徐再思 (1280 ca. – 1330 ca.) "Hong zhijia" 紅指甲 (Red Nails)³⁵², Qiao Ji's 喬吉 (1280 – 1345) "Hong zhijia zeng Sun Liange shi ke Wujiang" 紅指甲贈孫蓮哥時客吳江 (Red Nails, Presented to Sun Liange, Temporarily a Guest in Wujiang)³⁵³, Zhang Kejiu's 張可久 (1270 ca. – 1348 ca.) "Hong zhijia"³⁵⁴, and Zhou Wenji's 周文質 (? - 1334) set of three *sanqu* titled "Fu fu ran hong zhijia" 賦婦染紅指甲 (Composed on [the topic of] Women Painting Their Nails Red).³⁵⁵ A common feature shared by the majority of the above-mentioned *sanqu* lyrics with Yang Weizhen's "Ran jia" is the representation of painted nails as red blossoms. Xu Zaisi opens his poem describing the newly painted red nails as "falling blossoms [which have] flown on the tips of her bamboo shoots" 落花飛上筍牙尖, bamboo shoots referring to her slender fingers;³⁵⁶ in the last line of Qiao Ji's poem, the red nails are compared to peach blossom petals (*ban taohua* 瓣桃花): "lifting her fragrant cheeks, similar to several peach blossom petals" 托香腮似幾瓣桃花;³⁵⁷ Zhang Kejiu's poem also ends

³⁵¹ Gu Sili, *Yuanshi xuan, Suyong ji* 肅離集, 3a-3b.

³⁵² Sui Shusen, *Quan Yuan sanqu*, 1056.

³⁵³ Sui Shusen, *Quan Yuan sanqu*, 616.

³⁵⁴ Sui Shusen, *Quan Yuan sanqu*, 765.

³⁵⁵ Sui Shusen, *Quan Yuan sanqu*, 558-559.

³⁵⁶ Sui Shusen, *Quan Yuan sanqu*, 1056.

³⁵⁷ Sui Shusen, *Quan Yuan sanqu*, 616.

with a close-up of the red fingernails resting against the woman's cheeks: "lifting the fragrant cheeks, a few fallen reds" 托香腮數點殘紅,³⁵⁸ in the second poem belonging to Zhou Wenji's set, the nails turn into falling blossoms as they play a stringed instrument: "adjusting the strings of the *guzheng* several fallen blossoms" 理箏弦點落花.³⁵⁹

It is feasible that Yang Weizhen was inspired by contemporary works on the topic of nail painting and saw the scene of a woman preparing a red dye to paint her nails fit for being inserted in his miniature *Xianglian ji*. The same consideration goes for his poem on the game of *taju* 蹋鞠 (a ball game similar to modern day football, also known by the alternative name of *cuju* 蹴鞠), an activity which does not appear in Han Wo's collection, but seemed to be a relatively popular theme in the late Yuan and be relevant to Yang Weizhen's own life. It appears in other poems of the time such as two poems titled "Taju pian" 蹋鞠篇 (A Piece on *Taju*)³⁶⁰ and one "Taju ge" 蹋鞠歌 (Song of *Taju*),³⁶¹ all written by Yang Weizhen for a female *taju* player called Liu Shufang 劉叔芳, Guan Hanqing's 關漢卿 (1241-1320) set of *sanqu* "Nü xiaowei" 女校尉 (The Woman Commandant)³⁶², Deng Yubin 鄧玉賓 "Shinü yuanshe qiqiu shuangguan" 仕女圓社氣球雙關 (The Ladies *Taju* Team),³⁶³ and Sadula's 薩都刺 (ca 1272- ca 1340) *sanqu* "Jinü cuju" 妓女蹴鞠 (Courtesans Playing *Cuju*).³⁶⁴

Yang Weizhen clearly established a connection with themes which seemed to enjoy a certain popularity during his times. Returning to the label I chose to apply to this and

³⁵⁸ Sui Shusen, *Quan Yuan sanqu*, 75.

³⁵⁹ Sui Shusen, *Quan Yuan sanqu*, 558-559.

³⁶⁰ Zou Zhifang, *Yang Weizhen shiji*, 29-30.

³⁶¹ Zou Zhifang, *Yang Weizhen shiji*, 311.

³⁶² Sui Shusen, *Quan Yuan sanqu*, 177-179.

³⁶³ Sui Shusen, *Quan Yuan sanqu*, 306-308.

³⁶⁴ Sui Shusen, *Quan Yuan sanqu*, 699-700.

the other *xianglianti* set by the late Yuan poet, “Late Yuan miniature *Xianglian ji*”, I treat the connection the poet established with the broader scene of Yuan dynasty poetry as another reason, along with the presence of the clear Yuan element of the dance of the sixteen demons, which makes the characterization of the “Xulian ji” poems as “late Yuan” go beyond the mere temporal (i.e. the time when they were composed) and extend to the thematic level.

Collective Imitation and Intertextuality in the “Xianglian Bayong” Sets

Yang Weizhen’s “Xianglian bayong” is a literary exercise in *xianglianti* poetry and belongs to a broader corpus of poems by the same title written by different late Yuan authors, as I have shown earlier in this chapter. The preface he wrote to his set of poems reveals the mutual imitation linking the different *bayong* poems to each other and voices the poet’s wish for himself and his entourage to achieve high standards of surface beauty and emotional intensity in *xianglianti* poetry. In this section I will continue to explore the collective nature of the *bayong* compositions. Yang Weizhen’s preface is not the only evidence of the imitative practice at the basis of the *bayong* poems and of their social, collective nature. In Qu You’s collection of miscellaneous notes *Guitian shihua*, we also find a record concerning a “Xianglian bati” set which Qu You himself wrote during his early youth and modelled on Yang Weizhen’s own set on the same eight themes. Unfortunately, Qu You’s poems are no longer extant; by the time he wrote *Guitian shihua*, they had already been lost and could only be recalled in fragments by their author:

Whenever [Yang Weizhen] passed by Hangzhou, he would definitely pay a visit to my younger paternal great-uncle. They would hold a drinking banquet the Chuangui Hall. He would stay for a few consecutive days. Once he showed us the “Eight Fragrant Dressing Case Themes”. I followed his style and composed eight *shi* poems to present to him. The manuscript was appended to my family’s collected writings and it has been lost for a long time. Now I still remember several couplets. One from “Fallen Flowers and Traces of Spring” recites: ‘The swallow tails touch the ripples [of her bound feet] with a faint blur / Her phoenix heads³⁶⁵ step on the moonlight, quietly without a sound.’ One from “The Beauty of Frowning Kohl Painted Eyebrows” recites: “Regret arises from the side of Zhang Chang’s brush³⁶⁶ / Spring is born towards the top of Liang Hong’s table”.³⁶⁷ One from “Using Coins for Divination” recites: “Weaving brocade by the window she hears words of laughter / Picking duckweed by the river bank she hears sighs of sorrow”. Master Yang Weizhen praised and enjoyed them and told my great-uncle: “This gentleman is a thousand *li* young steed”.

或過杭，必訪予叔祖，宴飲傳桂堂，留連累日。嘗以《香奩八題》見示，予依其體，作八詩以呈。藁附家集中，忘之久矣。今尚記數聯，《花塵春跡》云：〔燕尾 點波微有暈，鳳頭 踏月 悄無聲。〕《黛眉顰色》云：〔恨從張敞 毫邊起，春向梁鴻案 上生。〕《金一卜歡》云：〔織錦 軒窗 聞笑語，采蘋 洲渚聽愁籟。〕《香頰啼痕》云：〔斑斑湘竹 非因雨，點點 楊花不是春。〕廉夫加稱賞，謂叔祖云：此君家千里駒也。廉夫加稱賞，謂叔祖云：此君家千里駒也。³⁶⁸

Relying on Qu You’s anecdote and Yang Weizhen’s preface, I am able to formulate the hypothesis that the writing of such sets of *xianglianti* poetry was a collective, shared practice among a local community of literati. Even stronger is the evidence provided by the close intertextual relationship linking the “Xianglian bayong” sets to one another. Even if Yang Weizhen’s preface and Qu You’s anecdotes were no longer extant, we would still be able to argue for the mutual influence among the several

³⁶⁵ “Phoenix heads” (*fengtou* 鳳頭) is a metaphor for bound feet.

³⁶⁶ Zhang Chang 張敞 was a scholar-official from the Eastern Han, famous for being a loving husband who showed his devotion for his wife by drawing her eyebrows. In Qu You’s poem, Zhang Chang’s brush is an erudite way to refer to a brush used for painting eyebrows. For an anecdote about Zhang Chang painting his wife’s eyebrows, see Ban Gu, *Han shu*, 76.3222-3.

³⁶⁷ Liang Hong 梁鴻 was an Eastern Han scholar who led a simple life in the countryside with his virtuous wife. So respectful was she towards her husband, that she would bring him food lifting the tray right above the eyebrows. Qu You cleverly uses this anecdote of wifely modesty to indirectly refer to a woman’s eyebrows.

³⁶⁸ Qu You, *Guitian shihua*, 2.1275.

“Xianglian bayong” sets and the social nature of their production, by simply examining the sets alongside each other. The existence of strong intertextual relationships between different poems which share the same individual title reveals that the authors wrote their compositions adhering to specific guidelines and conventions and, in at least some cases, imitated and echoed each other’s works when writing on the same themes. Poems by different authors written to the same title not only share the same core themes, but also an array of common imagery related to the inner world of emotions and the outer world of sensuous beauty. To support my statement, I hereby present a selection of “Xianglian bayong” poems, organized according to individual title. My aim is to show how poems by the same title written by different authors interact with each other not only through their shared theme, but also by means of shared diction and imagery. For this reason, my examples are taken from poems with the strongest intertextual links among each other.

The poems under the title “Huachen chunji” are centred on the motif of the faint traces left by a woman’s graceful steps. While all the other authors locate the woman’s stroll in a blossom covered garden, the willowy-waisted girl at the centre of Huang Boyang’s poem lightly steps on a gem adorned bed covered with fragrant powder:

The gem-adorned bed, as pure as floating ice,
The soft powder on half of the bed, fragments of red sandalwood.
The small stockings on the ripples of her feet, light are their traces at dawn,
The faint mark of a hook, a slender half moon.
At each step of her golden lotuses, her body is about to float,
Stepping as a goose on sand, in spring she should be bashful.
She obtained a slender waist, as thin as a willow branch,
We know who will receive a hundred *hu* of pearls!

七寶方牀冰漾潔，
軟粉半鋪紫檀屑。
凌波小鞵曉痕輕，
一鉤淺印纖纖月。
金蓮襯步身欲浮，
雁沙踏破春應羞。
贏得纖腰柳枝瘦，
珍珠百斛知誰收。³⁶⁹

The poem opens and closes with an allusion to one of the many anecdotes concerning the Jin dynasty poet and aesthete Shi Chong 石崇 (249-300) and his concubines.³⁷⁰ According to anecdotal records, Shi Chong seemed to have a particular obsession with female slimness. Allegedly, he would often cover an ivory bed with fragments of agarwood and incense powder and subsequently order his concubines to step on it. The ones who did not leave footprints were bestowed with strings of pearls, while the unfortunate ones who did were, instead, forced to lose weight to meet their patron's strict beauty requirement.³⁷¹ Once we become familiar with the anecdotes concerning Shi Chong's obsession with female slimness, we are then able to understand the reason why Huang Boyang chose to open his poem with the images of a jewelled bed half covered with red sandalwood fragments and to close it with the bestowment of pearls. Alluding to the private beauty contests organized by Shi Chong, the poet further emphasizes the remarkable slimness of the woman celebrated in his verses.

³⁶⁹ Song Xu, *Yuanshi tiyao*, 8.3b.

³⁷⁰ For more information about Shi Chong and his luxurious extravagance, see Wilhelm, "Shih Ch'ung and his Chin-ku-yüan".

³⁷¹ Wang Jia, *Shiyi ji*, 9.214-215.

Huang Boyang, Yang Weizhen, Bei Qiong, and Wang Guoqi make explicit references to Shi Chong. Yang Weizhen opens his poem with a comparison between the depicted scene and the famous anecdote about the Jin dynasty aesthete and his concubines: “Whose steps [have left] blurred traces / just alike Master Shi’s spring-filled bed?” 是誰步履印微茫，便似石家春滿床。³⁷² Just like Huang Boyang, Bei Qiong closes his poem with the bestowment of pearls: “How could she obtain a hundred pearl necklaces? / The young concubine is jealous of Xiangfeng” 如何珠百琲，小妾妬翔風。³⁷³ The mention of Xiangfeng 翔風 (mid-fourth century) – one of Shi Chong’s favourite concubines, whose beauty and talent were envied by his other women – in the last line is used to underline the fact that the gift of pearls should be read as an allusion to Shi Chong’s slim concubines.³⁷⁴ Wang Guoqi chooses to set his poem in the Jingu yuan 金谷園 (Gold Valley Garden), Shi Chong’s private estate: “roaming feelings in the Jingu garden / are not worn away completely.” 金谷遊情，消磨不盡。³⁷⁵ Shen Xi is, instead, much more veiled in his allusion to Shi Chong. He takes part in the shared motif by inserting the detail of “the floating fragrance of agarwood fragments” 沉屑浮香。³⁷⁶ I believe that this detail can be understood as a reference to the fragrant powders used by Shi Chong to cover the surface which his concubines had to step on.

Allusions to Shi Chong’s fondness for thin beauties form a common thread weaving together different poems on the same theme. It is no coincidence that almost all the poems titled “Huachen chunji” employ the same allusion, although in slightly different ways. Inserting an allusion to Shi Chong was probably a requirement that had to be

³⁷² Zou Zhifang, *Yang Weizhen shiji*, 351.

³⁷³ Bei Qiong, *Qingjiang ji*, 9.4b.

³⁷⁴ For anecdotes about Xiangfeng 翔風, see Wang Jia, *Shiyi ji*, 9.214-215.

³⁷⁵ Song Xu, *Yuanshi tiyao*, 8.7a.

³⁷⁶ Tang Guizhang, *Quan Jin Yuan ci*, vol. 2, 1044.

followed by those wanting to write a poem on this theme. The function of the allusions to Shi Chong is to emphasize the fact that the visual appreciation of the faint traces left by a graceful beauty actually equates to the appreciation of her body. Together with slimness, another physical attribute is celebrated using the delicate footprints as a starting point: tiny feet. Huang Boyang clarifies the true purpose of the allusion to Shi Chong's anecdote by making a direct mention of the woman's slim waist and her tiny feet covered in stockings. Some of the other poets also directly mention her bound feet, poetically referred to as "a pair of jade hooks" (*shuang gou yu* 雙鉤玉) by Qian Shu,³⁷⁷ "a pair of mandarin ducks" (*shuangyuan* 雙鴛) by Wang Guoqi,³⁷⁸ and "brocade mandarin ducks" (*jinyuan* 錦鴛) by Shen Xi.³⁷⁹ Stockings cover her feet also in both Bei Qiong's - "the ripple of her feet covered in gauze stockings are tiny" 羅襪凌波小 -³⁸⁰ and Qian Shu's poem - "she puts gauze stockings on her pair of jade hooks" 故將羅襪雙鉤玉.³⁸¹

With the compositions by the title "Yujia tihen" poets found themselves with a perfect means to aestheticize sorrow and create visually appealing images of feminine vulnerability. In these compositions the intensity of a woman's internal suffering finds its visual expression through the detailed description of her disintegrating make-up. The poets' attention is not limited to tears themselves, but broadens to include the effect of tears on the made-up face. What the poets are interested in capturing are what Birrell calls "cosmetic tears".³⁸² The effect of tears on make-up is fully exploited in its sensuousness: rouge on the cheeks and white powder on the face all melt and

³⁷⁷ Song Xu, *Yuanshi tiyao*, 8.5a.

³⁷⁸ Song Xu, *Yuanshi tiyao*, 8.7a.

³⁷⁹ Tang Guizhang, *Quan Jin Yuan ci*, vol. 2, 1044.

³⁸⁰ Bei Qiong, *Qingjiang shiji*, 9.4b.

³⁸¹ Song Xu, *Yuanshi tiyao*, 8.5a.

³⁸² Birrell, "Erotic Decor", 280.

crumble under streams of teardrops. The shared imagery linking the individual poems is the beautiful analogy between a weeping beauty and frail blossoms battered by the rain. There is a prevalence of pear blossoms - “colour, adhering to the thick rain, falls on the pear blossom” 彩黏膩雨上梨花 (in Yang Weizhen’s poem, line 4);³⁸³ “a curtain of spring rain soaks the pear blossom” 一簾春雨濕梨花 (in Ling Yunhan’s poem, line 8);³⁸⁴ “smiling she points at the pear blossoms in the sunset rain” 咲指梨花暮雨中 (in Qian Shu’s poem, line 8);³⁸⁵ “a pear blossom carrying raindrops, unable to endure sorrow” 梨花帶雨不禁愁 (in Wang Guoqi’s poem, line 4) -,³⁸⁶ but we also find other flowers, such as crabapple - “by the six bended balustrade a rain of crabapple blossoms” 六曲闌邊海棠雨 (in Huang Boyang’s poem, line 8)³⁸⁷ - and lilac blossoms – “lilac blossoms secretly seal her sorrow in the rain” 丁香暗結雨中愁 (in Shen Xi’s poem, line 4) - .³⁸⁸ With regards to the pear blossom in the rain, it is a conventional literary image associated with the ill-fated life and fragility of beautiful women.³⁸⁹ A famous earlier poetic example of the association between pear blossoms and female sorrow can be found in Bai Juyi’s “Changhen ge”. A mournful Yang Guifei, who has now become an immortal known by the name of Taizhen 太真, is described as follows: “Her jade countenance looked bleak, forlorn, criss-crossed with tears. / A single branch of pear blossom, in springtime laden with rain.”³⁹⁰ 玉容寂寞淚闌干，梨花一枝春帶雨。³⁹¹ The analogy between a weeping woman and a blossom under the rain also

³⁸³ Zou Zhifang, *Yang Weizhen shiji*, 351.

³⁸⁴ Ling Yunhan, *Zhexuan ji*, 2.64a.

³⁸⁵ Song Xu, *Yuanshi tiyao*, 8.4b.

³⁸⁶ Song Xu, *Yuanshi tiyao*, 8.6b.

³⁸⁷ Song Xu, *Yuanshi tiyao*, 8.2a.

³⁸⁸ Tang Guizhang, *Quan Jin Yuan ci*, vol. 2, 1044.

³⁸⁹ Wah, “A Close Look at the Pear Blossom”, 153.

³⁹⁰ Translation taken from Kroll, “Po Chū-i’s ‘Song of Lasting Regret’”, 100.

³⁹¹ Bai Juyi, *Bai Juyi ji*, 239.

implies that the woman's face is as delicate and beautiful as a flower, thus further contributing towards the intended aestheticization of sorrow. The celebration of the beauty of female sorrow through the representation of its visual effect on a woman's features is also at the centre of the poems by the title "Daimei pinse". In this case the poets' focus is on a woman's eyebrows contracted by sorrow. Eyebrows were considered an aesthetically pleasing facial feature in women. Again going back to the poems on palace ladies of the *Yutai xinyong*, we can see that already by the Liang dynasty poets had developed a predilection for eyebrows among all the other facial features, the reason being "the idea that of all the features it is the eyebrows which convey most truly the inner feelings of a woman".³⁹² If we consider the already mentioned anecdote about Xi Shi and her ugly neighbour, knitted eyebrows could add to a woman's attractiveness, provided that she was naturally beautiful to start with. In most of the "Daimei pinse" poems the woman is suddenly struck by sorrow while painting her eyebrows. It is evident that the appliance of make-up held a special fascination for male poets. Not only it was a quintessentially feminine activity, but it also provided the poets with more opportunities to sensually describe a woman's face. Make-up is also a central element within the poems titled "Yuelian yunmian", where the linking element among half of them is the presence of references to the moon goddess Chang'e 嫦娥.

The poems by the title "Xiuchuang ningsi" focus on embroidery, the feminine art par excellence, often regarded in imperial China as "one measure of a woman's worth".³⁹³ The "Xianglian bayong" poems on this theme connect the womanly activity with deep thoughts of longing, following the traditional association between needlework and

³⁹² Birrell, "Erotic Decor", 277.

³⁹³ Weidner, "Women in the History of Chinese Painting", 21.

thoughts of love, already well established in the poems of the *Yutai xinyong*. In most of the “Xianglian bayong” poems on the theme the woman suddenly interrupts the activity and finds herself immersed in deep melancholy thoughts. The common imagery which creates a strong link among some of the poems on embroidery by Yang Weizhen and the other late Yuan poets is the use of willow catkins (*xu* 絮) as an embodiment of emotions: “her worries are like scattered willow catkins following the wind and falling” 愁如亂絮隨風落 (Qian Shu);³⁹⁴ “the mind roams, flying willow catkins, all over without touching the ground” 心遊飛絮渾無着 (Yang Weizhen);³⁹⁵ “a willow flower is her spring heart” 楊花一點是春心 (Wang Guoqi);³⁹⁶ “heart-broken to the extreme by the embroidering of mandarin ducks, a catkin ball, when it rolls, its roundness breaks” 情傷端為刺鴛鴦，絮毬滾處從圓碎 (Ling Yunhan).³⁹⁷

While the embroidery is consciously interrupted by the woman in the “Xiuchuang ningsi” poems, her dream is interrupted without choice in the poems titled “Yunchuang qiusi”. The interruption of the dream is a common element of most of the poems sharing the same title and is generally caused by a sudden sound: the sound of “wind bells” (*fengling* 風鈴 in Bei Qiong’s poem³⁹⁸ and *yanma* 簷馬 in Ling Yunhan’s),³⁹⁹ a fallen “gold marble” (*jindan* 金彈) (Yang Weizhen),⁴⁰⁰ the sound of a patterned horn (Wang Guoqi), or simply unidentified sounds (Huang Boyang and Shen Xi).

³⁹⁴ Song Xu, *Yuanshi tiyao*, 8.5b.

³⁹⁵ Zou Zhifang, *Yang Weizhen shiji*, 352.

³⁹⁶ Song Xu, *Yuanshi tiyao*, 8.7b.

³⁹⁷ Ling Yunhan, *Zhexuan ji*, 2.65a.

³⁹⁸ Bei Qiong, *Qingjiang shiji*, 9.4b.

³⁹⁹ Ling Yunhan, *Zhexuan ji*, 2.65b.

⁴⁰⁰ Zou Zhifang, *Yang Weizhen shiji*, 352.

Concluding Remarks on the “Xulian ji” and “Xianglian bayong” Sets

The “Xulian ji” and “Xianglian bayong” sets show us how *xianglianti* poetry provided Yang Weizhen and his contemporaries with a platform for literary leisure and experimentation. Consciously and explicitly inserting himself within the tradition of aesthetic and erotic exploration of the feminine of Han Wo’s *Xianglian ji*, Yang Weizhen successfully combined imitation and innovation. While on the one hand he imitated the poetry of Han Wo and even borrowed entire verses from the late Tang poet, on the other hand, he introduced themes and images which do not belong to the late Tang collection and sought to subtly personalize his *xianglianti* sets by chronologically situating it in contemporary times. He did so by means of small details which reveal a Yuan dynasty setting. In the case of the “Xulian ji”, by stating that his set is a continuation of Han Wo’s *Xianglian ji*, he created a literary game for the reader, the game being to identify which poems were in direct imitation of Han Wo’s collection and which, instead, were more original works produced by Yang Weizhen’s poetic imagination.

CHAPTER FOUR

***Xianglianti* as Autobiography: The Case of Wang Cihui's *Yiyu ji* (Doubtful Rain Collection)**

Wang Cihui attached great importance to *xianglianti* poetry, as shown by the high number of amorous-erotic poems belonging to his *Yiyu ji*. He devoted his “unbridled talent”⁴⁰¹ to recording his emotional experiences and creating a sensuous poetic world dominated by female beauty, love, longing, and desire. Borrowing an expression from Han Wo’s preface to the *Xianglian ji* which I have discussed earlier in the dissertation, Wang Cihui seemed to be another poet “unable to forget feelings” (*bu neng wang qing* 不能忘情),⁴⁰² who found in poetry a means to express and explore the complexities of his and his lovers’ (or, more broadly, women’s) interiority. His collection has an almost obsessive quality with regards to the world of *qing*. While many poets seemed to have focused on amorous-erotic themes mainly during certain stages of their life, such as their youth (e.g. Han Wo) or their old age (e.g. Yang Weizhen), Wang Cihui devoted most of his life to writing verses about women, love, and desire. He felt the need to record real and fictional amorous experiences on paper, immortalize his most private memories, and celebrate his love of women through the representation of their physical beauty and their deepest heartfelt emotions. For Wang Cihui composing *xianglianti* poetry was not a simple pastime, but a true necessity, a defining element of his identity as a man and poet – or, at least, this was what the poet wanted his readers

⁴⁰¹ I borrow the expression “unbridled talent” from the phrase *hongsi zhi cai* 閎肆之才 (magnificent and unbridled talent) which appears in Yan Shengsun’s preface to the *Yiyu ji*. See Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 4.

⁴⁰² See Chapter Two.

to think. The third couplet of “Chunmu jianyi” 春暮減衣 (Taking Off My Outer Robe on a Spring Evening), a composition which might be described as “self-reflexive”, voices the centrality of *xianglianti* poetry in Wang Cihui’s life: “My sick lungs cannot be far from the wine goblet, / my poetic guts can do nothing but approach the fragrant dressing case.” 病肺未能疏酒盞，詩腸無奈近香奩。⁴⁰³

Among the earliest compositions belonging to the *Yiyu ji* features “Chongti” 重題 (Writing Again on the Same Theme), a quatrain the poet wrote at the age of thirty (1623), which can be treated as an early declaration of what would be a life-long literary devotion to the world of *qing*.

In his poem “Chongti” 重題 (Writing Again on the Same Theme) Wang Cihui explicitly indicated the major source of his poetic inspiration:

“Writing Again on the Same Theme”

In front of the steps the flower of oblivion grows to no avail,

Within the curtains the melancholy-dispelling rhino horn hangs in vain.

There is only longing which helps my poetic inspiration,

As I have finished a piece, once again I write another one on the same theme.

《重題》

階前漫有忘憂草，

帳里空垂辟悶犀。

惟有相思助吟興，

一篇纔了又重題。⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰³ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 148.

⁴⁰⁴ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 32.

The poem opens with an indirect representation of feelings of melancholy longing. Instead of directly naming these particular feelings, Wang Cihui chooses to evoke them by mentioning two very specific objects whose magical qualities are both related to the sphere of emotions: the flower of oblivion (*wangyou cao* 忘憂草) and the melancholy-dispelling rhino-horn (*bimen xi* 辟悶犀). The flower of oblivion refers to the day-lily (*xuancao* 萱草), which was traditionally believed to have the property of making people forget about their worries. The same flower appears in Xu Ling's preface to the *Yutai xinyong* where it is named *gaosu* 皋蘇 (or alternatively *xuansu* 萱蘇). In pointing to the leisurely nature of his anthology, Xu Ling presented poetry as a possible cure for the "disease of melancholy" (*chouji* 愁疾) which affected lonely palace ladies (the intended readers of Xu Ling's anthology): "Perhaps [poetry] can act as a substitute for the flower of oblivion and slightly dispel the disease of melancholy". 庶得代彼皋蘇，微蠲愁疾。⁴⁰⁵ As for the second imagery, Wang Cihui chose to visualise the presence of feelings of melancholy by exploiting one of the various magical properties attributed to rhino-horns: the ability to dispel sadness from the heart.⁴⁰⁶ The intensity of the poet's sadness is visualized through the day-lily and the rhino-horn, one growing to no avail and the other hanging in vain. In the second couplet, Wang Cihui reveals the cause of his worries and melancholy state of mind: love longing (*xiangsi* 相思). Love longing is here presented as both a source of pain and a source of pleasure: a source of pain as it is a primary cause of emotional turmoil;

⁴⁰⁵ Xu Ling, *Yutai xinyong*, vol. 1, 13.

⁴⁰⁶ Rhino-horns were considered as having a series of magical properties. Other examples of magical rhino-horns are the "cold dispelling rhino-horn" (*bihan xi* 避寒犀), the "water dispelling rhino-horn" (*bishui xi* 避水犀), and the "anger dispelling rhino-horn" (*juanfen xi* 蠲忿犀).

a source of pleasure as it is the creative force behind the composition of poetry and the very theme on which many of Wang Cihui's poems are centred.

Treating "Chongti" as the author's reflection on his own poetic practice, I use it as a starting point for my analysis of Wang Cihui's amorous-erotic corpus. This very simple and straightforward poem reveals a great deal about the centrality of love longing and, by extension, of the importance covered by the complex world of *qing* within the *Yiyu ji*. The poem might also be treated as a hint at Wang Cihui's tendency to repeat certain themes, to reuse some expressions or images, and to write multiple poems on the same beloved woman. In the sections of the present chapter dedicated to the analysis of *xianglianti* poetry, I will examine these very aspects of Wang Cihui's work. I will show how by means of explicit praise and repetition the late Ming poet revealed his preference for certain aspects of femininity (such as sorrow, mild anger, and unadorned beauty). I will also examine his autobiographical approach towards *xianglianti* poetry, showing how, using titles and self-annotations, he emphasized the authenticity of some of the poems of the *Yiyu ji*, and, by extension, of the entire collection.

An Analysis of Selected Prefatory and Commentarial Materials to the *Yiyu ji*

Before exploring the intensely private poetic world of the *Yiyu ji*, I would like to focus our attention on a selection of prefatory and commentarial materials to Wang Cihui's collection. The *Yiyu ji* presents a considerable amount of prefaces. Geng Chuanyou has appended to his PhD thesis a total of eleven prefaces to the *Yiyu ji*,⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁷ Geng Chuanyou, "Yi ge bei wenxue shi yiwang de zhongyao zuojia", 138-143.

five of which are also included in Zheng Qingmao's annotated edition of Wang Cihui's poetic corpus.⁴⁰⁸ Wang Cihui himself did not leave behind any preface or postface to accompany the entire collection, but he did occasionally write prefaces to individual poems or poetic sets.

The earliest prefaces to the collection date back to the early years of the Kangxi 康熙 reign (1661-1722) and were written by Yan Shengsun 嚴繩孫 (1623 – 1702) and Hou Wencan 侯文燦 (fl. 1690). The latter, mostly famous as a *ci* lyricist and as the compiler of the earliest Qing dynasty anthology of *ci* lyrics *Shi mingjia ci* 《十名家詞》 (*Ci Lyrics by Ten Famous Poets*), was also responsible for the appearance of the first woodblock printed edition of the *Yiyu ji*. Yan Shengsun, known as one of the Three Plain Clothed Scholars of Jiangnan (*Jiangnan san buyi* 江南三布衣) together with Jiang Chenying 姜宸英 (1628-99) and Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 (1629-1709), greatly admired Wang Cihui's poetry and supported Hou Wencan's choice of printing the *Yiyu ji* by writing a preface to the collection.

I would like to take Yan Shengsun's preface as a point of departure for my analysis of a selection of prefatory and commentarial materials to the *Yiyu ji*. The preface which Yan Shengsun wrote to the *Yiyu ji* is worth being examined in detail for several reasons: it inserts Wang Cihui's poetry within the larger context of traditional Chinese erotic poetry, a tradition which he traced back to the *Shijing*; it provides useful information for reconstructing the early textual history of the *Yiyu ji*; and, lastly, it paints a vivid picture of the social and cultural context of hedonism which provided a fertile ground for the emergence and transmission of such poetry. This last-mentioned aspect (the hedonistic context of late Ming Jiangnan) is not examined in the present chapter, as

⁴⁰⁸ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 3-9.

the related section of Yan Shengsun's preface has already been discussed in Chapter Two within the broader context of Wang Cihui's *fengliu* identity. Let us now look at the text of the preface:

Poetry arises from feelings; the mutated Airs of Wang, "Among the Mulberries", and "Beyond the River Wei", which are all arrayed among the three hundred [poems of *The Book of Poetry*], are the beginning of the songs of seductive allure. Later, the "Songs Read Aloud" and the "Ziye Songs" expressed feelings of loneliness and had a rapid rhythm. During the Tang Li Shangyin's poetry was full of melancholy. Its purport was close to that of the poems of *The Lyrics of Chu*. As for Han Wo's *Fragrant Dressing Case Collection*, its language was particularly delicate and subtle. Thereupon, Master Wang Yanhong of Jintan, using his magnificent and unbridled talent expressed his exuberant and unrestrained nature. [His poems] thoroughly explore feelings and attitudes; they are thoroughly revealing and deeply profound. They can be said to have surpassed [other erotic poems] from the past and the present. Nowadays the fame of the *Doubtful Rain Collection* is far reaching in the lower eastern reaches of the Yangtze. When I was young, [the collection] was circulated and copied, and every household stored a copy. Moistening [one's brush with] the ink left-behind [by Wang Cihui] was beneficial to those who aspired to be famous. However, this collection did not have a printed edition to be circulated. Hou Wencan read it and appreciated it. Thereupon, he added his own annotations and collation notes and sent it to be woodblock printed. After this, the master's poems were clearly shared all under heaven. Alas! In Jinsha during the days of peace, wealthy mansions faced one another. The wealthy and fashionable youths of the time banqueted with fine meats and fish delicacies. Possessing great talent and feelings, every day they entertained each other with sensual pleasures of sight and sound. Such activities as swishing sleeves and hanging hairpins, hosting guests for the night and sending them off, had all become frequent habits. As for writing compositions, they had a nimble poetic creativity. Their talent was also enough to match it. Thereupon, among the gentlemen of the day who were good at writing poetry there were probably many like this. As for the direction of their [poetic] trends, they all went along the same track. Deeply immersed in pleasures and wantonly unrestrained, they could not be said to have composed the correct tunes. However, by means of these poems, later generations can observe the principles of rise and fall and be deeply moved by this. I am, therefore, pleased that Hou Wencan was able to print these poems and, thereupon, I briefly examined their times, so as to wait for later readers to judge them. Written by Yan Shengsun from Wuxi.

詩發乎情，而王風之變、桑中、洧外，列在三百，為艷歌之始。其後，讀曲、子夜，寂寥促節。在唐則玉溪惆恍，旨近楚騷。韓相香奩，言猶微婉。於是，金壇王先生彥泓，以閎肆之才，寫宕往之致。窮情盡態，刻露深永，可謂橫絕古今也。今疑雨集之名籍甚江左。

少年傳寫，家藏一帙，溉其餘瀋，便欲名家，而本集顧未有鋟板以傳者。候子蔚齋，讀而賞之。爰加校定，付之剞劂。由是，先生之詩，顯然共之天下矣。嗟乎！金沙當承平之日，甲第相望。一時裙屐子弟，席華靡，擅才情，平居以聲色徵逐。拂袖挂釵，留髭送客之事，習為故常。至於擘剗刻燭，才亦足以副之。故當日能詩之士，蓋多其人，而風尚所歸，並同一轍。雖其酣嬉蕩佚，不可謂為正音，然由後以觀盛衰之端，感慨系之矣。余既喜蔚齋之能刻是詩，而因微論其世，以俟後之覽者定焉。無錫嚴繩孫題。⁴⁰⁹

Before praising Wang Cihui's poetry, Yan Shengsun traces a brief history of the development of *yanshi* (poetry of seductive allure), identifying the *Shijing* as its fountainhead. The Qing author thought that Wang Cihui's *xianglianti* poetry was not merely a fine example of this poetic subgenre but the highest achievement within the entire realm of erotic poetry.

Even before the appearance of the first woodblock printed edition of the *Yiyu ji*, Wang Cihui's poetic talent did not go unnoticed. According to the information provided by Yan Shengsun's preface, the *Yiyu ji* seems to have enjoyed a considerable popularity on a local level. His contemporary Chen Weisong 陳維崧 (1625 - 1682) also testified to the popularity of Wang Cihui's poetry in the Wu area. In the short biographical entry that Chen Weisong wrote for the female poet Wang Lang 王朗, Wang Cihui's daughter,⁴¹⁰ we read that her father "widely spread poetry of the fragrant dressing case and seductive allure style all around the Wu area" 以香奩艷體盛傳吳下。⁴¹¹ By having its woodblocks carved, Hou Wencan allowed the collection to spread more widely and enjoy greater popularity, potentially beyond the regional context where it originally circulated in manuscript form.

⁴⁰⁹ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 3.

⁴¹⁰ For more information about Wang Cihui's daughter Wang Lang, see Geng Chuanyou, "Yi ge bei wenxue shi yiwang de zhongyao zuojia", 23-26.

⁴¹¹ Chen Weisong, *Furen ji*, 19a (103).

In writing a preface for the first printed edition of the collection, Yan Shengsun expressed his full support of Hou Wencan's choice to publish the *Yiyu ji* and placed his seal of approval on Wang Cihui's amorous-erotic poetry. However, throughout the lines of the preface Yan Shengsun reveals an ambivalent attitude towards the poems of the *Yiyu ji*. His enthusiastic praise of Wang Cihui's poetic talent at the beginning of the preface is accompanied by a justification in moral and utilitarian terms of his choice to promote and expand the fame of the *Yiyu ji*. From the final part of the preface where Yan Shengsun creates a connection between the poetry of the *Yiyu ji* and the luxury and hedonism typical of late Ming Jiangnan, it is evident that Yan Shengsun worried about the morally problematic nature of Wang Cihui's poetry. The key term revealing this concern and his ambivalent attitude towards Wang Cihui's *xianglianti* poetry is the compound *zhengyin* 正音 (the correct tunes). Within a cultural context where music was intimately related to the sphere of morality, *zhengyin* referred to "music judged as virtuous, righteous and 'proper'".⁴¹² Originally used to describe the quality of sound, the term was later extended to the realm of poetry as shown in Yan Shengsun's preface.⁴¹³ Yan Shengsun noted that Wang Cihui's poems could not be regarded as examples of *zhengyin*, due to the unrestrained life of pleasures embodied by them. How then did Yan Shengsun manage to justify his choice to promote a type of poetry which was not regarded as proper? He adopted one of the strategies which I mentioned in Chapter One: he assigned a didactic function to Wang Cihui's morally problematic *xianglianti* production. He argued that, despite not being examples of *zhengyin*, these poems could still fulfill a morally relevant function, in so

⁴¹² Tien, *The Semantics of Chinese Music*, 55.

⁴¹³ In early Chinese texts we find other examples of music-related terms showing a link between music and morality, e.g. *Zheng Wei zhi yin* ("the sounds of Zheng and Wei") and *mimi zhi yin* 靡靡之音 ("decadent and malaise sound"). See Tien, *The Semantics of Chinese Music*, 55.

far as they were a reflection of the social and historical context of their times. He legitimized the publication of Wang Cihui's poems by presenting them as a mirror of morality for later generations, as verses able to show "the principles of rise and fall" (*shengshuai zhi duan* 盛衰之端). Yan Shengsun's approach towards Wang Cihui's *Yiyu ji* is more precisely rooted in the traditional exegetical principle of *zhiren lunshi* 知人論世 (literally "to know the man and examine his times", which could also be rendered as "to explore the life and world of an author"), as revealed in the final part of the preface, where its author states "I briefly examined their times, so as to wait for later readers to judge them".⁴¹⁴

While Yan Shengsun legitimized the poems of the *Yiyu ji* by presenting them as a reflection of their times and thus possessing a didactic value, Hou Wencan elevated their status by seeking a deeper meaning beneath the alluring amorous-erotic surface. In his preface to the *Yiyu ji* Hou Wencan did not portray Wang Cihui as a pleasure seeking *fengliu wenren*, but chose instead to emphasize the sorrows and frustrations that the late Ming poet encountered throughout his life:

Master Cihui studied assiduously for his whole life and was repeatedly troubled by the imperial examinations. The chalcedony *qin* was broken, the orchid jade was severed.⁴¹⁵ His life was indeed full of frustrations and disappointments. He truly had the sorrow of Qu Yuan and the resentment of Jiang Yan 江淹 (444-505). He had the dejection of losing one's path of Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210-263), he shared the sorrow and worries of being without a home and approaching old age with Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770). He especially entrusted these [sorrows and

⁴¹⁴ The concept of *zhiren lunshi* was first articulated in the *Mengzi* 孟子 through a dialogue between Mencius and Wan Zhang 萬章 (*Mengzi* 5B.8); see Yang Bojun, *Mengzi yizhu*, 251. For a discussion on the concept of *zhiren lunshi* and its implications and interpretations see Chen, "Text and Context: Mencius' View on Understanding the Poems of the Ancients". For an English language translation and a commentary of the *zhiren lunshi* passage see Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, 34-35.

⁴¹⁵ The expression "the chalcedony *qin* was broken" refers to the death of Wang Cihui's wife, on whom the poet wrote many poems documenting her illness and mourning her death, while "the orchid jade was broken" probably refers to the loss of his son. See Geng Chuanyou, "Yi ge bei wenxue shi yiwang de zhongyao zuojia", 100.

worries] to the heartfelt whispers exchanged by young men and women and to the unexpressed longing in the boudoirs, to express the resentment hidden inside his bosom. [His poetry] cannot be regarded as lines of rouge and powder and blue mansions, of cloud-cutting and moon-carving.

次回先生窮年力學，屢困場屋。斷瑤琴，折蘭玉。其坎坷潦倒，實有屈子之哀，江淹之恨，步兵之失路無聊，與少陵無家垂老之憂傷憔悴。而特托之於兒女丁寧，閨門婉戀，以寫其胸中之幽怨，不得概以紅粉青樓、裁雲鏤月之句目之也。⁴¹⁶

From the above quoted section of the preface, we can see how Hou Wencan tried to elevate Wang Cihui's erotic poems by applying the concept of *jituo*, another strategy which I discussed in Chapter One. He argued that beneath the beautiful surface of words of love and feelings of longing hid the expression of regrets and sorrows of another nature. In order to validate his unconvincing argument, Hou Wencan strove to compare Wang Cihui with poets of the past famous for the expression of their frustrations and resentment through poetry, the first of whom is Qu Yuan, the originator of the *meiren xiangcao* allegorical tradition. It is true that Wang Cihui experienced many difficulties throughout his life, including the decline in status of his family, repeated failures in the imperial examinations, and the death of his wife and son. In one his early poems, written in 1625, Wang Cihui somberly stated "the flavour of this world [bitter] like a thistle / I have tasted it almost entirely" 世味如荼嘗欲遍。⁴¹⁷ The line gloomily echoes as a premonition of future sorrows and disappointments and might be used to describe the difficult experiences the poet encountered throughout his life. However, this does not mean that he used *xianglianti* poetry allegorically to reveal the bitterness that he had tasted throughout the years. He had already done

⁴¹⁶ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 4.

⁴¹⁷ Zheng Qingmao, "Ganhuai zayong" 感懷雜詠 (Various Poems on Being Stirred by Emotions), number three, in *Wang Cihui shiji*, 37.

that in a very straightforward manner in his *ganhuai* compositions.⁴¹⁸ Despite Hou Wencan's attempt at presenting it as a form of *jituo* practice, Wang Cihui's *xianglianti* poetry resists a moral or political allegorical reading of the *meiren xiangcao* type, a view I share with Geng Chuanyou.⁴¹⁹

In their combination of praise and legitimization, Yan Shengsun's and Hou Wencan's prefaces reveal a certain degree of anxiety over the perception and reception of Wang Cihui's poetry, an anxiety which can be better understood when considered against the backdrop of the moralistic tendencies of the early Qing literary scene. Since their prefaces were written to accompany the first printed edition of the collection, their anxiety might have also been rooted in commercial reasons. The legitimizing prefaces can be understood as major marketing tools to persuade potential buyers that Wang Cihui's *Yiyu ji* would be a valuable addition to one's private library, by ensuring that there was a deeper edifying meaning beneath its alluring and morally suspect surface.

It is likely that Hou Wencan requested a preface from Yan Shengsun in order to create a stronger paratextual marketing strategy. In his discussion of the commodification of writing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Kai-wing Chow examines the different roles of paratexts, pointing out how prefaces by famous authors (*minggong* 名公 or *mingjia* 名家) functioned as a seal of guarantee for newly published books.⁴²⁰ Because of his reputation as a learned scholar during his lifetime, Yan Shengsun can be easily categorised as a "reputable master". In publishing and promoting a morally suspect collection, Hou Wencan made sure not to be alone in his choice by obtaining the seal of approval of a renowned contemporary man of letters.

⁴¹⁸ For a discussion of the different types of misfortunes lamented by Wang Cihui in his *ganhuai* poems, see Geng Chuanyou, "Yi ge bei wenxueshi yiwang de zhongyao zuojia", 124-128.

⁴¹⁹ Geng Chuanyou, "Yi ge bei wenxueshi yiwang de zhongyao zuojia", 100.

⁴²⁰ Chow, *Publishing*, 109-115.

Hou Wencan's mention of an unidentified admirer of Wang Cihui's poetry who allegedly asked him to print the collection can also be interpreted as part of the very same marketing strategy:

In the *gengwu* year (1690), I was collecting *ci* lyrics in the *Yi Garden*. Just after I had stopped compiling [the anthology] halfway, there was a guest who told me: "Master Cihui's poems are profound in substance and extremely beautiful in style. There are no words which are not fragrant. When there is sorrow, it is certainly accompanied by charm. After the *Jade Terrace*, and the *Xikun* [Collection], it was not easy to obtain many [poems with such qualities]. It is a pity that his manuscript has not been woodblock printed."

歲庚午，余選詞於亦園。既輟簡，客有謂余者曰：次回先生詩沉博絕麗，無語不香，有愁必媚，玉臺、西崑而後，不易多得，惜其遺稿未刻也。⁴²¹

From the above quoted section of the preface, we learn that Hou Wencan's decision to print the *Yiyu ji* was not a spontaneous choice but more precisely a willingness to fulfill another's wish. The anonymous admirer of the *Yiyu ji*, simply referred to as a "visitor" (*ke* 客), chose to emphasize the aesthetically pleasing qualities of Wang Cihui's poetry by using the terms *xiang* 香 (fragrant) and *mei* 媚 (charm), two words with strongly feminine aesthetic connotations; for this reason and for the association of Wang Cihui's poetry with the verses of the *Yutai xinyong* and of the *Xikun ji* 西崑集 (Xikun Collection), I contend that these comments should be interpreted as specifically directed towards Wang Cihui's *xianglianti* production, rather than his poetry as a whole.

Other early Qing literati held Wang Cihui's poetry in similarly high esteem. Among them, the most noteworthy are Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 (1629-1709) and Yuan Mei. Zhu Yizun, a famous seventeenth century *shi* poet who also played a key role in the revival of *ci* poetry in the early Qing, was another admirer of Wang Cihui's poetry. Unlike Yan

⁴²¹ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 5.

Shengsun, he did not regard Wang Cihui as the best author of erotic poetry up to his times. In his opinion, Li Shangyin and Han Wo were the best writers of “compositions on amorous thoughts” (*fenghuai zhi zuo* 風懷之作). However, he still held Wang Cihui in very high esteem and praised him with the following words:

Those in later times who wrote in the style of seductive allure worry that what they say is not exhaustive. How can their poetry be refined? Thereupon, there must be less music of *qin*, *se*, bells, and drums and more of the emotions of tossing and turning while asleep; only then one can follow Han Wo and Li Shangyin. The poetic composition of Wang Cihui of Jinsha carried on the legacy of the men of the Tang to profound levels. [. . .] [These poems] are all full of charming elegance. When reciting them, one’s heart is moved, eyes are captivated, guts are stirred and the *qi* is shaken.⁴²²

后之为艶體者，言之惟恐不盡，詩焉得工？故必琴瑟鐘鼓之樂少，而寤寐反側之情多，然后可以追韓軼李。金沙王次回結撰深得唐人遺意，[. . .]皆饒風韻，誦之感心媿目，回腸蕩氣。⁴²³

Zhu Yizun singled out the late Ming poet from the sea of post-Tang authors of poetry of seductive allure as a true heir of Li Shangyin and Han Wo. After expressing his judgement, he quoted several couplets and a few full poems from Wang Cihui’s *Yiyu ji*, so as to provide some concrete examples of Wang Cihui’s ability to stir deep feelings with his poetic craft. The famous eighteenth century poet Yuan Mei also admired Wang Cihui’s ability to stir feelings; in his words “Wang Cihui’s poetry often enters one’s heart and spleen” 王次回詩往往入人心脾. He also praised the *Yiyu ji* as “a masterpiece of fragrant-dressing case poetry” (*xianglian jue diao* 香奩絕調).⁴²⁴

Moreover, his passion for Wang Cihui even brought him to vehemently defend the late

⁴²² When translating Zhu Yizun’s comment, I consulted both Xiaorong Li’s and Grace Fong’s renderings of a selection of the same passage. See Li, “I Sliced My Flesh”, 39-40; and Fong, “Inscribing Desire”, 442.

⁴²³ Zhu Yizun, *Jingzhi ju shihua*, 19.570.

⁴²⁴ Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua*, 15.

Ming poet from Shen Deqian's heavy criticism. When compiling the anthology of early Qing⁴²⁵ poetry *Qingshi biecai ji* 清詩別裁集 (An Anthology of Selected Poems of the Qing Dynasty), Shen Deqian deliberately chose not to include Wang Cihui's poetry due to the harmful influence that it could have on people's minds. In the general remarks (*fanli* 凡例) that he wrote as an introduction to his anthology, Shen Deqian expounded his orthodox poetics. It is within the larger context of the exposition of his ethical view of poetry that Shen Deqian explained his choice of excluding the poems included in Wang Cihui's *Yiyu ji* and other verses of a similar nature from his selection:

Poetry needs to be originally rooted in nature and feelings; [it must be] related to the daily application of the principles of human relations and the causes of the rise and falls of the past and present, only then it can be preserved; it is a case of what is known as [poetry] "having substance in its words". If [poetry] is totally unrelated, only achieves superficial showiness or uses "shouting and striking" to express it, this is not the intent of the authors of the *Airs*. There are even more extreme cases, tending to produce words of the realm of gentleness,⁴²⁶ such as poems of the type of Wang Cihui's *Doubtful Rain Collection*. They are the most harmful to one's thought. I did not keep any of them.

詩必原本性情， 關乎人倫日用， 及古今成敗興壞之故者， 方為可存， 所謂其言有物也。 若一無關繫， 徒辦浮華， 又或叫號撞搪以出之， 非風人之旨矣。 猶有甚者， 動作溫柔鄉語， 如王次回疑雨集之類， 最足害人心術， 一概不存。⁴²⁷

Shen Deqian's disapproval of Wang Cihui's poetry is not surprising when considered alongside his morally charged criticism of Han Wo's *Xianglian ji* and more generally the challenge posed by amorous-erotic poetry to the poetic orthodoxy.⁴²⁸ Since Han Wo's

⁴²⁵ Even though he was a Ming dynasty poet, Wang Cihui was sometimes erroneously treated as a Qing poet since his *Yiyu ji* was woodblock-printed only in the early Qing.

⁴²⁶ Xiaorong Li defines the phrase *wenrou xiang* as both "the material world of pleasure brought by women to men" (which she renders as "the Home of Gentleness") and as "the conceptual and discursive space focusing on the erotic and amorous feelings and sentiments evoked during the men and women's sexual and romantic encounters" See Li, "I Sliced My Flesh", 51-52 (note 39).

⁴²⁷ Shen Deqian, *Qingshi biecai ji*, "Fan li" 凡例, 2a-b.

⁴²⁸ For Shen Deqian's judgement of Han Wo's *Xianglian ji* see Chapter Two, 49.

Xianglian ji can be considered as the poetic forefather of Wang Cihui's *Yiyu ji*, one would expect Shen Deqian to have a similarly negative opinion of the Ming dynasty collection. Shen Deqian's decision to exclude Wang Cihui's poetry from his anthology was not well received by Yuan Mei. From *Suiyuan shihua*, Yuan Mei's collection of remarks on poetry, we learn that the poet strongly disagreed with Shen Deqian's choice and wrote him a letter to defend the *Yiyu ji* and continue their discussion on poetics:⁴²⁹

The *Doubtful Rain Collection* by our dynasty's [poet] Wang Cihui is a masterpiece of fragrant-dressing-case [poetry]. It is a pity that he had accomplishments only in this particular type of poetry. When the minister of state affairs Shen Deqian selected poetry of our dynasty, he discarded and did not record [Wang Cihui's poetry]. What else shows his narrow-mindedness [more than this]? I once wrote a letter to criticize [his choice] which said: "The Crying Osprey" is the first of the "Airs of the State" and it just speaks of feelings between men and women. When Confucius emended [the *Classic of Poetry*], he kept the airs of Zheng and Wei. Who are you not to select Wang Cihui's poetry?" Shen Deqian had no way to answer.

本朝王次回疑雨集，香奩絕調，惜其只成此一家數耳。沈歸愚尚書選國朝詩，擯而不錄，何所見之狹也。嘗作書難之云：關雎爲國風之首，即言男女之情。孔子刪詩，亦存鄭、衛，公何獨不選次回詩？沈亦無以答也。⁴³⁰

The letter which Yuan Mei wrote in defence of the *Yiyu ji* can be found within the poet's collected works under the title "Zai yu Shen Da Zongbo shu" 再與沈大宗伯書 (Another Letter Written to Shen Deqian).⁴³¹ From the argument he constructs in his

⁴²⁹ For a study of the debate on erotic poetry between Yuan Mei and Shen Deqian, see Geng Chuanyou, "Yanshi gai ruhe duidai".

⁴³⁰ Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua*, 15.

⁴³¹ Yuan Mei had already written a letter to Shen Deqian to discuss their ideas about poetry, hence the title "Another Letter Written to Shen Deqian". The earlier letter written by Yuan Mei to Shen Deqian is titled "Da Shen Da zongbo lun shi shu" 答沈大宗伯論詩書 (A Letter Discussing Poetry In Reply to Shen Deqian); see Yuan Mei, *Xiaocangshan fang wenji*, 17.283-284.

letter, we can see that Yuan Mei's own views on poetry were in sharp contrast with the orthodox ethical poetics which Shen Deqian expounded in his anthology:

I have heard that in *Selected Poems* you only left out Wang Cihui's poetry, as you thought that, being seductive-allure style poetry, it cannot leave a moral lesson to posterity. Once again I question this. First of all, "The Crying Osprey" is indeed a poem of seductive allure. It uses the reason of searching for a fair maiden to go as far as "tossing and turning in bed". If King Wen was born today and had met you, it would be dangerous! *The Book of Changes* says: "one yin and one yang is called the *dao*" and it also says "there are husband and wife, only then there are father and son". *Ying* and *yang* and husband and wife are the ancestors of poetry of seductive allure. Fu Xuan 傅玄 (217–278) was good at talking of the feelings between young men and women, yet he was a honest minister. As a man, he was a *junzi*. Shen Yue 沈約 (441–513) served two dynasties,⁴³² served the Buddha and had a confession written in an ornate language.⁴³³ As a man, he was a petty man. Wang Cihui's literary talent was extremely alluring. In Wang Shizhen's collected works, there are frequent [instances of poems] borrowing from him. You, sir, admire Wang Shizhen the most. It is not tolerable not to investigate [his poems] at all. The way of selecting poetry is the same as that of writing history. Among the talented men of an era, those whose [life and work] should be transmitted are all suited for arranged biographies. There is no need to restrain one's view and narrowly choose them. [...] Confucius did not eliminate the poems of Zheng and Wei, yet you, sir, only eliminated Wang Cihui's poetry. Isn't it excessive?

聞別裁中獨不選王次回詩，以為艷體不足垂教，僕又疑焉。夫關雎即艷詩也，以求淑女之故，至於輾轉反側，使文公生於今，遇先生，危矣哉。易曰：一陰一陽謂之道，又曰：有夫婦然後有父子。陰陽夫婦，艷詩之祖也。傅鸞善言兒女之情，而臺閣生風。其人，君子也。沈約事兩朝，候佛，有綺語之懺。其人，小人也。次回才藻艷絕，阮亭集中，時時竊之，先生最尊阮亭，不容都不考也。選詩之道，與作史同。一代人才，其應傳者皆宜列傳，無庸拘見而狹取之。[...]孔子不刪鄭、衛之詩，而先生獨刪次回之詩，不已過乎。⁴³⁴

In his defence of Wang Cihui's poetry, Yuan Mei creates a connection between later poetry of seductive allure and the *Shijing*, emphasising the status of the early

⁴³² Shen Yue, in fact, held official posts under three different dynasties: the Song (420-479), the Qi (479-502), and the Liang. See Mather, *The Poet Shen Yüeh*, 3.

⁴³³ This is a reference to Shen Yue's "Chanhui wen" 懺悔文 (Text of Confession and Repentance)

⁴³⁴ Yuan Mei, *Xiaocangshan fang wenji*, 17.285.

poetry anthology as a Confucian classic. His main argument can be summarised as follows: if Confucius chose to include poems on erotic themes, then later editors of poetry should not be allowed to discriminate against amorous-erotic poetry because of its theme. Yuan Mei also argues against the direct relationship between the content of poetry and the life and conduct of its author, one of the roots of the perceived problematic nature of erotic poetry, as discussed in Chapter One.

The literary debate between Shen Deqian and Yuan Mei caught the attention of later editors and commentators of Wang Cihui's poetry. Several prefaces to the *Yiyu ji* make reference to the divergence of opinions between Shen Deqian and Yuan Mei. For example, in his preface to the *Yiyu ji*, the late Qing and early Republican period scholar Ye Dehui 葉德輝 (1864-1927) made reference to the debate between the two eighteenth century poets and criticized Shen Deqian for his choice not to include Wang Cihui's poetry in his anthology: "However, in his careful selection, Shen Deqian was obviously unable to avoid adopting the perspective of a country scholar" 然則歸愚之兢兢別裁，殆不免于村夫子之見。⁴³⁵

Unfortunately, Wang Cihui did not leave behind a preface to present his poetic oeuvre and ensure its correct reception. However, we can still obtain some information on how the late Ming poet viewed his poetry from his very own poetic corpus. From the already quoted line "poetic guts had to approach the fragrant dressing case" and his quatrain "Chongti", we can see that he saw poetic composition, in particular *xianglianti* poetry, as a necessity, as an integral part of his life and identity. As it will be later shown, he inscribed his innermost self and his amorous experiences in his verses and made it evident by means of references to events and people

⁴³⁵ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 5.

belonging to his life contained in titles and self-annotations. As for the morally problematic nature of his poetry, Wang Cihui did not feel guilty or uneasy about it, as I have briefly discussed in Chapter Two. Differently from Yang Weizhen, who although in a probably jokingly way, still revealed some uneasiness about his *xianglianti* production, Wang Cihui did not feel the need or want to apologize for his verses. He did not attempt to distance his life and conduct from his work. On the contrary, he used *xianglianti* poetry as a personal medium to construct his *fengliu* identity, to present himself as an amorous man.

An Analysis of Wang Cihui's *Xianglianti* Poetry

Using the previous analysis of selected paratextual materials to the *Yiyu ji* as a starting point of inquiry, the present section takes a closer look at Wang Cihui's *Yiyu ji*, showing how the late Ming poet inserted himself in the literary path opened by Han Wo's *Xianglian ji* and further contributed to the development of the feminine and amorous-erotic thematic sphere in traditional Chinese poetry. As I previously pointed out, the thematic range of the *Yiyu ji* is not exclusively limited to the amorous-erotic sphere. However, for the purpose of my research, I will only focus on those poems which can be classified as *xianglianti* in its broadest sense.

Asserting One's Taste: Wang Cihui's Predilection for Female Sorrow, Mild Anger, and Unadorned Beauty

As recorded in Hou Wencan's preface to the *Yiyu ji*, an unidentified admirer of Wang Cihui stated that in his poetry "when there is sorrow, it is certainly accompanied

by charm” 有愁必媚。⁴³⁶ The anonymous praise recorded by Hou Wencan surely applies to the many *xianglianti* poems in the *Yiyu ji* which are pervaded by a general melancholy mood and, even more, to those which specifically explore the theme of sorrow and heartbreak. The expression of feelings of sorrow in the collection is not exclusively confined to the poems which can be classified as *xianglianti*. In his *ganhuai* poems, Wang Cihui expressed his personal frustrations of being ill, having encountered difficulties throughout his life path, and being far away from home. However, I believe that the above comment was meant to refer primarily to such poems, due to the feminine connotation of the term *mei* 媚 (charm).

When portraying the sorrow caused by love and longing, Wang Cihui aptly followed the aestheticizing tendency of the *xianglianti* tradition. As shown in the previous chapter within the section devoted to the analysis of the sets of poems by the title “Xianglian bayong”, female sorrow was traditionally regarded as aesthetically appealing, both from an emotional and a visual point of view. In the poetic representation of contained female sorrow poets found a perfect place to merge the sphere of *qing* with the sphere of *se*. Not only did Wang Cihui look at female sorrow through an aestheticizing lens, thus positioning himself in perfect line with the *xianglianti* tradition, but in some of his poems he even went a step further by explicitly praising the effect of sorrow on a woman’s features for its visually pleasing quality. A perfect example is the quatrain to the title “Zhuyi” 追憶 (Reminiscing), a poem which captures the instant when a woman’s “thousand sorrows” are revealed on her face through the slight frowning of her eyebrows:

⁴³⁶ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 4.

Ten thousand accumulated sorrows are revealed through a slight frown,

Her vermilion lips are about to move, but once again they hesitate.

Do not say that smiling eyes are dazzling,

A moment of sorrow creates an extreme sense of intimacy.

萬疊傷心露淺顰，

唇朱欲動更逡巡。

休論笑眼生花處，

一段愁光昵殺人。⁴³⁷

In this poem Wang Cihui captures the movements of expression triggered by sorrow on a woman's face: the delicate frown of her eyebrows and the hesitant contraction of her lips. This, according to him, was a scene of supreme beauty, worth being immortalized in verse. As the poet declares in the final couplet, smiling eyes cannot compete with a sorrowful glance. The same concept is worded with minor lexical differences in one of the poems written to "the one longed for" (*suo si* 所思): "Do not say that smiling eyes are dazzling, Even an instant of sorrowful countenance intoxicates one's heart." 休論笑眼生花處，片刻愁容也醉心。⁴³⁸ In the second poem of the same set, as discussed in Chapter One, Wang Cihui presents himself as an utmost expert in "flower appreciation" (*kanhua* 看花), where flowers are an obvious metaphor for beautiful women.⁴³⁹ Wang Cihui's self-proclaimed identity as a connoisseur of female beauty not only contributes to the construction of his unconventional, stylishly refined, *fengliu* poetic persona but also strengthens the aesthetic value of sorrow in *xianglianti* poetry.

⁴³⁷ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 106.

⁴³⁸ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 61. "Yong qian yun ling ji suo si mo yi zhang dai wei da" 用前韻吟寄所思，末一章代爲答 (Poems Written to the One I Long for Using the Previous Rhyme Scheme; The Final Composition Serves as Her Reply)

⁴³⁹ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 61.

If we read Wang Cihui's *Yiyu ji* as a private, autobiographical record of the poet's sensual and emotional experiences, it was the bewitching woman at the centre of the set of poems "Mengyou shi'er shou" 夢游十二首 (Roaming in Dream: Twelve Poems), to fully open his eyes towards the aesthetic superiority of a sorrowful frown over a charming smile. The twelve poems of the set sketch the development of feelings of love between the poet and the woman. Wang Cihui was initially captivated by the dimples on her smiling face: "when she arrived, her smiling dimples were the most adorable" 來時笑靨最堪憐.⁴⁴⁰ So besotted was he that his eyes were filled with desire and he seemed to have lost the desire to eat: "my wild heart reached the eyes and I cast aside cup and chopsticks" 狂心上眼拋杯筯.⁴⁴¹ However, he later realized that her smile could not be compared to her frown:

In the joy of the dancing banquet she languidly raised her eyes
When the tune of the song became intensely sad, she moved her lips in secret.
Her feelings were warm, but her face was cold.
Only then I knew that a charming smile could not be compared to a frown.
舞筵歡處慵抬眼，
歌調淒時暗動唇。
心事自溫顏自冷，
始知嬌笑不如顰。⁴⁴²

The woman's frown is the culmination of a series of visual clues to her internal struggle not to reveal her deep emotions. These almost imperceptible movements of expression - her slowly raised eyes, her lips moving to the sound of a sad tune, and the

⁴⁴⁰ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 260.

⁴⁴¹ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 260.

⁴⁴² Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 260.

frowning of her eyebrows - are all captured by the attentive eye of the poet. As will be shown later in the present chapter, Wang Cihui often displayed a great attention to small details, not limited to the visual sphere.

The peculiarity of the above quoted verses is not their aesthetic approach towards female sorrow per se, a feature widely shared by poems belonging to the *xianglianti* or amorous-erotic category. What makes them stand out is their explicit nature: these verses are explicit statements, voiced by the poet himself, celebrating female sorrow as an object of aesthetic contemplation. It seems that Wang Cihui felt the need to expound the reason behind his (and many other *xianglianti* practitioners') fondness for images of female sorrow as a poetic subject, and he did so by means of his very own verses on the topic. These statements might also be regarded as an implicit encouragement for other poets to continue aestheticizing and celebrating female sorrow through poetry, since images of sorrow could evoke a stronger sense of beauty and create a deeper emotional response than images of joy and laughter.

The sorrow caused by love and longing was not the sole bitter emotion to have attracted Wang Cihui's aesthetic eye. Throughout the *Yiyu ji*, he also revealed a predilection for the effect of mild anger and irritation on a woman's features. I use the adjective "mild" to describe the type of female anger portrayed in the collection, since, in some the verses which I will quote later, Wang Cihui himself chose to accompany the word "anger" with either the adjective *qing* 輕 or *bo* 薄, both translatable as "light", "slight", or "mild". It is probable that fury and extreme anger were regarded as too extreme to be celebrated as key components of feminine charm. Both the adjective *qing* and the adjective *bo* can be seen as a clue of the aestheticizing approach which the poet chose to take towards the representation of female anger. By

presenting a woman's anger as mild and delicate, the main poetic focus could be easily moved from the specific triggering causes of anger to the charm of its physical manifestation and to the aesthetic and emotional pleasure it can cause in a male lover and, by extension, a male reader.

Although the representation and appreciation of female anger was not as common as that of sorrow, before Wang Cihui, we still find references to angry women within the amorous-erotic tradition. An early example, which is also an explicit acknowledgement of the beauty of female anger is the second poem of Shen Yue's set "Liu yi shi" 六憶詩 (Poems on Six Memories), whose last couplet reads: "When she smiles she is certainly without pair / When she is angry she is even more lovable". 笑時應無比，嗔時更可憐。⁴⁴³

Within the *ci* tradition, we can find several examples of coquettishly angry women. A very early example is the following anonymous Tang dynasty "Pusa man" 菩薩蠻 (To the Tune Bodhisattva Barbarian) *ci* lyric, in which a man purposely provokes his beautiful lover:

A peony holds pearls of dew,
Breaking [the flower off the branch] the beauty walks past the hall.
With a smile, she asks her lover:
"Is the flower better or is my appearance better?"
Her lover purposely causes her anger,
Saying that the blooming branch is finer.
She throws a coquettish tantrum,
Tears the flower to pieces, and hits the man.
牡丹含露珍珠顆，
美人折向庭前過。
含笑問檀郎，

⁴⁴³ Xu Ling, *Yutai xinyong*, vol. 1, 191.

花強妾貌強？
檀郎故相惱，
須道花枝好。
一面發嬌嗔，
碎掇花打人。⁴⁴⁴

The poem is a lively vignette focusing on the flirtatious simulation of anger, a concept expressed by the term *jiaochen* 嬌嗔 (“coquettish tantrum” or “coquettish anger”). The word *jiao* 嬌 (also translatable as “lovable”, “charming”, “attractive”) within the compound reveals that this type of anger (*chen* 嗔) is perceived as attractive. It also implies that the angry outburst might be just a simulation. Simulated or genuine yet mild anger was perceived as having the power to make a beautiful woman more desirable. The term *jiaochen* might be compared to the modern day concept of *sajiao* 撒嬌, a child-like behaviour adopted by young women for persuasive purposes, of which faking anger by means of affected gestures and facial expressions is a main component.⁴⁴⁵ Wang Cihui’s appreciation of female anger also includes its simulation, as I will later show in my analysis.

While the poetic representation and appreciation of angry women was certainly not unique to Wang Cihui, the late Ming poet’s treatment of female anger is remarkable in its frequency and intensity. Within the *Yiyu ji*, there are various references to female anger spread throughout the poems of the collection.

⁴⁴⁴ Zhang and Huang, *Quan Tang Wudai ci*, 979. The late Ming poet and painter Tang Yin 唐寅 (1470-1524) composed his own version of the same scene in a *shi* poem titled “*Ji hua ge*” 妒花歌 (Song of Jealousy towards the Flower). In Tang Yin’s poem the woman also “throws a coquettish tantrum” (*fa jiaozhen* 發嬌嗔) after her lover playfully states that she is not as beautiful as a flower. See Cao Xuequan, *Shicang lidai shixuan*, 493.10b-11a.

⁴⁴⁵ Yueh, “The Tactic of the Weak”, 27.

In a poem rhyming with his friend Duanyi's 端已,⁴⁴⁶ Wang Cihui describes a beautiful woman with whom he has to momentarily part, choosing to single out her angry frown as the most memorably beautiful detail to be recorded: "all along the moment when my heart was intoxicated by her city-toppling beauty / had been when she earlier slightly frowned her eyebrows in mild anger". 由來心醉傾城處，早在微顰薄怒時。⁴⁴⁷ From this couplet we can see how the visual effect of mild anger is very similar to that of restrained sorrow: both are often physically materialized through a slight contraction of the eyebrows, a feature regarded as able to increase a beautiful woman's attractiveness. As seen in the analysis of the "Xianglian bayong" poems, frowning was a facial expression which had been traditionally regarded as able to increase a beautiful woman's attractiveness, as in the case of the legendary beauty Xi Shi. It is, therefore, not surprising that not only sorrow but also anger was perceived as a beautifying emotion by Wang Cihui. In some of his poems, there is actually no clear way to establish whether a woman's frown is caused by either sorrow or anger or by a combination of the two emotions.

In the light-hearted love vignette created in "Si meng" 似夢 (Like a Dream) Wang Cihui reveals his passion for his lover's angry demeanour not only by describing it as "charming" (*jiao* 嬌) but also by urging her to feign anger:

Like a dream is the strong joy, then again also lifelike,
Looking carefully she is the very person who threw the shuttle.
Her initial slight anger was particularly charming,
With a smile I asked her to get angry again.

⁴⁴⁶ Duan Yi is a recurring name in the titles of the poems collected in the *Yiyu ji*.

⁴⁴⁷ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 153.

似夢濃歡復似真，
細看原是擲梭人。
當初薄怒尤嬌絕，
笑倩如花更一嗔。⁴⁴⁸

Why did the poet urge the beautiful woman to feign anger? The answer is contained in the third line of the poem: “her initial slight anger was particularly charming”. From the opening couplet we learn that the flower-like beauty had originally rejected her suitor. “The person who threw the shuttle” is an allusion to an anecdote about the Jin 晉 Dynasty (265-420) musician Xie Kun 謝鯤 (282–324). In order to reject Xie Kun’s romantic advances, his beautiful neighbour threw her shuttle at him, causing two of his front teeth to fall out of his mouth. References to this particular anecdote are commonly used as a metaphor for romantic rejection.⁴⁴⁹ Because of the contrast between her initial and present attitude, being with her not only brings a strong sense of joy to Wang Cihui, but also feels unreal to him, almost dreamlike. From the entire poem it might be deduced that although her anger was a sign of refusal, meant to drive suitors away and put an end to their advances, Wang Cihui perceived it, instead, as an attractive and inviting element of feminine charm. Female anger, when mild and contained (and, therefore, easily approachable through an aestheticizing lens) was regarded as a source of beauty and pleasure by the poet.

⁴⁴⁸ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 193.

⁴⁴⁹ An example of the use of the anecdote about Xie Kun being rejected by a beautiful neighbour girl as a metaphor for romantic rejection can be found in the preface to Han Wo’s *Xianglianji*: “Luckily, I did not suffer the humiliation of having my teeth broken.” 幸無折齒之慚; see Han Wo, “Xianglian ji zixu”, in Xu Zhuo, *Quan Tang shi lu*, 93.21a. For the anecdote, see Fang Xuanling, *Jin shu*, 49.1377.

Wang Cihui's appreciation of anger was not only confined to the merely sensual, visual level; it also had a deeper dimension.

From "Gan yong" 感詠 (Composed When Moved by Feelings), a poem which also contains an allusion to Xie Kun's failed attempt to seduce his neighbour, it is evident that anger also had an emotional appeal for the poet. In its second line, Wang Cihui states that the manifestations of mild anger of his beloved had the effect of increasing the sense of intimacy that he felt towards her: "slight frowns and mild anger would always make me feel close to her" 淺顰輕怒總相親.⁴⁵⁰ Rather than aesthetically praising a woman's angry demeanour, in this poem Wang Cihui chose to focus on the emotional effect of anger. In his view, anger had the power of increasing the sense of intimacy towards one's beloved, of creating a stronger connection between lovers. But how does anger create a stronger emotional attachment between the poet and the women he loves? An answer to this question can be found in another poem of the *Yiyu ji*, which further elaborates on how anger (or even its simulation) can create a stronger emotional attachment between lovers:

"Writing Another Composition on That Person" Poem Number Eight

The hope in the heart is old, the joy of reunion is new,
Having just tasted the tip of the sugar cane, its taste I already treasure.
Having small courage it is easy to be surprised and easy to be pleased,
The curve of her eyebrows is fit for smiling, even more for frowning.
She has not showned any doubt or jealousy, her longing is still very shallow,
When one is willing to reveal coquettish anger then love starts to be true.
I plan to make her angry to try and see [what happens],
I am ashamed that in the end I became close to a fickle person.

⁴⁵⁰ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 198

《再賦個人》其八
心期舊矣合歡新
蔗尾才嘗味已珍
膽小易驚還易喜
眉彎宜笑更宜顰
未形猜妒思猶淺
肯露嬌嗔愛始真
作計惱伊嘗試看
自慚終近薄情人。⁴⁵¹

The answer to my earlier question is more precisely contained in the sixth line of the poem: “when one is willing to reveal coquettish anger then love starts to be true”. From this line we learn once again that Wang Cihui associated anger with emotional genuineness and intimacy. In his eyes, a woman’s irritation towards her lover, or more precisely her willingness to manifest it without restraint, was a reflection of the depth of her feelings for him. Wang Cihui’s appreciation of anger was, therefore, not limited to the purely visually aesthetic level, but had a deeper aspect attached to it. It did not stop at the sphere of *se*, at the visually pleasing surface of an angry beauty’s face, but it reached to the world of *qing*, seeking in the expression of anger, no matter whether staged or genuine, a reflection of the depth of the feelings of his beloved.

In his brief discussion of the eroticization of female anger in Western poetry which spans over more than a millenium - from the latin elegiac poet Propertius (ca. 50–45 BC– ca. 15 BC) to the English Renaissance poet Thomas Campion (1567-1620) and the Romantic poets John Keats (1795-1821) and Lord Byron (1788-1824) – the English

⁴⁵¹ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 136-137.

literature scholar Andrew M. Stauffer made some very interesting observations on the topic:

When a man reads the anger of a woman from an aesthetic vantage, he ignores her message for its medium: that is, her enraged body, which he calls beautiful. His strongly anti-verbal delight in her physical expressions of outrage filters the content from her voice, leaving only appassionato tones behind. The angry woman turns from political agent to eroticized spectacle by way of the male aesthetic imagination [...] women's anger speaks volumes to the interpretive male, who reads her manifestations of rage as revealing signs of her sexual temperature, and insists that there is a truth about angry beauty. In its turn to the erotic, his response thus combines aesthetic and hermeneutic delight; he finds beauty and truth in the face of the outraged woman, whose curses turn to blessings in his ears. [...] the male speaker reads the enraged body of his mistress as a transparent text, assuring himself that anger is that state of passionate arousal which cannot be counterfeited.⁴⁵²

The same observations can be applied to Wang Cihui's representation and celebration of female anger. Stauffer's comments on the relationship between anger, beauty, and truth are especially relevant for the last poem I quoted, one of the compositions written on the woman known as "that person", in which the poet establishes a connection between "coquettish anger" and love, perceiving anger as containing elements of authenticity (*zhen* 真).

From the examples provided above, it is evident that restrained sorrow and, especially, mild anger had a two-fold effect on the poet (and, by extension, on his male readership): visual and emotional. On one hand they pleased his aesthetic eye for the beautifying effect they have on women's features; on the other they created an emotional response within his heart, causing him to feel a stronger bond between him and the object of his affections.

⁴⁵² Stauffer, "(Out) Raging Women",
<https://web.archive.org/web/20000524012741/http://web.calstatela.edu/faculty/astauff2/outrage.htm>
↓

While the aesthetic treatment of frowns and sorrowful glances was well rooted in the *xianglianti* tradition, Wang Cihui's strong appreciation of unadorned, almost untidy, beauty added a new element to *xianglianti* poetry. Similarly to what he did with the visual manifestations of sorrow and anger, Wang Cihui praised unadorned beauty by explicitly asserting its superiority. The following poem is a perfect example:

“Twelve Impromptu Quatrains” Number Nine

Putting on her clothes as she has just risen, the coiled bun has fallen

Kingfisher-plume ornaments and phoenix-shaped hairpins are scattered, she has not drawn
[her eyebrows]

There is no harm in stopping the toilette for an instant

The time when your hair is dishevelled is when you are most city-toppling attractive

《即席口占絕句十二首》其九

攬衣初起髻鬟傾，

翠鳳離披畫不成

梳洗不妨停一刻，

亂頭時節最傾城⁴⁵³

In her study of love imagery in the palace style poems on palace ladies and court entertainers of the *Yutai xinyong*, Anne Birrell aptly pointed out that “(n)atural beauty alone is not enough to arouse erotic interest among the court poets; evocations of beauty owe their success to artifice rather than to nature.”⁴⁵⁴ Birrell's observations on female beauty in the *Yutai xinyong* can be summarized through her own statement

⁴⁵³ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 273. The ninth poem of the set of impromptu quatrains “Jixi kouzhan jueju shier shou” 即席口占絕句十二首 (Impromptu Quatrains: Twelve Poems).

⁴⁵⁴ Birrell, “Erotic Decor”, 250.

“woman is adored when adorned”.⁴⁵⁵ The opposite statement can be applied to this and other poems by Wang Cihui: woman is adored (even) when not adorned.

Although Wang Cihui did not dislike adorned female beauty, he did not deem adornments to be necessary to enhance a woman’s natural beauty. The previously quoted quatrain, which offers a glimpse of a private morning scene in the bedchamber, is a true celebration of unadorned beauty. The poem voices the desire of the poet wanting to admire his lover before she begins her morning toilette. According to Wang Cihui, a woman reaches the peak of her attractiveness when her hair is in disarray. It is when her hair is dishevelled and unstyled, free from hairpins and other hair decorations, that her beauty is “most city toppling” (*zui qingcheng* 最傾城). The phrase “city-toppling” is a commonly used expression in traditional Chinese literature to refer to outstanding female beauty. It derives from a song composed by the court musician Li Yannian 李延年 (ca. 140-ca. 87 B.C.) to describe his sister Lady Li, who later became the favourite of Emperor Wu of Han: “one glance [from her] topples a man's city; Another destroys his kingdom”⁴⁵⁶ 一顧傾人城，再顧傾人國。⁴⁵⁷

It is interesting to notice how Wang Cihui also used the same expression, city toppling, to describe a woman’s angry frown.⁴⁵⁸ This might imply that in Wang Cihui’s eye a beautiful woman with dishevelled hair had the same level of attractiveness of a beautiful woman angrily knitting her eyebrows. The characterization of unadorned beauty as “city toppling” also appears in one of the several poems which Wang Cihui wrote about one of his (real or fictional) lovers, an unidentified woman simply referred to as *geren* 個人 (that person):

⁴⁵⁵ Birrell, “Erotic Decor”, 250.

⁴⁵⁶ Translation by Paul Rouzer in Rouzer, *Writing Another's Dream*, 31.

⁴⁵⁷ Lu Qinli, *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao Shi*, 102.

⁴⁵⁸ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 153.

“That Person”

Seeking a realm of gentleness to lodge this life of mine,

Fengliu by nature, I will give [my life and love] to you, my darling.

Let eyebrows and eyes be able to convey words,

Why waiting for poems to pledge love?

Light rouge was on your cheeks when you took a seat

Even with hair dishevelled and coarse clothing you are always city-topplingly beautiful

Those with noble feelings do not delight in the application of lead powder

It is not to entirely prevent envious eyes from being surprised.

《箇人》

覓個柔鄉寄此生，

風流天付與卿卿。

直教眉眼能傳語，

可待詩篇爲定情。

雙臉斷紅初卻坐，

亂頭粗服總傾城。

高情不喜鉛華禦，

未是全防妒眼驚。⁴⁵⁹

Because of her natural beauty, “that person” is extremely attractive even when totally unadorned. The phrase used to describe her appearance, “with disheveled hair and coarse clothing” (*luantou cufu* 亂頭粗服) is taken from the description of Pei Kai 裴楷 (237-291) in the Jin dynasty collection of anecdotes *Shishuo xinyu*. Pei Kai was a scholar-official of outstanding beauty who always looked attractive without the need

⁴⁵⁹ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 116-117.

of adornment.⁴⁶⁰ Similarly to the naturally handsome Pei Kai, “that person” does not need any adornment, such as white powder, to be beautiful. Even without the aid of heavy make-up she is still the object of other women’s envy. In another poem about “that person”, Wang Cihui claims that he particularly likes how she looks when she has just got up from sleep and has not yet started to attend to her appearance: “I like it extremely when she has not done her toilette / and her loosened blue-black chignon presses against the freshness of her sleepy face” 喜殺未曾梳洗在，翠鬢鬆壓睡容鮮。⁴⁶¹

In stating his love for “dishevelled hair”, Wang Cihui is boldly celebrating natural beauty free from artifice. This particular attitude can be better understood within the larger context of Wang Cihui’s *fengliu* identity and the unconventionality attached to it. As seen in Chapter Two, when translating and clarifying the meanings of *fengliu*, Paul Kroll uses, among several others, the expression “a gentleman’s polished indifference to polish”.⁴⁶² What is Wang Cihui’s poetic appreciation of dishevelled hair if not a form of “polished indifference to polish”? In another verse touching upon the same topic Wang Cihui calls himself a “lover with wild eyes” 狂眼蕭郎 (*kuangyan Xiao lang*): “the lover with wild eyes is fond of dishevelled hair” 狂眼蕭郎愛亂頭。⁴⁶³ Why are his eyes *kuang* (wild), an adjective which often recurs in Wang Cihui’s poetry?⁴⁶⁴ Because they are unfettered, free to appreciate beauty in all its manifestations. The phrase “wild

⁴⁶⁰ Liu Yiqing, *Shishuo xinyu*, 336. For an English translation of the anecdote about Pei Kai’s natural beauty and elegance, see Mather, *Shih-shuo Hsin-yü*, 333.

⁴⁶¹ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 105.

⁴⁶² Kroll, *A Student’s Dictionary*, 115.

⁴⁶³ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 135.

⁴⁶⁴ According to Geng Chuanyou’s count, the adjective *kuang* occurs seventy-four times within Wang Cihui’s *Yiyu ji*. See Geng Chuanyou, “Yi ge bei wenxueshi yiwang de zhongyao zuojia”, 74.

eyes” therefore refers to Wang Cihui’s unconventional aesthetics, what Xiaorong Li called “his avant-garde taste”.⁴⁶⁵

Wang Cihui’s brief statements explicitly asserting his expertise and taste in terms of female beauty might easily go unnoticed when reading the *Yiyu ji* for the first time, as they are scattered throughout the hundreds of poems belonging to the collection. However, their importance towards our understanding of his *xianglianti* poetry and his self-constructed *fengliu* poetic persona should not be overlooked. By means of these aesthetic judgements in verse form, Wang Cihui presented himself as a connoisseur of women, able to appreciate the different nuances and manifestations of female beauty. He appreciated not only smiles, but also frowns and tears; not only lavishly made-up women, but also totally unadorned ones. Besides helping Wang Cihui in his self-construction of a *fengliu* poetic persona, these scattered statements provide readers with a clue on how to interpret images of female sorrow, anger, and unadorned beauty within the entire *Yiyu ji*: they should be treated as elements of superior beauty and should create a strong emotional and aesthetic response in the reader. These brief statements spread throughout the *Yiyu ji* could be treated as a fragmentary manifesto of Wang Cihui’s own approach towards the appreciation of the feminine in real life and in *xianglianti* poetry. Wang Cihui embodies what Keith McMahon described as “the refined *fengliu* type, the man who is sexually and emotionally ‘open’ to women and who has a sharp eye for subtleties”,⁴⁶⁶ an alternative model of masculinity that became prominent in the seventeenth century.

⁴⁶⁵ Li, “I Sliced My Flesh”, 43.

⁴⁶⁶ McMahon, *Causality and Containment*, 51.

Personalizing *Xianglianti* through Details

Wang Cihui's "sharp eye for subtleties" is particularly evident in his detail-oriented exploration of female charm. Through *xianglianti* poetry the poet captured with words the alluring world of *se*, focusing on its details of aesthetic significance, no matter how impermanent or small. As Xiaorong Li observed, Wang Cihui "tends to sexualize, or more generally sensualize everything in depicting his emotions and intimacy with the women he loved. [. . .] From bite marks to footprints, from the rustling sounds of silk skirts to the jingle-jangle of bracelets, from the fragrance of rouge to the aroma of flowers, the poet would not let the traces and marks left by and on his beloved women escape from his observation. He is meticulous about and self-indulgent in these details."⁴⁶⁷ Many of these have strong erotic undertones, especially those implying physical contact with or proximity to a woman.

A perfect example of erotically charged details are the marks imprinted on a woman's skin (*hen* 痕), causing the reader to fantasize about the pleasant feel of soft and delicate jade-like skin. The following line emphasizes the exquisite delicacy of a woman's skin: "brushing against her body, even silk brocade from Wu leaves marks" 吳綾拂體也生痕.⁴⁶⁸ Even high quality silk from Wu, renowned for its lightness, is not fine enough to cover her delicate skin. The source for this hyperbolic exaltation of a woman's skin might be an anecdote concerning Li Juan 麗娟, one of the favourite palace ladies of Emperor Wu of Han 漢武帝 (r. 140-87 B.C.). Allegedly, Li Juan's "jade skin was soft and her breath was more fragrant than orchids. She did not want clothes and tassels to brush against her, fearing that her body would be left with marks". 玉膚

⁴⁶⁷ Li, "I Sliced My Flesh into Paper", 44.

⁴⁶⁸ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 80.

柔軟，吹氣勝蘭。不欲衣纓拂之，恐體痕也。⁴⁶⁹ By making reference to Wu silk and possibly taking inspiration from the legendary anecdote about one of Emperor Wu's palace ladies, Wang Cihui found a creative way to praise a woman's fine skin within the space of a line.

While the marks caused by silk clothes are of hypothetical and hyperbolic nature, the love bites left by a passionate lover on a woman's body are true and realistic in their physicality. These types of marks, being visible proofs of love play or love-making, have an obvious and strong erotic connotation. Love bites occupy a special position in the scene depicted in the following quatrain:

"Various Compositions on Idle Matters" Poem Number Three

Having brushed her sidelocks, she takes a side glance

The red cotton has just polished the mirror bright and cold

As she tilts her snowlike neck a little to have a look

For the marks left by his teeth, right now she feels anger and happiness.

《閑事雜題》其三

掠鬢初齊側眼看，

紅綿新拭鏡光寒。

斜回雪頸些些見，

貝齒留痕恰惱歡。⁴⁷⁰

In this poem, Wang Cihui adds an unexpected element to the stock scene of a beautiful woman adorning herself in front of the mirror: the teeth marks imprinted on

⁴⁶⁹ Guo Xian, *Han Wudi bie guo*, 4.1b.

⁴⁷⁰ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 83.

the snow-like whiteness of her neck. While love bites and other marks left on a lover's body are common in other pre-modern poetic traditions, such as Latin elegiac poetry and, especially, Sanskrit classical poetry,⁴⁷¹ they seem to appear rarely in traditional Chinese amorous-erotic poetry. The detail of the marks left by a lover on a woman's neck would have probably caused a certain amount of surprise in a pre-modern Chinese reader. Even more astonishing would have been Wang Cihui's mention of love bites, or more precisely of their absence, in the context of a poem on a neighbour girl who had committed suicide by hanging. In describing her lifeless body, the poet's eyes fall on her neck: "her fair neck didn't even bear love bites, but is tied by a belt in a united-heart knot".⁴⁷² 素頸何曾着齒痕，卻教反縛同心結。⁴⁷³ As Xiaorong Li observed, "[a]ssociating the marks on the dead girl's neck caused by the hanging belt with the marks of kiss is not only Wang's way of lamenting a wasted youthful life, but also a reflection of his general tendency to depict sensational subject matter from a sexual and sensual angle."⁴⁷⁴ Due to the rarity of love bites within the Chinese poetic tradition, the shock value and novelty of the poem is even stronger.

Wang Cihui often added his own personal touch to stock scenes of the amorous-erotic tradition by inserting very peculiar, and often sensual, details which cause the poem to stand out. Remaining within the context of the literary *topos* of a beauty gazing into a mirror, in another poem on the same theme Wang Cihui adds his personal touch by making the woman choose a refined and unusual hair accessory to

⁴⁷¹ For a discussion of the role of love-bites and other body marks in Roman lyrical and elegiac poetry, see Sutherland, "Writing (on) Bodies" and the chapter "Bruised Bodies: The Wounds of Love" in Raucci, *Elegiac Eyes*, 35-58. Surprisingly, to this day there are no thorough discussions on love-marks in Sanskrit poetry. I wish to thank Maddalena Italia for providing me with information on the motif of love bites and other similar marks in the Latin and Sanskrit poetic tradition.

⁴⁷² Translation adapted from Li, "I Sliced My Flesh", 45.

⁴⁷³ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 332.

⁴⁷⁴ Li, "I Sliced My Flesh", 45.

adorn her coiffure: “golden cicada and jade swallow hairpins she both dislikes as vulgar / she only inserts an ancient rhino-horn hairpin from Siam” 金蟬玉燕都嫌俗，單插暹羅舊蜜犀。⁴⁷⁵ The woman’s peculiar taste in terms of hair accessories could also be read as an indirect reflection of Wang Cihui’s unconventional aesthetics and, more broadly, of his *fengliu* persona.

Returning to the firstly mentioned mirror-scene quatrain to the title “Xianshi zati” 閑事雜題 (Various Compositions on Idle Matters), the first three lines are a build-up towards the final verse in which the woman notices the love bites on her neck. Seeing the marks causes in her contrasting emotions. She feels anger and happiness at the same time. Anger because they taint the whiteness of her skin and she would have to find a way to hide them from the view of others. Happiness because the very same marks are a visual reminder of her lover, a memory of love imprinted on her body. The love bites imprinted on her neck are probably treated by the fair-skinned woman “as proud proof that a relationship exists”.⁴⁷⁶

We find a similar yet reversed situation in one of the poems that Wang Cihui wrote for A Suo 阿鎖, one of his main lovers, who will be mentioned again later in this chapter together with other women loved by the poet:

After she burst into anger because of misinterpreted half said words

The crook of my arm was full of scattered finger marks.

“Tomorrow morning you should avoid mentioning it in front of others

I won’t allow you, my love, to pull up your sleeves”

嗔怒才因半語訛，

⁴⁷⁵ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 274.

⁴⁷⁶ Sutherland, “Writing (on) Bodies”, 69.

臂彎零亂指痕多。
明朝翻向人前諱，
不許檀郎卷袖羅。⁴⁷⁷

As we can see, in this scene the one bearing marks is not A Suo, but Wang Cihui himself. The finger marks left on the poet's arm are the result of her sudden burst of anger. Considering the fact that Wang Cihui regarded female anger as aesthetically pleasing, we might consider the poem as a playful appreciation of female anger. The playful nature of the poem is emphasized by Wang Cihui himself by means of a self-annotation which states that the composition "made [A Suo] roar with laughter" 爲歡笑絕倒. The element which provoked her laughter is probably A Suo's admonition to Wang Cihui not to show the marks she caused on his arms. In "Gan yong", a poem already mentioned within my earlier discussion of Wang Cihui's appreciation of female anger, Wang Cihui boldly declares: "having my face scratched is simply a small matter, although I walk and sing with my teeth broken,⁴⁷⁸ I am still satisfied" 創痕著面渾閑事，齒折行歌亦可人。⁴⁷⁹ The couplet is intended to be read metaphorically as a portrayal of the poet's attitude towards romantic rejection. Rejection was not lived by the poet as a negative experience and did not prevent him to further seek pleasure "beneath blossoms", as its fifth line recites: "in this unfortunate life of mine, beneath blossoms I am alive" 薄命生涯花底活。⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁷ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 308.

⁴⁷⁸ This is another reference to the anecdote of Xie Kun's failed attempt at seducing his neighbour, which resulted in the woman throwing a shuttle at him and him losing two of his front teeth.

⁴⁷⁹ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 198

⁴⁸⁰ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 198.

In his exploration of the multifarious details of the world of *se*, Wang Cihui poetically engaged all the five senses. A good example of his multisensory appreciation of the sensuous world of *se* is a set of twelve impromptu poems, each focusing on a specific moment of an amorous episode. Throughout the set of poems, the reader is made to experience private and intimate fragments of the poet's life by means of an array of sensory impressions, not limited to the visual sphere. The impromptu nature of the poems is made evident through their collective title: "Jixi kouzhan jueju shi'er shou" 即席口占絕句十二首 (Twelve impromptu quatrains). The phrase *jixi zhankou* 即席口占 refers indeed to spontaneous, extemporaneous compositions, written on the spur of the moment. The set of quatrains might have been written in the social setting of the banquet and were, therefore, created for the immediate enjoyment of fellow men of refined literary taste. As an equally plausible alternative, they could have also been composed in a more intimate and private context, either in the quiet solitude of the poet's studio or even in the intimacy of the bedchamber. The latter setting comes to mind after reading the seventh poem of the set:

In the quietness of the night the cry of the parrot is heard from the other side of the screen

Smelling the faint fragrance of her hair, I wake up from drunkenness

Suddenly on the pillow I chant a poem and compose it,

I wake up the flower-like beauty to recite [the poem] to her.

夜靜鶯哥叫隔屏，

髮香微嗅醉初醒。

偶然枕上哦詩就，

In the last couplet, poetic inspiration visits the poet in the middle of the night, while he lies in bed with a “flower-like beauty” (*ruhua* 如花). Unable to contain himself and eager to share the product of his poetic mind, he wakes his lover and recites the poem to her. The focus on the poet reciting his composition out loud at the end of the quatrain creates a circular structure in which the sense of sound occupies a central position. Both the first and the final line of the quatrain are occupied by auditory impressions: respectively the parrot’s cry and the poet’s voice. Adding an extra layer to the circular structure, both sounds cause someone to be suddenly awakened from sleep: the poet in the first couplet and the beautiful woman in the last. The quatrain is dominated by the sense of sound, yet it also includes the olfactory sphere. In the first couplet, the poet focuses on an olfactory detail, the faint fragrance emanated by the woman’s perfumed hair, thus reinforcing the intimate atmosphere of the private scene to which the reader is given privileged access through verses. As Susan Stewart pointed out in regards to taste and smell in her study of the senses in Western poetry, “the inherent voyeurism of the reader’s position is all the more emphasized by the focus on these non-visual senses so embedded in proximity.”⁴⁸² The detail of the fragrance of the beauty’s hair increases the intimacy of this particular private scene of the poet’s life, to which the reader is given privileged access through the poem lines. It also effectively conveys the physical proximity of the poet to the “flower-like beauty”. Even without the mention of the pillow in the third line, it would still be evident that

⁴⁸¹ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 273.

⁴⁸² Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*, 27.

the poet is lying in bed next to his lover, since as he wakes up, he is able to perceive the faint perfume lingering on her hair.

Other poems within the same set disregard the sense of sight in favour of other sensory impressions. The first poem of the group opens with an auditory impression: “the swishing of her skirt and the sound of her shoes reaching the temple steps / cause lover Xiao to be even more unable to control himself.” 裾飄屨響到寺墀，便遣蕭郎不自持。⁴⁸³ The lack of visual descriptions of the woman’s beauty in the remaining part of the poem causes the reader to focus his attention on the faint sounds presented in the first line. The swishing of the woman’s skirt and the sound of her footsteps are enough to cause excitement in the poet’s heart, as they anticipate the appearance of her naturally beautiful countenance right in front of his eyes. Similarly to the opening poem, the second poem of the set neglects the visual sphere to give prominence to other senses, more precisely those of taste and smell:

Olives are sweet as their aftertaste reaches the teeth,

As the drinking banquet was about to end she repeatedly sniffed a plum blossom.

I guess that on her sleeves and her gauze kerchief,

Still lingers [the fragrance of] a Longtuan tea cake.

橄欖回甘沁齒牙，

酒闌頻嗅小梅花。

懸知袖口羅巾上，

剩卻龍團一餅茶。⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸³ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 272.

⁴⁸⁴ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 272.

The former is here embodied by olives, small fruits initially bitter and sour to the taste, but then surprisingly sweet in their aftertaste. The latter is represented by a plum blossom whose fragrance seems to increase as it is repeatedly inhaled. The two images have the function to lead the reader towards the olfactory impression of the last two lines: the fragrance lingering on the woman's garments, as imagined by the poet, who associates it with the refined Longtuan tea. The poet's fantasizing on the fragrance of her sleeves and kerchief indirectly reveals his wish for proximity and intimacy.

Physical proximity and intimacy are directly represented in several other poems of the set, in particular in poems number four and five, two bed scenes characterised by a bolder eroticism in comparison to the other poems of the set. The fifth poem, an example of Wang Cihui's (relatively few) overtly erotic poems, was singled out for criticism by the Qing lyricist Zou Zhimo 鄒祗謨 (fl. 1666) who criticized the last two lines of the poem – “she let her lover caress her thoroughly under the quilt / suddenly, the red slippers appeared beside the pillow” 教郎被底摩娑遍，忽見紅幫露枕邊⁴⁸⁵ – by labelling them as “too craftily obscene” (*xian xie guoshen* 纖褻過甚).⁴⁸⁶ Without the same level of boldness of its preceding poem, the sixth poem of the set also focuses on the sense of touch:

Waking up from a dream with wine induced thirst, I peeled a tangerine.

In the tenth month the frost is light, still carries some bitterness.

I am grateful to the cotton-like hands of the jade person,

for they often warmed up my cold fingers.

⁴⁸⁵ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 273.

⁴⁸⁶ Feng Jinbo, *Ciyuan cui bian*, 8.6a.

夢回酒渴破漳柑，
十月霜輕尚帶酸。
生受玉人綿樣手，
爲郎頻熨指尖寒。⁴⁸⁷

The poem opens with the poet waking up from sleep and peeling a tangerine to quench his thirst. The mention of this apparently irrelevant action performed by the poet (line 1) together with that of the early winter season as a temporal setting for the romantic encounter (line 2) is just a pretext to appreciate the woman's soft hands. The thematic core of the poem belongs to the last two lines where the poet celebrates the "jade-person's cotton-like hands". The appreciation of the woman's fingers is not visual, as it is the case of many poems centred on a woman's slender fingers, such as Han Wo's "Yong shou" 詠手 (On a Hand)⁴⁸⁸, but is instead tactile in nature. Through the character 綿 *mian* (cotton) the poet emphasizes their softness to the touch. The tactile appreciation culminates in the final line where the poet expresses heartfelt gratitude to the hands which lovingly provided some relief from the winter chill to his cold fingers. All the poems of the impromptu set offer glimpses of Wang Cihui's amorous experiences by capturing very specific details which struck a chord with the poet's aesthetic and emotional sensibility and remained impressed in his mind. Within the *Yiyu ji* we find many other instances of romantic episodes re-enacted in verse through the representation of selected multisensory memories.

⁴⁸⁷ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 272.

⁴⁸⁸ Chen Jilong, *Han Wo shi zhu*, 365-366.

Inscribing Private Memories in *Xianglianti* Poetry

Private memories are often the inspiration behind Wang Cihui's compositions. A set of eleven poems he wrote on the various gifts and love tokens he received from one of his lovers clearly shows the intimate link between memories of private experiences and poetic inspiration. Each object triggers a very specific memory in the poet, the memory of a selected intimate moment he shared with his beloved. The poet chose to emphasize the individual reminiscences by using the phrase *xiangde Shuangwen* 想得雙文 (I think of Shuangwen) within each quatrain. The recurring use of the introductory phrase *xiangde Shuangwen* is a variation on the phrase *yide Shuangwen* 憶得雙文 (I recall Shuangwen) used by the Mid Tang poet Yuan Zhen in his set of five quatrains under the collective title "Zayi" 雜憶 (Various memories).⁴⁸⁹ The name Shuangwen refers to a woman with a doubled name - for example, Yingying 鶯鶯, the female protagonist of Yuan Zhen's famous *chuanqi* 傳奇 tale "Yingying zhuan" 鶯鶯傳 (The Story of Yingying).⁴⁹⁰ Wang Cihui's indebtedness to Yuan Zhen in this set of poems is not limited to the aforementioned phrase. However, his eleven quatrains were not intended as a mere exercise in poetic imitation, as was the case of his poems "Xiao Yuan Xiang ti" 效元相體 (In imitation of Yuan Zhen's style), two quatrains in which the words *yide Shuangwen* appear at the beginning of each second couplet.⁴⁹¹ In his set of eleven quatrains, Wang Cihui integrates poetic imitation with personal experience. The personal nature of the poems is made clear by the long self-explanatory title given to the set, which acts as a preface to the poems:

⁴⁸⁹ Yuan Zhen, *Yuan Zhen ji jiaozhu*, vol. 3, 1437.

⁴⁹⁰ This was pointed out by Shields in her discussion of Yuan Zhen's *yanshi*; see Shields, "Defining Experience", 63.

⁴⁹¹ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 32.

During the spring or summer of the Dingmao year [1627], I left [home] and settled outside of Lotus Lake. For a long time my Ding Niang had requested [love tokens]. Frequent were the gifts I received from my Xu Shu. [As the gifts] stirred my feelings and lingered in my thoughts, I composed a poem on each object. On my returning boat I recalled and recorded them as a substitute for a face-to-face meeting. I placed them in my sleeves for ten years. Certainly, they have not faded away.

丁卯春夏，余離居芙蓉湖外。久闕丁娘之索，屢勤徐淑之遺。觸緒縈思，每物成詠。歸舟追錄一過，聊代晤言。置袖十年，定不漫滅。⁴⁹²

No mention is made of the indebtedness to Yuan Zhen in the long prefatory title.

By means of the collective introductory title, poetic imitation is moved to the background, while the private nature of the poems moves to the foreground. Each poem is presented as an emotionally genuine creation, as the product of stirred feelings and lingering thoughts, which are in turn the consequence of the numerous gifts the poet received from his lover. To each quatrain the poet himself appended a short self-annotation (*zizhu* 自注) to clarify which particular object had given rise to the specific memory celebrated in the last two lines of the poem: tea (*cha* 茶); a medicinal herb (*yao* 藥); agarwood (*chenshui* 沉水); a lined garment (*jiayi* 袷衣); a belt (*peijin* 佩巾); mixed fragrances (*zaxiang* 雜香); copper pokers (*tongzhu* 銅箸); fruit (*guoren* 果仁); a rose (*meigui* 玫瑰) a decorated pouch (*huadai* 畫袋) a white feathered fan (*baiyu shan* 白羽扇); her handwritten characters on a letter (*fengzi* 封字), as a metonym for a handwritten letter. Each gift evokes in the poet's mind a specific memory associated with his lover. Let us look at the sixth poem of the set, the one inspired by the mixed fragrances the poet received from his lover, in order to have

⁴⁹² Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 71.

a concrete example of how the gifts are used as a pretext to evoke private memories of love:

Ambergris⁴⁹³ and stone-leaf are each full of fragrance
How can they reach [the intensity of] the own fragrance of my lover's body?
I think of when I held Shuangwen's hands
At once I smelled the scent of her breath and the fragrance of flowers
龍涎石葉各氤氳，
爭及歡來體自芬。
想得雙文載攜手，
語香花氣一時聞。⁴⁹⁴

The poem is another example of Wang Cihui's capacity of going beyond the visual in his exploration of the world of *shengse* and in his celebration of feminine attractiveness. The poem captures a fleeting moment that remained impressed in the poet's olfactory memory: the moment when he was inebriated by his lover's fragrance as he held her hands. The mixed fragrances which were given to the poet as a gift thus become a pretext for celebrating the woman's attractiveness in olfactory terms. They are also used as a term of comparison to emphasize the fineness of the fragrance emanated by the woman's body. When read in connection with Yuan Zhen's set of quatrains on Shuangwen, the poem shares the sensual attention to the woman's fragrance with the final couplet of the first poem of the mid Tang poet's set: "I recall Shuangwen - when I had achieved her inner [chamber] / Deep inside her jade lintels, I sensed her hidden fragrance."⁴⁹⁵ 憶得雙文通內裡，玉櫳深處暗聞香。⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹³ Literally meaning "dragon saliva", *longyan* 龍涎 refers to ambergris, a substance produced in the intestines of sperm whales which has been used for centuries as a perfume ingredient. As for *shiye* 石葉, literally meaning "stone leaf", I was not able to identify this particular type of fragrant substance.

⁴⁹⁴ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 72.

⁴⁹⁵ Translated by Shields in Shields, "Defining Experience", 76.

⁴⁹⁶ Yuan Zhen, *Yuan Zhen ji jiaozhu*, vol. 3, 1437.

The eleven poems on the memories triggered by various love tokens are not the only example of poems which Wang Cihui wrote about a specific woman he knew in real life. Excluding Wang Cihui's wife, on whom the poet, rather than composing *xianglianti* pieces, mainly wrote poems documenting her illness and mourning her early death, three women stand out for their recurrence within the *Yiyu ji*: A Suo 阿鎖, A Yao 阿姚, and the unnamed woman simply known by the generic name of *geren* 個人 (that person). We might assume that these were the women who had the strongest emotional impact on the poet's sentimental life. Chinese scholars have spilled much ink on the identity of the three women and the type of relationship that they had with the late Ming poet. Among the three, A Yao and *geren* attracted most of the scholarly attention. A major scholarly debate concerning the identity of *geren* is whether she was: one of the female servants belonging to Wang Cihui's household; a courtesan; another name that the poet used for A Yao; or simply a product of Wang Cihui's poetic fantasy.⁴⁹⁷ As for A Yao, scholars disagree as to whether she was a servant or a professional entertainer. There are also different interpretations of the type of relationship that tied her to the poet, more precisely as to whether she became Wang Cihui's concubine or she was simply one of his several lovers.⁴⁹⁸ I do not intend to delve deeply into questions concerning the women's social position and the specificity of their relationship to the poet, as not only these aspects have already been discussed by others in enough detail, but they are also of secondary importance to my study of Wang Cihui's *xianglianti* poetry. What mainly interests me is the function played by these three (and several other) women of Wang Cihui's life within his *xianglianti* corpus. How did Wang Cihui use these real (or, at least, allegedly real) women in his poetic creation? What did the use of flesh-and-blood women add to Wang Cihui's *xianglianti* corpus?

⁴⁹⁷ For a summary of the different theories concerning the identity of *geren* see Geng Chuanyou, "Yi ge bei wenxueshi yiwang de zhongyao zuojia", 59-61.

⁴⁹⁸ For a summary of the different theories concerning the identity of A Yao see Geng Chuanyou, "Yi ge bei wenxueshi yiwang de zhongyao zuojia", 54-59.

I argue that by writing poems about the women he loved, Wang Cihui further individualized his *xianglianti* production. By making explicit the autobiographical nature (or, at least, the autobiographical relevance) of his poetry, Wang Cihui claimed the intimate scenes and the heartfelt words recorded in his verses to be closely connected to his own life experiences. In this way, he consolidated his image as a *fengliu* poet and as a man with an amorous nature. In the light of those poems which have a self-declared autobiographical nature by means of their titles and self-annotations, the entire *xianglianti* corpus within Wang Cihui's *Yiyu ji* can be read as a collection of snippets creating a fragmentary autobiographical account of the poet's sentimental life.

I hereby take the case of A Suo to show how Wang Cihui used his lovers to personalize his *xianglianti* production. This case study is particularly interesting since some of the poems on A Suo are accompanied by brief self-annotations emphasizing the biographical relevance of the compositions. From one of these annotations written by the poet himself, we know that A Suo was a courtesan who lived in Beijing; more precisely, "she resided in Jiutiao *hutong*; her door faced a stone well" 居九條衚衕，門臨石井。⁴⁹⁹ By providing the reader with the specific location where A Suo lived, Wang Cihui probably intended to emphasize the fact that A Suo was not a generic stock image of a beautiful woman, but a flesh-and-blood courtesan with whom he was acquainted in real life. Throughout the poems on A Suo, one can find several clues to her status as a courtesan. A Suo's madam - her *amu* 阿母 or *aniang* 阿娘 (literally meaning "mommy") - is mentioned more than once by Wang Cihui. For example, in the following poem, A Suo worries that her madam might discover the special bond which ties her to the poet:

Having secretly set the joyful date a few days in advance,

You gave away your gold bracelet in exchange for bamboo mats and plates.

Fearing in your heart that the madam would question you over and over again,

⁴⁹⁹ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 299.

You just said that your lover's arrival was a chance occurrence.

密訂歡期數日前，
自將金釧治盤筵
心嫌阿母叨叨問，
只說郎來是偶然。⁵⁰⁰

Her status as a professional entertainer is also hinted at by her frequent association with the context of the banquet. The banquet mat (*yan* 筵) repeatedly appears when A Suo is mentioned. In one of the quatrains that Wang Cihui wrote about her, A Suo is presented as “a powdered Ruan Ji” (*fen Bubing* 粉步兵) and a “recorder of matters” (*lushi* 錄事).⁵⁰¹ Both expressions show a close connection with the world of banqueting, a social context in which female entertainers occupied a central position. Since Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210-263) was famous for his love of drinking, it is safe to assume that “a powdered Ruan Ji” refers to a female equivalent of the Jin dynasty poet. Being a good drinker is a quality which one would expect of a professional entertainer, who often had to drink together with banquet guests and take part in a variety of drinking games. The expression “recorder of matters” was used as a synonym of “courtesan” (*ji* 妓) and shows an intimate connection between professional entertainers and the practice of drinking games. Since it was used as an alternative to the term *jiujiu* 酒糾 (the supervisor of wine), the “matters” (*shi* 事) which courtesans had to record were each guest's performance in the drinking game.⁵⁰²

⁵⁰⁰ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 306.

⁵⁰¹ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 306.

⁵⁰² Both expressions, *lushi* and *jiujiu*, are used to refer to courtesans in Lu You's *Lao xue an biji* 老學庵筆記 (Jotted Notes from Laoxue Studio): See Lu You, *Lao xue an biji*, 6.82.

A Suo, with whom the poet had a romance lasting at least several months, is first introduced in the *Yiyu ji* within a set of three poems by the title “Zuo qing A Suo” 左卿阿鎖 (My Dear Miss Zuo A Suo).⁵⁰³ Throughout the set Wang Cihui celebrates her beauty and her charming manners, especially in the following lines: “pure like jade, brightly beautiful like a flower, her elegance sets her apart from the crowd / once again the old fragrance is seen within the Zuo family” 玉淨花明秀出群，左家重見舊時芬 (poem no. 1); “with her simple allure, at first glance one suspects her to be the moon” 素艷乍看疑是月 (poem no. 1); “it is hard to rely on beautiful words to repay her charming smile” 難倚麗詞酬巧笑 (poem no. 2). He also documents the beginning of their relationship, the new joy (新歡 *xinhuan*) that A Suo found through the poet. The three poems of the above-mentioned set are the first of a series of compositions (twenty-four in total, mostly belonging to sets of poems) all dedicated to the same woman which can be found within the *Yiyu ji*: two poems titled “Zai fang Zuo qing” 再訪左卿 (Visiting Again My Dear Miss Zuo);⁵⁰⁴ three poems titled “Tong A da Yechen zhai zhong ye ji wei lu” 同阿大野臣齋中夜集圍爐 (Gathering at Night in the Study of the Humble Official with A Suo);⁵⁰⁵ one individual poem titled “A Suo xue zhong xia ma” 阿鎖雪中下馬 (A Suo Dismounting a Horse in the Snow);⁵⁰⁶ another individual poem under the title “Zuo ji xianhua” 左姬閑話 (Lady Zuo’s Idle Talk);⁵⁰⁷ two poems titled “Bieyu” 別語 (Parting Words);⁵⁰⁸ and a set of sixteen poems whose long

⁵⁰³ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 298-299

⁵⁰⁴ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 299-300.

⁵⁰⁵ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 300-301.

⁵⁰⁶ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 301-302.

⁵⁰⁷ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 303-304.

⁵⁰⁸ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 304.

prefatory title - translated in full right below – together with their accompanying self-annotations will be discussed in more detail in the present section:

When I was about to leave, A Suo wanted me to finish writing the previous poems, eleven in total. After a while, with an unsatisfied look on her face, she said: “These words are too refined, I do not use these [type of words]. You could compose a few other pieces. Take those traces of our love relationship in the past few months which are clearly imprinted in your heart and record them. No lies, no seductively alluring [words/images]. Do not praise my looks and my skills. If any of your words violates [these rules], then you will be penalized with a winecup.” I said: “Of course. However, each time a poem is finished and you, my darling, think it is acceptable, you will also pour yourself a full cup and enjoy it. How does it sound?” With a smile, she promised. Thereupon, I composed [these poems] on the spot to accompany our wine drinking.

臨行，阿鎖欲盡寫前詩凡十一首。既而色有未滿曰：“斯語太文，妾不用此，可爲別製數章，取數月來情事縱跡歷歷於心者譜之。勿誑，勿艷，勿譽妾姿藝。如一語有犯，即罰君一杯。”余曰：“固然。但每詩成而卿以爲可，亦引滿賞此，何如？”一笑許諾，遂口占爲下酒。⁵⁰⁹

The long title serves as an introduction to the entire set and provides valuable information on the genesis of the sixteen quatrains. The creative process behind the poems saw the active participation of A Suo. In this specific occasion, in the relaxed, yet melancholy context of a night of drinking before a long-term parting, the courtesan acted as both muse and poetic judge to the poet. As the prefatory title narrates, the poems were not only inspired, but also requested and judged by A Suo herself. Feeling unsatisfied with some of Wang Cihui's previous verses, she demanded a new set of poems, which would abide to her own rules, namely: “do not lie, do not [use] seductively alluring [words], do not praise my looks and my skills.” 勿誑，勿艷，勿譽妾姿藝. A Suo also requested that the poems should avoid excessively refined

⁵⁰⁹ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 305.

language. As it is revealed by two of the annotations within the set, A Suo did not share Wang Cihui's erudition. Here is the annotation to the fifth poem of the set as an example: "She asked me the meaning of the character *liu* 絡 (skein, lock [of hair]). I explained it using [a phrase from] a Tang poem: "a skein of dark hair", yet she was still not convinced with the meaning. I explained it once again using the local speech as "combing the hair in three skeins". Only then she was content and that was all. 問余絡字義，余解以唐詩青絲一絡，意猶未愜，再解以方言，三絡梳頭，始鬯然耳。⁵¹⁰

The poet's self-annotations to his sixteen quatrains on A Suo might be easily overlooked when reading the entire set, especially in Zheng Qingmao's annotated edition, where the annotations added by Wang Cihui himself are printed exactly in the same font as the numerous interlinear annotations by others. However, they are worth paying attention to. Together with the prefatory title, they add a great deal to our understanding of the poems in their original context. The annotations scattered throughout the set indirectly point to the authenticity of the poems and allow us to have a clear idea of the diverse functions which can be covered by a *xianglianti* composition. In the set of sixteen impromptu quatrains on his romance with A Suo, Wang Cihui fully exploited the multifaceted expressive potential of *xianglianti* poetry. The poems simultaneously perform multiple functions, as I will now briefly discuss.

First of all, the most evident function performed by the poems is a purely ludic one, the typical function of banquet poetry: namely, to provide an accompaniment to a night of drinking. The impromptu poems add an element of refinement to the activity of drinking by forming an integral part of the drinking game played by the poet and his

⁵¹⁰ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 306.

lover. The poems are also used as a means to keep alive Wang Cihui's and A Suo's shared memories of love. The poet inscribed in verse those aspects of their relationship which left a stronger impression on his heart, thus creating an eternal memory of their romance. Through the poems he immortalized those fleeting yet emotionally significant moments when A Suo revealed her affection for him. Because of the rules dictated by A Suo, rather than focusing on the courtesan's beautiful appearance, on the allure of surfaces, Wang Cihui had to devote his entire attention to the emotional bond between them. In many instances, he chose to show A Suo's deep affection by recalling small details and actions which revealed her feelings to the attentive observer. Within the set, A Suo's feelings for the poet are often shown indirectly, mainly through gestures and actions, rather than through passionate declarations of love. "For your lover you kept a phoenix tea cake" 爲郎留住鳳團茶 or "you gave away your gold bracelet in exchange for bamboo mats and plates" 自將金釧治盤筵, Wang Cihui recalls in his verses. These actions were probably selected by the poet as emotionally significant, as proof of her love for him, as they revealed the favourite treatment that she reserved to him. The fifth poem of the set clearly shows that A Suo treated Wang Cihui very differently from others:

The raven-black coil [of your hair] not yet finished, you hated being rushed

You evaded [them saying] you had not returned from yesterday's wealthy home.

Suddenly, it was reported that the one on your mind was dismounting the horse,

With a smile holding your dark locks you came out of the curtains.

盤鴉未竟厭人催，

推托侯家昨未回。

忽報意中人下馬，

笑持青縵出簾來。⁵¹¹

The spontaneity with which A Suo rushes out of the curtains with her hair undone as soon as she hears that Wang Cihui is on his way reveals the excitement that she feels when in the company of the poet and the intimacy established between the two of them. She did not feel the need to show herself to her lover all made-up. Considering my previous comments on Wang Cihui's penchant for unadorned beauty (epitomized by uncombed hair and a face free from rouge and powder), we might assume that she knew that there was no need to rely on the art of beautification to please the poet. This is further confirmed by another of the sixteen quatrains of the set, in which A Suo removes the powder on her face in occasion of the poet's arrival:

When I arrived you tried your best to wash away the lead powder,
You lit up the incense in the burner yourself and poured the tea yourself.
With your slender hand especially holding a bronze key,
You asked your love: "can you manage the house"?
來時盡意洗鉛華，
自炷爐香自潑茶。
纖手特操青鎖鑰，
問郎堪否便當家。⁵¹²

Another function performed by the poems of the set is to create an even stronger emotional connection between the poet and the beloved. Wang Cihui used his poetry

⁵¹¹ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 306.

⁵¹² Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 307.

as an emotional tool able to trigger deep emotions in A Suo's heart. The majority of the annotations to the set keep track of the number of times that Wang Cihui's poems were deemed satisfactory by A Suo and, as a consequence, the courtesan had to drink a cup of wine. Some of the annotations also record her spontaneous reaction to the poems. While the fifteenth poem of the set "made her roar with laughter" 爲歡笑絕倒,⁵¹³ the tenth and final quatrain moved her to tears: "after she finished listening [to this poem], she became sad. As she took up the wine to pour it to herself, tears were already brimming" 聽罷淒然，取酒自斟，而淚已盈盈矣，⁵¹⁴ reads the annotation to the tenth; "as she saw this, she covered her face sobbing. She tossed the cup away and lay down. The cart driver was urging [me to get on] the carriage. I also could not keep on drinking wine anymore" 見此掩面唏噓，擲盃而卧，僕人促駕，余亦不能再飲以酒矣，⁵¹⁵ reads the annotation to the final poem. It is clear that the poems had a powerful effect on their direct recipient, probably due to the authenticity of the emotions and the truth of the events recorded through their lines.

Concluding Remarks on Wang Cihui's *Xianglianti* Poetry

The composition of *xianglianti* poetry was a life-long activity for Wang Cihui. The poet successfully personalized the genre and thoroughly explored its thematic potentials. He did not merely exploit it as a ludic medium or as a means to display his literary talent, but used it to project his identity as a *fengliu* poet.

⁵¹³ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 308.

⁵¹⁴ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 307.

⁵¹⁵ Zheng Qingmao, *Wang Cihui shiji*, 308.

It is obviously impossible to prove whether the amorous and sensual scenes portrayed in Wang Cihui's *xianglianti* poetry correspond to the actual truth. This matter, however, should not concern us. Even though we cannot gauge with certainty the authenticity of the facts and feelings recorded throughout the *Yiyu ji*, what is important is Wang Cihui's effort into presenting his collection as a reflection of his inner and outer life. By emphasizing the non-fictional nature and the autobiographical relevance of a considerable number of his verses, Wang Cihui appeared to follow the dictum *shi yan zhi*. He used *xianglianti* poetry according to the orthodox function of *shi* poetry, namely to articulate the self. The self he projected was that of a boldly amorous man, who placed *qing* at the forefront of his life and poetic practice.

CONCLUSION

Despite the centuries separating them, Yang Weizhen and Wang Cihui can be regarded as both belonging to the same cross temporal literary community, a community of *fengliu* authors of *xianglianti* poetry. Although a great number of pre-modern Chinese poets tried their hand at composing ornate *shi* compositions on the theme of love and women, Yang Weizhen and Wang Cihui are among the ones who stood out for the special attention they devoted to this type of poetry. The element which ties both authors to Han Wo is not *xianglianti* poetry per se, but the prominence they gave to it. As I have shown in my discussion of Yang Weizhen's and Wang Cihui's respective *xianglianti* production, there are some substantial differences in the way the two poets approached the same poetic subgenre. Yang Weizhen's approach is mainly imitative and ludic. He found in *xianglianti* poetry a perfect means to create images of female beauty and charm to be collectively enjoyed with like-minded literati. Wang Cihui's *xianglianti* practice, despite not being devoid of imitative and ludic aspects, is, instead, tinged with a strong autobiographical flavour. The late Ming poet often used *xianglianti* poetry as an autobiographical medium to record his own love experiences and to reinforce his identity as an amorous man and a fine connoisseur of female beauty, emphasizing by means of titles and self-annotations the real existence of some of the beauties immortalized in his verses. With different aims in mind, both Yang Weizhen and Wang Cihui followed Han Wo's footsteps in bringing poetry which was supposedly frivolous, and even possibly regarded as morally dangerous, to the foreground. It is true that in the preface he wrote to his "Xulian ji", Yang Weizhen took his distances from his "beautiful words in the air". Yet the very fact that he wrote a

preface to legitimize his verses, without assigning them a forced allegorical reading, already reveals his willingness to promote and transmit *xianglianti* poetry. It was probably also the effort they put into promoting *xianglianti* poetry which gained Yang Weizhen and Wang Cihui the association with the word *yao* 妖 (demon, demonic) and made them outstanding and inspiring members of what I termed a cross temporal *fengliu* community of authors of *xianglianti* poetry. Using the motif of the concept of demons of literature and demonic poetry as a thread, several centuries later and across the seas, we find in the Japanese *kanshi* poet Mori Shuntô 森春濤 (1819-1889) of the Meiji era (1867-1912) a true follower of Yang Weizhen's and Wang Cihui's example in the practice, promotion, and legitimization of *xianglianti* poetry.⁵¹⁶ Criticized for his passion for *xianglianti* poetry, Mori Shuntô fully embraced the derogatory appellations of "demon of literature" and "devil of poetry" as long-desired titles:

In the past, Wang Yi regarded Yang Weizhen as a "demon of literature", probably because he composed bamboo brach [songs] and the "Supplementary Dressing Case". I am also someone who enjoys fragrant dressing case and bamboo branch [compositions]. To receive some day the appellations of both "demon of literature" and "devil of poetry" has been a lifelong desire. If distinguished masters worthy masters rebuke me, I will certainly not refuse [their criticism].⁵¹⁷

昔王常宗以文妖目楊鐵崖，蓋以有竹枝續匳等作也。予亦喜香匳竹枝者，他日得文妖詩魔竝稱，則一生情願了矣。若夫秀師呵責，固所不辭也。⁵¹⁸

The literary community of *fengliu* authors of *xianglianti* poetry was not only cross-temporal, but also transnational, as it extended beyond the borders of China. By looking at Sino-Japanese interactions in the creation of poetry on love and

⁵¹⁶ On Shuntô's role in the promotion of *xianglianti* poetry in Meiji Japan, see Tuck, "The Poetry of Dialogue", 76-90.

⁵¹⁷ For my translation I also consulted Tuck's translation of the same passage; see Tuck, "The Poetry of Dialogue", 88.

⁵¹⁸ Morikawa Kenzô, ed., *Shuntô shishô*, 5.9a, quoted in Tuck, "The Poetry of Dialogue", 88.

women, Robert Tuck and Xiaorong Li have both acknowledged and partly explored the cross-temporal and transnational nature of the *xianglianti* tradition - Tuck in a chapter in his PhD thesis on poetic sociality in Meiji Japan which focuses on Mori Shuntô's adaptation of Qing dynasty poetics, with a special focus on *xianglianti* poetry,⁵¹⁹ and Xiaorong Li in her article on the Meiji anthology *Meiren qiantai shi* 美人千態詩 (Poems on a Thousand Manners of Beauties), an anthology of poems on the theme of beautiful women written in classical Chinese by both Chinese and Japanese poets.⁵²⁰ Although my dissertation only looks at two representative figures within this cross temporal and transnational community, my hope is that more scholars will continue to follow this research path and that their combined effort will lead to tracing a detailed history of this literary community. Another major aspect discussed throughout my thesis which deserves further investigation is the complex and tense relationship between amorous-erotic poetry and traditional Chinese orthodox poetics. It is my intention to devote future research to the exploration of the existing tension between the amorous-erotic and the moral in the Chinese tradition.

⁵¹⁹ Tuck, "The Poetry of Dialogue", 76-90.

⁵²⁰ See Li, "Beauty without Borders".

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