(Trans)Culturally Transgendered:

Reading Transgender Narratives in (Late) Imperial China

by

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Abstract

This dissertation takes as its subject of study transcultural and historical investigations of the production and meanings of transgender in imperial China. I see this dissertation as part of the Chinese transgender studies scholarship pioneered by "beginning" works, such as *Transgender China,* that try to respond to this "transcultural turn" facing contemporary Anglophone-dominant transgender scholarship. My dissertation takes as its task not only to sketch out, for the first time in the English language, the largely understudied body of transgender existences in the Chinese texts of premodern China, but to systematically reexamine the lives of some transgendered individuals that survived its time via these texts and their significance in shaping a premodern Chinese transgender history, and to open up new approaches to world transgender experience of existences and formations as a whole.

Throughout my analysis, I specify "transgender in imperial China" as an analytical term to describe people whose sex identity, gender identity or expression is perceived and/or interpreted to be ambiguous or transformable. For more effective discussion and for concerns of length, this dissertation will organize the discussion around three major types of transgender existences in imperial China, particularly in the later imperial Ming-Qing era: *erxing* (two-shaped), *nü hua nan* (FTM), and *nan hua nü* (MTF), as exemplifications of the historical Chineseness of transgender in global transgender history. Following my threefold organization of Chinese transgender phenomena, I structure the discussion into five parts. Chapter One, "Understanding *erxing*, *nan hua nü,* and *nü hua nan*: Competing Discourses," provides a textual journey

of *erxing*, *nan hua nü,* and *nü hua nan* records and accounts. Chapter Two, "The Threat of the Hidden Penis: The Criminalization of *Erxing*", investigates a group of early Chinese transgender individuals: the two-shaped *erxing* (roughly equal to the modern term of intersex), who were, more often than not, portrayed as sex criminals who lived in one sex, yet possessed both female and male genitals at the same time. Chapter Three, "The Absence of the Penis: The Li Liangyu Cycle and the Homoerotic Turn of *Nan hua nü*", turns to the reverse MTF accounts. In the last chapter, Chapter Four, "The Allure of the Penis: 'Getting a Son' and *Nü hua nan*", looks into a prevalent formula demonstrated by many of the Ming-Qing accounts of FTM sex transformation, particularly their sudden discursive outburst in the Qing dynasty. My conclusion, "The Promise of the Strange: Transgender in Imperial China as Ethical Objects as Ethical Beings," offers a holistic look at the three types of transgender existences discussed in this project and summarizes the major aspects of different modes of recognizing transgender in imperial China that these existences have collectively demonstrated.

This study elaborates on the malleability, constructedness, and the historicity of sex that are inherent in transgender narratives in imperial China, particularly in late imperial China of the Ming and Qing discourses of the strange. The dissertation proposes that being constantly projected onto the discursive realm as the subject of "the strange" rather than the creator of discourses, being constantly projected onto the discursive realm as the subject of "the strange" rather than the creator of discourses, they constitute what I take to be "ethical objects." As ethical objects, earlier Chinese transgenders, such as *erxing*, *nan hua nü,* and *nü hua nan*, are never subjects, but the objects, of "the morality

of behaviors." They are critical to the operation of morality only when they become the content that moral codes are exercised upon.

To summarize, this dissertation marks an effort to locate both the dissonance and the alliance among earlier and late imperial Chinese transgender narratives, and different modes of moral behaviors that these ethical objects of strange reveal and rely on. Certainly, I am also well aware that my work has its own limitation and constraints. Yet, Chinese transgender studies, and transcultural transgender studies at large, can be greatly enriched if scholars can further explore the potential of the field.

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Introduction

Erxing, *Nan hua nü,* and *Nü hua nan*: Recognizing Transgender in Imperial China

[To] persist in one's own being is only possible on the condition that we are engaged in receiving and offering recognition. If we are not recognizable, then it is not possible to persist in one's own being, and we are not possible beings; we have been foreclosed from possibility. (Butler *Undoing Gender*: 31)

Recognition is a necessary condition of attaining culturally intelligible personhood, according to Judith Butler, one of the foundational scholars of the contemporary reexamination of gender categories and identities. This recognition might be an indulgence for "those who already know themselves to be possible;" yet, for "those who are still looking to become possible," "possibility is a necessity" for existence (*Undoing Gender* 31). If this is the case, I would add, for those whose existences were scattered in the domain of the strange, often doubted, de-materialized, sometimes idealized, occasionally demonized, and largely forgotten, recognition and possibility are not only necessities, but also urgencies.

Here, I refer to many transgender existences, including *erxing* (true hermaphrodite), *nan hua nu* (male-to-female sex transformation), and *nu hua nan* (female-to-male sex transformation), buried in sparse, obscure, and often trivialized (though once popular) discourses in imperial China since antiquity. In these discourses, one is led into a bizarre world of seemingly abnormal phenomena – of males who menstruate or give birth, of females who grow beards or impregnate other women, of men who turn into women and women who turn into men in various situations, of men who lived as women and women who lived as men due to various circumstances, and even of individuals who were said to be capable of manipulating their genital organs so as to appear sometimes male, sometimes female.

The recognition of these Chinese ancient transgender existences marks an effort both to conduct an overdue systematic investigation of a uniquely Chinese cultural framework of conceptualizing transgender, and to offer a transcultural response to the changing contours of contemporary transgender studies in Europe and North America.

Hence, my dissertation takes as its task not only to sketch out, for the first time in the English language, the largely understudied body of transgender existences in the Chinese texts of premodern China, but to systematically reexamine the lives of some transgendered individuals that survived its time via these texts and their significance in shaping a premodern Chinese transgender history, and to open up new approaches to world transgender experience of existences and formations as a whole.

Call for a Transcultural Turn: Changing Contours of Transgender Studies

Since the late 1990s, transgender issues have increasingly attracted scholarly attention in Western countries. In less than two decades, discussions of transgender and related issues, including but not excluded to sex anomaly, gender variance, bodies with ambiguity, identity in transition (or transitioned), intersex management, and transgender rights, have gradually developed into a topic of serious and respectful inquiry in many interrelated disciplines such as medicine[1], biology[2], sociology[3], anthropology[4], cultural studies[5], and legal studies[6]. Though different disciplines may take different approaches to and emphases on transgender studies, overall they provide a critical moment for us to rethink, and sometimes to unthink, some of our stubborn beliefs about understanding the self, the body, sex categories, and their relation to culture and history.

Many anglophone scholars understand the term "transgender" in English as defined by Virginia Prince, who, in 1979, proposed it as a term to replace the mostly medical term "transsexual." Prince believed people could never transform their essential biological sex by changing their bodies. For Prince, the status of "transsexual" is never possible to achieve; instead, she suggested "transgender" as a more appropriate notion. Despite the origin of the term as a reaffirmation of the immutable, dichotomous sexes, the contemporary use of "transgender" has far surpassed its original schema. As

[1] See, for instance, Von Krafft-Ebing; Hirschfeld; Benjamin; Dreger.
[2] See, for instance, Roughgarden.
[3] See, for instance, Duggan; Grabham; Holmes; Namaste; Vidal-Ortiz; Califia; Namaste; Meyerowitz; Kotula; Feinberg.
[4] See, for instance, Mak; Sandy and Goodenough; Herdt.
[5] See, for instance, Dufresony; Barbin and Foucault; Wilchins; Prosser; Bolin; Hodgkison; Califia; Fausto-Sterling,; Namaste; Kotula; Meyerowitz; Butler; Prince.
[6] See, for instance, Currah, Juang, and Shannon; Donahue; Spade; Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitock.

"transgender" gains more currency in both academic and popular discussions, it remains a much contested and complicated social category that has been increasingly employed as a challenging, mobilizing, and inclusive way of conceptualizing the fluidity and plurality of sex, gender and sexuality.

Scholars have different understanding of what "transgender" means and incorporates. Sociologist Salvador Vidal-Ortiz defines transgender in relation to the conformity of gender expression to social gender expectations. He claims:

> Transgenderism … includes people whose gender expression is non-conformant with gender role expectations of males and females in a given territory or society. Cross-dressers, transvestites, and transsexual are all often covered under the transgender category. Moreover, people of any sexual orientation whose gender expression remains outside a rigid or gender conformist system often identity as transgenders. (224)

On the other hand, other gender scholars, such as K.L. Broad, tend to consider transgender in concrete terms as multiple subject positions and extend the concept as an umbrella term that might "includ[e] transvestites, transsexuals, crossdressers, transgenderists, gender blenders, gender benders, drag queens, bi-genders, feminine men, androgynies, drag kings, intersexuals, masculine women, passing men, gender dysphorics and others who might consider themselves a 'gender outlaw'" (qtd in Vidal-Ortiz 263).

Nonetheless, the catch-all capacity of "transgender" to encompass such a huge canvas of lives has not been accepted without certain doubts. Transgender scholars and activists caution against the risks implied in the possibilities that the all-inclusive term "transgender" might offer. Currah, Juang, and Minter point out that the term can, at times, "mask the differences among gender nonconforming people and risks implying a common identity that outweigh differences along racial and class lines" and be "insufficiently inclusive or too imprecise in others" (xv-xvi). Nonetheless, they still believe that there is a "considerable value in [this] term that can draw together people who believe that individuals should have a right to determine and express their gender without fear, stigmatization, marginalization, or punishment" and view it as an ultimately "collective political identity" (xv).

Although I firmly believe in the analytical and political use of transgender as a term, I also detect the growing risk that the term faces. Transgender, as a term emerging in

conjunction with certain Eurocentric intellectual trends within feminism and queer studies, remains perniciously preoccupied with monolithic discussions of gender and the body, to the exclusion of other important factors that seem external. As Currah, Juang, and Minter acutely sensed, restricting transgender within the narrow terrain of gender expression, gender position, and other sex, gender, sexuality categories alone would prove "insufficiently inclusive or too imprecise". Rather, several factors seemingly external to gender, such as race and class, also need to be accounted for when discussing transgender. To position transgender at the intersection of race and class marks a significant progress in fully understanding transgender lives in the complex totality of all social relations, of which gender relations constitute merely one part. However, race and class are not the only crucial factors we need to take into account.

Transgender is not only a term, or a collective identity of certain gender groups, but more importantly, a dynamic process, an ongoing phenomenon that is in continuous development. The dynamic nature of the transgender phenomenon implies that its meaning is always relative, situated in its historical and cultural specificity. One cannot refer to transgender at any moment as an absolute totality. In most cases, transgender, as used in contemporary Western discourses, means by default a contemporary, European and North American transgender phenomenon, in which the Western notions of gender and transgender are given a privileged position in global discussions. The habit of interpreting gender and transgender phenomena in other cultures, such as Indigenous cultures and Asian cultures, through a white, European lens based on the Judeo-Christian tradition and the Western development of science, biology, and psychology has already been noted by scholars[7].

The disappointing fact about this Eurocentric conception of transgender is that it conveys little about transgender phenomena in other cultures and in other historical times in which gender expressions, gender identity, and the body itself would no longer function as the only cognitive parameters, and where different modes of producing and

[7] Some examples include Native Studies scholar Andrea Smith, in *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*; anthropologist Alice Schlegel in "Gender Meanings: General and Specific" in *Beyond the Second Sex: New Directions in the Anthropology of Gender*; Walter L. Williams in *Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture*; and sinologist Bret Hinsch in *Passion of Cut Sleeves*.

interpreting sex transformation, irregular body configuration, gender performance, and sexual behavior could be possible. What is understood as transgender by modern Western definition; for example, a male wearing dresses or a male who is feminine, might not be taken as such in cultures and in specific historical timeframes in which men typically wear dresses or where femininity does not put a male's sex and gender into question. How cultures organize gender and sexual expressions in particular times and places are not always the same. As Donna Haraway warns, what we call "facts" about the living world are not universal truths; rather, they "are rooted in specific histories, practices, languages and peoples" (217). Apects of gender and transgender as we perceive them are neither timeless nor universal nor objective.

The fact is that connotations of both gender and transgender have always been culturally and historically specific. The transgender phenomenon is often highly dependent on perceptions of gender. In fact, in most cases, transgender and gender are two sides of the same coin. As much as gender is culturally and socially produced, as noted by Butler, transgender is always as relational and contextual a phenomenon as gender:

> what the person "is," and, indeed, what gender "is," is always relative to the constructed relations in which it is determined. As a shifting and contextual phenomenon, gender does not denote a substantive being, but a relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific sets of relations. (*Gender Trouble* 10)

Similarly, no one is born a transgender, just as no one is born a gendered person; in other words, no one is born man, woman, intersex, gay, lesbian, gender bender, and the list can go on and on.

It has already been widely established that rules and customs that associate a person with a particular gender are social and cultural decisions. This prioritizing of the cultural over the material in exploring sexual and gendered identities as products of local situations and contexts has been referred to as the "cultural turn"[8] in feminist analysis. The cultural turn in discussions of gender has greatly facilitated the development of queer studies and transgender studies. As "transgender" gains increasingly important discursive currency on a global scale, this term of Western origin begins to take on a highly fixed,

[8] See Barrett.

privileged, and hegemonic contour. It becomes *the* transgender to which other transgender phenomena have to refer.

The "cultural turn" in practice seems to imply a turn to one culture only: Western culture. This risk of cultural hegemony in transgender studies has already attracted the attention of some prominent transgender scholars from inside. Susan Stryker, for example, admits that transgender as "a category of First World origin" is "currently being exported for Third World consumption" (14). It is against this trend that a real sense of a "cultural turn " – a "transcultural turn" – is to be called for, so that non-European, multiple genres of analysis beyond temporal, discursive, and cultural boundaries can be developed. Only when transgender phenomena are being examined with a global scope can the untapped potential of transgender studies be fully explored in diverse cultures and historical moments, while the transgender phenomenon ceases to be merely a "Western" situation and becomes a "transcultural" one.

Though a field of transcultural and transhistorical concerns, contemporary transgender studies implicates, more often than not, a Western (North American/European) endeavor, with a specific focus on national or regional issues that might not be readily applicable to other parts of the world. However, particularly nowadays, it is crucial to move beyond the confines of our own cultural contexts, to align ourselves with a global perspective, and to reckon with transgender issues always with adequate cultural sensibilities and an awareness of cultural and historical specificity. The contour of transgender as global phenomena will not be complete as long as discussions of transgender histories and transgender issues in other cultures, such as Chinese, Muslim, African, Indian, and all other understudied and underrepresented traditions, are missing.

Responding to the Call: The Transgender Phenomenon in Imperial China

Compared with the exponentially increasing number of publications on transgender in a Western context, serious engagements with transgender in China have been very rare, both in the West and in China, and particularly in mainland China. There are two reasons for this. On the one hand, not surprisingly, little significance has been given to the Chinese aspect of transgender in mainstream transgender studies. On the other hand,

Chinese scholars themselves have yet to establish Chinese transgender as a distinct discipline. As an academic field of study, transgender studies in China still has a long way to go before it becomes institutionalized, as its counterparts in many other Euro-North-American countries have[9].

Except for a few (compilations of) translated works on transgender studies from sources in the English language[10], the first collection in English explicitly pushing Chinese transgender phenomena to the fore of academic concerns and affirmatively employing the term in its title – *Transgender China,* edited by Howard Chiang – was not published until the end of 2012. In addition to Chiang's introduction and Susan Stryker's afterword, this volume includes nine essays on several issues that comprise what a "transgender China" might look like: from Chinese eunuchism, Daoist concept of androgyny, transgender cinemas (from the classic homosexual representation between Chen Dieyi and Duan Xiaolou in *Farewell*, *My Concubine* [1993] to the recent transgender documentary *Queer China*, '*Comrade' China* [2009]), TV series, cross-dressing shows in contemporary Taiwan, to the trans movement in Hong Kong that is slowly working transphobia into trans pride.

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[9] This is not to say that there has been a lack of significant studies of Chinese transgender, but the study of Chinese transgender has seldom been conducted in the name of transgender. For instances, since the early 1980s, cornerstone studies of Chinese homosexuality, in the broad sense of transgender, has begun to emerge. For instance, in 1984 Hong Kong journalist and gay culture activist Xiaomingxiong (pseudonym) published the first monograph on homosexuality in China – *Zhongguo tongxing'ai shilu* (The History of Homosexual Love in China), in which he devoted three chapters to "kuaxing wenhua (transgender culture)" – "shuangxingai (bisexuality)," "yizhuang xianxiang (transvestism)," and "bianxing xianxiang (transsexualism)." In 1990, gender sinologist Bret Hinsch published *Passions of the Cut Sleeve,* offering the earliest detailed treatment of the Chinese homosexual tradition in the English language. Later, Chinese women's rights activist and sexologist Li Yinhe dramatically changed the Chinese scenario of homosexuality with what is considered "the bible among homosexuals" – *Tongxinglian yawenhua* (The Subculture of Homosexuality).

Aimei de licheng: zhongguo gudai tongxinglian shi (Journey of Ambiguity: The History of Homosexuality in Ancient China) by independent scholar Zhang Zaizhou (also using the name Zhang Jie) was published in 2001. In 2008, Zhang followed up this work with *Quwei kaoju: zhongguo gudai tongxinglian tukao* (An Interesting Investigation: The Illustrated History of Homosexuality in Ancient China), which is generously supplemented with hundreds of valuable illustrations on LGBT in ancient China. Both of Zhang's works provide elaborately researched history of homosexuality in China from the Han dynasty up to modern China.

[10] See, for instance, He Chunrui who published a collection of excerpts from several Western transgender theories); Wang Wenqin, who has translated into Chinese Joanne J. Meyerowitz's *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States*.

Transgender China may be the first glimpse of the Chinese transgender phenomenon that Western readers receive. I do not intend to belittle the critical value of this work to the study of transgender aspects within the Chinese context. However, compared to its ambitious title, the aspects that it actually covers seem relatively conservative and limited. Chinese eunuchs[11], Daoist androgyny[12], homosexuality in cinema and the history of homosexulity[13], and cross-dressing[14] have been extensively written about by both Chinese scholars and international sinologists, though not necessarily under the heading of transgender. Even though many critical components have been left out of Chiang's *Transgender China* project, I agree with Stryker that it "makes an important contribution both to Sinophone studies and to transgender studies, but it nevertheless represents only the beginning of a complex conversation about how concepts and categories travel transnationally from Anglophone scholarship to Chinese culture, society, and history" (289). What concerns me the most are the questions of where the study of the Chinese transgender phenomenon should go after this "beginning", and how to conduct the study of transgender in Chinese culture, society and history in such a way that meaningful cultural dialogues are possible.

What this means for me is, as Howard Chiang acutely points out, "reorient[ing] the imagining of a transgender China by *not* assigning Western notions of gender and transgender an epistemologically and ontologically privileged position" (11). Hence, I regard my project as a part of this effort to depart from the dominant "transgender" epistemology rooted in the Western Judeo-Christian culture and to question the academic tendency to universalize the Western understanding of "transgender". However, my approach significantly departs from Chiang's in that my work focuses exclusively on the history and culture of transgender in imperial China (particularly in late imperial China), rather than modern China, as the subject of study. I firmly believe it is through situating

[11] See: Taisuke; Jay; Tsai; Anderson; Doran; and, Wang, *Disanxing shijie*.
[12] See: Colegrave; Ruan and Matsumura; and Furth, "Androgynous Males and Deficient Females".
[13] See: note 9 and "Male Homosexuality in Traditional Chinese Literature" (Ruan and Tsai 1987); Ng; *Tongzhi: Politics of Same-Sex Eroticism in Chinese Societies* (Zhou 2000); *The Emerging Lesbian: Female Same-Sex Desire in Modern China* (Sang 2003); *Homoerotic Sensibilities in Late Imperial China* (Wu 2004); Vitiello and, most recently, Kam.
[14] See: Tian, "The Paradox of Sex"; *Cross Dressing* (Li 2003); "Male Dan" (Xu 2007); *Xingbie,* (Wang 2011).

Chinese transgender in specific historical and cultural moments, before the conceptual continuity of gender and transgender was radically interrupted when China entered the modern era, that several more unique, indigenous Chinese aspects of transgender of the past can be identified.

The Chinese transgender phenomenon has a long, rich history. It is important to recognize that general perceptions of the categories of sex, gender, and sexuality in modern China have only been formed very recently and were significantly influenced by revolutionizing cultural changes in modern Chinese history. The radical national cultural movements and political restructuring that defined Chinese history from the 1910s to the 1970s resulted in seismic changes in every aspect of life for the Chinese people. As Chinese society transitioned from its imperial past to a modern Communist society, certain cultural and social aspects that were specifically associated with the imperial history of thousands of years became gradually forgotten, lost, and vanished. From this perspective, it is critical to revisit Chinese history and culture before the introduction and influence of Western notions of gender and transgender. A systematic investigation of Chinese transgender in history means not only an effective way to answer "the transcultural turn" if true global transgender discussions are expected, but also a belated effort to recognize and carve out a Chinese transgender history.

Compared with the diversity and long history of transgender in China, existing studies on homosexuality (*tongzhi*), male cross-dressing in the tradition of opera performance (*nan dan*), and limited aspects included in Howard Chiang's collection represent merely a tip of an iceberg by focusing on aspects of transgender in modern China, without adequately acknowledging the reality of transgender in the rich historical past of China. The point is that Chinese transgender studies would need to incorporate the past more effectively and extensively than what has been explored so far in both scope and complexity, in order to produce a fuller picture of transgender China. This certainly requires arduous efforts beyond any single work or individual. Therefore, I see this dissertation as part of the Chinese transgender studies scholarship pioneered by "beginning" works, such as *Transgender China,* that try to respond to this "transcultural turn" facing contemporary Anglophone-dominant transgender scholarship. Drawing on

the research that previous Chinese transgender studies have established, my work treads further into the discursive space that *Transgender China* has opened up.

This dissertation takes as its subject of study transcultural and historical investigations of the production and meanings of transgender in imperial China. Throughout my analysis, I specify "transgender in imperial China" as an analytical term to describe people whose sex identity, gender identity or expression is perceived and/or interpreted to be ambiguous or transformable. To better structure my analysis and to more systematically ground the Chinese transgender phenomenon in imperial China, this thesis reworks the threefold interpretation of "trans" in the term "transgender" by McKenna and Kessler and the detailed painting of sex development by Greenberg, Bruess and Haffner into the following three dimensions that I take "transgender in imperial China" to cover:

1. Female-to-male (FTM) and male-to-female (MTF) change of sex, in terms of change in both internal and external morphological sex features, and phenotypic sex (or secondary sex characteristics). The prefix "trans" in "transgender" in this case is comparable to that in "transform," meaning, primarily, an occurrence of significant bodily change, due to various reasons and interventions from outside. Transgender in this case include not only "transsexual" but also those who experience a (perceived) change in secondary sex features, such as women suddenly starting to grow beards or men starting to menstruate. In Chinese cultural context, it might refer to *nan hua nü* (man transforming into woman), *nü hua nan* (woman transforming into man), *fu nü sheng xu* (woman growing beard), and *nan zi chan zi* (man giving birth to children).

2. Sex/gender realities beyond the officially recognized sex/gender dichotomies of male and female, man and woman in ancient China. "Trans" in this case means "transcend", moving "beyond" traditionally conceived gender binaries, which often involves many human morphological conditions characterized by a lack of congruency among genitals, gonads, phenotypic sex and/or an atypical form of any of those. It includes, but does not limit to, those who are born intersexed, which in Chinese terms have been referred as *er xing* (two-shape), *er yi zi* (the two-polar), *bu nan bu nü* (not-man-not-woman), *fei nan fei nü* (non-man-non-woman), and *tai jian* /*huan guan* (eunuch).

3. Gender crossing that relates to nonconforming gender performance, cross-

dressing, gender impersonation, and/or the journey of passing in social lives, but does not necessarily involve sudden changes in sex (transsexual) or sex morphological confusions (intersex). “Trans” in this circumstance indicates the action of "crossing," "transgressing" gender boundaries and is close to "transvestism" and "cross-dressing," often with no implication of alteration of genitals. In Chinese transgender discourses, references to gender crossing can be found in such concepts as *jia nü* (fake woman), *bian fu* (attire-change), *nan you* (male opera performer in a female role), *nan ji*/*xian gu*/*xiang gong* (male homosexual prostitute), *luan tong* (catamite), *nü fuma*[15] (female royal son-in-law)[16], and *zhuangyuan furen* (Mrs. First Scholar in the Nation)[17].

However, as the following discussion will demonstrate, these three dimensions were not exclusive to each other. More often, these dimensions of transgender, sex transformation, intersex, and gender crossing are closely interrelated and are present at the same time in certain transgender situations. For more effective discussion and for concerns of length, this dissertation will organize the discussion around three major types of transgender existences in imperial China, particularly in the later imperial Ming-Qing era: *erxing* (two-shaped), *nü hua nan* (FTM), and *nan hua nü* (MTF), as exemplifications of the historical Chineseness of transgender in global transgender history. With the exception of numerous verions of *nü fuma* (female royal son-in-law) and *zhuangyuan furen* (Mrs. First Scholar in the Nation), which deserve a separate project to do justice to their own cultural context, most of the other aspects of historical Chinese transgender will also be discussed as necessary. What do *erxing* (two-shaped), *nan hua nü* (man transforming into woman) and *nü hua nan* (woman transforming into man) mean in the Chinese context? How do they differ from or correspond to hermaphrodites, intersex, MTF and FTM in the Western tradition?

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[15] I use the translations in Hucker of official titles.”

[16] A classic story in Chinese opera, adapted and evolved from the historical figure Huang Chonggu 黄崇嘏, a woman who was believed to have cross-dressed as a man and got the first place in the national civil examination. When the court offered her an official position, she turned down the position with a poem subtly explaining her female identity to the prime minister who offered Huang the hand of his daughter. See *Taiping guangji*, chapter 367.

[17] The popular story of Li Guiguan 李桂官, a famous male opera actor whom Bi Ruan 毕沅, the *zhuangyuan* (First Scholar in the Nation, or first place in the national civil examination), fell in love with and took as his wife. See *Zhanpu zaji*, chapter 1 “Beauty and Talents among Opera Performers”.

Introducing *erxing*, *nan hua nü,* and *nü hua nan*: First Impression

People born with both male and female sex organs, people whose sex organs have transformed from the male to the female and from the female to the male, and those who have concealed their real sex while assuming misleading gender expressions have been documented throughout recorded time in China. They are sporadically found in earlier Chinese official dynastic history, medical treatises, purportedly trustworthy legal casebooks, and most prominently in the literary tradition of story-writing (*xiaoshuo* 小说[18]). In some cases, these forms of transgender existences were not distinguished and were referred to by the more general names of *ren ke* (human abnormality)[19] or *ren yao* (human monster)[20], an ancient Chinese umbrella term for any individual with gender or sex irregularities. However, three major types of transgender existences can be identified: *erxing*, *nan hua nü*, and *nü hua nan*.

The first type refers to individuals who are born with both male and female sex organs, their sex morphology being described as *erxing*. The two Chinese characters in this term, *er* and *xing*, mean respectively "two" and "shape," with "shape" specifically implying "shape of the genital." The most definitive use of *erxing* to refer to individuals with both male and female genitals appeared in an allegedly reliable collection of completed legal cases called *Yiyu ji* (Collection of Difficult Lawsuit Cases[21]), originally

[18] *Xiaoshuo*, literally meaning "small talk," in traditional Chinese literature is an indigenous Chinese term for a genre of writing that includes several subgenres of literary pieces that might be equivalent to the Western concept of *story* or *fiction*. There have been numerous studies of *xiaoshuo* and its subgenres; some examples include the Chinese sources, such as Li Yeqiu; Chen Guojun; Chen Dakang; Zhan Xiaoyong; Hou Zhongyi. Here, I understand *xiaoshuo* in the Ming-Qing era as including the following components, ordered in the sequence of their development in Chinese literary history: *zhiguai xiaoshuo* (collection of short stories of the strange, the abnormal), *biji xiaoshuo* (notebook jotting, collection of miscellaneous short stories), *huaben xiaoshuo* (collection of longer stories imitating the oral storytelling tradition), and *zhanghui xiaoshuo* (single long fictional narratives with chapter-by-chapter layout in the sense of modern novels).

[19] See Li Shizhen: 4393-96; Shen Defu: 729-30.

[20] See Li Qingchen: 56.

[21] The earliest Chinese collection of legal cases in extant literature. It was first compiled by He

printed in the Song dynasty but substantially expanded in the Ming dynasty. In a case entitled "*erxing*" in the expanded edition by the Ming editors, a nun was discovered to be equipped with both male and female genitals ("possessing *erxing* [*shen dai erxing* 身带二形]"). Guilty of seducing and deflowering young maidens, s/he was given the sentence of "being tattooed on the forehead with the two characters of '*erxing*' (*er ci erxing er zi* 额刺二形二字)," in addition to other, more severe penalties (He, He and Zhang 6:2a). The term "*erxing*" has also been frequently adopted elsewhere to describe similarly two-sexed individuals.

Yet, this does not mean that *erxing* is the exclusive term to describe the two-shape sex morphology. Other descriptions and appellations were also seen in Chinese historical accounts. For instance, the earliest written record of an *erxing* individual in *Jin shu* (Book of Jin), an official dynastic history book compiled by the Tang dynasty court between the year 646 and the year 648, documents "someone who had both male and female genitals (*jian nannu ti* 兼男女体) and could have sex with both men and women" (Fang et al. 908)). Here, "*jian nannu ti* (having both male and female bodies)" was used instead of *erxing*. Similarly, *Guangsi jiyao* 广嗣纪要 (Protocols on Generating Many Heirs) [1663], a popular medical text on procreation and eugenics in late imperial China, mentions five andrological conditions that cannot inseminate. Among the five sterile conditions, the fourth one is "Having both female and male genitals, commonly known as '*er yi zi*' (*er qiao ju you, suwei er yi zi ye* 二窍俱有，俗谓二仪子也)" (Wan 13). For analytical convenience, in this dissertation I use the more accepted term of *erxing* to describe individuals with both genitals, or true hermaphrodites in Western terms[22].

The second group of transgender individuals is generally known as *nan hua nü*. This is a very easy term because the Chinese characters neatly correspond to the English "man-transforming into-woman," with "*nan*" being the Chinese character for "man,"

Ning 和凝 and He Meng 和嶚, and later expanded in the Ming by Zhang Jing 张景. All of the cases recorded were considered very complicated and difficult to judge, but were justly solved in the end. The cases recorded in this collection have been seen as very reliable. The collection also proved enormously influential as household books, and had been reprinted many times throughout time.

[22] See Fausto-Sterling and the Simpson classification of spurious and true hermaphroditism (Dreger 143/44).

"*hua*" for "transform," and "*nü*" for "woman." *Nan hua nü*, the historical Chinese concept of male-to-female transgender individuals must be distinguished from modern surgery-based MTF transsexuals. Chinese *nan hua nü* has little to do with surgical procedures of transforming male genitalia into female genitalia. Rather, it involves two speculations. First, in historiographical accounts, most *nan hua nü* were documented as having given birth to children, while other details were completely unmentioned. For example, in *Han shu* (Book of Han: 206 BCE-23 AD) [111 AD] Chapter 27, Treatise on the "Five Elements" Part 7 records the following entry:

> During the Jianping Period (6BCE-3BCE) under the Reign of Emperor Ai, in a place called Yuzhang, there was a man who changed into a woman. He later got married and gave birth to a son[23].
> 哀帝建平中，豫章有男子化为女子，嫁为人妇，生一子. (Ban et al. 603)

Again, in *Song Shi* (History of Song) Chapter 62, Treatise 15, "Five Elements" (1) Part 2, a similar entry is found:

> In the 6th year of the Xuanhe Period (1119-1125), or the year 1125, a vendor selling olives in the capital city got pregnant and was about to giving birth to a son. But the first midwife couldn't successfully deliver the baby. The delivery was not successful until they changed seven midwives. After the child birth, the man ran away from the capital city.
> 宣和六年，都城有卖青果男子，孕而生子，蓐母不能收，易七人，始免而逃去. (Toqto'a and Alutu 924)

Given the lack of other critical information, and if one gives credit to these accounts' references to bearing children, it seems most likely these *nan hua nü* with functioning ovaries and uterus border on female hermaphrodites who might be brought up as male but gradually developed into female when reaching puberty.

Another account in a personal collection of orally circulating stories and anecdotes known as *Er tan lei zeng* (Revised and expanded edition of *Talks through Ears*) (1603), compiled by the Ming literatus Wang Tonggui (?1541-?, active around 1620), offers a more evident case of *nan hua nü* as female hermaphrodite. According to this piece, a certain Mr. Liu, who was socially perceived as a man, became a biological woman. However:

> After a while, his penis shrank [and in its place a vagina could be seen]; [it turns out that he] actually possesses a vagina. So he pierced his ears and bound his feet like women do. Later, a man from Pingjiang took him as a

[23] Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own.

> concubine. I've heard that he already gave birth to two sons.
> 久之肉具渐缩去，实有牝，乃遂穿耳缚足。平江人纳为妾去，闻已生两子矣。(18:5a)

Though recorded as a strange incident of sex transformation, the description of both the shrinking of the penis and the discovery of the biological vagina points to the evidence that Mr. Liu could well be a female hermaphrodite by modern standards.

By comparison, all other personal narratives of *xiaoshuo* indicate another speculation of *nan hua nü*. These narratives very clearly deny the possibility of female hermaphroditism; rather, they represent more of a cultural interpretation and imagination of the possibilities and meanings of removing the penis. In many cases, most notably "Li Liangyu," "Li Zhaifan," and "Male Mencius' Mother", which will be discussed in Chapter Two, becoming a woman was taken as a natural outcome of removing the penis. Here, removing the penis means both literally removing, through castration or other *force majeure* (such as illness), and symbolically removing, by hiding it from gender expressions and social roles. In either case, *nan hua nü* in traditional Chinese cultural context refers to biologically male individuals who lived as biological or socially perceived women after passively or actively incurred absence of their male genitals, or the cultural phallus.

In many sources in which the second group of accounts is contained, the third group of transgender accounts of *nü hua nan*, literally meaning "woman-transforming into-man," that record the opposite transformation from female to from are also found. Similarly to *nan hua nü*, *nü hua nan* is essentially different from the Western modern concept of FTM transsexuals with the assistance of medical technology. Historical entries of the Chinese *nü hua nan* reflect the same problem as with *nan hua nü*: the entries are too minimalistic to grasp the exact nature of the sex transformations. The majority of the historical entries read quite similarly. For instance, the aforementioned *Han shu* Chapter 27 also records:

> *Shi ji* (Records of the Grand Historian) records that during the 13th year of the Reign of King Xiang of the Wei kingdom (318 BCE-296 BCE), or the year 306 BCE, there was a woman who transformed into a man.
> 记魏襄王十三年，魏有女子化为丈夫. (Ban et al. 603)

In *Hou han shu (*Book of the Later Han*)* Chapter 82, "Biography of Xu Deng" recounts:

> There was someone named Xu Deng from the Min Region. [Xu was]

> originally a woman, [but later] transformed into a man, known for the skill of witchcraft.
> 徐登者，闽中人也。本女子，化为丈夫，善为巫术。(Fan and Sima 1851)

For the same lack of other critical information, as viewed by modern standards, *nü hua nan* at best can be surmised to be male hermaphroditism, in which an individual who may have been brought up as a girl gradually develops into a man when reaching puberty. *Jin shu* (Book of Jin, 265 AD-420 AD) Chapter 29 Treatise 19, "Five Elements," seems to confirm this speculation. It chronicles:

> During the Yuankang Period (291-299) under the Reign of Emperor Hui, a girl named Zhou Shining in Anfeng began to gradually transform into a man when she was 8. [When she] reached the age of 17 or 18, [the male] temper and nature became fully developed in her.
> 惠帝元康中，安丰有女子周世宁，年八岁，渐化为男，至十七八而气性成. (Fang et al. 907)

Here, very rarely, sex transformation was observed as a process that took years to complete rather than being presented as a result. It is possible that the information on sex transformation as a developing process was in fact an evidence of the growth of the penis in cases of male hermaphroditism.

Unlike in historical accounts, personal narratives of *xiaoshuo* tend to attach a moral frame to *nü hua nan* and interpret sex transformation from female to male as a fortuitous result of certain moral deeds. Often, the sex transformation of *nü hua nan* was defined as a sudden growth of a penis that was actualized by various forms of mysterious force, such as a thunder strike, magic pills, or sudden illness, while the causes of sex transformation were usually attributed to certain moral aspects of the individual or his/her family. Moral stories of *nü hua nan* are particularly popular in the Qing dynasty as responses to specific social expectations and practices. *Nü hua nan* are presented less as biological transformations of bodies than as cultural products of liquidating the family crisis of "lacking a male heir" through the acquisition of a penis; in other words, a "son".

As the first impressions of Chinese *erxing*, *nan hua nü,* and *nü hua nan* might indicate, the transgender phenomenon in imperial China demonstrates features significantly different from those in early modern and modern Western approaches to hermaphrodites, the intersexed, FTM, and MTF. The most prominent difference is that traditional Chinese transgender existences represent clinical and scientific concerns far

less than political, cultural, and social concerns. Scientific and clinical fascinations with hermaphrodite bodies and life experiences in early modern Europe[24] never existed in the imperial history of China. What interested the authors and readers of these old Chinese discourses of *erxing*, *nan hua nü,* and *nü hua nan* the most are not the scientific medical implications of the material bodies per se, but the cultural and social meanings of these bodies. In this sense, Chinese *erxing*, *nan hua nü,* and *nü hua nan* were primarily portrayed as symbolic bodies rather than anatomical bodies. In these narratives, symbolic meanings of bodies and bodily changes were given central significance.

To be more specific, for the majority of early Chinese *erxing*, *nan hua nü,* and *nü hua nan* discourses, there is merely one part of transgender bodies that is meaningful: the penis. All possibilities of bodily sex changes hinge on it: *erxing* usually implies individuals who previously were socially perceived as female but later discovered to possess a hidden penis; *nan hua nü* are those who were born biologically male but somehow suffered the loss of the penis, and *nü hua nan* refer to people who were born, or taken to be, biologically female but somehow acquired a penis. This exclusive attention on one bodily part, the penis, also betrays a highly patriarchal mode of sex determination in imperial China.

Fundamentally, early Chinese transgender discourses are critical for understanding transgender lives, not because they offer valuable clinical evidences or scientific investigation as European physicians, sexologists, and psychologists had (Hirschfeld; Cauldwell; Benjamin; Garfinkel), but because they are the sites in which we can locate the apparatus of the socio-cultural production of gender and transgender in specific historical moments. These discourses provide not only the reflection of the social and cultural meanings of *erxing*, *nan hua nü,* and *nü hua nan* and how they were perceived historically, but also produce these meanings and shape these perceptions. Together, they yield a complex and concrete picture of how *erxing*, *nan hua nü,* and *nü hua nan* have been culturally recognized, produced, and de-produced in discursive spaces.

The questions that need to be answered, then, are: What transgender bodies were recognized, accepted, rationalized, even desired, while other transgender bodies were

[24] For France, see Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park's study (Kessler: 34-35); Dreger 33-34; for Germany, see Mak: 35; for Poland, see Von Neugebauer.

despised and eliminated? Under what circumstances? How were meanings and perceptions of *erxing*, *nan hua nü,* and *nü hua nan* discursively and socially constructed? How important were bodily corporeal contours (external genitals, anatomical organs, gonads, and chromosomes), embodiment (gender performances) and internal identity of the individual (psychological identification with one's own) for this construction? What cultural anxieties, expectations, and aspirations were embodied in different levels of recognition of *erxing*, *nan hua nü,* and *nü hua nan*? And most importantly, how will these earlier accounts of transgender illuminate contemporary discussions of transgender as a transcultural phenomenon?

Chapter Overview

Following my threefold organization of Chinese transgender phenomena, I structure the discussion into the prelude and three body chapters. By providing two primary conceptualizing modes of *erxing*, *nan hua nü,* and *nü hua nan* prevalent in different historical moments, the prelude demonstrates the connotation of Chinese transgender in imperial history to be inherently historical and contextual. With the prelude having set the stage for the body chapters, three major dissertation chapters ensue, each studying one specific component of transgender existences in the Ming-Qing era: *erxing, nan hua nü,* and *nü hua nan*. The project does not seek to prescribe or proscribe what Chinese transgender is or is not, nor does it intend to proclaim that these are the only components of Chinese transgender. On the contrary, through these selected transgender existences within a specific historical time frame and cultural context, this project explores the historical and cultural specificity of the Chinese transgender phenomena.

Chapter One, "Understanding *erxing*, *nan hua nü,* and *nü hua nan*: Competing Discourses," provides a textual journey of *erxing*, *nan hua nü,* and *nü hua nan* records and accounts. This brief examination of historical and first-hand sources on transgender is designed to assert a rich, though sometimes neglected, textual history of Chinese transgender lives, analyze the three sets of epistemological modes offered by three genres of texts: political omen-reading mode in historiographical entries, dynamic change-asserting mode in traditional Chinese medical treatises, and a mixture of morality-oriented mode and idiosyncratic mode in Ming-Qing *xiaoshuo*. The prelude helps set the

stage for the discussions to come.

As shown in the title, Chapter Two, "The Threat of the Hidden Penis: The Criminalization of *Erxing*", investigates a group of early Chinese transgender individuals: the two-shaped *erxing* (roughly equal to the modern term of intersex), who were, more often than not, portrayed as sex criminals who lived in one sex, yet possessed both female and male genitals at the same time. Some do not possess both genitals but can maliciously manipulate their known genitals in a way that the hidden genitals would be released at command; there are also those who strategically camouflage their appearances and performances to impersonate the sex that they are not, for lustful purposes. There are three archetypal figures of *erxing* that recur in the existing accounts: Dong Shixiu 董师秀 (*Yiyu ji* [Collection of Difficult Lawsuit Cases, expanded in the Ming dynasty]), Lan Daopo (*Jianhu ji* [Collection of Hard Gourd Tales, preface 1690]), and Sang Chong (official historiographical records, lawsuit case documents, and popular fiction). This chapter views these Chinese cases together with several contemporary cases in the United States (as discussed in *Queer(In)justice: The Criminalization of LGBT People in the United States*), and questions the mechanism of criminalizing *erxing*. Bearing the stigma of "human monster" (*yaoren* 妖人) and hypersexual lust, *erxing* usually are demonized as "monster of *yin* (lust/hypersexuality)" and penalized for sexual amorality or fraud, meaning the death penalty in most cases. Unlike *nan hua nü* and *nü hua nan* who were able to settle in one sex, *erxing* individuals, being intermediates straddling the two conventionally sexed bodies, in collected Chinese transgender accounts normally exist as tragic figures to whom even the minimum social chance to live remained denied. Unfortunately, similar tragic stories as recorded in these Chinese *erxing* remain true nowadays.

Chapter Three, "The Absence of the Penis: The Li Liangyu Cycle and the Homoerotic Turn of *Nan hua nü*", turns to the reverse MTF accounts. I notice that narratives of MTF sex transformation in the Ming-Qing era undertake an entirely different approach to interpret and rationalize the phenomena of sex transformation. More importantly, MTF narratives in the Qing further take on diametrically different features than those in the Ming. In fact, the MTF narratives under examination suggest a subtle "male homoerotic turn" at the end of Ming and the beginning of the Qing, grouping the

narratives accordingly into two assemblages – the Li Liangyu rhizome in the Ming and homoerotic MTF ones in the Qing. The latter is represented by characters such as Liu Menzi, the male prostitute who becomes a real woman; the male homosexual prostitute Li Zhaifan in "Record of Extraordinary Love (*qingqi ji* 情奇记)"; and the life-time impersonator You Ruilang in Li Yu's romance "Male Mencius' Mother (*nan mengmu jiaohe sanqian* 男孟母教合三迁)". With the introduction of "*the cult of qing* 情 (passion/feeling)" and the Chinese homoerotic practice of *nanfeng* 男风 in the Ming-Qing era, MTF sex transformation accounts establish sex transformation as a deliberate human action, rather than a deed by some miraculous force as in the FTM cases, and acknowledge the subjectivity of sex transformation. As male homosexuality gradually emerges as a central theme in MTF experiences, the attitude towards MTF transformation as textually reflected also transitions into a more complicated, eventually more understanding one. As these MTF trans-lives demonstrate, perhaps for the first time, MTF becomes not something to be ashamed or suspected of, but a personal life choice deserving of praise, offering a difficult yet recognized alternative path to motherhood and personhood, the ultimate pursuit of contemporary transgender studies and movement.

The last chapter, Chapter Four, "The Allure of the Penis: 'Getting a Son' and *Nü hua nan*", looks into a prevalent formula demonstrated by many of the Ming-Qing accounts of FTM sex transformation, particularly their sudden discursive outburst in the Qing dynasty. After delving into a complex interplay of the traditionally gendered family clan system, the intensified moralism of the Qing government (moral lecturing institutions *shengyu xuanjiang* 圣谕宣讲 and morality books *shanshu* 善书), and Buddhist karmic beliefs (ledger *gongguoge* 功过格), I discover that FTM sex transformation was largely a socially-oriented rhetorical practice referring to "getting a son (*dezi* 得子)," as exemplified in selected accounts from morality books, Buddhist retribution stories ("Records of Action and Response" (*ganying ji* 感应记) and "Records of the Divine Efficacy" (*lingyan ji* 灵验记)), Li Yu's popular story "The Bodhisattva's Ingenuity", which appears in his collection *The Silent Opera*. I argue that the majority of Chinese FTM accounts at this time reorient FTM from a matter of desire, gender identity, or subjectivity (such as most gender theory would focus on) to a mainly discursive,

rhetorical practice that stemmed from the allure of the male body, symbolically marked by the penis, and the collective, societal daydreaming of getting a son.

My conclusion, "The Promise of the Strange: Transgender in Imperial China as Ethical Objects as Ethical Beings," offers a holistic look at the three types of transgender existences discussed in this project and summarizes the major aspects of different modes of recognizing transgender in imperial China that these existences have collectively demonstrated. This section also provides further elaboration on the discussions of *erxing*, *nan hua nü,* and *nü hua nan* as concrete examples of transgender responding to the "transcultural turn" and points to possible ways to further explore the transcultural character of the transgender phenomenon, transgender identities, and transgender recognitions.

Chapter One

Understanding *Erxing*, *Nan hua nü,* and *Nü hua nan*: Competing Discourses

Three sets of epistemological modes of understanding *erxing*, *nan hua nü,* and *nü hua nan* can be identified in early Chinese transgender discourses: the omen-reading approach in official dynastic history; the natural principle of semen, blood, and *qi* in medical treatises; and the cultural-penis morality-oriented model in legal case narratives and some personal narratives of *xiaoshuo*, popular stories. Each offers a unique way to conceptualize and respond to these transgender existences. However, this is not to imply that these modes of understanding *erxing*, *nan hua nü,* and *nü hua nan* were employed to the exclusion of each other; rather, sometimes a narrative might show two modes of interpretation at the same time. While historiographical and medical approaches seldom converged, both of them had lasting influences on *xiaoshuo* narratives of popular stories. It is common to see writers of popular stories also citing the omen-reading tradition of historiographical discourses or viewing specific transgender existences as part of natural laws of *qi*.

The truth is that writers of popular stories traditionally draw materials from extensive sources, including dynastic historical entries, medical treaties, and sensational legal cases. Therefore, it is in personal narratives of *xiaoshuo* that major strands of cultural meanings and perceptions associated with *erxing*, *nan hua nü,* and *nü hua nan* were brought together, sometimes in competition sometimes synthesized. Furthermore, writers of *xiaoshuo* did not simply borrow previously prescribed meanings and perspectives. Instead, they also blend in their own individual understanding of sex transformation and sex anomaly, producing competing discourses of understanding transgender. Here, "competing discourses" describes two layers of the competing condition: on one hand, due to their specific epistemological frameworks, different types of discourses compete with each other during the cultural and discursive production of transgender; on the other hand, with their idiosyncratic, individual twists of traditional approaches, diverse personal narratives also contend with each other for originality, authenticity, and authority.

This chapter mainly investigates the first two interpretive frameworks projected in early Chinese historiographical and medical discourses, while the corpus of competing discourses of personal narratives will constitute the content of following chapters in the dissertation. Owing to the plural modes of understanding transgender offered in these competing discourses, the transgender phenomenon in imperial China should not be taken as a coherent cultural and social reality. In contrast, cultural assumptions and beliefs that were produced by these competing discourses of transgender are inherently incoherent and heterogeneous.

Phantasmatic Existence: Historiographical Discourses and Transgender as Political Omens

> If the power of petty people of lower classes grows and the power of the emperor weakens, then there will be men changing into women. If noble and wise people are dismissed from their positions, and the emperor alone controls all the powers, then there will women changing into men.
> 小人聚，天子弱，则丈夫化为女子。贤人去位，天子独居，则女化为丈夫。(Yasui and Nakamura 840)

This very brief and enigmatic line was recorded in *Chunqiu qiantanba* (A Short but Profound Study of *Spring and Autumn Annals*), written anonymously during the East Han Dynasty (25-220 AD). It represents one of the earliest metaphysical commentaries on *Chunqiu* (Spring and Autumn Annals)[25] and is a frequently cited explanatory source in early dynastic histories of the Han and Jin dynasties. This line might leave modern Western readers greatly befuddled: familiar categories of sex, gender, sexuality, and body are no longer relevant. Instead, sex transformation was de-corporealized into significations of state politics. To make sense of it, a contemporary sex/gender mindset might need to be suspended for a moment in favour of an ancient Chinese cultural framework for conceptualizing changes of human bodies.

The key to understanding this line lies in what actually connects state political condition and gender/sex transformation. Whether it is the power growth of lower-class people, the weakening of the ruler's power, the demotion of noble and wise people from

[25] In the earliest Chinese official chronicles text extant, the entries are so imprecise that their meaning can be only grasped with the aid of numerous commentaries. These texts concisely sketched the historical events (many of them of political significance) from 722 BCE to 481 BCE.

court, or the excessive power of the emperor, it all points to the imbalance of power distribution. This imbalance is a disorder of the normal, acceptable configuration of state power in which the ruler controls a safe portion of power under the surveillance of wise court officials while lower-class people remain in their prescribed humble social place. This disturbed power structure literally manifests on human bodies through sex/gender disorders – men changing into women and women into men. Therefore, sex/gender transformation becomes a metaphor for political disorder, and is appropriated as a direct mapping of the anxiety caused by potential political jeopardy. Sex/gender transformations are read as omens of heaven, as indicators of the perilous political state of the nation.

It is not uncommon for dynastic history writers from the Han dynasty and on to spot and record similar omens of heaven, and assign them political significance: military coups, death within a royal family, the decline of the dynasty, poor management of the state, the emperor's neglect of state affairs, to name a few. A cursory survey of historical accounts would show that sexual abnormality, sex transformations and even nonconforming gender performances, among other supernatural incidents (such as a woman giving birth to quadruplets, a rooster changing into a hen dogs growing horns, a man giving birth, natural disasters, epidemics, and many other weird things) were read as manifested signs of heaven which are actualized by unexplained, supernatural forces.

Starting with *Han shu* (The Book of Han), the tradition matured into special sections called "*Wuxing*[26] *zhi* (treatise on the five fundamental elements)" that were dedicated to recording these miscellaneous omens and weird natural happenings. For instance, one entry in Chapter 27 of *Han shu* (The Book of Han) interprets a man changing into a woman as an omen for the dynasty's doom:

> During the Jianping Period (6 BCE-3 BCE) under the Reign of Emperor Ai, in Yuzhang, there was a man who transformed into a woman. He later got married and gave birth to a son. Chen Feng from Changan [deciphered this omen and] said this means the Yang has changed into the Yin, so the dynasty will end and no royal heir will be left. There was some other man who said, since the [transformed] man has born a son, so there would be one more new emperor for this dynasty, and then it will end.

[26] *Wu xing* is a Chinese philosophical term. The five elements are wood, fire, earth, metal and water. This concept is a fivefold conceptual scheme used in many traditional Chinese fields to explain a wide array of phenomena.

> 哀帝建平中，豫章有男子化为女子，嫁为人妇，生一子。长安陈凤言此阳变为阴，将亡继嗣，自相生之象。一曰，嫁为人妇生一子者，将复一世乃绝。 (Ban et al. 673).

In reading this sex/gender transformation, the omen reader Chen Feng introduced a critical aspect of the ancient omen-reading tradition of transgender: the concept of *yin* and *yang*. The concepts of *yin* and *yang* have been fundamental categories in Chinese philosophy since antiquity. It refers to two primary cosmic elements of the six *qi* (vital force)[27] of *tian* (heaven) abstracted from the natural succession and alternation of the four seasons that generate and govern all events and existences in the world. The working of *yin* and *yang* manifests itself on every level of the world: from cosmic forces (*yin* defined as receptive/passive/cold while *yang* symbolizes creative/active/warm), to social structures (*yin* defined as subordinate/powerless/inferior and *yang* as dominant/powerful/superior), to the gender system (*yin* defined as female/feminine/submissive while *yang* means male/masculine/leading).

The omen-reading tradition with the (dis)equilibrium of the *yin* and *yang* is profoundly rooted in the epistemic framework of Chinese theologico-philosophical theory of *tianren ganying* (interaction between heaven and the human world). Systematically theorized by the most prominent Confucian scholar Dong Zhongshu (179-104 BC) in the Han dynasty (206 BC-22 AD), this theory of human cosmic correlations had been the official and dominant ideology of the conceptualization of the world in the Han dynasty and exerted an enduring influence on later dynasties. It was so fundamental to the epistemic framework at that time that, officially, almost every aspect of the perceptible world had to be understood as a part of the working of a grand cosmic schema. Simply put, this theory serves as "a frame of reference" developed by the Confucians, who might also be the writers of these dynastic histories, to "interpret the intentions behind the phenomena of the supernatural forces" (Chen "*Confucianism as Religion*" 121).

This notion of heaven-human interaction holds that the human world (including sex/gender configurations) is governed by and should follow the mandates of heaven. The

[27] *Qi* in Chinese philosophy as used in official dynastic histories is to be distinguished from *qi* in traditional Chinese medicine. In the second section, we will see another use of *yin*, *yang*, and *qi* in Chinese medicine. Though the cosmological and medical connotations of these terms have much in common, they are quite different concepts.

configuration of *yin* and *yang* functions as the barometer of how well heaven's mandates are followed. If the mandates of heaven are properly obeyed, then the cosmic *yin* and *yang* elements will maintain harmony (*he*), heaven will be pleased and mete out auspicious signs. However, if the mandates are not followed, the cosmic *yin-yang* equilibrium will be disturbed and heaven will be angered, which will later be shown in portents and omens. In this sense, *yin* and *yang* become the pivotal nexus connecting the human world (political changes) with the cosmos (accessible through omens of heaven such as sex/gender transformation).

It is the disequilibrium of *yin* and *yang* on a national level (doom of the dynasty means the demotion of the *yang* – emperor) that called up the disorder of *yin* and *yang* on a bodily level (a man changing into woman as the omen). The sex/gender transformation became symbolic in the sense that it was a reification of an imaginary, phantasmatic state of cosmic disorder and abnormalcy. Similarly, in the first record from *Chunqiu*, the rationale also relies on this *yin-yang* human-heaven correlation: growth of *yin* (lower-class people) and weakening of *yang* (the emperor) incurred the omen of *yang* losing to *yin* (men changing into women), whereas demotion of *yin* (wise court officials) and excess of *yang* (the emperor's power) would result in *yin* being engulfed by *yang* (women changing into men). As parables for history writers to admonish the rulers about the checks and balances of power, sex/gender transformation becomes not only highly asexual and symbolic, but thoroughly instrumental.

Due to the multi-layered meaning of *yin* and *yang*, sex/gender transformation had been conveniently considered a label of disorder and abnormality: the abnormal situation of bodily *yin* and *yang* were read as symptomatic of the abnormal situation of the nation, and of the cosmos in a broader sense. Some dynastic history entries elaborated on this reading in an even more evident and nuanced way. For example, the following passage about a girl who had presented herself as a man for many years of her life, from *Nan shi* (History of Southern Dynasties, 420AD-589AD) Chapter 45 "Biographies of Wang Jingze, Chen Xianda, Zhang Jinger, and Cui Huijing[28]", is a good example in point:

> A woman named Lou Cheng from Dongyang cross-dressed and disguised [herself?] as a man. She was moderately good at chess, could understand

[28] All of them are generals who started military commotions but failed.

> great literary works and had visited many great families, and even got promoted to be the governor of Yangzhou. When her female identity was discovered, the emperor Ming ordered her to return to her hometown Dongyang. Cheng, for the first time in her life, put on women's clothes and left the city. She sighed, "With all my talent, what a pity it is to go back and to be simply an old lady!" This is an example of *renyao* 人妖 (human monsters) that belong to the Yin yet tries to act as the Yang, and thus, are doomed to fail in their tricks, which is proved by the failed coups plotted by Jingze, Yaoguang, Xianda and Huijing.
> 东阳女子娄逞变服诈爲丈夫，粗知围棋，解文义， 遍游公卿，仕至扬州议曹从事。事发，明帝驱令还东。逞始作妇人服而去，叹曰：“如此之伎，还爲老妪，岂不惜哉。”此人妖也。阴而欲爲阳，事不果故泄，敬则、遥光、显达、慧景之应也。(Li 1127)

This account of a gender-crossing girl named Lou Cheng was inserted at the very end of a very long biographical entry of the above-mentioned four commanders that detailed their individual lives: how they were all born in humble families (“belong to the Yin”) but managed to ascend to prominent positions in the court (“yet tries to act like the Yang”), and how they all suffered brutal deaths during military rebellions they staged or were thought to have plotted. Writers of the official history of the Southern dynasties, in hindsight, read Lou Cheng’s male-impersonating situation as heaven’s omen for the political commotions and the fate of the four commanders. Appropriation of gender transgression as omens to reprimand the rebels and warn off similar attempts is also self-evident here. The management of the gender-transforming individual Lou Cheng further illustrates the moral: the boundary of men (emperor/*yang*) and women (generals/*yin*) should be firmly kept clear; women (generals/*yin*) should be contented being and confined in their prescribed place; and, any crossing of boundaries (disturbing the natural equilibrium of *yin* and *yang*) will suffer severe consequence. By reading gender transgression as omens, by demonizing cross-dressers as “human monsters,” writers of official dynastic history intended to enforce and consolidate social/gender hierarchy, and intimidate those who desire/dare to subvert.

The case of Lou Cheng is also particularly important because of the use of the designation “*renyao*” (human monster). The adoption “*yao*” (monster) is of vital importance for understanding transgender in ancient China in general, and truly takes the instrumental cultural shaping of transgender to another level. Many other cultures had viewed, and some still do view, transgender as monstrous, yet probably few cultures

had so seamlessly incorporated them into the human world, while at the same time were able to so easily dismiss them as alien species, as early Chinese culture had.

This correlation between monstrosity and the disequilibrium of the *yin qi* and *yang qi*, which is reflected in human bodies as the disorder of man and woman, was more evidently seen in the cultural perception of *erxing*. Though the exact time frame and context of its first usage among the population is unknown, the earliest written record of an *erxing* individual (though the term itself was not used) appeared in *Jin shu* (Book of Jin), a history book compiled by the Tang dynasty court between the year 646 and the year 648, in the following account:

> In the capital city of Luoyang, there was someone who had both male and female bodies, could have sex with both men and women, and [was] especially lustful in nature. The reason this occurred is due to the disorder of *qi* since the Xianning and Taikang periods (275AD - 289AD) – indulging in the male favorites became more popular among the upper class men than sex with women. This new trend was soon copied by the whole world, which caused many couples to separate and led to many women losing husbands and many men losing wives. And it is because of the disorder and disturbance of the *qi* of men and women that there would be *humans with monstrous shapes* (*yaoxing* 妖形). [Emphasis mine]
> 惠帝之世，京洛有人兼男女体，亦能两用人道，而性尤淫，此乱气所生。自咸宁、太康之后，男宠大兴，甚于女色，士大夫莫不尚之，天下相仿效，或至夫妇离绝，多生怨旷，故男女之气乱而妖形作也。(Fang et al. 908)

The historical entry of *erxing* is intriguing in many ways. First, as with other types of transgender, *erxing* was similarly regarded as a special supernatural species caused by "the disturbance of *qi,*" that is, the abnormal situation of *yin* and *yang* disorder/disharmony; specifically, male homosexual behavior prevailing over heterosexual practices, which directly threatened the normative heterosexual marriage system with collapse, and which contributed to social instability. In this case, this particular *erxing* individual was not seen as an ontological reality. Rather, *erxing* was entirely dismissed from the realm of reality as a perversion of nature: the humanness of the transgender person, instead of being recognized as a real corporeal possibility, was reduced to a contingent, transient, phantasmtic type of monster occasioned only by "disorder and disturbance of the *qi*."

Lastly, it is noteworthy that this account of *erxing* has had a great influence on later *erxing* discourses. It was occasionally cited by eminent writers such as Shen Defu (1578 AD-1642 AD) among sources as existential proof of intersex in Chinese history[29]. The elements this entry uses to distinguish the intersexed person from the normal sexes, such as "*jian nannü ti* (having both male and female bodies)" and "*yaoxing* (human with monstrous shapes)," were also frequently drawn upon by later writers of popular stories of *erxing*.

How the *yin-yang* epistemic frame shaped ancient Chinese historical perceptions of transgender also sheds light on the malleability of transgender perception itself. There is always the possibility that transgender could be perceived differently if another set of meanings are written onto transgendered bodies. The next section discusses transgender accounts in earlier Chinese medical treatises of several authoritative physicians[30] in early Chinese medical history.

"Endless Changes:" Chinese Traditional Medicine and Transgender as Possibilities

Unlike historical discourses that rendered transgender problematically unreal, earlier medical discourses adopted a more positive and understanding, though not necessarily accurate, interpretive mode towards sex changes and sexual anomaly. Shifted from the politicized omen-reading frame, traditional Chinese medicine viewed sex changes and sexual anomaly as endless biological possibilities inherent in human bodies, in a manner similar to the ways in which contemporary biological/medical transgenderists regard sex and human bodies as diverse as a "rainbow" or "spectrum." Rather than rejecting such

[29] In Shen offers this account: "People with both female and male organs have always existed since ancient times. *Dabanruo jing* (Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra, or Large Sutra on the Perfection of Wisdom) mentioned five types of '*huang men*' (*paṇḍaka* in Sanskrit). But having male and female organs does not necessarily entail a particular gender expression. The fourth type is called '*Bo cha ban*' (*pakṣa* in Sanskrit), which was explained by the Buddha as 'those who are able to act as men in half of the month but not able to do so in the other half of the month'. But the Sutra didn't mention they can act as woman. *Huangdi neijing* (Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon) *Suwen* (Plain questions) relates the idea of female pulse, male pulse, and those with both female and male pulses. During the reign (290 AD-306 AD) of Emperor Hui (259 AD-307 AD) of the Jin dynasty, in then the capital city of Luoyang, there was an extremely lascivious intersex who could act both as man and woman. This was viewed by the wise men of that time as the omen for the prevalence of male concubines in the court" (729-30).

[30] In the Chinese tradition, physicians were often philosophers as well. See Furth, "The Physician".

bodies as unreal, supernatural sorts of perversions of nature, Chinese medicine took the opposite approach and neatly integrated transpeople into the definitely real and human domain.

Chu Cheng (ca. 483), of the Liu Song Dynasty (420-479), was among the earliest physicians to attempt to explain the formation of the intersexed body. In *Chushi yishu* (Posthumous Book by Master Chu), Chu offers this explanation from a semi-biological point of view:

> The intercourse between a man and a woman represents a great interactive pleasure between two lovers. When the Yin blood arrives before the Yang semen, the blood then encapsulates the semen as the core; thus a male shape will be formed. If the Yang semen arrives before the Yin blood, the semen then encapsulates the blood as the core; thus a female shape will be formed. … If the Yin and the Yang arrive at the same time, a *fei nan fei nü* (non-female non-male) body [will be formed]; if the semen and the blood are dispersed, it is the *qi* of twins or triplets.
> 男女之合，二情交畅。阴血先至，阳精后冲，血开裹精，精入为骨而男形成矣；阳精先入，阴血后参，精开裹血，血入居本而女形成矣。…… 阴阳均至，非男非女之身；精血散分， 骈胎品胎之气. (Chu 1)

It is true that Chu's semen-blood model of how a fetus is conceived and how its sex is formulated may seem over-simplified, and certainly not as precise as the modern medical/biological XY-chromosome or gonadal model would have it. Yet, in terms of openness or thinking otherwise, Chu was centuries ahead of modern biology. He clearly articulates that human bodies can be sexed in more than two ways, and a third sex beyond *man* (male) and *nü* (female) – *fei nan fei nü* (non-female non-male) – is a real biological possibility. In his model, *fei nan fei nü* is conceived of as a category separate from, but equal to, the female sex and the male sex. In this concise passage, Chu does not explain what a *fei nan fei nü* body would look like, or could look like in a baby. In his medical practice, would he think of as *fei nan fei nü* babies with partial or incomplete sex traits, or babies with both male and female sex traits, or babies with sex traits different from both? In fact, judging by the matter-of-fact tone that Chu adopted in this passage, there was no reason to think being *erxing* is any different than being female or male in terms of sexual possibilities; he was already pointing out the fact that there are more than two possibilities by which human bodies can be sexed, regardless of how he rationalizes this recognition of non-binary sexual categorization.

Another conceptual weight of Chu's view of *erxing* lies in his view of bodies of the third sex not as bodily disorders (or as omens of some cosmic disorder), but as normal and natural, as all human lives can be. These *fei nan fei nü* might be different and belong to no conventional sexes, but are legitimate and entirely human lives just as twins and triplets are. Chu's perspective is a significant break from the omen-reading framework employed by dynastic history writers who regarded sex/gender transformation and intersex as demonized lascivious *renyao* (human monster). Even if Chu's recognition of the corporeality of *erxing* bodies paralleled the demonization of all possibilities of transgender in dynastic history, it seems they both remained in their distinct epistemic frames. Therefore, how representative was Chu's view of other physicians in ancient China? Would this medical view become widespread enough to have helped shape popular perceptions of transgender in ancient China?

If Chu's passage stands for merely a recognition of the third possibility of human sex – *fei nan fei nü* (non-male non-female), then Zhu Zhenheng (1281-1358), one of the Four Great Masters of Medicine in the Jin and Yuan Period (1115-1368), opened the human sex to even broader possibilities. Zhu elaborates on this issue in the following long paragraph from his masterpiece *Ge zhi yu lun* (Supplemental Essays for Investigating Things and Extending Knowledge) that is worth quoting at length:

> People would wonder, 'I've already known about the different creation of female and male. How should we explain those males who can't be fathers, those females who can't be mothers and those who combine both male and female bodies (*nan nü zhi jianxing zhe*)?' To this, I would reply, 'The reason that some men couldn't be fathers is because their Yang *qi*[31] is inadequate; the reason that some women couldn't be mothers is because their yin *qi* is obstructed; the reason that some are born combine-bodied (*jianxing*) is because the genitals are manipulated by an odd *qi*, which results in different types of intersexes. There are two types of females with male attributes: the first type can either become the wife if matched with a man or become the husband if matched with a woman; while the second type can only become the wife but never the husband. Sometimes, there will be women with entire male genitals, and this is because the odd *qi* is extremely strong.' People may ask: 'If the evasion of the odd *qi* is only manifested in the genital area of babies, why will formulations of the manipulated genital shapes be so different?' I would reply: 'If the genital is still weak, it is more prone to the

[31] The vital energy of the human body and human activities.

> manipulation of the odd *qi*. Once the odd *qi* gets the upper hand, the balance of the Yin and the Yang will be disturbed while neither will be dominant. Neither can the bodily formulation move left, nor can it move right; instead, it is trapped between the two sides while its ultimate shape is determined by the degree of the intensity of the odd *qi*. Therefore, the shapes of the combined bodies would not be identical.'
> 或曰：分男分女，吾知之矣。 男不可为父，女不可为母，与男女之兼形者，又若何而分之耶？余曰： 男不可为父，得阳气之亏者也；女不可为母，得阴气之塞者也；兼形者，由阴为驳气所乘而成。其类不一，以女函男有二：一则遇男为妻，遇女为夫，一则可妻而不可夫。其有女具男之全者，此又驳之甚者。或曰：驳气所乘，独见于阴（婴儿之阴器），而所乘之形，又若是之不同耶？予曰：阴体虚，驳气易于乘也。驳气所乘， 阴阳相混，无所为主。不可而左，不可属右，受气于两岐之间，随所得驳气之轻重而成之。故所兼之形，有不可得而同也。(Zhu 34-5)

In the traditional Chinese medicine, *qi* may refer to both the *yin-yang* vital energy that constitutes the human body, and the energy flow around and through the body. This *qi*, or the internal bodily *qi,* indicates operation of life energy on a micro-level of the human body; while *qi*, or the external cosmic *qi*, in the theologico-philosophical sense usually means primary cosmic elements on a macro-level that generate and govern all things in the world. For centuries, the bodily *qi* has functioned as the hermeneutic category for Chinese medicine. According to *Huang di nei jing* (The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine), the earliest Chinese medical text and the fundamental doctrine source for Chinese medicine (composed between 475 BCE and 220 BCE), humankind is divided into males and females, but each sex is composed of both principles: the masculine yang *qi* and feminine yin *qi*. 'As a male, man belongs to *yang*: as a female, man belongs to *yin*. Yet both, male and female, are products of two primary elements, hence both qualities are contained in both sexes" (cited in Sukie 114).

While Zhu Zhenheng's theory is reminiscent of the binary explanatory framework in historiographical discourses, Zhu extends the binary system of *qi* into a triple-*qi* system, with the odd *qi* functioning as a major element in shaping intersex when the other two *qi* tie with each in influence. As Zhu's account illustrates, the complementary and dynamic conceptualization of the bodily *qi* rejects any dualistic model of sex and tends to frame it as multiple and diverse. Zhu suggests that aside from the two sex/gender/bodies that are taken for granted, there exist at the same time many other sex/gender/body possibilities,

such as a male with inadequate yang *qi*, a female with obstructed yin *qi*, a female with male attributes, and various types of intersex (depending on the configuration of the normal yin *qi* and yang *qi*, and the incongruous odd *qi*). Hence, by conceiving of a multiplicity of genders, Zhu carefully lays out the diverse possibilities on the spectrum of sex and gender and brings physically intermediate beings into the realm of the normal.

As an alternative to the previous blood-semen model, Zhu's modified bodily *qi* model underlies another medical model to reckon with some details regarding transgender, such as what causes intersex, what traits might be attributed to intersex, and the diversity inherent not only in intersex but also in male and female. Zhu's observation provides an even stronger ground for an inclusive conceptualization in traditional Chinese medicine of sex/gender/body transcending the binary. His recognition of the human body's diversity and the way he nuanced this diversity, in particular, lends weight to his foresight on the issue of transgender, as contemporary gender biologists confirm it is the "rainbow as a spectrum of possibilities" that constitutes "the species' future" and "a species without variability has no evolutionary potential" (Roughgarden 15).

Nonetheless, Li Shizhen (1518-1593), an extremely well-known medical authority in the Ming dynasty, is the physician who contemplated the question of transgender most comprehensively and most originally. In the last chapter of his medical classic *Bencao gangmu* (Systematic Materia Medica), titled "*ren gui* (human anomaly)", Li offers an intriguing analysis of the reason why transgender existences and sex irregularities are not against but accordant with the dynamic cosmic principle of change. Li first specifies that, in addition to men and women, there are five types of sterile men (the last type being intersex) and five types of sterile women:

> "*Qian* (man) becomes the father and *kun*[32] (woman) becomes the mother. This is a normal condition. But why there are also five types of men who

[32] According to "Xici" 1.1 in *Yijing*, *Qian* is Heaven, pure *yang*, and male; *Kun* is Earth, pure *yin*, and female. *Qian* initiates, whereas *kun* completes.

> That *tian* (heaven) is high and, *di* (earth) is low is a natural phenomenon. That is why q*ian* is high up and *kun* is low down. High and up is noble; low and down is base.…Because the *yang* line and the *yin* line of the Yijing model the changing movements of nature, the strong and weak lines will come into contact and exert friction with one anther.…The movements of *qian* [*yang*] create *nan* (man), and the movements of *kun* [*yin*] complete *nu* (woman). (Wen and Trowbridge 29).

cannot act as fathers and five types of women who cannot act as mothers? Isn't this because such extraordinary men lack *yang qi* while such extraordinary women lack *yin qi*? The five kinds of sterile women are: *luo* 螺 (spiral stria of the vulva, i.e., vagina with things in spiral shape inside), *wen* 纹 (stricture of the vagina, i.e., vagina too narrow for penetration), *gu* 谷 (imperforate hymen, i.e., genital structured without the vagina opening like a drum), *jiao* 角 (protruding shape in vagina area), or *mai* 脉 (amenorrhea or menoxenia, i.e., suffering from life-long menstrual disorders or discharges). The five forms of sterile men: *tian* 天(born impotent, or *tian huan* 天宦 [born eunuch] as called in earlier times), *jian* 犍 (being castrated, or eunuchs), *lou* 漏 (semen too weak to be kept from emission), *qie* 怯 (cowardice, or inability to be erect or get hard during sex), and *bian* 变 (change of sex, or forms of both sexes, more popularly called *er xing* 二形). (Li 4395, modified by the author)

夫乾为父，坤为母，常理也。而有五种非男不可为父，五种非女不可为母，何也？岂非男得阳气之亏，而女得阴气之塞耶？五不女，螺、纹、鼓、角、脉也。(螺者，牝窍内旋有物如螺也。纹者，窍小即实女也。鼓者，无窍如鼓。角者，有物如角，古名阴挺 是也。脉者，一生经水不调及崩带之类是也。五不男，天、犍、漏、怯、变也。天者，阳痿不用，古云天宦是也。犍者，阳势阉去，寺人是也。漏者，精寒不固，常 自遗泻也。怯者，举而不强，或见敌不兴也。变者，体兼男女，俗名二形。

He then raised a series of rhetorical questions to set up the introduction of his own theory:

when *yang* is generated, growth of *yin* is promoted. If there is only *yang*, it will not grow, nor will only *yin*. This is the normal condition. But there were both *sishi* who can impregnate a woman without being with her and *sinü*[33] who can get pregnant even without being a man. Also there are women having moustaches and men producing milk or even giving birth to babies. Why is this? Is this because the *qi* (Vital Energy) runs into abnormal conditions and everything is reversed, as the kingdom of women[34] where people get pregnant by themselves or as cocks that lay eggs? The endowment of *yin* and *yang* in each person will not deviate from normal/conventional proportions. However, sometimes a man may change into a woman and a woman many change into a man. Why is this? Are these all caused by supernatural spirits that disrupt the normal order of things? (Li 4396, modified by the author)

阳生阴长，孤阳不生， 独阴不长，常理也。而有思士不妻而感，思女不夫而孕，妇女生须，丈夫出潼，男子产儿者，何也？岂其气脉时有变易，如女国自孕，雄鸡生卵之类耶？男生而覆， 女生而仰，溺水亦

[33] Mythical species recorded in *Shan hai jing*.

[34] *Nü guo*, literally kingdom of women, is a well-known sort of utopia in the Chinese popular imagination. Many stories have provided different depictions of *nü guo.*

然。阴阳秉赋，一定不移常理也。而有男化女，女化男者，何也？岂乖气致妖而变乱反常耶？

Clearly, Li was refuting earlier perceptions that interpreted phenomena such as women sometimes growing beards, men's breasts producing milk, men having given birth, and individuals changing from one sex to the other, as caused by "supernatural spirits that disrupt the normal order of things." He always starts by stating what is normal/conventional, then lists situations that actually go against norms/conventions, and lastly, questions why: if one is to trust in norms and conventions, then why would nature also bring about abnormal and unconventional creatures and situations? How should one explain this?

Li concludes, "The evolution and transformation of the Heaven and Earth are boundless. Human beings also have endless changes" (4396). He further adds, "all changes are based on the condition of the *qi* (vital energy)," in that the *qi* is constantly changing (4396). To pinpoint the perception of change and transformation as a common theme of nature, he aptly cites the following poem:

> *Heaven and Earth are the furnace, and nature's creation is craftsmanship.*
> *Yin and Yang are the charcoal, and all things under heaven are the copper*[35].
> *Combination and resolution occur without any order,*
> *Changes are boundless and endless.*
> *A thing may turn into a human being.*
> *This is just natural, which arouses no surprise.*
> *A thing may also turn into a nonhuman being.*
> *This is natural too.* (Li 4396, modified by the author)
> 天地为炉兮造化为工，
> 阴阳为炭兮万物为铜。
> 合散消息兮安有常则？
> 千变万化兮未始有极。
> 忽然为人兮何足控抟，
> 化为异物兮又何足患。

Finally, Li ends his discussion by mocking those who insist "such things in strange forms and odd shapes are unbelievable" as *fu xue zhi shi* 肤学之士 (people with shallow knowledge/understanding of things). He believed that one's disbelief in the possibilities of irregularity only reflects his/her ignorance: "it means he has not learned that all things

[35] Here, furnace, craftsmanship, charcoal, and copper are understood within an extended metaphor for the forging process of copper. The copper (things in the world) is forged in the furnace (Heaven and Earth as container), which is heated with energy power (yin and yang), with the craftsmanship of the agent (nature as the agent, and its creation as craftsmanship).

are subject to infinite changes in infinite time. How can it be said that "it is impossible?" (4396).

Li radically reconceives the traditionally abnormal (*fanchang* 反常) as manifestations of boundless and endless changes of nature ("Changes are boundless and endless 千变万化兮未始有极"). In doing so, he shifts completely to deconstruct conventional perceptions of what is normal and what is abnormal. Those transgender aspects that had been demonized as "disordered" and "monstrous," such as sex change, mismatched gender traits, let alone gender transperformance, should, in Li's logic, be accepted as normal. It is normal for nature to offer us changes in things; similarly, it is also normal for it not to change. This is because nature itself knows no order, knows neither "norm" nor "anomaly": "*Combination and resolution occur without any order*." What remains at the core of his theory is to try not to organize nature's creation into fixed boxes with imposed categories, but to accept and recognize nature and changes as what they are and never feel surprised by its boundless and endless possibilities.

In this light, the human body/temper/desire is not only diverse in type, as Zhu Zhenheng suggests, but is at the same time subject to boundless and endless possibilities of change. How the body can be configured and presented is permanently unstable, always situated in a process of changing and becoming. Sex/gender/body is always sex/gender/body open to changes and in becoming. Transgender is part of these changes, part of the process of becoming; thus, it is completely normal. The world that boundless bodily possibilities eventually create turns out to be not only diverse as "evolution's rainbow," but as dynamic as an "evolving rainbow."

So far, I have presented two almost opposing views on transgender in ancient Chinese accounts: the omen-reading tradition that defined transgender as monstrous, phantasmatic existences in official dynastic history; and the inclusive perspective that naturalized sex/gender/body diversity and transformation in medical accounts. I also noted that these two drastically perspectives had long co-existed with each other in Chinese history. Yet, had they gained the same amount of currency among people? Also, if I may repeat the question I asked earlier, would the medical view have become widespread enough to have helped shape popular perceptions of transgender in ancient China?

My speculation is that, despite the discursive challenges that these medical accounts of transgender posed to the official omen-reading conservatism in dynastic historical accounts, it is still questionable that they could actualize any real sense of subversion of the latter, because the omen-reading framework is an official power discourse, while the inclusive model is a minority discourse circulated among a limited group of people. Medical taxonomies and the categorization and recognition offered by these Chinese physicians do not necessarily amount to a social good. The recognition and justification of third sexes as medically legitimate do not necessarily make them socially legitimate. Nonconformatively-shaped bodies always belong to the political site regulated by power discourses. As Julie A. Greenberg suspects about the situation of transgender recognition in the United States (and elsewhere likewise), "often, the law has operated under the assumption that the terms *male* and *female* are fixed and unambiguous, despite medical literature to the contrary" (51).

The task remains to look for accounts of real-life transgender lives in the past so that we can see which readings of transgender, if any, truly shaped popular perceptions of transgender in history. The answer to this question lies not so much in pursuing the questions of how transgender people were *perceived*, *why* transgender would exist, as in politicizing the questions of *how* transgender people existed, exist and should exist. To unravel the '*how*,' I will focus mainly on more accessible accounts of transgender lives in Ming-Qing popular stories, while also drawing on those transgender popular stories predating the Ming-Qing era to which I do have access.

Ming-Qing *xiaoshuo*: Constructing *erxing*, *nan hua nü,* and *nü hua nan*

Though other historical periods do not lack accounts of transgender in various forms, it is in the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1636-1911) materials that one finds a strikingly larger amount of transgender materials compared with previous times. Not only does the Ming-Qing period offer overwhelmingly more transgender stories (among the 53 transgender stories I have come across during the research, 45 stories are from the Ming-Qing era), this period (especially the late Ming) also produced several of the most enduring, almost archetypal, figures of FTM sex transformation (姑苏老翁女 "the daughter of a rich old man in Suzhou"), MTF sex transformation (李良雨 Li Liangyu),

tactful male gender-cross imposters (桑翀 Sang Chong/桑茂 Sang Mao), and intersex sexual predator (蓝道婆 Lan Daopo) that largely shaped popular beliefs towards transgender individuals and established some major themes for the entire discourse around transgender that continued until the late 19th century.

The Ming-Qing era occupies the most important niche in the story-writing (*xiaoshuo* 小说) tradition in Chinese literary history. Although, historically, for a long time *xiaoshuo* had been viewed as lower literature inferior to higher literary genres, such as annotations of Confucian classics, official history, philosophical treatises, prose, and poetry, none of these genres in pre-modern Chinese literature could possibly compete with *xiaoshuo* in their capture of the kaleidoscopic, vivid picture of society bursting with life. In pre-documentary ages, *xiaoshuo* is probably the closest thing to a documentary in written form. Nowhere else could one have access to everyday people's lives hundreds of years ago, to the depth of "social psychology" through the lens of these lives. And, it is unarguably accepted in academia[36] that *xiaoshuo* in the Ming-Qing era represents the zenith of *xiaoshuo* in both the breadth of their topics and the maturity of narrative techniques. Further, in the Ming era there was already a mature market of book publishing and consumption, thanks to the development of print technology and urbanization. Not only were more books produced, but they were also circulated at a faster speed and travelled to places as far as other countries, such as Japan[37] and Korea. In a word, more books were preserved while many similar books written in dynasties more distant in history had fewer chances to make their way into the present. Given the large numbers of *xiaoshuo* production and the technology of book preservation, it is not unnatural to locate more *xiaoshuo* that touched upon transgender events in this period in particular.

The prevalence of *xiaoshuo* in the Ming-Qing era was also made possible through a significant group of people, the literati, especially those who had failed the imperial

[36] For instance, the prominent Chinese historian Gu Jiegang describes *xiaoshuo* as social psychology, as narratives blending individual/unofficial and official narratives (Qi 9-10); Chen Yinke, one of the most important historian, linguistician, and literature scholar in modern China, promotes what he summarizes as "*yi xiaoshuo zheng shi* 以小说证史 (to verify history with xiaoshuo)" (Qi 11-14).
[37] See Sun kaidi.

exams for becoming civil officials, became disillusioned about politics, and decided to depart from the high literature that was instrumental for a career in government positions. They buried their heads in researching older records and materials that formed an undercurrent against mainstream orthodox learning. Because they were dealing with subjects less politically sensitive and less formal, they became more liberal in content selection and expression, which brought the tradition of *zhiguai* (writing the strange) to a unprecedented new level – *biji* (notebook jotting). Not only had they revived and reworked many *zhiguai* stories from the past, they also added much more personal, contemporary materials and concerns to this ancient genre of story writing, through informal, regular gathering chats, stories gleaned from extensive travel experience, enormous amount of mail correspondence with friends in all parts of the country, and life-long dedication and research. This is the reason why the Ming-Qing gave birth to many great writer/compilers of *zhiguai* and *biji*, such as Lang Ying 郎瑛(1487-1566), Lu Can 陆粲 (1494-1551), Li Xu 李诩 (1506-1593), Shen Defu 沈德符 (1578-1642), Xie Zhaozhe 谢肇淛 (1567-1624), Tan Qian 谈迁 (1593-1657), Chu Renhuo 褚人获 (1635-1681), Wang Shizhen 王士禛 (1634-1711), Pu Songling 蒲松龄 (1640-1715),Yu Yue 俞樾 (1821-1907), and Li Qingchen 李庆辰 (1838-1897). These writers/compilers were not restricted by the orthodox sense of the propriety of study; rather, they considered every scope of human experience worthy of examination. They wrote about historical anecdotes, weird phenomena, absurd experiences, rumors circulating in town, plausible events, encounters with alien kinds, and all levels of lives in society. Accordingly, sexual anomalies, biological mutations, and other transgender phenomena were also among their subject matter.

In addition to the prominence of the *zhiguai* and *biji* types of *xiaoshuo* in this period, there was another important factor contributing to the growth of transgender stories in the Ming-Qing era: the influence of the"Yangming School of Mind[38]" (阳明心学), a school of Neo-Confucianism founded by Wang Yangming 王阳明 (1472–1529), which became one of the dominant Confucian schools in the mid-late Ming period and Qing period. The "Yangming School of Mind" was later vehemently pushed into a left-wing direction by

[38] See Sun Zhimei: 149-178.

later thinkers and prominent literary figures such as Li Zhi 李贽 (1527-1602) and Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716-1797). Contrary to orthodox Confucian emphasis on Principle (*li* 礼), regulation, and rationality, at the very core of the left-wing Neo-Confucian thoughts are instinctive desire (*yu* 欲) and feeling (*qing* 情), which when reflected in literary practice developed into, as described by some scholars, "the cult of *qing* in Ming-Qing literature[39]." Under the guideline of *qing*, writers in the late Ming and Qing era took a bolder approach to explore human feeling and desires. Further, due to the fin-de-siècle decadence resulting from unprecedented social prosperity, the social permissiveness of pleasure-seeking activities (including prostitution and male homosexual practices), and the loose regulation of the central government (resulting from political corruption) in the late Ming era, this period also gave rise to the trend of erotic literature, and works more open about, and with detailed descriptions of, erotic and sensual elements.

It is also against this backdrop that transgender themes (often with explicit erotic tones) were taken as legitimate subjects by professional story writers in the late Ming, such as Feng Menglong 冯梦龙 (1574-1646), Ling Mengchu 凌濛初 (1580-1644), Lu Renlong 陆人龙 (around 1587-1644), Ye Quan 叶权 (1522-1578), and the anonymous writer known as Zuixihu xinyue zhuren 醉西湖心月主人 (around 1620). Several of these transgender themes were renewed in the Qing dynasty; nonetheless, the sexual libertinism and openness of the late Ming was to a great extent curbed under Manchu rule, except regarding male homosexuality. This is because when (heterosexual) prostitution was first banned and criminalized by the emperor in the early Qing period (in 1659), *nan ji* 男妓 (male-homosexual prostitutes) gradually gained tremendous popularity. The already prevalent social male homosexual practices, male gender inversion, and *nan feng* 男色 (male love) were taken to new heights throughout the Qing dynasty[40], the dominance of which, in a sense, overshadowed other transgender themes in *xiaoshuo* in this period.

Lastly, real-life events pertaining to MTF sex transformation (though probably more likely to be explained as male hermarphroditism in modern terms), professional male transvestite impostors, and intersex that we can track down to reliable sources in the

[39] See Huang, "Sentiments of Desire".
[40] See Wu, *Homoerotic Sensibilities.*

early-mid Ming could also explain the concurrent emergence of several clusters of stories. These clusters revolved respectively around three aforementioned central figures: Li Liangyu, Sang Chong, and Dong Shixiu. According to *Ming shi* 明史 (Book of Ming), the official dynastic history of the Ming, Li Liangyu was transformed from a man to a woman in 1568 (Zhang et al. 442). The historical record did not provide any more details in Li Liangyu's case, but this incident was picked up by at least seven *xiaoshuo* writer/compilers in the late Ming, several of whom may have been Li's contemporaries. Based on the significant number of stories produced around that time that tried to make sense of Li's sex transformation (sometimes inevitably with imagination), we can only imagine the stir that this case had made back then. The notorious male transvestite Sang Chong certainly triggered another set of transgender accounts. Extant official sources[41] all dated the case to the year1477, when Sang and his secret group of professional male transvestites were reported to the central legal section, and the case must have caused such a national sensation that the emperor had to interfere and ordered the immediate beheading of Sang and his companions. Needless to say, this case was instantly seized upon by many writers in the Ming-Qing period. A third pivotal incident was actually dated in the late Song period (960-1279), between 1265 and 1274, according to the Ming expanded version of the Song dynasty legal casebook *Yiyu ji* 疑狱集 (Collection of Difficult Lawsuit Cases) He, Ning 和凝, He Meng 和嶝, and Zhang Jing 张景. This case was later extended to a wider audience through the earliest popular crime case compilation, *Huangming zhusi gongan* 皇明诸司公案 (Legal Cases from Judiciary Sections in the Ming), in 1598. This prototype crime fiction catered to the yearning of the now more established readership among common folks for the unusual and the sensational; it became an immediate hit and generated many pirated reprints and similar compilations[42]. In tandem with the demand for more eye-catching and readable stories, this legendary intersex added another critical ingredient for the Ming-Qing transgender accounts.

[41] Two other Chinese resources are 明世宗实录卷 (Truthful Records from Shi Emperor of Ming) and 国朝献征录 (Records of the [Ming] Dynasty).
[42] See Duan Zhan'ge "Book Dealer Yu Xiangdou."

To sum up, the significant number of transgender stories in the Ming-Qing era was the result of a strong book production-consumption economy, the formation of both a wider readership and larger devoted writer circles, and the stimuli of several prominent transgender events in society. It is in these stories that concrete lives of *erxing*, *nan hua nü,* and *nü hua nan* are recorded, imagined, and constructed.

Chapter Two

The Threat of the Hidden Penis: The Criminalization of *Erxing*

"The way of heaven consists of the Yin and the Yang, while the way of the human world lies in man and woman. Dong Shixiu's body possesses *erxing*, and this renders her neither man nor woman, but a monster. The crimes she has committed against those rich families where she has tutored in the past are too numerous to list. How can she possibly be allowed to live on this earth still? [I here forth] sentence [his/her] forehead be tattooed "*erxing*" (two-shaped), in addition to twenty lashes, ten days in cangue and imprisonment in the Cuifeng military camp."

判云：在天之道曰阴与阳，在人之道曰男与女，董师秀身带二形，不男不女，是为妖物。所历诸州县富室大家作过，不可枚举。岂可复容天地间。额刺二形二字。决脊二十,枷令十日,押下摧锋军寨拘锁。– *Yiyu ji* (He et al. *Collection of Difficult Lawsuit Cases*, 8: 1b-2a)

This chapter centers on *erxing* (literally meaning *two-shape*), a group of transgendered lives presented in early Chinese narratives that roughly correspond to those known as true hermaphrodites in early modern Europe, yet are interpreted under significantly different contexts and assumptions. Transgender discourses in imperial China preserve a diverse array of *erxing* lives. It is true that most of the two-shaped *erxing* were introduced as sex criminals who lived in one sex yet possessed both female and male genitals at the same time; there are also those who strategically camouflaged their appearances and performances to impersonate the sex that they were not, for a shameful/lustful purpose. However, there are also certain examples of *erxing* individuals whose double sexes were both recognized and fully utilized.

Nonetheless, positively recognized *erxing* have been relatively rare. As this chapter will illustrate, the majority of *erxing* were introduced as sophisticated gender impersonators who skillfully manipulated social norms for sex-corresponding gender expressions in their gender management. They were seen as predominately lascivious criminals with insatiable sexual desires that disrupted the strict boundaries surrounding conventional family and social systems. For this reason, these troubling *erxing* existences were regularly handled with many forms of violence: public humiliation, inhuman

methods of sex determination, and ultimately, death. What the violence that society inflicted on certain *erxing* bodies betrays are profound social and cultural anxieties over the possibilities that possessing two sexes would imply: one can selectively represent one sex in gender expression while hiding the other sex, particularly if the female sex was the signified one and the male sex was purposefully concealed because it was the hidden penis that immediately threw the community and society into panic. It is precisely this threat posed by the hidden penis of *erxing* that this chapter will inspect. Before this, it is worthwhile to refine the connotations of *erxing* as exemplified in these discourses.

Textual overview*: erxing* and "hermaphrodite," Eastern and Western perspectives

The concept of *erxing* is an ancient one. Literally, *erxing* means *two shapes*, here "xing (shape/form/appearance)" being a euphemism for "the shape for sexual organ," i.e., penis, the male sexual organ; and vagina, the female sexual organ. It is probably the Chinese term that is the closest to the European concept of "hermaphrodite" in both meaning and history. Just as the ancient term "hermaphrodite" has given way to the modern medical term "intersex," in modern Chinese "*erxing*" is seldom used while the term "*liang xing ren* (two-sex-person)" became more accepted to the general public. However, in my discussion, I would like to keep the historical term "*erxing*" to refer to my historical subjects. This is very similar to the way Alice Dreger chose to use "hermaphrodite" in her discussion of scientific and medical European literature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Dreger 30). The first reason for using this term is that it simplifies my narrative. Though literally meaning "two-sex-organ," *erxing* had been used historically for anyone who challenged the assumption that one person can only have one sex (genital), whether prenatal double genitals, double genitals that are naturally alternating or accidentally acquired, or genital shifting by purposeful manipulation. Second, I also use "*erxing*" because it was in fact the blanket term commonly used before and during the period of my study for individuals suspected of being subjects of double, alternating, self-mutating, doubtful, or deceiving sex organs.

The resemblance of *erxing* to the Western equivalent of "hermaphrodite" and "intersex" does not mean they are one and the same thing. Even "hermaphrodite" and its modern substitute "intersex" are not to be confused, as Alice Dreger points out:

> "Intersexed" literally means that an individual is *between* the sexes – that s/he slips between and blends maleness and femaleness. By contrast the term "hermaphroditic" implies that a person has *both* male and female attributes, that s/he is not a third sex or a blended sex, but instead that s/he is a sort of double sex, that is, in possession of a body which juxtaposes essentially "male" and essentially "female" parts. (31)

Erxing should be distinguished from both terms. On the one hand, I use "*erxing*" to actualize the dynamic, shape shifting and multiple potential of sex as opposed to sex as a static, permanent and singular identity. In this sense, *erxing* incorporates anyone whose body physically embodies the fallacy and arbitrariness of the one-body-one-sex rule. It both includes and exceeds the references of *hermaphrodite* and *intersex*, such as individuals who were believed to be a woman in the first half of the month and a man in the other half (alternating genitals), whose male genitals were only occasionally seen, or who could retract and let out their male genitals at their will.

Besides subject range, the historical backgrounds and cultural connotations associated with *erxing* and hermaphrodite also greatly vary, on the other hand. As is well known, the concept of the hermaphrodite has its origin in ancient Greece. First, in Greek mythology, according to the story Ovid told in Book IV of *Metamorphoses*, the gods Hermes and Aphrodite, being "the embodiments of ideal manhood and womanhood" respectively, had a son named Hermaphroditus after them. Later, a nymph fell in love with Hermaphroditus. Her desire for him was so inflamed that when she had a chance to embrace his body, "she wrapped herself around him, as a serpent/ Caught by an eagle, born aloft, entangles/ Coils around head and talons." (Humphries 93). Later, in case her love would escape from her, she prayed to God that their bodies be permanently united; thus, the first hermaphrodite came into being:

> And the two bodies seemed to merge together,/ One face, one form. As when a twig is grafted/ On parent stock, both knit, mature together,/ So these two joined in close embrace, no longer/ Two beings, and no longer man and woman,/ But neither, and yet both. (Humphries 93)

Eventually, Hermaphroditus was seen transformed into "a creature of both sexes"; his limbs softened and his man's voice was gone.

Another story that helped shape in the Western imagination "the long-standing image of the hermaphrodite as a tragicomic, double sexed creature" is Aristophanes's

account of the lost species of the "Androgynous" sex in Plato's *Symposium*: "The sexes were not two as they are now, but originally three in number; there was man, woman, and the union of the two, having a name corresponding to this double nature, which had once a real existence, but is now lost" (Jowett 62). According to Aristophanes, "the man was originally the child of the sun, the woman of the earth," while the Androgyny was "the man-woman of the moon, which is made up of sun and earth," the most complete form of man. However, due to their insolence to the gods, the original human beings as androgynous wholes were cut into two[43] by Zeus, leaving human beings permanently separated and forever seeking reunification with their other halves.

In addition to the hermaphrodites of mythical origin, Jean Cadden has traced the conception of the hermaphrodite as in-between sexes back to the Hippocratic writers. Hermaphrodites in ancient Greece were not seen as particularly evil or ominous; rather, their extra genitals were viewed "like extra toes or nipples, in that it represented an overabundance of generative material" (Dreger 32). According to Alice Dreger, it was in Roman and medieval times that "some hermaphrodites may have been put to death, as apparently were all kinds of 'monstrous' beings. The reasoning behind these murders held that the 'monster' was surely a supernatural portent, a messenger of evil, a demonstration of bad happenings, and that as such deserved and even require prompt annihilation" (Dreger 32-33).

A similar tradition of perceiving *erxing* as omens also existed in Chinese discourses. To revisit the earliest extant discursive trace of *erxing* in *Jin shu* (Book of Jin) (Ch. 2: 7):

> In the capital city of Luoyang, there was *someone who had both male and female bodies, could have sex with both man and woman*, and [*was*] *especially lustful in nature*. The reason this would occur is due to the disorder of *qi* since the Xianning and Taikang periods (275 AD-289 AD) – indulging in the male courtesans became more popular among the upper-class men than sex with women. This new trend soon was copied by the whole nation, which caused many couples to separate and led to many women losing husbands and many men losing wives. And it is because of the disorder and disturbance of the *qi* of men and women that there would be *humans with monstrous shapes*. [emphasis my own]

[43] Interestingly, the Latin root of the word "sex" means "to cut apart" or "to separate".

惠帝之世，京洛有人**兼男女体，亦能两用人道，而性尤淫**，此乱气所生。自咸宁、太康之后，男宠大兴，甚于女色，士大夫莫不尚之，天下相仿效，或至夫妇离绝，多生怨旷，故男女之气乱而妖形作也。(Fang et al. 908)

The exact appellation "*erxing*" was not used in this account. Instead, the *erxing* individual was introduced with a more explicit description of his/her body configuration and bisexual preferences: "*someone who had both male and female bodies, could have sex with both man and woman*". "*Erxing*" is a more economic term that summarizes this body configuration of "*jian nannu ti* (having both male and female body)." As in ancient Roman and medieval European times, *erxing* is similarly interpreted as "*human with monstrous shapes*," which was further explained by the theory of *qi*[44]. Nonetheless, from this ancient account we cannot be sure of the fate of the *erxing* from Luoyang. S/he could have been sentenced to death, as in ancient Rome or medieval China and Europe, or s/he might have been spared his/her life. In fact, what matters here lies not in his/her fate, but in his/her presence, his/her coming into being in the first place and in how s/he differed from other members in society.

The critical attributes of *erxing* were given in plain words: s/he "*who had both male and female genitals and could have sex with both man and woman*." This description of double sex and bisexuality itself reads rather neutrally, and the tone would not be revealed if not for the complementary part immediately following: "*This person is extremely lustful in nature*." Traditionally, "*yin* (lustful)" has been a strong accusation of moral depravity with intense condemnatory connotations. Compounded with the adverb "*you* (especially)," the *yin* attribute of the *erxing* is only more intensified, presenting an even harsher tone on the part of the author. What is more problematic here is that this highlight observation of the *erxing* as "*especially lustful in nature*" was imposed as a self-evident aspect that seemed to need no further explanation or illustration. Though this does not create a causal relation between double sexed/bisexuality and "lust", it associates sexual preference with moral depravity.

Interestingly, the account goes on to attribute this double-sexed, bisexual lust of *erxing* to the prevalence of the homosexual practice that had gradually caught on among upper-class men. It held male homosexuality and the disorder of *qi* it incurs accountable

[44] The theory of *qi* and *erxing* has been elaborated on in my introduction.

for both the existence of *erxing* and their lustful bisexuality by nature. According to the causal relation between homosexuality and bisexuality established by this account, the emergence of *erxing* is not only contingent on, but also *indirectly* consequential of, homosexual behavior. I use "indirectly" because homosexual behavior itself as a privileged pleasure among upper-class men might not be a questionable matter. It was an expression of their power that would not necessarily threaten the upper-class family structure. As subtle as it is, we can still detect the double standards for the upper class and the commoners in terms of family system and marriage ethics[45]. It only came to be blameworthy when it became widespread among the commoners and caused the originally balanced order of *qi* between men and women (the heteronormative family system) to collapse. Therefore, the *direct* cause of the emergence of *erxing* revealed here consists of the disturbance of the conventional family system, which is made very clear in the last sentence: "it is because of the disorder and disturbance of the *qi* of men and women that there would be *humans with monstrous shapes*." Though homosexual behaviors here are definitely seen as eroding into conventional family boundaries and threatening the maintenance of heternormativity through traditional family structure, it is the collapse of heterosexual normative family units that the effect of disorder of *qi* was most clearly embodied, which directly gave birth to creatures of disorderly *qi* – "humans with monstrous shapes"; in other words, *erxing*.

However, this interpretation of *erxing* as a manifestation of the disorder of *qi* does not appear in later accounts. In fact, the corpus I have studied shows a ten centuries' discursive gap of *erxing* narratives in almost ten centuries after the Jin entry. The earliest account of *erxing* after the Jin that I have been able to locate comes from the Song dynasty; meanwhile, it was in the Ming-Qing era that one can observe the real resurgence of *erxing* narratives. Owing to this significant jump in time, later *erxing* narratives adopted conceptualizing modes that utterly abandoned the ancient Jin mode of the cosmic *qi*. These specific accounts are discussed below.

[45] There are many Chinese emperors and other notable officials and famous historic figures who were known as homosexuals. See Zhang Jie, *Aimei de lichen* (Journey of Ambuguity), pp. 200-213.

Table 2.1 Distribution of historiographical entries of *erxing*

Source	Year	About the individual: name/region
Pre-Ming-Qing dynasties		
1. Jin shu (265 AD-420 AD) (Book of Jin, 206 BCE-23 AD)	275-289 AD	From Luoyang, the capital
2. Sou shen ji		Citing *Jin Shu*
3. Guixin zashi (?) (Miscellaneous tales from Guixin Street)	Zhou Mi (1232-1298)	A maid of the House of Zhao
4. Yiyu ji (Collection of Difficult Lawsuit Cases)	1265-1274	Dong Shixiu and the other nun
5. Chongkan buzhu xiyuanlu jizheng (Reprint of Annotated Collections of Cases of Injustice Rectified[46]*)*	1247	Person growing a flesh rod

Table 2.2 Distribution of *erxing* in Ming-Qing personal narratives

The Ming dynasty (1368-1644)		
Source	Author	Name of *erxing* individual
1. Qi xiu lei gao (?) (Drafts of Seven Branches of Knowledge)	Lang Ying (1487～1566)	Su Minci's Concubine
2. Bai shi hui bian (1607) (Complete Compilation of Popular History and Anecdotes)	Wang Qi (1530-1615)	Chen Shounu
3. Wanli yehuo bian (?) （Anecdotes from the Wanli Period [1573-1620]）	Shen Defu (1578-1642)	Overview of *erxing*
4. Wu za zu (Five Miscellaneous Dishes)	Xie Zhaozhe (1567-1624)	Wife of an official
5. Pai an jing qi [1627/8] (Slapping the Table in Amazement)	Ling Mengchu	Nunnery
The Qing dynasty (1644-1911)		
6. Chunxiang zhuibi (?) (Chunxiang Essays)	Dong Han (1621-?)	Wife of Mo Yanchen
7. Jianhu yuji (preface 1703) (Supplement to Collection of Hard Gourd Tales)	Chu Renhuo (1635-?):	Lan Daopo
8. Chibei outan (1701) (Occasional Talks from the Studio at the North of a Pond)	Wang Shizhen (1634-1711)	Some 40-year-old widow from Jining
9. Zi bu yu (c. 1680)	Yuan Mei	Wang Erxi

[46] *Collections of Cases of Injustice Rectified,* or *the Washing Away of Wrongs*, is a Chinese book written by Song Ci in 1247 during the Song Dynasty (960-1276), as a handbook for coroners. In the Qing dynasty, Wang Youhuai reedited the collection and added more cases (published in 1844). Later, Ruan Qixin added annotations to Wang's collection. This annotated and reedited version became the most popular version.

(What Confucius Does Not Talk About) Liaozhai zhi yi	(1716-1797) Pu Songling	(fictional)
10. Nanpu qiubo lu (preface 1690) (Collection of Hard Gourd Tales)		Unnamed individual The Jin source
11. Ibid.		Prostitute named Chunxiang si
12. Sanyi lu (1800) (Records of Three Strangeness)		Shen Qiuhan, the female Buddhist monk
13. Yue xue (c. 1781) (Fragments from Canton)		A 15-, 16-year-old prostitute
14. Ibid.	Ibid.	A prostitute named A Lan
15. Danwu biji (Notes by Master Danwu)	Gu Gongxie (1722—?)	A widowed matchmaker
16. Ji wo can zhui (1872) (Residual Redundant Talks of Parasitic Snail)	Kuiyu daoren (pseudonym) (?-?)	Mrs. Zhang-Wang
17. Ibid.	Ibid.	A girl from a rich family
18. Zuicha zhiguai (1892) (Strange Stories of Drunken Tea)	Li Qingchen (1839—1897)	A Buddhist nun

Several aspects stand out in the overall *erxing* account distribution outlined here. To begin with, for a very long time following the Jin entry, I have not noticed other accounts that openly mentioned *erxing* until the late Song dynasty. As shown in the rundown, so far only four accounts referring to *erxing* have been observed to predate the Ming-Qing era. The considerable resurgence of the *erxing* narratives, as well as *nan hua nü* and *nü hua nan* in the Ming-Qing era is closely related to the development of print culture, and the booming industry of popular literature that has been discussed in earlier chapters. The surge of *erxing* narratives represents merely a small grid of the big picture – the Ming-Qing era as the golden age of narratives with unprecedented speed and amount of narrative production, in short stories, essays, novels, poetry and many more. The Ming-Qing era, indeed, witnessed a flourish of diverse types of literature with an ever-growing print market that was constantly demanding and rapidly proliferating stories, particularly stories that were strange and bizarre. And stories of *erxing*, the same as other transgender narratives, are the kinds of stories that are bizarre and juicy enough to sell, spread and take hold in popular belief.

When it comes to the popular belief of the *erxing,* a certain level of continuity and consistence has existed between earlier pre-Ming-Qing accounts and later Ming-Qing

ones, despite the substantial gap based on extant *erxing* narratives. The influence of the first three accounts on Ming-Qing *erxing* narratives is too obvious to neglect: they are repeatedly cited, reworked and reimagined. For instance, the Luoyang *erxing* examined earlier had been cited many times. In *Wanli ye huo bian*, the renowned encyclopedia compiler Shen Defu was clearly referring to earlier sources in his investigation of *erxing* (No. 4 in Table2.2), the most elaborate and comprehensive overview of the time. Though Shen chose the more general heading "*ren ke* (human abnormalities)," his discussion clearly was focusing on only one specific body: the *erxing*.

> People with both two shapes (i.e. female and male organs) have always existed since ancient times. *Dabore jing* (Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra, or Sutra of the Great Perfection of Wisdom) mentioned five types of "*huang men*" (*paṇḍaka* in Sanskrit). The fourth type is called "*bo cha ban*" (*pakṣa* in Sanskrit), which was explained by the Buddha as "those who is able to act as man in half of the month but not able to in the other half of month". But the Sutra doesn't mention they can act as women. *Huangdi neijing* (Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon) *Suwen* (Plain questions) relates the idea of female pulse, male pulse, and those with both female and male pulses. During the reign (290-306) of Emperor Hui (259-307) of the Jin dynasty, in the then capital city Luoyang there was an extremely lascivious intersex who can act both as man and woman. This was viewed by the wise men of that time as the sign of the prevalence of male favorites in the court. However, it didn't tell of those intersexes as acting as man during half of the month while woman during the other half either.
> 人生具两形者，古即有之。《大般若经》载五种黄门，其四曰博叉半，释迦谓半月能男，半月不能男，然不云亦能女也。《素问》有男脉应、女脉应之说，遂具两形矣。晋惠帝世，京洛有人兼男女体，亦能两用，而性尤淫。解者以为男宠大兴之徵，然亦不闻一月中阴阳各居其半也。(729-30)

The underlined part in Shen's entry is the reference to the Luoyang *erxing*. Shen very clearly made *erxing* his subject, and declared his own attitude towards *erxing* at the very beginning of his treatise. The aforementioned Luoyang *erxing* was among a broad spectrum of references he used to prove the historical legitimacy of *erxing* individuals, including "*bo cha ban*" in Buddhist sutra, the medical classic *Huangdi neijing*, anecdotes of the half-month-man-half-month-woman in Changshu city, and even astrology. With all these examples, his argument is that *erxing* has a long history and constitutes an undeniable reality of our world, not only in the human world. To further support his point,

he invokes the following Chinese folk belief of a shape-shifting, gender/sex-flexible species of foxes:

> There was an old saying that foxes have two shapes. When they get extremely old, they can change shapes to entice people. They will change into woman when seeing man, man when seeing woman. This kind of monster was currently heard of in the capital city, where both the husband and wife were enticed by it yet both of them thought they had met a great man/woman. The truth is that both the woman the husband met and the man the wife met are in fact the same animal[47].
> 旧传狸有两体，其年久者能变幻惑人，遇男则牝，遇女则牡。今京师有此妖，或一家中内外皆为所蛊，各自喜为佳遇，然实同此兽也。
> (Shen *Wanli ye huo bian*: 730)

This continuity of *erxing* narratives over time can also be directly seen in the overall portrayal of *erxing* individuals. In addition to the Luoyang *erxing*, another pre-Ming-Qing (earlier than the 14th century) proto-narrative of *erxing* is "A Maid of the House of Zhao" (title my own, No. 3 in 2.1). Unlike more dramatic and more developed ones, this narrative from the late 13th century is less complicated and its language is also quite economic. The following entry is classified under the heading "*renyao* (human monster):"

> It was during the time when Zhao Zhonghui was the general in Weiyang City. One of his assistants, who also had the last name Zhao, had a very pretty and smart maid that was beloved by other maids. [However,] [e]very time Assistant Zhao tried to get intimate with her, she would refuse adamantly. [This made] Assistant Zhao suspect there was something fishy. It was when he tried to have her by force that he discovered she was in fact a man. He soon reported the case to the governor. After examination, it was revealed that she had two shapes (i.e. both male and female genitals), assuming different shapes when

[47] *Er shi lu* (Record of What Ears Have Heard) [1801?] Vol. 2: "Hu Haohao." The first part of the story recounts a very stereotypical fox-mistress narrative: a man with the last name of He was intrigued by a fox-changed-prostitute. He lived in her place for several months. Finally He decided to go home for once in case his wife became suspicious. At this point, the story departs from other fox narratives. When he was near his house, he saw a handsome youth walking straight into his wife's chamber. He waited outside to see what would happen, only to witness a tryst between the youth and his wife. Furious and humiliated, He was about to kill the young man, but found that the youth changed into the prostitute he visited and lured He to join them in sex. Each of the humans is forced to watch while the fox has sex with the other. The fox assumes a female form to copulate with He, and a male form with He's wife. There is a mixture of humiliation and pleasure for the couple. In his/her leaving, the stranger changed into a fox and disappeared instantly. See Yue Jun: 23.

copulating with different sexes. Hence, s/he was sentenced to death accordingly.

赵忠惠帅维扬日，幕僚赵参议有婢慧黠，尽得同辈之欢。赵昵之，坚拒不从，疑有异，强即之，则男子也。闻于有司，盖身具二形，前后奸状不一，遂置之极刑。(Zhou *Gui xin za shi*: 37)

This record represents a more sophisticated *erxing* narrative than the Luoyang one in that it portrays the *erxing* individual in a domestic setting, introducing him/her as a fully recognized human being living a normal, civilian life with more precision in many details, such as the gender s/he assumed in everyday life, his/her profession, personality, relation with his/her master, how his/her secret identity was exposed, and how s/he was treated as a consequence. The influence of this narrative on later narratives was enormous. As we will soon see in the later discussion of specific narratives, it was foundational for the later proliferation and development of *erxing*, with its elements constantly reworked and further developed by many later Ming-Qing narratives.

The Ming and the Qing periods combined provide at least twenty narratives about *erxing*. The significant amount of narratives allows us to meet a sizeable group of *erxing* individuals from diverse family backgrounds (some from rich families [No. 19], some from aristocratic families [No. 5, 9], and some orphans or unidentitfied [No. 1/6, 8, 10, 11]), with varying social roles (needle workers [No. 1/6, 8, 10], nuns/monks [No. 13, 20], concubines [No. 2], wives from noble families [No. 5, 9], prostitutes [No. 12, 14, 15], or matchmakers [16]), and having lived their lives with their *erxing* identity very differently (some became arch-criminals [No. 1/6, 8, 10, 20, 16]; some were house confined [No. 7,13]; while some tasted double pleasures as both man and woman [No. 5, 12, 14,15]). However, under this diversity there remained a significant consistence with earlier narratives: 1) almost all of the *erxing* individuals also assumed the female gender (with one exception – No. 13) before their *erxing* identities were exposed or developed; 2) the majority of them were young, single, and unattached to blood families, thus outside the traditional Chinese family system; 3) they were all known as hypersexual, whether criminally lustful, adulterous, or with an extraordinary demonstration of sexual appetite.

It was these three core elements laid out here that built the scaffold of *erxing* narratives, the only way we could access their lives during Ming-Qing era (not scientific enough). And they are all closely associated with the pre-Ming-Qing era narratives: 1)

assumed the female gender and 2) young, single, and unattached to blood families were consistent with "A Maid of the House of Zhao" while 3) hyper-sexual was reminiscent of the Luoyang *erxing*. No matter how different other details were, these were the crux of *erxing* individuals that we need to bear in mind.

Erxing Situations That Would Call For Juridical Intervention

The maid of the House of Zhao was not the only *erxing* that was subjugated under the juridical system. What is startling here is the level of penalty inflicted on the *erxing*-bodied maid. What did s/he do that deserved a penalty as grave as death execution? On the surface, the account seems to claim that her/his crime was simply the possession of an *erxing* body and the bisexual potential this body suggested. This was certainly aggravated by her/his choice of presenting her/himself as a female and concealing this important fact about her/his body. This was probably the part that infuriated her/his master Assistant Zhao the most – what a shame it was to be fooled by a fake-woman! Yet, neither the unconventionally constructed body itself nor the act of assuming a gender unfaithful to her/his sex seemed to be adequate to account for a death penalty.

Being born with *erxing* and possessing two genitals at the same time did not appear to be a deadly sin. *Erxing* individuals were able to live a normal life and get married, just as most civilians would, as long as they settled themselves in one sex (in most cases the female sex), obeyed the law and did not cross the line – while secretly living out the other sex (in most cases the male sex) at the same time. The moment that the *erxing* individuals risked the sexual integrity that society expected them to maintain, the juridical law and its regulatory power would immediately come into play. The following, possibly forensic, report provides us with such a case in point. This was included in a lawsuit filed under the heading "The Lawsuit of Adultery between Ma Yunsheng's wife Wang and Jin Sanguang's wife Zhou Sijie in Wuxian," contained in the first volume of *Chongkan buzhu xiyuanlu jizheng* (Reprint of Annotated *Collections of Cases of Injustice Rectified*):

> The examination shows that inside Zhou Sijie's vagina, a soft flesh rod has been growing since birth. This doesn't cause trouble when having sex with her husband. Once aroused, the flesh rod would come out. It is around 2 or

> 3 *cun*[48] in length, as big as the thumb, and is able to conduct adultery with married women.
> 吴县民马允升妻王氏与金三观妻周四姐奸宿一案。验讯周四姐产门内从小生有软肉桩一条，与丈夫交媾并不关碍。肉桩举发即伸出，长有二三寸，粗如大指，可与妇人通奸。(Song and Wang 1:32a/b)

We know from this lawsuit that an *erxing* individual called Zhou Sijie, previously recognized in public as a woman, was caught in adultery with another married woman. It was very clear that what offended the law was surely not a woman possessing a sexually functioning male genital (very professionally described with the precision unknown in all other *erxing* accounts), as this had not affected her getting married and copulating with her husband. It was the exercise of the sexual potential beyond the prescription of her social gender and outside the marriage institution that invoked the juridical interference.

Unfortunately, this account does not include the juridical sentence given to Zhou Sijie, based on this report. But, I surmise that it would be very unlikely that s/he would be sentenced to death as happened to the maid of the House of Zhao. The reason I would make this judgment is that there was no standard written law for regulating *erxing* and their sexual behaviour. The following record from Chapter 25, "Talking about the Strange and Abnormal", Part 6 in *Chibei outan* (Occasional Talks from the Studio at the North of a Pond, 3.2 No. 10) recounts another *erxing* individual resembling Zhou Sijie in early Qing dynasty:

> In Jining city, Shandong province, there was a woman who was around 40 years old, and had been widowed for several years. Yet, she suddenly grew a male genital, and since then she began to have sex with her daughter-in-law every day. After a while, her son finally reported to the officials, but the officials couldn't decide how to deal with this case, as it was so strange and abnormal that there had been no precise laws to regulate it. So the officials gave the sentence that the woman be confined in an empty room while only water and food were served. This happened during the Wuwu year of 1678.
> 山东济宁有妇人，年四十余，寡数年矣。忽生阳道，日与其子妇狎。久之，其子鸣于官，以事属怪异，律无明文，乃令闭置空室中，给其饮食。戊午年事也。(Wang 597)

In this more dramatic version of Zhao Sijie, the widow was believed to have suddenly grown a male genital (though it could also be that she had it all along but was not revealed until her/his affair with her/his daughter-in-law) and was exposed by her/his

[48] 1 *cun* equals approximately 3.33 cm.

own son. Keeping in mind the strict gender-divided space regulation by which women belonged to the domestic, the inside (*nei* 內), and only men belong to the public, the outside (*wai* 外), it is not difficult to understand how the widow could have the opportunity to conduct adultery with her/his daughter-in-law – both were constrained within the limited domestic space. The revealing of this *erxing* element and the same-sex incest scandal undoubtedly confounded the juridical officials significantly. Nevertheless, facing the unprecedentedly bizarre nature of this lawsuit, they admitted that "there had been no precise laws to regulate it" and sentenced the widow to house confinement, rather than giving her the death penalty.

The above two accounts indicate that, even though possessing or having acquired an *erxing* body might catch the attention of the juridical department once exposed, having an *erxing* body and using it to one's own advantage could be hideous enough a crime to justify a death penalty. Unlike in Roman times, when hermaphrodites were executed because of what they are, for being hermaphrodites (Dreger 32-33), there appears to be no known example in China of an intersex individual being killed (judicially or not) just for having an intersex body. In these Chinese accounts, *erxing* were executed first and foremost because of what they did, and only secondly because of what they were. Put another way, criminalization and capitalization of *erxing* was based on the deed, not on the doer: what an *erxing* individual did, rather than what an *erxing* individual was, determined the relation of *erxing* to the law.

The questions to be asked here are: what deadly crimes have *erxing* committed that could suffiently rationalize the decision to condemn them (such as the maid of the House of Zhao) to death? How did many *erxing* individuals come to be known as arch-criminals that should by no means "be allowed to live on this earth," that had to be punished with death, as stated by the judge in *Yiyu ji* (Collection of Difficult Lawsuit Cases) quoted at the beginning of this chapter? This leads us to a series of narratives that profoundly shaped the image of *erxing* individuals as infamous, flagrant archetypal criminals, not without demonization.

Stigmatizing Dangerous *Erxing* Womanizers: Dong Shixiu and Lan Daopo

Whether the lovely maid of the House of Zhao, Zhao Sijie, who had an affair with a married woman, or the widow who had sex with her/his daughter-in-law, at large they did not seem to be aggressive or malicious, let alone villainous by nature. There was also no mention of the fact that their confrontation with the law took a violent form. Though these examples represent only a minority of *erxing* individuals recorded in these earlier accounts, the more predominant and deep-rooted image of *erxing* in popular perception was that of dangerous, sophisticated, aggressive, deceitful, and crafty sex predators and womanizers.

*Dong Shixiu, the womanizer punished by tattooing "*erxing*" on the forehead, and the unnamed nun*

The most reliable account was contained in the aforementioned commercial collection of allegedly true legal cases, *Yiyu ji* (Collection of Difficult Lawsuit Cases). In its 8th volume, the case titled "*Erxing*" refers to two 13th-century legal cases revolving around two nuns, whose crimes were virtually, and incredibly, identical. A story-in-story narration is structured to allow one case to slide naturally into the other without redundant repetition. The story begins with an unnamed nun who was reported to have impregnated a young girl. When the investigation of her/his case showed no progress, a certain juridical assistant noticed its high resemblance to an earlier similar case of another nun known as Dong Shixiu, and this similarity finally enabled the present case to be cracked. For analytical purposes, the full story is quoted at length:

> In the Xianchun period (1256-1274) of the Song Dynasty, there was a man who was originally from Zhejiang province but lived in Jiangxi province. He hired a Buddhist nun to teach his daughter embroidery. Strangely, one day his daughter was found pregnant. Under close scrutiny, the daughter confessed, "It was the nun." Her parents found this too strange to believe, so she explained, "When the nun slept with me in the same chamber, she often talked about things between husband and wife. Occasionally I would be tempted, and she said to me, 'I have two shapes. When I am with the Yang (man) I am a woman; when with the Yin (woman) a man.' When I touched her down there, she was truly a man. So many times we had intercourse."
> [Upon hearing this,] Her parents sued the nun to the officials. [However,] The nun didn't admit her deed, while the body examination results also

showed nothing against her. Therefore, the case was reported to the higher authority *xiansi* (the official who specialized in solving difficult legal cases). The *xiansi* at that time was someone called Weng Danshan, and he too couldn't find a clue.

[Then,] One of his assistant officials said, "Back in the Bingshen year (1236) in the Duanping period, a nun in Guangzhhou named Dong Shixiu was very pretty. It happened that one day some guy attempted to take advantage of her. When probing for her vagina, he found out she was in fact a man. When this case was reported to the court, the officials conducted an examination of her body and found her to be a woman. Then, a midwife suggested, 'Ask her to lie down, pour salted water on her genital, and get a dog to lick on it.' [They tried her method, and] there indeed appeared the male genital, like a turtle suddenly letting out its head from the shell." Weng Danshan forwarded this case further to a higher official, a commandante whose name was Peng Jiezhai, who gave out the following sentence: 'The way of heaven consists in the Yin and the Yang, while the way of the human world lies in man and woman. Dong Shixiu's body possesses *erxing*, and this renders her neither man nor woman, but a monster. The crimes she has committed at those rich families where she has tutored in the past are too numerous to list. How can she possibly be allowed to live on this earth still?'Her forehead was tattooed '*erxing*' (two-shaped), in addition to twenty lashes, ten days in cangue and imprisonment in the Cuifeng military camp. [The nun] died after this."

Later, they tried the midwife's method, and indeed it was just as the midwife predicted, so the nun was executed. [*translation my own*]
宋咸淳（1265-1274）间，浙人寓江西。招一尼教其女刺绣，女忽有娠。父母究问，曰：'尼也。'父母怪之，曰：'尼与同寝，常言夫妇咸恒事。时偶动心，尼曰：'妾有二形，逢阳则女，逢阴则男。'揣之则俨然男子也，遂数与合。'父母闻官，尼不服，验之无状。至于宪司，时翁丹山会作宪，亦莫能明。某官曰：'昔端平丙申年，广州尼董师秀有姿色，偶有欲滥之者，揣其阴，男子也。事闻于官，验之，女也。一坐婆曰：'令仰 卧，以盐肉水渍其阴，令犬舐之。'已而阴中果露男形。'如龟头出壳。转申上司，时彭节斋为经略，判云：在天之道曰阴与阳，在人之道曰男与女，董师秀身带二形，不男不女，是为妖物。所历诸州县富室大家作过，不可枚举。岂可复容天地间。额刺二形二字，决脊二十,枷令十日,押下摧锋军寨拘锁，肉具存亡。申之。如其说验之，果然，遂处死。(He et al. 8:1a/b – 2a)

This account introduces two *erxing* individuals in confrontation with the law with previously unseen complexity and violence. The basic elements of portraying *erxing* as criminals deserving death remain familiar: 1) assuming the female gender (nuns); 2) being single and unattached (again, nuns); 3) hypersexuality (seducing girls). Other than these, what this account presents to the reader are two *erxing* crimes of a nature resolutely

different from those mentioned earlier: they were no longer powerless maidservants or married/widowed middle-aged women, but crafty and deceitful womanizers under the camouflage of their profession: nuns, who were traditionally exemplars of moral discipline and sexual abstinence. Due to the nature of their profession, they were able to penetrate into the strictly regulated chamber of the unmarried daughters of rich families. However, what happened after that may be truly appalling to contemporary readers. In a society that not only enforced pre-marital virginity and valued it, sometimes, with more reverence than life, pregnancy of a daughter before marriage constituted one of the worst kinds of family scandals that would devastate the family's fame and honor[49]. Naturally, the appalled parents immediately pressed their girl for the truth.

The nearly-erotic and certainly too-honest confession of the daughter was mind-boggling for those present. No one would expect the culprit that deflowered their dear daughter to be the least suspicious and least dangerous person. The narrative naturally turns to the criminal, who, in strong contrast with the girl, was not planning to cooperate. Thanks to the assistant to the *xiansi*, the juridical precedent of Dong Shixiu was brought in for reference. The overall framework of Dong Shixiu easily reminds us of the account of the maid of the House of Zhao, except that the former is a much more elaborate and more violent version than the latter. Both of them caught the attention of men because of their beauty; both were reported as *erxing* by the men who tried to harass them; and, both were sentenced to death. However, it was the meticulous details of the Dong Shixiu case that shed new light on the investigation of the *erxing* population and the popular perception of them in medieval China.

In this case, a disturbingly primitive process of identifying *erxing* was inflicted on Dong Shixiu's body: "Ask her to lie down, pour salted water on her genital, and get a dog to lick on it". This was a brutally abusive intervention designed to create strong sexual stimulation for erection. However, by the standards of modern medicine, this method was not necessary to determine *erxing*, since in most cases the physical morphology of *erxing* was able to be identified with the naked eye or by palpation. Nor were there other clinical documents that recorded this diagnostic method for *erxing* (see Dreger). Yet, this highly intrusive and inhumane diagnostic method had invariably been employed as a standard

[49] See Lu *True to Her Word*.

practice in all the major narratives (that is, the five in my corpus) of *erxing* criminals that I have come across. Unfortunately, the violence done to Dong Shixiu during the diagnostic stage was just a beginning. Once her/his true sex identity was confirmed, the punishment was easy: death.

Imbued with pre-existing cultural presumptions and the working of the social normalization mechanism of *erxing*, the judge's rationalization of his administrative decision is particularly illuminating. The first thing to notice is the obstinacy of binary sex conceptualization to the exclusion of all other sex possibilities; as the judge states, "The way of heaven consists of the Yin and the Yang, while the way of the human world lies in man and woman. Dong Shixiu's body possesses *erxing*, and this renders her neither man nor woman, but a monster." This conceptual leap from viewing Dong Shixiu as someone having an *erxing* body to viewing her/him as a monster helps to protect the rigid binary sexual norms by stripping her/him of a human identity, and consequently, essential human rights, including the right to live. The strategy of denying other sex possibilities had been crucial to reinforce the illusion of a clear-cut two-sex model: humanity consists of two sexes, i.e., man and woman; to be a human implies being either man or woman, which was the prerequisite of being a human being; if someone does not fit into the sex of man or that of woman, thus failing to fulfill the prerequisite of being a human being, then s/he does not belong to the human realm but is dehumanized as a monster; more precisely, a lascivious and deceitful sex monster.

After defining Dong Shixiu as a monster that fell out of both human sex norms and morality, the judge easily convicted her/him as a criminal. The prosecutor's task was also greatly facilitated when the accused belonged to the category of dehumanized monsters, preconceived as deceitful, crafty and sexually degenerate. As sociologist Craig Haney notes, it is more palatable to kill "monsters" or "mere animals" in that "they have been excluded from the universes of morally protected entities" (44). The same strategy of demonizing a human being before justifying the decision to kill her/him is a universal and enduring one. As Mogul, Ritchie and Whitock note: "In capital cases a prosecutor must successfully undertake what should be a morally difficult, ethically complex task of convincing a jury or judge to kill another human being" (80). They further add: "To succeed, the prosecution must demonize, dehumanize, and 'other' the defendant" (80). In

Dong Shixiu's case, since s/he did not fit the normative prescription of sex morphology, s/he was easily dehumanized and made ready for prosecution.

According to the judge's comment, the prosecution of Dong Shixiu was established upon crimes "too numerous to list." What were her/his crimes, then? The answer was having illicit sex with girls from rich families, or more accurately, if the judge were to conceptualize it, seducing or forcing them into illicit sex. In the imperial Chinese legal system, levels of punishment for "illicit sexual intercourse (*jian* 奸)" vary, depending on many factors, such as social categories (officials [*guan* 官], commoner [*liang min* 良民], base class [*jian min* 贱民], prostitutes [*chang* 娼], and others) or professions (clergymen, soldiers, and others) of the parties involved. Nonetheless, a principal consideration in deciding the liability and penalty of those who "conducted illicit sexual intercourse" (*fan jian zhe* 犯奸者) is to determine whether the act was "coercive illicit sexual intercourse (*qiang jian* 强奸)" or "consensual illicit sexual intercourse (*he jian* 和奸)". Here "consent" means a woman's willing participation: if there was evidence that a woman consented to illicit sex, it meant that she shared the guilt, and hence shared the punishment for this crime; if a woman was a victim forced into sex, then only the offender would be liable and his penalty would be of a higher level than in the former case.

This is tremendously important in order to understand Dong Shixiu's case and other high-profile *erxing* legal cases of *jian* (illicit sexual intercourse). According to Matthew Sommer points out in his seminal study on the regulation of sexuality, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China*, when "rape [illicit sexual intercourse] was lifted out of the background offense and accorded central prominence, […] a woman's attitude toward sexual intercourse took on a new importance for the law" (67). Simply put, a woman's attitude toward *jian* had critical valence in defining the nature of *jian* cases. Further, as Sommer observes, the importance of the distinction between coercive *qiang jian* and consensual *he jian*, between coercion and consent, "increased dramatically after the Tang [618-907 AD] … reaching its apogee in the 18th century" (67). It was very unlikely that the judge of Dong Shixiu's case in the 13th century was unaware of this. Interestingly, despite the clear indication of consent on the part of the daughter in the

account (and, by narrative inference, the girls in rich families involved in Dong Shixiu's case): "Occasionally I [the daughter] would be tempted…So many times we had intercourse (*shi ou dong xin… sui yu shu he* 时偶动心…遂与数和)," her consent was completely kept out of consideration in proceeding the case. In both the framing case (the unnamed nun) and Dong Shixiu's case, the women were washed clean of any guilt by shifting all the liability onto the body of the *erxing*. *Erxing* individuals had to suffer full liability, including pillory (bearing the tattooed characters "*erxing*" on the forehead), beating, torture, and even the death penalty.

The reason why girls from rich families were successfully transformed from accomplices to victims, while the nature of the cases changed from consensual *he jian* to coercive *qiang jian,* was largely due to the strategy of demonizing *erxing* individuals. In this account, two parties were constructed in direct opposition: on one side, we have the vulnerable, innocent girls who could not resist the temptation; on the other, there are the predatory, crafty, hypocritical and profane *erxing* monsters with a hidden penis. The only possibility to explain their "illicit sexual intercourse (*jian*)" to the public had to be that of *coercion*, regardless of what the girls confessed. What was it, then, that made the prosecutor decide to exempt the girls? What was the law really defending when protecting the girls' credential? Why were *erxing* individuals so threatening that they had to be extinguished?

Lan Daopo: the skilled needle worker intruding into the inner chamber

The answers may be found in another *erxing* criminal of the late Ming period, known as Lan Daopo. The storyline of Lan Daopo is a familiar narrative of sexual crime: An *erxing* individual was often hired as a homestay needlework tutor, before her/his *erxing* identity was exposed. Later, one student reported to the magistrate that s/he was an *erxing*. Then, it followed that s/he was arrested and executed. But the narrative, at the same time, clarified several new points that would help us to reassess *erxing* criminal narratives in a new light. Unlike the previous case of Dong Shixiu, the account of Lan Daopo does not come from a dedicated legal case source. Rather, as most other transgender accounts did, it was found in the citation of a lost personal collection of stories: *Jieshi shengtan* (Extra Talks from Jieshi Mountain) by Wang Zhaoyun (active

around 1601), and in Chapter 4 of *Jianhu yuji* (Supplement to *Hard Gourd Collection of Tales*) [1703] by Chu Renhuo (1635-?), an important intellectual and writer during the early Qing dynasty. The account relates:

> During the Jiajing period (1521-1567) of the Ming Dynasty, in Ruizhou there was an intersex person called Lan Daopo who had both Yin (female) and Yang (male) bodies. [S/he] had no beard or moustache, so [s/he] had her feet bound as women do and devoted [her/his] time in practicing woman's work [*nugong* 女红 or, feminine skills].[50] [Later, s/he became] extremely skilled [in *nugong*], and hence was often hired by big families to tutor their daughters in embroidery and weaving. [As a tutor, s/he] was with her students day and night, and slept in the same bed. In the beginning, there was nothing strange. However, after midnight, [her/his] penis would reveal itself and [s/he would then] be licentious with these girls. [S/he often got her way until] later one girl, Lan, played the same trick, refused to comply, and escaped to tell her parents about this. Her parents then asked an old lady to test [her/him during the night], and found what the girl was telling them was indeed true. They then reported [her/him] to the magistrate, [who had her/him] arrested and interrogated. [Being found guilty,] [s/he] was pilloried around the whole city in a huge cangue. [Because] so many girls whom Lan tricked into sex hanged themselves out of shame, Lan was sentenced to be beaten to death. This is why old *sangu liupo* 三姑六婆 (literally, three kinds of women and six types of old ladies)[51] should not be allowed into houses.

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[50] such as embroidering, sewing and weaving. *Nugong* was among the canonical Four Virtues (*side* 四德) of women in imperial China.

[51] According to volume 10, *Nan cun chuo geng lu* 辍耕录(*Records of Retiring to the Plough in South Village*), a miscellaneous collection of essays, historic anecdotes, and stories by Tao Zongyi 陶宗仪, an intellectual who retreated to the countryside to escape wars, *sangu liupo* referred to three *gu*s (three types of women whose professions ended with the suffix *gu*): *nigu* 尼姑 (Buddhist nuns), *daogu* 道姑 (Taoist nuns), and *guagu* 卦姑 (female fortune tellers), and six *po*s (six types of women whose professions ended with the suffix *po*): *yapo* 牙婆 (female brokers), *meipo* 媒婆(matchmakers), *shipo* 师婆 (witches), *qianpo* 虔婆 (whorehouse proprietresses), *yaopo* 药婆(medicine women), and *wenpo* 稳婆(midwives) (126).

Although they brought great convenience to women confined in carefully guarded inner chambers that segregated them from men in traditional Chinese society, *sangu liupo* were preferably shunned by society, particularly upper-class families, to a certain extent, for fear that they would inflict bad influences upon women of good families. For instance, in chapter 12 of the Qing satire fantasy novel *jing hua yuan* 镜花缘(Flowers in the Mirror) [1827] by Li Ruzhen 李汝珍, one character says: "I heard there are many *sangu liupo* at this place. Once they were allowed into the house, the innocent women in the family often suffered great loss because of them, sometime being swindled out of money and sometimes have clothes stolen (吾闻贵地有三姑六婆，一经招引入门，妇女无知，往往为其所害，或哄骗银钱，或拐带衣物。)" (52).

Lan Daopo did not belong to any of the *sangu liupo* professions, but her/his name contained *po.* In addition, like other unwelcomed *sangu liupo*, Lan Daopo represented the same

> 嘉靖中，瑞州府有蓝道婆者，身具阴阳二体，无髭须，因束足为女形，专习女红，极其工巧。大族多延为女师，教习刺绣织纴之类。即与女子昕夕同寝处，初不甚觉，至午夜阳道乃见，因与淫乱。后至一家，女徒伴宿，蓝婆求奸，女子不从，寻与父母语其故。因令老妪试之，果然。首于官，捕至讯实，以巨枷遍游市里。女子曾失身者缢死甚众，道婆仍杖死。所以人家三姑六婆不许入门，以此。(2112)

This account brings to the fore another set of central elements in *erxing* criminalization narratives: 1) The *erxing* criminal took deliberate measures to achieve a female look, such as binding feet (arched feet formed by footbinding was one of the essential markers of female and male difference) and practicing *nügong* (woman's work), a female gender- specific activity, so being hired as a *nügong* tutor should be understood as a carefully-planned plot. 2) The *erxing* criminal could manipulate her/his penis in such a way that it was only seen after midnight, raising another myth of the hidden penis of the *erxing*. 3) The creation of chaste daughters. This was done in two ways: on the one hand, the story introduces the chaste girl who resisted the *erxing*'s move of *qiujian* (requesting illicit sexual intercourse) and preserved her chastity; on the other hand, the reader was further told about another group of unchaste girls who were shamed into committing suicide. 4) A moral was added at the end of the account: "This is why *sangu liupo* should not be allowed into houses." Put another way, this means: keep your daughters safe in their boudoirs, watch closely over them and ward off women from outside who might intrude into your family.

Overall, one thing grows clearer in the light: compared to Dong Shixiu and the other nun, *erxing* criminals like Lan Daopo were presented as more discreetly disguised, more audacious in sexual seduction, and thus more dangerous yet more subtle enemies. Meanwhile, one feature of the *erxing* criminal discourse was a tendency to collapse all female victims into the category of daughters, who were seen as more innocent, resistant, and respectful, resulting in a more striking contrast between the demonized *erxing* criminals and their martyred victims. This enabled *erxing* individuals such as Lan Daopo to be framed as inherently deceptive, aggressive, and lewd, and therefore unworthy of life. With the severity of her/his liability in view, the violent execution of Lan Daopo became morally justified and ethically entitled – in the name of doing justice to the girls who

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possibility of bringing dangerous influences from outside into the family.

suffered humiliation and committed suicide, and protecting other girls from similar threats. In other words, it was done for the public good. However, what underlies the public interests of deploying criminalizing narratives about gender deviance to demonize *erxing* betrayed a collective patriarchal anxiety over the security of carefully guarded female space and female chastity. Womanizing *erxing* criminals reified but an embodiment of unforeseeable, imminent threats that menaced the virginity of marriageable daughters in upper-class families. And in the battle with sex predators such as *erxing* criminals, the stakes for society were high.

Nowhere were the stakes more explicitly presented than in the lawsuit regarding an *erxing* criminal of illicit sex, featured in the *zhiguai* collection *Zuicha zhiguai* (Strange Stories by Drunken Tea) [1892] by the late Qing writer Li Qingchen. This account was of immense value because it focused on the victim-daughter, which was rare for such stories, and provided the most detailed look into her desire in her sexual encounter with the *erxing*, her life in the forbidden boudoir and the impact of her involvement with the *erxing* upon her life. Because the basic storyline largely resembles that of Dong Shixiu and Lan Daopo (a female-looking embroidery tutor turned out to be an *erxing*; s/he had illicit sexual intercourse with the daughter; her/his *erxing* identity was unveiled, and s/he was executed accordingly), and also for concerns of length, the full story will not be quoted here; instead, I will quote parts of it as needed.

Unbearable pleasure: erxing *with a hidden penis*, *the boudoir and chastity cult*

Li Qingchen tells the story of a young girl in a rich family, who was pretty, smart, talented in poetry, painting, chess, and had many other skills that an elegant woman should master. When she reached the age of marriage and was betrothed, her parents arranged a nice house for her to dwell in until her betrothed family came to receive her. She had been accompanied by no one, except for two maidservants, until one day when, while visiting her mother, she met a mendicant, and quite young, Buddhist nun who came to her mother's house. Because the nun could also read and knew about chess, they grew very fond of each other and became close chamber friends. After they became more familiar with each other, gradually their talks became more playful and

frivolous/amorous (*wanglai ji nian, jian bu xiexue* 往来既稔，渐涉戏谑)[52]. Then, one night after all the maidservants had fallen asleep, they had the following subtle conversation (bearing in mind that they had been sleeping on the same bed during this time):

> The nun asked the girl, "Will a virgin have desires too?" She kept asking, but the girl did not answer, so she moved her hand inside the girl's clothes, and said: "what a gorgeous nest here! The bird will move in."[53]
>
> The girl laughed, "Such a foolish nun! Have you lost your mind? You are having a nest too; where comes the bird?"
>
> The nun replied, "I sure do have it."
>
> "Where is it, then?" the girl asked.
>
> "It's here." So the girl felt the nun's private area, and indeed there was a chick[54] waiting there.
>
> "I thought you were a nun; are you actually a monk?" Horrified at this, the girl wanted to run away.
>
> The nun hugged her and begged her not to leave. "Please don't be afraid. I am a two-shaped man (*erxing ren*). Usually, I'm just like a woman, but when I want a woman, I will turn into a man; when I want a man, I will still be a woman. This remains a secret that no one knows. Also, in this late middle of night, nobody will find out; why are you afraid?"
>
> So the girl agreed to what the nun had proposed. After they had sex, the nun asked the girl to feel her genital again – indeed, there was the nest alone. The girl was amused, "No one can tell when it is going to come out or not. What a opportune and precious tool that you have!" The two became all the more intimate ever since.
>
> 尼谓女曰："处子亦动情乎？"连问之，女不答，乃探女怀云："好个鹊巢，鸠将居之。"女亦笑曰："痴姑子，尔颠耶？尔也鹊巢，何鸠居之有？"尼曰："我固有鸠在。"问在何处，曰："在此。"女笑曰："如光鸠，骂毁尔巢。"遂扪其私，则小鸡竦而待矣。大惊曰："予以尔为尼，尔固僧耶？"欲遁。尼抱而哀之曰："娘子勿忧，予二形人也。平

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[52] *Xixue* 戏谑 originally means being humorous, often used with sexual connotation, meaning flirting talks. The usage of *xixue* in this context seems to be intentionally ambiguous. Given the context, it is reasonable to infer a homosexual erotic implication in the word *xixue*.

53 Both the nest (vagina) and the bird (penis) are euphemisms. It was a creative appropriation of a classic Chinese idiom, *jiu zhan que chao* 鸠占鹊巢 (A turtledove occupies the nest of magpies) first used in *Shi jing* 诗经(Book of Songs). 《诗经·召南·鹊巢》: "维雀有巢，维鸠居上." It was believed that turtledoves do not make their own nests, and instead prefer to seize the nests of magpies as their own. A similar English idiom would be "a dog in a manger." Here, in the original Chinese "好个鹊巢，鸠将居之" the nun applies this idiom to refer to sexual activity, indicating her/his literacy. In the rest of the conversation, this idiom is employed as an extended metaphor for sexual activity.

[54] Chick (*xiaoji* 小鸡) is a vulgar slang for penis.

时与女无殊，然感女则男，感男则女，人不能窥其奥也。且深夜无人知，何所患焉？”女许之。入帐事讫，令女验之，则惟有鹊巢而已。女笑曰：“出没不测，真逢时之利器也。”从此益亲，往来无间。(1-2)

The above conversation allows us a rare glimpse of the emotions of the daughter: an unequivocal sexual desire. Yet, it remains ambiguous whether her sexual desire was homosexual and/or heterosexual. When the nun initiated a sexual advance (touching her vagina), the daughter seemed more amused than offended. Since this was before the nun revealed her/his male genital, the sexual interaction and flirtation seemed bordering on the homosexual side.[55] Later, the daughter was obviously intrigued by the nun's sexual cues. Though there was a moment of rejection, it was her own choice to engage in illicit sex with the nun. The appreciation she expressed at the nun's secret penis ("What a opportune and precious tool that you have!") showed nothing but intense feelings of fulfillment and pleasure, all the more delightful because it was a secret.

Deep in the boudoir, a secret illicit sexual pleasure, grown from friendship and homosexual attraction, continued. A crucial factor that facilitated, and was also greatly accountable for, the development of this amorous pleasure was the boudoir. Known as *guifang* 闺房 in Chinese, the boudoir (or sometimes, inner chamber) represents a rigidly gendered space that society circumscribed for women to maintain sex segregation and regulation. To enforce gender boundaries, societies usually allocate space for social members based on their gender: women belong to the inside, the domestic; while men enjoy the outside, the public. Not only were women's bodies domesticated for this purpose (indeed, one of the principal social functions of footbinding was to restrict women's activity[56]), in imperial China, the education of women also emphasized a cult of domesticity. For most women, the boudoir was the only permitted space throughout life: they received female education, including learning *nugong* (women's work) and reading, music, and chess (if born in an affluent family), in the boudoir before they were married; after marriage, the boudoir was where they raised daughters and continued doing *nugong*.

[55] For further studies on female homosexuality and sisterhood in imperial China, see Zhang Jie, *Aimei de lichen* (Journey of Ambiguity), pp. 724-748.
[56] For further studies on footbinding and gender boundary, See Dorothy Ko, *Every Step a Lotus* (2002) and Cinderella's Sisters (2007).

For daughters in common families, doing *nugong* was a major component of life in the boudoir,[57] both before and after marriage (Figure 2.1). This was constantly reflected in the *erxing* accounts: the reason that most *erxing* individuals were able to enter the boudoir was that the families were looking for *nugong* teachers.

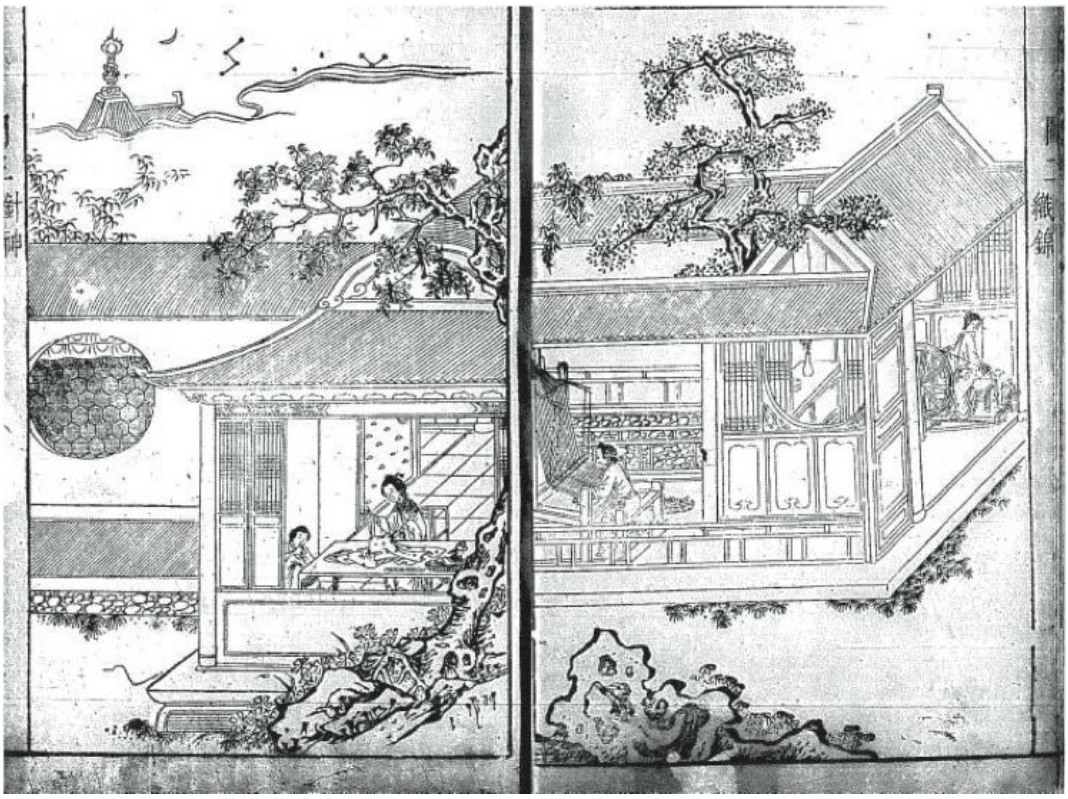

Figure 2.1: *Nugong* (Women's work): weaving and embroidering (Source: Qinhuai Yuke, comp., *Lüchuang nüshi,* fig. 2–3.)

Often, it was their excellence in *nugong* skills that offered *erxing* individuals the passport to the otherwise strictly-guarded female boudoirs. In this socially and morally regulated female exclusive environment (Figure 2.2), female desire constituted an unspeakable, yet realistic part of the boudoir. Female desires could be seen in some form of strong sisterhood bond, or as demonstrated in current *erxing* criminal legal cases in discussion, in the form of illicit sexual pleasure, even though they were clearly aware it was against their education and against social mores.

[57] See Grace S. Fong, "Female Hands."

Probably, before regulating *erxing* individuals who understood and took advantage of the boudoir's desires, the law should more honestly come to terms with these desires. It would be far easier to extinguish the scapegoat *erxing* criminals than these desires. Even if the war against the *erxing* sex criminals were won, somewhere still these desires would loom. More importantly, these desires would prove they were not without a price, so the accounts continued.

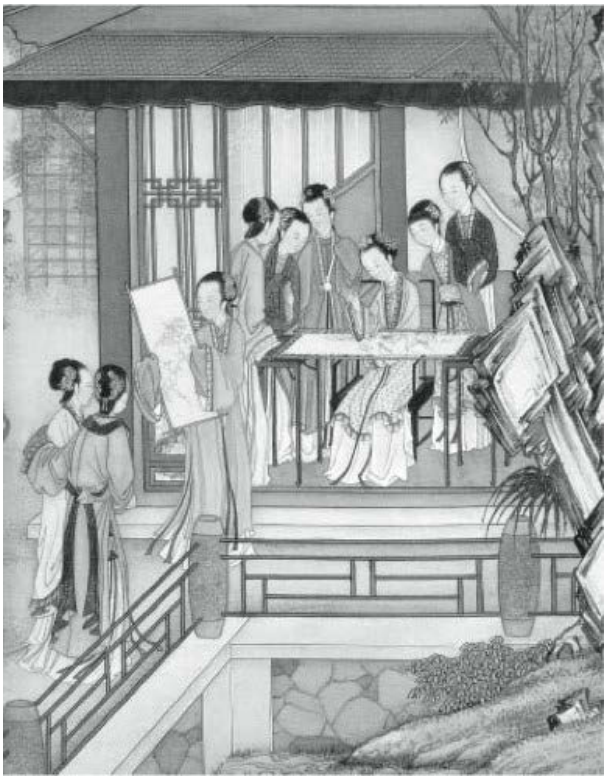

Figure 2.2: Women embroidering and the boudoir, a painting by Chen Mei (ca. 1638–1707). (Source: Guo Xueshi and Zhang Zikang, eds., *Zhongguo Lidai shinü huaji,* fig. 114)

To return to the lawsuit described by Li Qingchen, by the time of the daughter's wedding day, she was already showing a pregnant belly. She had to lie to her parents that this was because she was sick. However, merely three months after the wedding, she gave birth to a child. Consequently, "[t]he husband felt so ashamed by her that he divorced her and ordered her to return to her natal family. The girl didn't go home; instead she took her own life by drinking poison" (夫丑之，迫令大归。女未归而仰药死。). Even so, her father was deeply grieved at this loss of his beloved daughter, so he sued her son-in-

law (possibly for causing the death of his daughter). Hence, we read the following conflict between the magistrate and her father:

> [The magistrate] felt something suspicious here, so he called upon the girl's father for inquiry. "It is obvious that your daughter hadn't been faithful (*zhen* 贞) to her husband, so why would you sue the latter?"
>
> The girl's father replied, "My daughter had never left her house. Having no chance to meet any men at all, how could she get pregnant? If truly a *jianfu* 奸夫(a man engaging in illicit sexual intercourse) was found, her death would be well deserved, so why would I shamelessly sue false charges?"
>
> 拘富室讯之，云："汝女不贞，何得妄控尔婿？"
>
> 富室云："女素楼居，终萝不见男子，何孕之有？果得奸夫，死自其分，敢赧颜诬告耶？"(Li 2)

Of course, an investigation was undertaken. Needless to say, in the end, the "*jianfu*" (the nun, though not really a man but an *erxing*) was identified, confirmed (by the same aforementioned dog-licking method of diagnosis), and executed. These were all stock *erxing* criminal narrative elements. What truly points to the heart of *erxing* criminal narratives lies in this brief dialogue between the magistrate and the father, respectively the spokesman of the law and that of the patriarchy. Their statements not only confirm that the boudoir is employed to segregate the daughter from interacting with men because interacting with men implies the danger of illicit sexual intercourse (*jian*), it further informs us of the cornerstone of *erxing* criminal narratives: the importance of a woman being absolutely *zhen* (faithful) throughout her entire life – before marriage (before and after being betrothed), within marriage, and after marriage (when her husband died before her or she was divorced by her husband). The value of faithfulness overrode the value of life, giving rise to what has been referred to as the "chastity cult"[58] or "the faithful maiden cult".[59]

Though Confucian culture has always prioritized female chastity, the notorious chastity cult was a distinctive late imperial phenomenon that surfaced in the thirteenth century, escalated into a cult[60] in the second half of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), and spread widely in the Qing (1644-1911), the period from which this chapter draws most of the *erxing* criminal narratives. As Lu Weijing pinpoints, it was rooted in the Neo-

[58] See T'ien Ju-K'ang, *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity*.
[59] See Lu Weijing, *True to Her Word*.
[60] Lu Weijing, *True to Her Word* (3).

Confucian creed of the cultivation of virtue that was behind massive "national campaigns to disseminate moral values through such institutions known as 'imperial testimonials (*jingbiao* 旌表)' honoring moral exemplars across the empire" (4). Moral exemplars were not excluded to men; hundreds of thousands of women were honored by the Ming and Qing courts as well, albeit predominantly in the two categories related to female chastity: "*jiefu* (faithful widow [who became widowed before the age of thirty and remains faithful to her dead husband until the age of fifty or above)," and "*lienü* (martyred woman [who died in/for defending her chastity])." During this national campaign, men were eligible for *jingbiao* in many categories (such as loyalty to the nation, talent, filial piety, and career achievements), but for women, "chastity" constituted the very few paths that could earn their families fame and honor. Therefore, female chastity was taken to be the first and foremost caliber of an honorable woman while general social views of honor and disgrace of women were heavily shaped by their performance of chastity.

dynasty / category	Zhou	Qin	Han	Wei/Jin North and South Dynasties	Sui and Tang	Five Dynasties	Liao	Song	Jin	Yuan	Ming	Qing
jiefu	6	1	22	29	32	2		152		359	27141	9482
lienu	7		19	35	29		5	122	28	383	8688	2841
Total	13	1	41	64	61	2	5	274	28	742	35829	12323

Table 2.3 Statistics of *jiefu lienü* of all dynasties
From Dong Jiazun 董家遵, "Statistics of *jielie funü* of all dynasties (*lidai jiefu lienü de tongji*)," in *Xiandai shixue* (Modern Historical Studies). p.11.

The maiden's desire-coded encounter with the alleged hypersexual and guileful *erxing* posed a perilous moment for her performance of chastity. Whether she followed her desire and consented to illicit sex, or was coerced into it but kept silent about it, it all meant the worst scenario of losing chastity. In the event of "imminent threat of sexual assault," or having consented to sexual temptation in our cases, "committing suicide was the ultimate demonstration of one's moral virtue" (Lu *True to Her Word*: 4). Therefore, in the case of a maiden's chaste purity in crisis, there existed a general practice of disgrace or death, as shown in numerous examples of *lienü* (martyred women) in historic records. Sadly, the sexual power represented by *erxing*'s hidden penis invariably reduced the maidens to disgrace-or-death quandaries by which, for them, death was deemed to be

a more favorable choice than living in disgrace, as the father in the above case commented on her daughter's suicide: "If truly a *jianfu* 奸夫 (a man engaged in illicit sexual intercourse) was found, her death would be well deserved." Within the traditional Confucian clan system of honor, female chastity was no longer a personal choice, but was critical for her family's (both natal and marital) reputation and honor. Thereby, while the direct danger that *erxing* criminals posed was the chaste purity, that is to say, the life of the maidens, their deeper repercussions would be felt by the maiden's family. Any suggestion of the maiden's involvement in illicit sex (*jian*) with a man would tremendously damage not only her own reputation but, more severely, that of her clan. For society in general, this represented the real stakes of allowing *erxing* and their extra, unexpected penis around the maiden.

The reverse scenario: Shen Qiuhan"the female Taoist monk," the erxing *with a hidden vagina*

In an extremely rare reverse scenario, *erxing* individuals with a hidden unexpected vagina, who presented as men, were regarded as far less threatening, and therefore not requiring as extreme a penalty. Though all other *erxing* accounts recorded *erxing* individuals living as women, the following account in Chapter 7 of *Sanyi lu* (Records of Three Strangeness), an anonymous late Qing collection of stories, provides a rare exception of an *erxing* transperformed as a man:

> There was a 26-year-old Taoist monk, Shen Qiuhan, who looked and acted like a man. One day, he was reported to be a woman. Soon he was arrested and summoned to the county court. After he was examined by a midwife, he was discovered to have both male and female organs. Under interrogation, he admitted that he had conducted illicit sex (*tongjian* 通奸) with several Taoist monks. Later, all other monks involved were also punished according to the law while his/her master was also exiled to Penglai. He/she was referred by the contemporaries as "The Female Taoist Monk." Later, when he/she was released, he/she returned to his/her father's house and remained unmarried all his/her life, and became a home practicing Taoist monk instead.
> 道士沈求汉，其容貌举止男子也。年二十六岁，一日被仇首是女子。拘至县庭，令稳婆探其私，具男女两体。乃鞫得素所通奸道士数人，俱置于法，其师问配蓬莱驿。时人称为雌道士，后回父家不嫁，仍为火居道士。(7:15a)

In this account, we see a dramatically different framework here. The formula for woman-transperforming *erxing* criminals was discarded to a great extent: no young maidens, no sophisticated efforts to acquire a female look, no subtle sexual insinuation and seduction, no violent diagnosis of *erxing* genitals, and no execution of the culprit. Instead, the whole event and its legal proceeding were seen as much less complicated and violent. Since those around Shen Qiuhan, the male-looking *erxing,* were no longer vulnerable and preciously guarded virgin maidens, the primary concern that defined female-looking *erxing* criminals such as Dong Shixiu, Lan Daopo, and the nun who impregnated the maiden – chastity anxiety – was out of the question. The overall tone toward an *erxing* criminal who transperformed as a man came to be milder and less ruthless than that of the *erxing* who performed as a woman. Unlike his/her female-looking counterparts, Shen Qiuchen was not executed; rather, after he/she served his/her sentence, he/she was able to be re-accepted, though not without compromise, by his/her natal family, religion, and society.

The much more lenient treatment of the male-looking *erxing* Shen Qiuhan by the law represents merely one pivotal difference. The other significant difference is found in the way the law defined the nature of Shen's illicit sex with other Taoist monks as consensual (*hejian*) rather than coercive (*qiangjian*). The account explicitly states that the law established the nature of his/her crime as "conduct[ing] illicit sex (*tongjian* 通奸) with several Taoist monks," with *jian* 奸(illicit sex) here meaning *hejian* 和奸(consensual illicit sex). This is further seen in the penalty arrangement: "all other monks involved were also punished according to the law," admitting both parties (Shen Qiuhan and the monks having had illicit sex with him/her) guilty of sexual misconduct. This equal liability of both the *erxing* and those who are sexually involved with him/her essentially altered the predominant criminal-victim pattern in which only the *erxing* was recognised as fully liable, thereby solely punishable, while the maidens involved were defended as legally innocent victims. It seems as if there is not so much a psychotic and persecutory fear of intersex bodies, as there is an anxiety over maintaining chastity in girls for the sake of familial status. *Erxing* women were only instrumentally dangerous, allowing possible impregnators to slip into a household under cover of managed female gender

identities, but not inherently more morally blameworthy than a common male seducer or rapist.

With the sexual tension of the hidden penis and the maiden's chastity being lifted, male-looking *erxing* individuals with a hidden vagina appeared to be less treacherous, cunning, sophisticated, and abominable criminals than female-looking ones, whose basic human right to live was called into question; as the judge commented on Dong Shixiu's crime, "How can she possibly be allowed to live on this earth still?" I would argue that the level of demonization and stigmatization of the image of *erxing* in narratives is proportional to the risk level it posed to society and its aftermath: the greater the risk and the grimmer the aftermath that *erxing* individuals implied, the more demonized and stigmatized they were in discourse. Obviously, compared with female-looking *erxing*, male-looking *erxing* meant a much lower risk level for society. It was true that they damaged social moral mores to a certain level; yet, other than that, no party involved in the scandal were devastatingly hurt in the end. At large, what the male *erxing* case presented was a common lawsuit of sexual misconduct. It would never cause the same level of alarm and anxiety that female *erxing* high-profile cases had caused due to the hidden penis.

Beyond the sex criminal model: The penis undisguised and stigma-free erxing

Though the female *erxing* Shen Qiuhuan was seen as much less threatening than the more destructive archetype of female *erxing* sex criminals, s/he was still framed within the disguise and sex criminal model. However, there were several other situations in Ming-Qing narratives in which *erxing* were framed entirely differently from this criminalizing approach. In these cases, some *erxing* individuals lived with both sex organs uneventfully, displaying no intention and/or under no pressure to hide their double-sexed identity. Some were also accidentally found possessing a penis, yet ended up being the envy of the community. All these narratives provide valuable perspectives for us to better understand *erxing* lives in different cultural and social circumstances. For instances, in *Wanli yehuo bian*, Shen Defu documents a female *erxing* who was able to liberally exercise her/his alternating genitals:

> There was also the wife of a certain government official in Changshu city

> in the Wu region, a lady originally from an upper-class family, who can act as a man in half the month. When she cannot be a woman, her husband will leave her and let the maids wait on her during the night. She was said to be even more virile and vigorous than men, and the maids all suffered from those nights.
> 又吴中常熟县一缙绅夫人，亦大家女也，亦半月作男。当其不能女时，蒿砧避去，以诸女奴当夕，皆厌苦不能堪，闻所出势伟劲倍丈夫，且通宵不讫事云。(730)

Then, in *Qi xiu leigao* Chapter 25, "*Erxing ren* (Two-shaped Person)", the late Qing scholar Lang Ying records:

> There was a man named Su Minci who took a new concubine. This concubine of his was a woman in the second half of each month, yet, in every first half of months, a penis would come out from her vagina.
> 苏民词取一妾，下半月女形，上半月则阴户出阳势矣. (474-75)

While in Chapter 3 of *Yue xie* (Trivial Stories from Yue [Canton/Guangdong]) by Liu Shixin 刘世馨 (active in Jiaqing period, 1795-1820) relates another female *erxing* prostitute named A Lan whose male genital was only occasionally showing:

> In Dianbai county, Guangdong province, there was a prostitute called A Lan. She was very pretty. And because she was very good at painting fish, an assistant for the governor with the last name of Cui was infatuated by her. It was said that sometimes she also had a penis in her vagina, and often had sex with her girl friends, though her penis was not that hard.
> 电白有妓名阿兰者，丰姿绰约，好女子也。能画鱼，为崔幕客所眷。言其阴户之内有时又出阳具，亦常与女伴交接，但不甚坚云。(3:11b-12a)

In another notebook *xiaoshuo* called *Nan pu qiu bo lu*, Chapter 3, Zhang Liangji (1799-1843), a poet known as one of the "Four Talents of Daoguang Reign" in the late Qing dynasty recalled another prostitute that might also be a female *erxing*:

> During the Reign of Emperor Hui of the Jin Dynasty, there was someone who had both male and female organs, and could conduct sex with both organs. A few years ago, in Puxi, there was a prostitute called Chunxiang Si who would also spend the night in other prositutes' places.
> 晋惠帝时有人兼男女体，能两用人道。向年浦西诸姬有名春香四者，亦尝出宿他姬家焉。(3:24b)

In the above accounts, their sex organs were double in practice, so that the impressions of *erxing* individuals described here fundamentally depart from that of earlier *erxing* sex criminals who secretively lived out their double sexes in disguise. These innocuous female *erxing* were portrayed in great contrast to archetype female *erxing* criminals such as Dong Shixiu and Lan Daopo. Here, not only were these female *erxing* legitimately recognized as women (whether as wives, concubines or prostitutes), but they could have

sex with both men and women freely while at the same time posing no menace to the community and social mores.

These female *erxing* were in fact exempt from moral judgment. Several factors can account for their moral exemption. First and foremost, they had stable social gender roles that limited their mobility in social space. Wives, concubines, and prostitutes did not have the freedom to conveniently access the maiden's boudoirs that mobile, rootless needleworking females had. This means there was no anxiety over them intruding into segregated maiden space to pollute the maiden with their male sex organs. In addition to this lack of mobility, they were also socially placed in positions in which sexual activities were relatively less censored. They were favorably conditioned (free access to women, for instance, maids or other prostitutes) and to some extent licensed to engage in more liberal sexual activities, as they dwelled in the regulatory leeway in which norms and moral principles were less vigorously executed. Though the high governmental official's wife was clearly female gendered, s/he could still live out the male sex unabashedly in that the high social status s/he had was able to grant her/him privileged moral freedom above regulation. Meanwhile, for the concubine and prostitutes, social tolerance towards their sexual liberties were given by virtue of the marginal social status they had: they were deemed underqualified to become moral subjects, thus below moral standards and unworthy of moral regulation. In either case, female *erxing* did not seem motivated to purposefully hide and misuse their penis the as archetypal female *erxing* criminal did; hence, there was no danger of gender confusion and sexual transgression.

In this sense, these female *erxing* represent certain transgender existences with which society was comfortable: they were securely placed in social spaces without mobility (whether within marriage or other social institutions), unambiguously and stably gendered as women, and, most importantly, the penis was undisguised. It again comes to the same problem: how an *erxing* was perceived was highly dependent on how the threat of the penis was managed. As long as the *erxing* was viewed safely settled in the female gender and role while the penis was confessed and seen as under proper control, and male sexual activities exercising the penis were restricted within the moral leeway, s/he would imply no harm to social order and mores, and thus remain stigma-free and penalty-free.

Viewed in this lens, the real imminent dangers that late imperial Chinese society identified as inherent in *erxing* criminal bodies could be boiled down to nothing but one: the hidden penis, or, as the girl in the narrative said admiringly: "No one can tell when it is going to come out or not. What a opportune and precious tool!" The hidden penis was particularly menacing in that it intimately penetrated the forbidden female space – arousing the suppressed female desire and damaging the carefully cultivated female chastity – and caught the guardians of the daughters off guard. The imposition of the death penalty for *erxing* criminals with a hidden penis was explicitly justified by the pollution of chastity suffered by the female victim and the ensuing repercussion of this damage born by her family at large.

If the argument that what the hatred and hostility towards female-looking *erxing* had mapped was essentially the fear of the hidden, unexpected penis and female desires it might awaken could be won, then, could we surmise that the identity of *erxing* is but a contingent factor for the cases? Put another way, how crucial has the *erxing* identity been for shaping archetype sex criminals[61] such as Dong Shixiu, Lan Daopo, and the nun who impregnated the girl? The example of Shen Qiuhan has already demonstrated that, without the hidden penis, *erxing* would no longer be portrayed as archetype sex criminals. If the sex criminals were stripped of their *erxing* identity but somehow still manipulated a hidden penis, would this affect the social perception of them? What if all other factors but the factor of the criminal being *erxing* remain exactly the same, what might be the case then? To further explore this possibility, another group of related sex criminal accounts may yield some important insights.

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[61] Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitock observe a similar process of cultural production of archetypal sex criminals in American society:

> The specter of criminality moves ceaselessly through the lives of LGBT people in the US. It is the enduring product of persistent melding of homosexuality and gender nonconformity with concepts of *danger, degeneracy, disorder, deception, disease, contagion, sexual predation, depravity, subversion, encroachment, treachery,* and *violence.* It is so deeply rooted in the U.S. society that the term *stereotype* does not begin to convey its social and political force. The narrative it produces are so vivid, compelling, and entrenched that they are more properly characterized as *archetypes* – recurring, culturally ingrained representations that evoke strong, often subterranean emotional associations or responses. In the realm of criminal archetypes, anxiety, fear, and dread prevail – potent emotions that can easily overpower reason. (23)

The Hidden Penis: Sang Chong, the Archetype Female-Impersonator Sex Criminal

In my research on *erxing* accounts, I noticed a cluster of sex criminal records that immensely resemble the above-cited cases of female-looking *erxing* criminals. They all revolve around the same central figure (sometimes associated with an organized criminal gang), who was most often referred to as Sang Chong (written as 桑冲 or 桑翀), sometimes also known as Sang Ban (桑瘢), or Sang Mao (桑茂). He was an actual sex criminal who very rarely made his way into official historiographical texts. Similar to the *nan hua nu* of Li Liangyu, discussed in the last chapter, the constellation of Sang Chong accounts also capitalized on a sensational true story in history and were easily identifiable by virtue of several shared elements.

Table 2.4 historic and personal accounts of Sang Chong in Ming-Qing

The Ming dynasty (1368-1644)		
Source	Author	Name of *erxing* individual
1. *Ming Xianzong chun huangdi chun shi lu* (Veritable Records of Emperor Xianzong of the Ming Dynasty: 1464-1487) [1491]	Liu Ji (eds.) (?-?)	Sang Chong 桑冲
2. *Zhuo ying ting biji* [preface 1547]	Dai Guan (1442-1512)	Sang Chong 桑冲
3. *Pengchuang leiji* (Records from a Rustic Window) [n.d.]	Huang Wei (active around 1490)	Sang Chong 桑翀
4. *Gengji bian* (Collection of Gengji) [finished in 1519 and first printed in 1591]	Lu Cui (1494-1551)	Sang Chong 桑冲
5. *Guochao Xianzheng lu* [ca.1590-1600]	Jiao Hong (1540-1620)	Sang Chong 桑冲
6. *Wu za zu* (Five Miscellaneous Dishes) [1616]	Xie Zhaozhe (1567-1624)	Sang Ban 桑瘢
7. *Huang Ming congxin Lu* (Reliable Record of the Supreme Ming: 1368-1620) [1620]	Chen, Jian (1497-1567) and Shen Guoyuan (?-?1635)	Sang Chong 桑冲
8. *Xingshi hengyan* (Stories to Awaken the World) [1627]	Feng Menglong (1574-1646)	Sang Mao 桑茂
The Qing dynasty (1644-1911)		
9. *Jianhu yuji* [preface 1703] (Supplement to Collection of Hard Gourd Tales)	Chu Renhuo (1635-?):	Sang Chong 桑冲

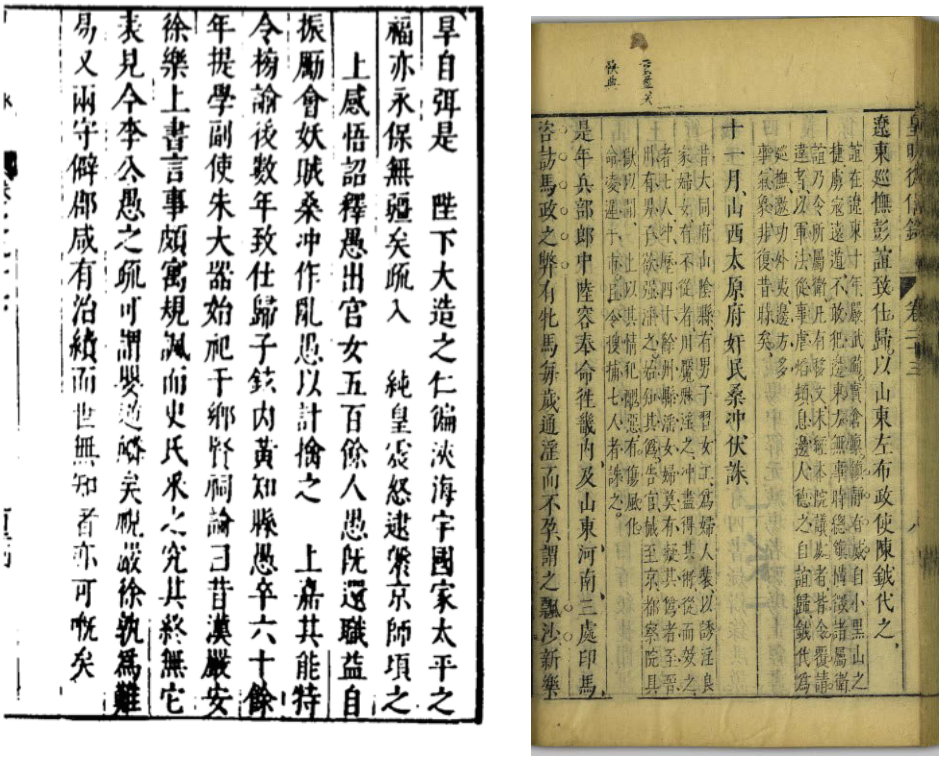

Figure 2.3 Left: *Guochao xianzheng lu* [ca.1590-1600] (No. 5 in Table 2.4; 97:124b.) and Right: *Huang Ming congxin lu* (Reliable Record of the Supreme Ming: 1368-1620) [1620] (No. 7 in Table 2.4; 23:8b) Fasc.

The notorious legal case of Sang Chong historically occurred in 1477, 13th year of Cheng Hua during the reign of Emperor Xianzong of the Ming dynasty. According to Chapter 172 (devoted to recording major events that occurred during the 11th month of the year 1477 across the empire) of the court- supervised official dynastic history file *Veritable Records of Emperor Xianzong of the Ming Dynasty: 1464-1487* (No. 1 in Table 2.4):

> Sang Chong from Shizhou in Taiyuan City of Shanxi Province submitted to the law and was accorded the death penalty. In the beginning, there were men from Shanyin county in Datong City who equipped themselves with *nugong* (woman's work) through practicing and dressed in women's clothes, so as to seduce into illicit sex (*yinyou* 淫诱) daughters and wives from decent families (*liangjia funu* 良家妇女). If [there were daughters and wives who] didn't comply, [they would] apply evil power to enchant and rape them (*yong yanmei yin zhi* 用魇魅淫之). [Sang] Chong had mastered this trick, and [later] seven more men had followed and studied this trick from him. During his travels, Chong had stayed in more than

> forty cities and towns, where he had tricked more than one hundred and eighty daughters and wives into sex and his fake (*wei* 伪) [female identity] remained unsuspected by anyone. [Later,] when he travelled to Jinzhou, a man tried to rape Chong. [Thanks to this,] his fake [female identity] became known. [So, he was] reported to the magistrate and transferred to the capital of the empire. *Ducha yuan* (Censorate, or "Chief Surveillance Office") further reported it [to the emperor]; the emperor pronounced [Chong's] crime had been extremely abominable and greatly damaged social mores [*you shang fenghua* 有伤风化], and ordered him to be executed by slicing (*lingchi*)[62] in public and seven other gang members to be arrested and sentenced to death.
> 山西太原府石州民桑冲伏诛。初，大同府山阴县有男子习女工，为妇人装，以诱淫良家女妇。有不从者，用魇魅淫之。冲尽得其术，从而效之者七人。冲历四十馀州县，淫女妇百八十馀人，莫有疑其伪者。至晋州，有男子欲强淫之，始知其伪。告官，械至京。都察院具狱以闻，上以其情犯丑恶，有伤风化，命凌迟于市，且令搜捕七人者罪之 。(172:4b)

On many levels, this account of Sang Chong greatly overlaps those of female-looking *erxing* sex criminals to the extent that they can be seen as sibling narratives. In both cases, a person of the non-female sex impersonates a woman by taking on a female appearance and practicing female gender-specific labor (*nugong*). The impersonators would then take advantage of their appearance and profession (*nugong* tutors) and seduce maidens (and wives) into illicit sex. When their real sexes were brought to light, they were put to death by the law without hesitation. Furthermore, the moral logic behind the juridical decisions were almost identical: these two types of criminals were particularly abominable in that they had not only undermined social mores (*you shang fenghua*) but, more devastatingly, they had impaired the chastity of decent women, daughters and wives from good families (*youyin liangjia fu nü*).

However, what rendered these two cycles of sex criminal accounts in essence a unifying narrative was the presence of the hidden, unexpected penis, whether *erxing* or not. Though more or less explicitly explained in these accounts, what propelled the harsh punishment inflicted on the sex criminals consisted of the same anxiety over female

[62] A form of execution in which the criminal is put to death by dismembering his/her body. This is one of the most barbarous capital punishments, being practiced in imperial China until 1905, when the late Qing government removed it from the Qing criminal code. See Timothy Brook et al, *Death by a Thousand Cuts*.

chastity and the same rage over individuals concealing their true sexes while pretending to be the female sex, which they were not.

Though unified by the core factor of the unexpected and hidden penis, these two groups of accounts displayed several noteworthy differences. Firstly, compared with female-looking *erxing* sex criminals, non-*erxing* male sex criminals impersonating women appeared to have incurred higher levels of rage from the law enforcers. It seemed relatively easier for society to come to terms with an *erxing* (who possesses female genitals) to assume a female gender appearance than a wholesome male (who does not possess female genitals at all) to impersonate a woman. Therefore, Sang Chong and his gang members were portrayed as more treacherous and more heinous than female-looking *erxing* sex criminals, due to their organized and systemic training process of attaining female looks and female skills, and what was seen as their employing evil power to enchant and rape women (*yong yanmei yin zhi* 用魇魅淫之).

In the meantime, as the sex criminals grew more sinister, by contrast the female victims were seen as more vulnerable, more sympathetic, and less liable. The illicit sexual relations between Sang Chong and the women were consistently described as nonconsensual (being "seduced into sex [*yinyou* 淫诱]") or coercive (in cases of resisting victims, the criminal would even "apply evil power to enchant and rape them" [*yong yanmei yin zhi* 有不从者，用魇魅淫之]). Even in cases in which consensual sex was present between the female impersonator and his victims, the demonic image of the criminal was powerful enough that people would overlook that possibility. Another version of Sang Chong (No. 8 in Table2.5), offered by the bestselling short story writer Feng Menglong (1574-1646) in the late Ming period, lucidly illustrates the perspective of the sex criminal. The following conversation occurred when an old woman (an aged experienced female impersonator) unveiled his secrets to the young Sang Mao[63] (a name variant of Sang Chong), who learned skills of female impersonation from the old woman, after the former revealed his hidden penis to the latter during sex:

> Not entirely uninitiated in matters relating to lovemaking, Sang Mao thought that the old woman was soliciting his services as a male partner. But when they went into action, the old woman revealed what was hidden

[63] Sometimes referred as the master of Sang Chong.

between the thighs and took the boy by his "rear court." (*The fact that the boy was not alarmed shows his depravity.*) …

Being but a boy after all, Sang Mao asked, "How can a woman like you have that thing? "

"Let me be frank with you, " said the old woman. "But don't let this on to anyone else. I'm not a woman. I'm a man, but my feet were bound when I was small and I learned how to dress up like a woman and speak softly. I'm also skillful at needlework. I secretly left my home village and, calling myself a widow, asked to be introduced to rich families as a teacher of needlework. The women usually admire my skills and let me stay in the house. So, with free access to the women's quarters, I get to sleep with them and have as much pleasure from them as I want. They grow quite attached to me and keep me for months on end without ever letting me out of the house. In case of virtuous women who reject me, I apply the 'seduction drug,' which I spray onto their faces with water when they're asleep. After they pass out, I do whatever I want to them. By the time they wake up, I've already had my way with them, and they feel so ashamed that they dare not say a thing. Instead, they give me lavish gifts and send me away, telling me to keep my lips sealed. I'm now forty-seven years old. I've been to both capital cities [Beijing and Nanjing during the Ming dynasty] and nine provinces and slept with beautiful women wherever I went. I've always been well provided for. And I've never been caught. "

"How wonderful! " exclaimed Sang Mao. "Will I be able to do the same? "

"A boy as pretty as you are will easily pass off as a girl. If you are willing to be my apprentice and travel with me, I'll bind your feet, teach you needlework and introduce you to people as my niece. You'll get your change when time is right. I'll also pass on the formula for the 'seduction drug' to you. It'll do you a lifetime of good. "

Sorely tempted, Sang Mao bowed four times in the deserted temple, honoring the old "woman" as his teacher. (Yang and Yang 205-6)

桑茂也略通些情窍，只道老姬要他干事。临上交时，原来老躯腰间到有本钱，把桑茂后庭弄将起来。事毕，雨还未止。桑茂终是孩子家，便问道："你是妇道，如何有那话儿？"老姬道："小官，我实对你说，莫要泄漏于他人。我不是妇人，原是个男子。从小缚做小脚，学那妇道妆扮，习成低声哑气，做一手好针线，潜往他乡，假称寡妇，央人引进豪门巨室行教。女眷们爱我手艺，便留在家中，出入房阃，多与妇女同眠，恣意行乐。那妇女相处情厚，整月留宿，不放出门。也有闺女贞娘，不肯胡乱的，我另有媚药儿，待他睡去，用水喷在面上，他便昏迷不醒，任我行事。及至醒来，我已得手。他自怕羞辱，不敢声张，还要多赠金帛送我出门，嘱付我莫说。我今年四十七岁了，走得两京九省，到处娇娘美妇，同眠同卧，随身食用，并无缺乏，从不曾被人识破！"桑茂道："这等快活好事，不知我可学得么？"老妪道：

> “似小官恁般标致，扮妇女极像样了。你若肯投我为师，随我一路去，我就与你缠脚，教导你做针线，引你到人家去，只说是我外甥女儿，得便就有良遇。我一发把媚药方儿传授与你，包你一世受用不尽！”桑茂被他说得心痒，就在冷庙中四拜，投老妪为师。(Feng 153-54)

This account supplements a great deal of (not exactly truthful but widely circulated and accepted elsewhere) details to what has been laid out in official history. For instance, how the female impersonators learned to manipulate their gender appearance to pass as a woman; how they approached their victims; how the “evil power to enchant and rape” worked (via “seduction drug”); and how they took advantage of the disgrace associated with the loss of chastity and got their way.

As in all other versions of Sang Chong, the criminal (here called Sang Mao) was later arrested and confessed “his record of coercing women into illicit sexes in the past (向来行奸之事).” When “his crime was reported to the emperor, the Ministry of Justice pronounced that such behavior of human monsters severely undermined moral conventions and was unknown in legal case history, and was therefore punishable by lingchi (dismemberment), and ordered that the death sentence be executed without delay” (具疏奏闻，刑部以为人妖败俗，律所不载，拟成凌迟重辟，决不待时).

In accordance with the extremely sinister nature of their crimes, the sentences Sang Chong and his gang received were also extremely harsh: *lingchi* represents a higher level of capital penalty than beheading or strangulation. More subtly, another reason that Sang Chong and his gang had to be ruthlessly rooted out by the law and according to the law, was that their punishment was necessary to liquidate any guilt of the maiden that might occur due to any indication of their moral and sexual delinquency; to defend the maiden’s moral and sexual integrity; to protect and preserve traditional sexual mores of society; and to safeguard family honor at large. To justify the necessity and righteousness of sentencing female-impersonating criminals to the full penalty of death, the law needed the maiden’s *jianfu*, i.e., the criminal, to be a licentious, deceitful and cunning sex predator who coerced the former into sexual intercourse (exemplified by the old woman and the grown-up Sang Chong), so as to eschew the likelihood of the maiden’s sexual desire and protect her chastity from being thus impaired.

By sentencing the sex criminal to the full and extreme penalty, the law was legally defining sex between the maiden and *erxing* as “coercive” rape (*qiangjian*). Because if

they were not taking full penalty, this meant only one possibility: the illicit sex was consensual (though it was the case for the cited legal case under discussion), which further meant "it is necessary that the wife [maiden] who engage[d] in illicit discourse with him be licentious, depraved, and without shame," as an official commentary on basic Ming-Qing statute against illicit sexual intercourse states (Sommer 7). Whereas, in contrast, once classified as coercive rape (*qiangjian*), it means "a woman has maintained her chaste purity (*zhenjie*), and a man uses coercion to violate her sexually, then he wantonly gives rein to his own lecherous evil in order to pollute (*wu*) her chastity (*jiecao*)" (Sommer 68). In order to more effectively defend the victims' chastity, the criminals were described as appallingly sinister in nature, and thus well-deserving of the most extreme form of the death penalty. To cite Huang Liuhong's influential 1694 handbook for magistrates, *A Complete Book Concerning Happiness and Benevolence*:

> Why is the penalty for "coercion" uniquely severe? In the context of illicit sex, "coercion" refers to the sudden pollution of a female, who has previously maintained her chaste purity, by means of violent coercion. The purpose of imposing the death penalty is to reward [the victim's] resolve to maintain chaste purity, and also to shame [the maidens] who are evil and licentious. (1973, I9/21b) (qtd. in Sommer 68).

Hence, the more extreme the penalty inflicted on the criminal, that is, on the hidden, unexpected penis, the more determined the resolve to guard female chastity, promote the chastity cult, and thus to further reinforce the Neo-Confucian gender order that is fundamental to realize "the Neo-Confucian social order" (Ng "Ideology and Sexuality" 69).

Conclusion: Powerful Archetypes and Discursive Overrepresentation of *Erxing* Sex Criminals

This chapter has looked at sizeable selections of *erxing* sex criminal (predominantly transperformed as female) accounts. These highly formulated and intertexual *erxing* criminal narratives in late imperial China (an *erxing* transperformed as a woman seducing or coercing girls into illicit sex) were significantly shaped by Neo-Confucian orthodox mindsets and values that attached growing ideological and cultural importance of female chastity to women and called for more strict regulation of female space, bodies and desires. Whether the intersex nuns and needle workers like Dong

Shixiu and Lan Daopo, or Sang Chong, the brash, cunning impersonator, they all personify one of the most perilous threats for Chinese maidens living in the gender-segregated boudoirs in imperial times: sexual contamination. Potential consequences that resulted from this and any other kinds of sexual contamination could be critical for both the maiden and her natal family. As some of the accounts have indicated, once a virgin maiden has been introduced to sex before marriage, particularly when this is outwardly showing in pregnancy, she is damaged as a marriageable commodity for breaking the default betrothal common understanding that the bride has to be a virgin. In this case, her natal family has to bear dishonor for its delinquency of guarding the maiden's virginity while her family by marriage has every reason to abort the marriage agreement if this was known before the wedding ceremony, or initiate a divorce in cases in which this fact was found out after the wedding.

The enduring images of archetypal hidden-penis sexual predators for women in imperial China, whether *erxing* or gender-transperforming ones, would not have been possible if detached from these specific cultural conventions and anxieties related to maiden virginity, or what has been referred to the faithful maiden cult, in imperial China, most prominently in the Ming and Qing era. For instance, when stripped of the maiden chastity anxieties (the root cause), the criminality of *erxing* individuals (the consequence) usually seemed to be automatically lifted. These usually imply two possibilities: when the *erxing* presented him/herself as male (Shen Qiuhan) or when the female *erxing* did not conceal the male part and were granted specific social space to live openly with both sexes, without disturbing other social members.

Therefore, not all *erxing* were necessarily stigmatized and criminalized. While stigmatization might also be the fate of the majority of *erxing*, particularly in late imperial China, the handling of *erxing* individuals is more complicated than this single mode. On the one hand, given the Confucian culture of ethics and morality that has long regulated social lives in China, the handling of *erxing* has often been marked with moral and ethical beliefs. Depending on the degree of how *erxing* existences conflicted with these fundamental beliefs, treatments of *erxing* will vary. For those who destructively damaged social mores, the death penalty would be inflicted; for those who posed less of a threat to social mores, more lenient punishment was the option. On the other hand, *erxing*

managements also depend on the social status of an *erxing* individual and the specific circumstances in which their two-shape sex identities were discovered. Therefore, social responses to *erxing* in imperial China were not uniform, but vary from case to case.

Yet, for many centuries this monstrosity of *erxing* as well their lustful nature certainly had taken a strong hold on both the popular imagination and textual records. In fact, with a few exceptions, *erxing* individuals gradually came to be seen as lustful and deceitful by nature, which fossilized into unique Chinese cultural preconceptions of the *erxing*. This stigma of lust has been imprinted into their discursive presences through narratives. Historians, writers of popular stories, scholars, and storytellers all took part in the stigmatization of *erxing* through overrepresenting one possibility of *erxing* over many other possibilities, via the discursive construction of powerful *erxing* sex criminal archetypes.

This is because *erxing* sex criminals might also be discursive commodities on which the Ming-Qing writers and publishers capitalized. As Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitock comment on the criminalization of LGBT people in contemporary American society, such as the Leopold and Loeb story, "crime is also a media commodity" (25). In the Ming-Qing era, long before modern media were developed, *xiaoshuo* took on a similar role as that of modern media in our lives, through wide circulation and dissemination of cultural ideas and images. In this sense, as Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitock summarize, "criminalizing scripts are at once political and cultural creations, taking hold in the public imagination through symbolic relationships between law enforcement and mass media" (25).

These powerful archetypes of female *erxing* sex criminals such as Dong Shixiu and Lan Daopo, and the highly intertextual impersonating sex criminals such as Sang Chong, represent such political and cultural creations through criminalizing discourses. They embody the notion that *erxing* pose a fundamental threat to the integrity and security of young maidens, the social value of maiden chastity, and social order and mores. These power archetypes had enduring consequences. As Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitock acutely reflect on modern queer criminal archetypes:

> "[The] animating force is that boundaries (racial, gendered, sexual, and economic) that should be impenetrable are being breached. This, in turn,

> generates an angry determination to make borders (geographic, ideological, religious, and cultural) ever more secure in order to keep subversive forces at bay. (36)

Chinese female *erxing* sex criminals were discursive products that respond to a specific cultural anxiety in late imperial China and mark a distinctively Chinese, yet transcultural, practice of understanding and regulating the double-sexed *erxing*; more specifically, the destructive potential that the hidden penis possesses.

Chapter Three
The Absence of the Penis:
The Li Liangyu Cycle and the Homoerotic Turn of *Nan hua nü*

"Lü Da asks again, 'Is it like a eunuch?'

Without waiting for Liangyu's reply, he takes Liangyu by surprise and suddenly puts his hand to Liangyu's private area: it's indeed 'flat,' but it also feels like having a vagina-like crevice."

吕达道："这等是个太监模样么？出他不意，伸手一摸，那里得平，却有一线似女人相似. ("Man Transforming into Woman in Heyang," in Lu Renlong, 1605)

Ruilang's face and figure had differed only slightly from those of a woman, and now that even this difference [penis] was removed, it was impossible to tell that he was male.

他起先的容貌、体态分明是个妇人。所异者几希之间耳；如今连几希之间都是了，还有什么分辨？("Male Mencius's Mother," in Li Yu, *Wu sheng xi* 122)

Historic Overview: *Nan hua nü* in the Ming-Qing era

In the last chapter, the discussion centered on reading *erxing* narratives in which *erxing* are seen as predominately lascivious criminals with insatiable sexual desires that disrupt strict boundaries surrounding the conventional family and social system. Though less menacing *erxing* are also recorded, it is the criminalizing of certain female *erxing* as archetypal sex criminals that dominated Ming-Qing discursive traditions of *erxing*. *Erxing* lives were violently managed due to the potential threat the hidden penis posed to the family, the community, and society. This chapter will focus on the *nan hua nü*, or male-to-female sex transformation, in Ming-Qing narratives in which rationales and interpretations of the absence of the penis take center stage.

In Chinese official histories until the late imperial period, sex transformation (*hua*) was among many extraordinary things that called for great national alarm or self-reflection on the rulers' part. Incidents of *hua* were traditionally regarded as signs of natural variances, and thus readable omens of great political significance, such as the

breakout of war, the dangerous ruling of the nation by incompetent emperors or usurpers, or the decline of a dynasty, according to the yin-yang cosmological correlation detailed previously. In ancient historical narratives, sex transformations were usually viewed as revelations of variance from the usual state of things, and thus were often more likely to attract official notice. Up to the Ming-Qing era, both *nü hua nan* and *nan hua nü* were interpreted with this political omen-reading mode. However, during the Ming-Qing era, the cultural perceptions toward *nü hua nan* and *nan hua nü* began to show great epistemic divergence. This chapter aims to investigate *nan hua nü* narratives in the Ming-Qing era, while *nü hua nan* will be the subject of the next chapter.

To begin with, it is helpful to first look at the narrative distribution of the *nan hua nü*. As the following summary demonstrates, though, in general, considerably scanter *nan hua nü* accounts (less than half of the total of *nü hua nan* narratives) can be located in extant historic sources, in terms of quantity of narratives, the Ming and Qing periods do not vary much. Though together constituting more than half of the total, both preserve relatively scant historiographical records of *nan hua nü*.

Table 3.1 Distribution of historiographical entries of *nan hua nü*

Source	Year	About the individual: name/region	Entry length (character)	Omen reading (notes)
Pre-Ming-Qing dynasties				
6. Han shu (Book of Han, 206 BCE-23 AD)	6-3 BCE	Yuzhang region (married and born a son)	57	Yes
7. Hou Han shu (Book of the Later Han, 6 AD-220 AD)	202 AD	Yuegui region	38	Yes
8. *Song shi* (History of Song, 960 AD-1279 AD)	1125 AD	Capital (Kaifeng) region	29	Yes
The Ming dynasty (1368-1644)				
9. Ming shi (The History of Ming, 1368-1644): Treatise on Five Elements	1568	Li Liangyu, from Jingle, Shanxi province	18	Yes
10. Ming shi (The History of Ming, 1368-1644): Biography of Song Xun	1568	Ibid.	33	Yes
11. Ming Muzong chun huangdi shilu (Faithful Record of Emperor	1568	ibid	18	No

Muzong of the Ming, 1566-1572)				
The Qing dynasty (1644-1911)				
12. Qing shi gao (Draft of the History of Qing, 1644-1911)	1800	Li Dafeng from Zhushan region	12	Yes
13. Ibid.	1863	Jimo region (born sons)	16	Yes

While the Ming official history includes more such accounts, though still hardly insignificant if we look merely at the number, than any other official historic records, all these three accounts turn out to concern the same individual and the same event: Li Liangyu's sex transformation in 1568. After that, no other *nan hua nü* cases made their way into the official history until the 19th century, when two cases managed to be entered into the draft of the official history of the Qing. Overall, we have to recognize that in official historic records, *nan hua nü* sex transformations have traditionally been underrepresented, most likely because they were often deemed not significant enough, hence not worth mentioning, unless the case had been as sensational and central in social discourse as that of the olive vendor that gave birth to a child (*History of Song*) or the tenant/merchant Li Liangyu who transformed into a woman and married his friend (three times recorded in the official history of the Ming).

However, the problem is that, even when these cases did manage to enter official historical records, details were customarily lost; we are left with no more than a few brief sentences that might contain crucial elements, yet far from sufficient for a substantial discussion of *nan hua nü* as a cultural phenomenon. For example, even simply based on these scant historic entries, it is not difficult to identify a consistent state attitude towards *nan hua nü*: reading it as an omen. Except for No. 6, *Faithful Record*, all other entries either include an explicit omen reading or are classified under the "Omen" heading. But how could *nan hua nü* be interpreted in the omen-reading tradition of supernatural occurrences? Have all *nan hua nü* been exclusively interpreted as omens? Or might there exist other rationales to justify and re-appropriate *nan hua nü* as the moralization of *nü hua nan* narratives in the Qing did? How was *nan hua nü* sex transformation differently or similarly conceptualized in comparison to its *nü hua nan* counterpart? These questions problematize a historical sketch of major *nan hua nü* incidents throughout dynasties. To

answer these questions, we need to turn our attention to personal narratives to access more fleshed-out details and, possibly, a solid amount of personal comments and critique.

In terms of textual distribution (see the table on the next page), personal narratives of *nan hua nü* in the Ming and the Qing largely correspond to historical entries:

1) An evenly distributed quantity in both eras, which differs greatly from *nü hua nan* cases. We know that due to state stratagems of stricter moral control adopted by the Qing government and development of the morality-book tradition, *nü hua nan* sex transformations have been conveniently grafted to the age-old patriarchal yearning of sons, and therefore they attracted unprecedented discursive attention in the Qing. Yet, in all dynasties other than the Qing, *nü hua nan* personal narratives have always been much less noticeable. Only two extant narratives could be traced to the Ming era, for instance. However, seen from the textual distribution, there seems to exist a continuous fascination with the *nan hua nü* sex transformation in both the Ming and the Qing.

Table 3.2 Distribution of *nan hua nü* in Ming-Qing personal narratives

The Ming dynasty (1368-1644)		
Source	Author	Name of the *nan-hua-nu* individual
1. *Jie'an laoren manbi* (printed c. 1597) (Casual Remarks by Old Man Jie'an)	Li Xu (1506-1593)	Li Liangyu
2. *Xian bo bian* (?) (Records of Wise Gambling)	Ye Quan (1522-1578)	Li Liangyu
3. *Er tan lei zeng* (1603) (Supplement to *Talks through Ears*)	Wang Tonggui (?-?)	Liu Menzi
4. *Bashi huibian* (1607) (Complete Compilation of Popular History and Anecdotes)	Wang Qi (1530-1615)	Unnamed (Li Liangyu)
5. *Gushan bizhu* (finished before 1607, printed in 1613) (Casual Written Talks from Valley Mountain)	Yu Shenxing (1545-1607)	Li Liangyu
6. *Huang Ming congxin lu* (printed in 1620) （Reliable Record of the Supreme Ming: 1368-1620）	Shen Guoyuan (?-?1635)	Li Liangyu
7. *Qing shi lei lue* (c.1628-1630) (Classified Outline of the History of Love)	Feng Menglong (1574-1646)	Unnamed (Li Liangyu)
8. *Xing shi yan* (1632) Exemplary Words to the World (the Ming Empire) Edited into other two editions: *San ke pai an jing qi* (Slapping the Table in Amazement: Third Collection) and *Huang ying* (Illusive Shadows) (1643)	Lu Renlong (?-?)	Li Liangyu
9. *Bian er chai* (c. 1628-1644)	Zuixihu xinyue	Li Zhaifan

(From Cap to Hairpin)	zhuren (pseudonym) (?-?)	(fictional)
The Qing dynasty (1644-1911)		
10. *Wusheng xi* (1665/6) (Silent Operas)	Li Yu (1611-1680)	You Ruilang (fictional)
11. *Liaozhai zhiyi* (c. 1680) (Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio)	Pu Songling (1640-1715)	Wang Erxi (fictional)
12. *Jian hu ji* (preface 1690) (Collection of Hard Gourd Tales)	Chu Renhuo (1635-?)	Li Liangfu[64]
13. *Shu yi ji* (1694) (Records of Telling the Strange)	Dongxuan zhuren (pseudonym) (?-?)	Unnamed
14. *Chibei outan* (1701) (Occasional Talks from the Studio at the North of a Pond)	Wang Shizhen (1634-1711)	Li Liangyu
15. *Liuya waibian* (c. 1781) (Miscellaneous Collection by Liuya)	Xu Kun (1715-?)	Unnamed
16. *Jiwo canzhui* (1872) (Residual Redundant Talks of Parasitic Snail)	Kuiyu daoren (pseudonym) (?-?)	Xing (last name)
17. *Quanlu suibi* (c.1912) (Random Notes from Curling-up Cottage)	Wang Bogong (1857-1921)	Lu Shiye[65]

2) However, one immediately notices that the Ming narratives mostly center on one prominent case: that of Li Liangyu, which has concurrently been highlighted in official histories of the Ming (with the two exceptions of No. 4 and No. 9, both of which, as I will discuss further, herald in their own ways a key thematic change of *nan hua nü* in the Qing personal narratives). At least seven writers and nine collections have touched upon Li Liangyu, unarguably the most famous, and allegedly historic, figure of *nan hua nü*. These narratives are of varied length and details, but they share a similar basic narrative that is traceable to the above-mentioned succinct entries in the Ming official historic records. This bears out the highly intertextual tradition within pre-modern Chinese literary history. Whether through unacknowledged direct copying, acknowledged borrowing, or more creative adaptation and imagination, discursive intertextuality points to the intricate discursive web of *nan hua nü* where boundaries between fact and fiction,

[64] Considering the resemblance of the writing of "fu (甫)" and "yu (雨)" (the last characters of both names), Li Liangfu (李良甫) could well be a mistaken name for Li Lianyu (李良雨). Such errors are not uncommon during the process of textual circulation, particularly in handwritten copies. The similarity of the main framework provides more evidence.

[65] "Shiye 师爷" is not a first name but his profession, to wit, "secretary to a county magistrate."

historiography and popular literature, are blurred. What we have is a hybrid and distinct group of *nan hua nü* narratives of Li Lianyu, which I treat as the "Li Liangyu cycle" that continues to expand in the dynasty.

3) In spite of two references to the Ming precedent of Li Liangyu, the Qing narratives certainly present a more diverse picture of sex transformation. Nevertheless, in terms of themes, motivation and the process of sex transformation, modes of interpretation, and in the overall tone, personal narratives of *nan hua nü* in the Ming and in the Qing take on diametrically different features. It is true that personality, social status, moral outlook, and literary talent and ambition all have played important roles in shaping these differences. More decisively, I would argue, a series of significant changes in the socio-cultural realm burgeoning in the late Ming and fully manifesting in the Qing era should be responsible for these salient differences between the two periods. The most noticeable change lies in the fact that by the very end of the Ming as *nan hua nü* narratives break away from the Li Liangyu cycle, they begin to take on an overt homoerotic tone, which I would like to tentatively refer to as homoerotic narratives after the "homoerotic turn."

Given the distinct characteristics of the two assemblages of *nan hua nü* narratives, namely, the Li Liangyu cycle and homoerotic narratives, as I examine these narratives more closely, I would like to follow these two threads. For this purpose, I rearrange the above narratives into two groups: the Li Liangyu cycle (No. 1-2, No. 4 -No. 8, No. 12, and No. 14) and homoerotic *nan hu nu* narratives (No. 9-No. 11, No. 13, and No. 15-No. 16), roughly belonging to the Ming and the Qing, respectively. For a comparison of the chronological and thematic divisions, my analysis will be organized into two parts.

Supernatural Change: The Li Liangyu Cycle and *Nan hua nü* in the Ming

Li Liangyu is probably the most written about individual in *nan hua nü* narratives. Since his experience of transforming from a male to a female has been singled out as an historical event of national interest in several places within the Ming official dynastic histories, the purportedly historical figure Li Liangyu became vital to the *nan hua nü* discourse. Not only has Li Liangyu been the most well-known individual of *nan hua nü* throughout Chinese history, his extraordinary experience has been the topic of discussion

in many personal narratives. No other *nan hua nü* incident has enjoyed as prevalent discursive currency as his case has inspired. Despite many retellings and reimaginings, the main storyline remains relatively consistent: in the year 1568, in Jingle County of Shanxi province, an adult man named Li Liangyu suddenly fell into stomach related illness. A male friend of his was able to take great care of him during his illness. Gradually, the stomach illness developed into groin pain and affected his male organ. In a strange way, he survived the illness but suffered the receding of his male organ into a vagina. Later, he married the friend who looked after him. When his transformation was noticed by local officials, his case was reported as an omen (the ascendency of the yin and the weakening of the yang) to the governor of higher position, who eventually presented it to the throne, suggesting great self-reflection and cultivation in state governance.

Referring to the official history, only three details regarding Li Liangyu's transformation are known for certain: his name, the date, and the place. For example, in *Faithful Record of Emperor Muzong of the Ming Dynasty*, we find this minimalisitic line recorded in Chapter 27, "December of the 2nd year of the Longqing period (1567-1572), or the year 1568": "On the 7th day [of December], in Jingle County, Taiyuan prefecture, Shanxi province, someone named Li Liangyu transformed into a woman" (Zhang 27:2a). Again, in the "Omen" section of *The History of Ming*, the complete entry reads merely: "In December of the 2nd year of the Longqing period (1567-1572), or the year 1568, a man named Li Liangyu from Jingle county, Shanxi province, had changed into a woman" (Zhang 442). When we turn to the biography of Song Xun, the governor who was believed to have handled Li Liangyu's case, in *The History of Ming*, because this piece was imbedded as one of government official Song's accomplishments, the focus was on how Song handled the case and not on the incident itself; even the exact year was lost:

> In the first year of the the Longqing period (1567-1572), or the year 1567, [Song Xun] started his post as a region inspector in Shanxi for the second time…. A man from Jingle named Li Liangyu transformed into a woman. Song Xun reported [to the emperor] that this is a sign of the decline of the yang and the flourish of the yin, which presages [the emperor] should listen to *junzi* (the Confucian gentlemen) and avoid *xiaoren* [petty person] so as to redeem the destiny [of the state]. The emperor rewarded him (for reporting and suggesting this).

> 隆庆改元，[宋纁]再按山西。……静乐民李良雨化为女，纁言此阳衰阴盛之象，宜进君子退小人，以挽气运。帝嘉纳之。(Zhang 5888)

Probably precisely because so much of the details concerning this transformation were missing in official records, reimagining and retelling this event would become possible and justifiable in personal narratives. Due to the void in official history that allows immense space for re-presenting the case, it is no surprise that details of Li Liangyu's experience were preserved in many different versions outside the official sources. The discrepancies involve almost every detail: his age, occupation, marital status, family members, the nature of his illness, the nature of his relationship with his male friend, and how he ended up are called into question and conditional on who is penning the narrative and for what purpose.

Casual Remarks by Old Man Jie'an: *a closer look into the case*

A much more complete account of Li Liangyu's sex transformation is found in a jotting notebook narrative, *Casual Remarks by Old Man Jie'an*, posthumously printed by the author Li Xu's grandson. After failing the civil service exam seven times, Li Xu felt disillusioned about becoming an official and devoted his time to writing poetry and essays, compiling local history and histories of mountains and rivers. *Casual Remarks* was generally received among scholars as a faithful record of the great events of his age. It has also been included in the Qing government's highly selective collection *Si ku quan shu* (*The Complete Library in Four Sections*). I here quote this narrative in length:

> In the 2nd year of the Longqing period (1567-1572), or the year 1568, the younger brother of Li Liangyun, Li Liangyu from Longquan village, Jingle county, Shanxi province, suddenly transformed into a female shape and became the wife of Bai Shangxiang from Qincheng village. Earlier, Liangyun's father Li Huan got the younger son, Liangyu. When Liangyu was 28 years old, their father passed away; this was in the year 1552. In the year 1558, Liangyu married the eldest daughter of Zhang Hao from Maji village. In year 1562, the couple broke up, so Liangyu divorced his wife and sold her to one villager named Gao Mingjin.
>
> Because Yu lacked a proper job to earn a living, he decided to help out at the house of his brother-in-law Jia Zhong'ao. In January 1567, Liangyu fell into a mild intestinal illness, which had been on and off until the 9th day of February of 1568, when the disease was so serious that he became bedridden. Another villager, Bai Shangxiang, who was also single,

looked after Liangyu day and night and slept beside him during this period. In April, Liangyu's male organ, without notice, retracted into his body and transformed into a vagina, so [he] coupled with Bai. On May 1st, [Liangyu] had first menstruation, which stopped on the 3rd day. After that he began to have menstruation regularly every month. Seeing this, Liangyu changed into female attire for maids, bound his feet, and changed into woman's shoes. However, he was too shy to let anyone know about this and hid his presence from people as much as possible.

In September, Liangyu's brother Liangyun heard about his transformation and visited Liangyu. Liangyun also asked his wife Nan to verify it. On the second day of November, [Liangyun] reported this case to the county magistrate. The magistrate arrested Liangyu and his partner Shangxiang for investigation, for which the midwife Fang led Liangyu to the stable to verify. She confirmed that he was indeed transformed, and was no different from a woman. [The magistrate] also summoned Liangyu's ex-wife Zhang for further inquiry. Zhang claimed that they had a normal sexual life during the three years of marriage but did have children. But due to poverty because they quarreled too often, Liangyu divorced her and sold her to a fellow villager. Her version of the event tallied with Li Liangyu's own statement obtained under further scrutiny conducted by Yao Hanzhou and others.

The regional inspector Song Xun reported it to the throne on December 25th that a man transforming into a woman forebodes the prosperity of the yin and the weakening of the yang, and proposed self-reflection and cultivation [of state governance].

隆庆二年，山西太原府静乐县龙泉都民李良云弟良雨忽转女形，见与岑城都民白尚相为妻。先云父李怀生弟雨，怀病故于嘉靖三十一年，雨年二十八岁，至三十七年娶马积都民张浩长女为妻。四十一年间，两相反目，将妻出与本都民高明金。

雨无营计，往本县地名也扒村投姐夫贾仲敖家工作。隆庆元年正月内，雨偶患小肠痛，旋止旋发，至二年二月初九日，卧床不起。有本村民白尚相亦无妻，于雨病时，早晚周旋同宿。四月内，雨肾囊不觉退缩入肚，转变成阴，即与白嫏配偶。五月初一日经脉行通，初三日止，自后每月不爽。雨方换丫髻女衣，裹足易鞋，畏赧回避不与人知。

九月内，云访闻之，令妻南氏探的。十一月初二日禀县，拘雨、相同赴审实，稳婆方氏领至马房验，系变形，与妇人无异。又拘雨出妻张氏勘明，娶后三年内往来交合，但未生息，止缘贫难嚷闹，卖离邻里。姚汉周等执结，与前相同。

巡按御史宋纁于十二月二十五日奏闻，称男变为女乃阴盛阳微之兆，以祈修省。(Li 1648)

Compared to historical narratives, this account adds substantial details to our knowledge of Liangyu's sex transformation. Based on this expanded version, not only did Liangyu

have an older brother, but he had also been married to a woman for three years. If Liangyu was already 28 years old in 1552, by the time he transformed (1568), he should have been 42 years old. If *nü hua nan* narratives reflected a certain level of reliability of the development of hidden male sex characteristics before or at the time of the puberty of a young girl, Li Liangyu's penis-to-vagina sex transformation at his age and the manner in which it occurred certainly require some imagination to believe. No modern biomedical research can prove that middle-aged men can change into women; nor does the description of penis retraction and vagina growth have any factual basis. Here, it seems that what is real becomes less important than what is believed to be real. Despite the highly suspicisous true morphology of Li Liangyu's anatomical sex, he was, nonetheless, widely believed to have not only transformed into a woman's shape (in terms of genitals) but also had become a completely functional woman (such as starting menstruation). Only after this transformation is complete does Liangyu set off the project of gender transperformance, such as dressing as a female and filling out the cultural prescription of binding feet.

Records of Wise Gambling: *reiteration and reevaluation*

Another interesting fact this narrative provides is that, unlike more immediate acceptances of *nü hua nan* transformation, the recognition process of Li Liangyu's transformation has not been that quick and easy. Compared to many *nü hua nan* sex transformed individuals, Li Liangyu is subjected to much more rigorous scrutiny; even those most intimate to him join the rest in suspecting he is a fraud. In fact, it is his brother Liangyun who reported the case to the magistrate. The verification process involves many steps: first, a midwife is brought in to declare his current genital morphology; then, his ex-wife is interrogated to confirm his past sex life as a man; lastly, Li Liangyu himself is cross-examined for conclusive evidence. It is only after these complicated procedures of investigation that this *nan hua nü* transformation finally receives uppermost governmental attention and becomes an overnight sensation.

Viewed in this light, the complexity and the number and high profiles of the personnel involved in handling Li Liangyu's case contributes more to calling sex transformation into question than to establishing it as a stringently tested fact. If someone

as authoritative as a regional inspector believes this is real and even presents it to the emperor, then it is much likely that common citizens would buy into the story. With the aid of precise dates and names of involved individuals, the historiographical style of recording this incident with historic accuracy and precision further works in favor of settling this incident as an unquestionable reality. No matter how medically questionable the realization of this man-to-woman genital transformation is and the tremendous suspicion Li Liangyu's *nan hua nü* has first aroused, the important thing is that, in the end, his sex transformation is recognized as a fact and he is accepted as a successful sex transformed individual.

Another personal account jotted loosely from anecdotes gleaned from travels, entitled *Records of Wise Gambling* (No. 2), was produced around the same time as Li Xu's *Casual Remarks*. Its author, Ye Quan (1522-1578), summed up the event in a similar way, except for several points at which details do not match up with Li Xu's account. For instance, in *Wise Gambling*, the narrative starts from the year 1566 when Liangyu developed heart disease instead of mild intestinal illness. Considering his illness and poverty, he decided to divorce his wife and allow her to remarry into a better family. Furthermore, Ye's narrative also makes it very clear that the reason why Liangyu's friend Bai Shangxiang came to his house to take care of his illness is that Bai is sympathetic to his poverty-stricken, ailing situation (*lian qi bing qie pin* 怜其病且贫). The narrative also describes how Liangyun appealed to the county court after his wife found out about Liangyu's sex transformation.

Two aspects in this account are particularly noteworthy. The first detail is Liangyu's ex-wife description of their sexual life when summoned by the county to assist in the investigation. As perhaps the only one who possessed any information about Liangyu's pre-transformed sexual organ, she firmly replied, "[Liangyu] is a real man; his male organ is especially large and strong, and there was nothing strange in having sex with him." I have not seen any similar comment in this regard elsewhere, but I surmise that there is a great chance that the author, or whoever he heard this from, imagined this detail to underline Liangyu's unquestionable male identity before his transformation. The second one is how the author personally accounts for Liangyu's sex transformation. After Li Liangyu's story, the author thus comments:

> In the Song dynasty, a woman transformed into a man. Nowadays, a man has transformed into a woman. [Both are] signs of the dynamics between yin and yang. As Wang Chong[66] once wrote in *Lunheng*: "Human beings are nourished by right and proper *qi* (*zhengqi* 正气) of heaven and earth; hence, their shapes do not change. [However], sometimes men would change into women and women change into men, just like soaring mountains will change into valleys while deep canyons will change into mountains. What these changes mean for politics are big changes of a very unusual nature." Is this why?
> 宋时妇人化男子，今男子化妇人，阴阳侵夺也之象也。王充《论衡》曰："人受天地正气，故体不变。或男化女，女化男，由高岸为谷，深谷为陵也，应政为变。为政变，非常性也。"其然乎？(Ye, 17)

Ye Quan believed that this had profound connections with the yin-yang philosophy and even cited the Han philosopher Wang Chong's yin-yang reading from the perspective of politics. He seemed still to entertain certain doubts about the yin-yang cosmological reading of this phenomenon.

Two other versions: the malleability of the story

In No. 4 in Chapter 172 of *Complete Compilation of Population History and Anecdotes* by Wang Qi (1530-1615), the yin-yang element is entirely overlooked. This narrative not only sets the story in a time 16 years later than recorded in the official histories and most other narratives in the Li Liangyu cycle, it also offers a different version of how the emperor responded to the magistrate's report. This entry is quite short:

> During the 14th year of the Wanli Period, or the year 1586, two merchants and best friends were travelling in Luoyang. One day, the younger merchant felt a seizure from a stomach ache too painful to bear. His friend was very concerned and immediately took him to see the doctor. Luckily, he survived. However, after ten days, he was transformed into a woman. This strange thing was reported to the officials, who further reported it to the imperial court. It happened that both men were still single, so the emperor's edict decreed the two to be married, which they happily executed.
> 明万历十四年，"洛中二行贾最友善，忽一年少者腹痛不可忍，其友亟为医治，幸不死，旬余而化为女。事上，抚按具奏于朝。适二贾皆未婚，奉旨配为夫妇"。(172)

Rather than ordering self-reflection and moral cultivation, what the emperor orders here is, surprisingly, the arrangement of a marriage, which indeed requires sufficient imagination to take in. Nonetheless, its creative take on the imperial court's reaction to

[66] A philosopher. See chapter one.

Liangyu's transformation compellingly reflects the wide circulation of this narrative. The more variations there are, the more widespread and persistent the narrative of Li Liangyu's transformation must have been. It is only through discursive proliferation that this story could grow into a cycle of interconnected but diversified system of narratives.

For example, the story as told in No. 5, *Brush Dust from Valley Mountain* by Yu Shenxing (1545-1607) is still recognizable, yet the event itself takes a drastically divergent shape. This account relates:

> In the 3rd year of the Longqing period (1567-1572), or the year 1569, in Jingle City, Shanxi province, there was a married man named Li Liangyu who was working as a workhand far from his family. He shared a room with another workhand. One night, he transformed into a female and had sex with his roommate workhand. Since then [they] had been living as a couple. Later, when this got reported to the governor of the county, Liangyu hanged himself to death.
> 隆庆三年，山西静乐县丈夫李良雨为人佣工，与其侪同宿。一夕，化为女子，其侪狎 之，遂为夫妇。守臣以闻，良雨自缢死。(15:177)

Here Liangyu is portrayed as an unchaste maiden or an unfaithful wife who commits suicide out of shame. Meanwhile, the relation between Liangyu and his male partner is not that of best friends but that of co-workers. Furthermore, as in No. 4, given its length, the whole narrative focuses on Li Liangyu's experience alone, leaving out important witnesses such as his wife and his brother. In other words, in this later version Liangyu's sex transformation picks up a stronger moral and erotic tone, especially when it comes to Liangyu's suicide, for which a sense of guilt and shame appears to be the only possible explanation.

The moral and erotic aspect is rendered more explicitly in the only Qing account of the Li Liangyu cycle, which is No. 12, *Collection of Hard Gourd Tales* by Chu Renhuo (1635-?). In this most distantly dated narrative of Li Liangyu's transformation, even Li Liangyu's name is fading from earlier records after having been circulated for more than a century (mistakenly written as Li Liangfu), let alone the event itself. Granted, the author of this version is telling the same *nan hua nü* story of Li Liangyu; even so, the story becomes almost unrecognizable but for its reference to the historical time frame and the ending. This version reads:

> In the 2nd year of the Longqing period (1567-1572), or the year1568, a man named Li Liangfu from Shanxi province was living in the capital city.

> On the night of the Festival of Lanterns,[67] after watching the lanterns from the streets, Liang saw a beautiful lady walking towards him, her maid carrying a lantern in front of her. Liangfu flirted with her and brought her to his place for the night. In the morning, the lady changed into a dove and flew away. Ever since, Liangfu had a severe stomach ache. By April, his male genital started to shrink, and [finally he] was transformed into a woman.
> 隆庆二年，山西李良甫侨寓京师。元宵夜看灯，夜静，见一女子靓妆而来，侍儿提灯前导。良甫就戏之，偕至寓留宿，化为白鸽飞去。良甫腹痛，至四月中，肾囊退缩，化为妇人。(1:1179)

In this narrative, the historical account is creatively blended into ostensibly fictitious traditions, such as urban horror tales in popular fiction (invoking the imagery of a lady walking at night with a lantern[68]) and folk tales (shape-shifting animal spirits as wives), in order to mould this tale into a cautionary tale against lust. In this literary rendition, Liangyu's transformation becomes a consequence and punishment incurred by his licentious behaviour. This implies it is not a sex transformation happening to Liangyu in a mysterious way (as in all previous versions), but that Liangyu himself caused it to occur through his action. In other words, Liangyu is not the medium for the mysterious power to reveal a sign of some sort; rather, it is he, or more precisely, his sexual desire, that possesses the dark power of sex transformation. Sex transformation is no longer presented as a inscrutable phenomenon but reimagined as an effect of certain human deeds; in this case, improper sexual behaviour.

So far, I have looked at several editions of the Li Liangyu cycle. Yet, though they are valuable in demonstrating the wide, persistent circulation of Li Liangyu's *nan hua nü* and its malleability as a narrative, none of them seems satisfactory to understand the individuals involved. How does the subject, Li Liangyu, himself feel about his sex transformation? How does his friend-partner react to it? How do other people around him respond to it?

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[67] The 15th day of the first month after the Chinese New Year.

[68] For instance, a popular story of "*Mudan dengji* 牡丹灯记 (Story of The Peony Latern)" in *Jiandeng xinhua* 剪灯新话(New Tales of the Trimmed Lamp) by Qu You 瞿佑(1347-1433), which had once been banned in the Ming dynasty, but become extremely popular in Japan as "Boton Dolong (The Peony Lantern)" when Qu You's story collection was adapted into Japanese *kaidan* horror stories in the early Ming. In "The Peony Lantern," the protagonist ran into a very beautiful lady walking with a latern at night. He invited the lady to his house, and they had sex. Later, he found out that the lady was a ghost and was killed by her (Qu 103-116).

In this regard, only one line in No. 1, Li Xu's *Casual Remarks,* points out Liangyu's attitude towards his *nan hua nü*: "However, he was too shy to let anyone know about this and hides his presence from people as much as possible." This description of his sense of embarrassment is inserted after he begins to experience menstruation and take on a female gender performance, that is, after he is thoroughly transformed, both corporeally and performatively. If we take a more careful look at the word choice, the Chinese words used here to describe his feeling are "畏赧 (*weinan*)," literally, "afraid of being shy." We further observe that parts of the phrase "畏 *wei*" (fear; cowardice; timidity) and "赧 *nan*" (shy; blush) are highly feminine here. To describe a man as "畏 *wei*" in most cases is negative, but for a woman to be "畏 *wei*" is not only deemed to be natural, it is even sometimes a recommended feminine quality; whereas "赧 *nan*," a gendered word traditionally reserved exclusively for women, especially young maidens, is even more seldom seen describing a man, except on occasions in which the male individual has been explicitly feminized, as in Li Liangyu's circumstances. In this way, the narrative smoothly transits into feminine vocabulary that proclaims discursive recognition of Liangyu's newly acquired female identity. After this discursive gender switch, the narrative quickly enters the multi-layered verification process.

Exemplary Words to the World*: between moral critique and discursive pleasure*

Similar presentations can be seen in No. 8, *Xing shi yan* (Exemplary Words to the World [the Ming Empire]) (1632), a 40-story Ming vernacular fiction collection by the writer-publisher Lu Renlong 陆人龙. Little is known about the author, but this work plays a tremendously crucial role in the study of Chinese vernacular stories. The original text of the *Xing shi yan* was long unknown, until its fortuitous rediscovery in 1987 in a single woodblock printed edition in Korea by the France-based sinologist Chan Hing-ho.[69] The reason why the original edition of *Xing shi yan* was not preserved in China remains a mystery, but it most likely resulted from state book banning or censorship.

[69] This is deemed one of the most important discoveries in the study of Chinese vernacular stories. Before the discovery, many of the stories in *Xing shi yan* were only known through several reedited editions, such as *Huan ying* (1643), *San ke pai an jing qi* (1643)*, bie ben er ke pai an jing qi*. The discovery has finally solved the complicated relation among these three

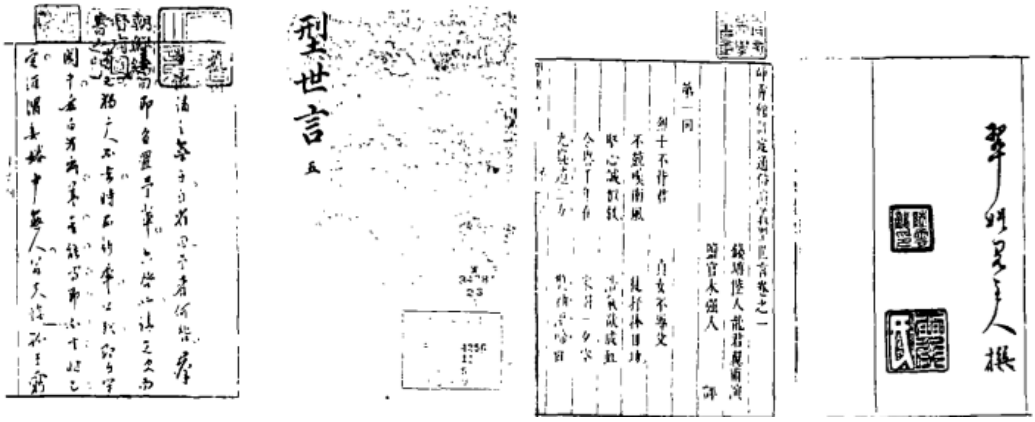

Figure 3.1 Original copy of *Exemplary Words to the World*.
Left: Preface; Right: Contents. From the Kyujanggak royal library of South Korea Copy of *Exemplary Words to the World* in Park Jae Yeon, p. 114

Luckily, most of the stories contained in it have been widely popular thanks to several pirated reprints of the original. For instance, in the original *Xing shi yan*, Li Liangyu's story takes the title "Husband parting with wife in Xi'an, man transforming into woman in Heyang" (*xi'an fu fu bie qi, heyang xian nan hua nü* 西安府夫别妻,郃阳县男化女)," the 37th story contained in this collection. In the reprinted edition known as *San ke pai an jing qi* (1643), its title is "Couple of Fake Bond, Friends of True Destiny (*fuqi huai jiahe, pengyou que zhenyuan* 夫妻还假合，朋友却真缘," the 21st story in a smaller collection including 30 instead of 40 stories in total. It is fortunate that this narrative made the editorial cut, but this was not achieved without the sacrifice of some of its original content.

One example of the changes to the story is its title. The original title, "Husband parting with wife in Xi'an, man transforming into woman in Heyang," is more direct in pointing out the sex-transformative nature of the incident, while the new title adopts a more subtle expression, "Friends of True Destiny," as a euphemism for the male-male union between Liangyu and his male friend that takes place after Liangyu's sex transformation. In the latter case, "Couple of Fake Bond, Friends of True Destiny," the content of sex transformation is tactically screened behind the tantalizing contrast

collections that puzzled scholars for decades – all unauthorized reprints of *Xing shi yan* under different titles. For more information, see Chan Hing-ho; Park Jae Yeon; Zhang Bing; Gu Keyong.

between fake couple and destined friends, so the explicit portrayal of a subject as controversial as man-to-woman sex transformation in the story could be safely hidden from exposing itself in the title, a risk the original title might be liable to.

Despite the titular change, both the new title in *San ke pai an jing qi* and its original title in *Xing shi yan* all draw particular attention to the married status of Li Liangyu before his sex transformation. Technically, this stress on Liangyu's pre-transformation marital status might have been carefully designed to underline his unquestionable heterosexual male identity through establishing him as having been a husband. However, interestingly, in order to pave the way for Liangyu's later transformation into a woman, the narrative at the same time deliberately creates a femininized image of our protagonist when he is introduced for the first time:

> This Li Liangyu…is 22 years old himself. He has a brother, two years younger than him, called Li Liangyun. Both of their parents passed away when they were very young. While the younger Liangyun is tall and sturdy, the elder Liangyu has beautiful eyes and pretty face; while Liangyun grows up into remarkably dignified presence, Liangyu develops a gentle and refined character…
> 这李良雨……自己二十二岁，有个同胞兄弟李良云，年二十岁。两个早丧了父母。良云生得身材魁伟，志气轩昂。良雨生得眉脸明眸，性格和雅…… (Lu *Xing shi yan*: 1594)

The previous version of the narrative mentions that Li Lianyu has a brother who plays a crucial role in unveiling the former's transformation. However, neither the appearance nor personality of the Li brothers, or any one of the personas, is commented on. The readers, therefore, do not know what exactly the involved individuals look like in the story. However, in this narrative, their appearances and personalities are not only taken into account, but they are also positioned in strong contrast: Liangyu's femininity (pretty; gentle; refined) as compared to Liangyun's masculinity (tall; strong; dignified). This emphasis on the contrast between Liangyu's feminine qualities and Liangyun's manhood qualities might seem inessential to the main topic of sex transformation. Nevertheless, this contrast, and more specifically the critique of male femininity, becomes crucial if we take into consideration the context in which the narrative of Li Liangyu is positioned.

In writing and compiling *Exemplary Words to the World*, Lu Renlong's goal is not to simply record strange events and present facts, as Li Xu did in *Casual Remarks*, but to achieve a higher social ambition through these "exemplary words to the world", an

organic collection consisting of carefully thematically arranged stories. As observed by Maria Franca Sibau in her study of moral themes of *Exemplary Words*, the 40 stories suggest "an elaborate architecture at the macro-textural level" (5). Overall, these stories are neatly organized into two contrasting halves. The first twenty stories recount exclusively positive examples of moral behaviour, while the latter twenty stories are mostly cautionary tales that expose and critique social vices and human follies – with the exception of the last three narratives, which are about supernatural creatures, such as fox spirits and dragons. Within the paired halves, some of the stories are further deliberately paired with a counterpart. For instance, the third story tells of an exemplary filial son whereas the fourth story describes a heroic deed of an exemplary filial daughter.

Viewed in this light, the technique of pairing and contrasting becomes an important narrative device to the overall structure of the collection. In the specific narrative of Li Liangyu, the pairing of the Li brothers and contrasting of their distinct qualities of manhood indicates not only a structural technique but also a thematic impetus. As the last narrative in the negative exemplary half of the collection, Li Liangyu's experience is also employed to take issue with certain social vices. What social vices and morals are reflected in his experience? How is *nan hua nü* sex transformation framed as a *negative* exemplar, even though *nü hua nan* has been traditionally read as a *positive* exemplar? The answer lies in not Liangyu's sex transformation itself but its implication as a heavenly omen, or representation, of social vices. To be more specific, what is problematized is not the *nan hua nü* sex transformation itself, but certain social practices. Nowhere is the moral impulse of social critique more poignantly felt than in the opening paragraph of the narrative:

> As I [the narrator] once said: if everyone can retain an upright personality, then among the hairpinned women there exist manly men; if no one cares about guarding their chastity and purity, then among those men many are truly women. This is why in this world there are catamites (娈童 *luantong*). They have narrow eyebrows and cute faces, and compete with women for [men's] favour. These are women among youth. There exist also those fawning men (佞人 *ningren*). They use soft voices and honeyed words, always obey and try to please [their masters], and femininity is inscribed in their bone marrow. These are women among adult men. There further exist those men who bend their backs, humble their steps, crawl to the rich and powerful, and know nothing but seduction and pleasure. These are

[male] concubines and maidservants (*qieying* 妾媵) of the scholar-gentry. There is no need to undress coats and trousers for hairpins and skirts; there is no need to cover manly features with powder and blush. Half of the world population is already yin [feminine], but if the whole world adopts [the yin] and indulges in lust, heaven will surely disclose certain signs. It was recorded that during the Xuanhe reign (1119-1125) of the Song dynasty, villainous ministers Cai Jing, Wang Fu, Tong Guan and Gao Qiu usurped the power and people fought for their favour, so heaven revealed a sign: A woman more than 40 years old in the capital Bianjing suddenly felt itchy in her cheeks, and after several scratches there, a bushy beard started to grow. In several days, the beard grew to several inches long. When the emperor received the report, he gave the imperial edict that she live as a female Taoist monk. This is an example of women with manly characteristics. Later, there was an olive vendor who suddenly was seen with a huge belly of a pregnant woman, and gave birth to a son right behind his vendor cart. This is a harbinger for men doing womanly deeds. In our own dynasty, the gang of eunuch servants (*yannu* 阉奴) Wang Zhen, Wang Zhi, Liu Qin and Feng Bao are neither men nor women (*buci buxiong* 不雌不雄) but threw the politics into corruption and disorder. Still, many [male] bootlickers put on powder and blush, kneel and adulate to obtain their favour. [This is] what people in the past called "every person in the dynasty is a woman (*juchao jie qiefu* 举朝皆妾妇),"[70] so heaven enlightens the world with a sign, which is our story of Li Liangyu during the Longqing reign.

我尝道："人若能持正性，冠笄中有丈夫；人若还无贞志，衣冠中多女子。故如今世上有一种娈童，修眉曼脸，媚骨柔肠，与女争宠，这便是少年中女子。有一种佞人，和言婉气，顺旨承欢，浑身雌骨，这便是男子中妇人。又有一种躬踽步，趋膻附炎，满腔媚想，这便是衿绅中妾媵。何消得裂去衣冠，换作簪袄；何消得脱却须眉，涂上脂粉。世上半已是阴类，但举世习为妖淫，天必定为他一个端兆。尝记宋时宣和间，奸相蔡京、王黼、童贯、高俅等专权窃势，人争趋承，所以当时上天示象。汴京一个女子，年纪四十多岁，忽然两颐痒，一挠挠出一部须来，数日之间长有数寸。奏闻，圣旨着为女道士，女质袭着男形的征验。又有一个卖青果男子，忽然肚大似怀娠般，后边就坐蓐，生一小儿，此乃是男人做了女事的先兆。我朝自这干阉奴王振、汪直、刘勤与冯保，不雄不雌的，在那边乱政。因有这小人磕头掇脚，搽脂画粉，去奏承着他。昔人道的举朝皆妾妇也。上天以灾异示人。此隆庆年间有李良雨一事。(Lu *Xing shi yan*: 1592-3)

[70] This sentence most likely refers to a similarly epidemic prevalence of men behaving like women in the Jin dynasty (265-420). According to Xie Zhaozhe: "The histories [*Jin shu* (Book of the Jin)] tell us that after the Xianning [275-280] and Taikang [280-296] periods, male favorites were extremely popular, more so than female beauties. Everyone among the gentry inclined to them. The whole world followed suit, to the point where husbands divorced their wives."

It is only after this long critical paragraph that Li Liangyu's story is formally introduced. As this introductory critique explicitly claims, the purpose of dealing with the Li Liangyu cycle is to condemn those men who are eager to sacrifice moral principles and manhood for pleasures and benefits in social life. In particular, the target groups include catamites, fawning men, male concubines and sexual servants who either literally cross-dress as women or behave in unmanly ways such as being obsequious and snobbish, and climb the social ladder through foul play.

On a deeper level, what this argument conveys is in essence a social anxiety over the decline of masculinity and the rising social trend of epidemic femininity among male social members in the author/compiler's age. Historically, by the end of the Ming dynasty and to the end of the Qing, in some cases, male femininity and male beauty had indeed become a more preferred quality in Chinese men, particularly with the increasing presence of somewhat feminized "talented scholar (*caizi* 才子)"[71] protagonists in literary representations, and, thoroughly feminized crossdressers due to the spreading of the "male homoerotic (*nanfeng* 男风)"[72] social practice, the latter of which is one of the main targets of vehement critique in this narrative. Many late-Ming scholars have also commented upon this dangerous vogue of over-feminization among men in society.[73] For instance, the scholar-official Li Dong (1532-?) even records that decent men would cross-dress to keep up with this fashion. He disapprovingly writes, with obvious unease, "It is well known that in the last twenty years in the cities of the Southeast all of the *shengyuan* and literati from households who can afford it doll themselves up like women, wearing red and purple outer wraps and undergarments. I need say no more" (qtd. in Wakeman 95). If we can trust Li's account, it is not hard to understand why in the above opening paragraph the author would be so indignant about male feminization and would thus exclaim: "[E]very person in the dynasty is a woman."

However, despite the asserted moral function of this narrative, it is really doubtful how effective the case of Li Liangyu can be as a social critique of over-feminization of

[71] See Louie Kam, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*.
[72] This will be discussed in depth in the second section of this chapter, which examines *nan hua nü* in the Qing dynasty. For more information, refer to Wu Cuncun; Sophie Volpp, 1994, 2001, 2002.
[73] Xie Zhaozhe; Shen Defu; Li Dong.

men, or as a supposedly heavenly evidence for the misdeeds of these despicable men. As we will soon see, in the narrative the focus is not so much on the moral implication of sex transformation and social concerns as an omen, but on the twists and turns of the plot, the readability of the story. As a result, the opening statement of the moral goal of the story is gradually replaced by the function of entertainment, and the almost voyeuristic pleasure of probing into the private space of sex transformation.

Returning to the narrative, it appears that Liangyu's femininity is harmless to his male identity and does not at all appear to have stood in his way of performing his social roles of husband and father. Liangyu soon is seen happily married to an equally beautiful woman. The narrative even devotes a poem to describe both the striking beauty and the enviable marriage of Liangyu and his wife:

> [Li Liangyu] took the daughter of Han Wei, known as Little Sister, as wife,
> Well, as for the couple:
> The man is romantic; the lady is young,
> A lovely union of matching beauty ordained by destiny.
> Two exquisite lotuses of the same root，
> A charming pair of love birds with ardent passion.
> This Little Sister has superb beauty and Li Liangyu is an attractive-looking young man,
> so their marriage has been very harmonious.
> [李良雨]娶一丁村韩威的女儿小大姐为妻，两个夫妇呵：
> 男子风流女少年，
> 姻缘天付共嫣然，
> 连枝菡萏双双丽，
> 交颈鸳鸯两两妍。
> 这小大姐是个风华女子，李良雨也是个俊逸郎君，且是和睦。(Lu *Xing shi yan*: 1594)

The persona of a beautiful lady and handsome youth and their happy union have been common elements in many traditional Chinese stories, known as "scholar-beauty" (*caizi jiaren* 才子佳人) romances.[74] Apparently, in this narrative of sex transformation, "scholar-beauty" romance cannot be the central storyline. Instead, it is more likely set up as a parody of this genre, or merely a cursory borrowing of this stock theme. At the same time, the romantic note is hastily summarized so the real storyline can be introduced:

[74] According to the compilers of a recent collection of romantic (*yanqing xiaoshuo*) stories, the *caizi jiaren* genre "commenced at the end of the Ming Dynasty and only began to decline after the Qianlong reign in the Qing Dynasty" (Yin and Ye, iii)

"[The couple] enjoyed a happy marriage for a year. Then, they had a baby girl named Xigu [Maiden of Joy]. Unfortunately, when Xigu was five months old, she started to have measles, and didn't survive it" (222).

Compared to the previous narrative in which Li Liangyu's pre-transformation marriage as a childless one, Lu Renlong's version not only pinpoints Liangyu's social role as a husband, it also makes clear his role as a father and his capability to inseminate a woman, all given as principal cues to construct his pre-transformation maleness as a perfectly "normal" man. But once this image of Li Liangyu as completely male is established, both his social roles as a husband and father need to be detached from his social identity as soon as possible to prepare for his secret sex transformation. Li Liangyu has to be detached from any member of his family [his parents, brother, wife, and daughter] to allow for the emergence of his future new identity. It is then not surprising to see that Li Liangyu did have a daughter, who died a premature death. This piece of information is quickly given at the beginning of the main story, so Liangyu can part with the rest of his family and start his journey of sex transformation in no time: despite the persuasion of both his brother and wife, Li Liangyu is determined to quit farming and have a go at business ventures. Soon, Liangyu bids farewell to his beautiful wife and his younger brother and embarks on a life-changing business trip with his fellow villager, also his future husband-to-be, Lü Da.

The rest of the narrative is devoted to delineating the development of Li Liangyu's sex transformation in nuanced detail. The readers soon find out the real circumstances that cause his transformation: once Liangyu has freed himself from family life, he begins to explore new pleasures with his friend. When he and Lü Da arrive at the Heyang town, he finds out that Lü Da is a pleasure-seeker who has been playing around with prostitutes, which is also why he is still unmarried. Because Lü Da knows a prostitute in this town from earlier visits, after a few days staying in an inn he succeeds in persuading Liangyu to visit brothels. As luck would have it, after fooling around for several days, Liangyu begins to run a cold fever and grow two huge blisters in his groin. Lü Da realizes what Liangyu has is syphilis, since he had it before, so he buys the medicine and carefully attends to the sick Liangyu. However, after taking the medication, strangely, not only do the blisters start to rot, but Liangyu's male organ is corrupted too.

Lü Da feels very sorry and apologizes to Liangyu that he should not have taken him to brothels. But Liangyu replies that this is nothing to Lü Da, since going to the brothel was his own decision. Before he knows it, Liangyu discovers that his male organ has completely dissappeared! Meanwhile, his beard also falls out entirely. Lü Da is greatly amazed at Liangyu's new look, and praises him as "a pretty woman."

Liangyu's sex transformation could have been introduced here; nevertheless, before the disclosure, the narrative adds the first twist to the plot: Liangyu's dream. In a fit of violent pain, Liangyu lapses into a coma. Soon, he finds himself led by two ghost guides to the shrine of the underground world. He is told by Yamaraja,[75] or the ruler of the underworld, that he should have been born as a woman but was mistakenly reincarnated as a man. Now that the error has been realized, Yamaraja orders that he should change back into a woman. Soon, Liangyu wakes up from the coma and realizes that this is a dream. Thinking back on the dream, he secretly touches his private area; to his great shock, the rotten part has healed into a vagina-shaped organ. Though Liangyu feels very shy about this discovery, luckily, his illness is fully cured. So when Lü Da tries to apply medication to him, Liangyu starts to avoid exposing his private part and tells him that the part is already healed.

Again, the story of Liangyu's sex transformation could have been brought to an end at this point. Instead, the narrative continues with the second plot twist: the erotic liaison between the two friends. As it happens, after half a month Liangyu has fully recovered his spirits; with his fair skin and red lips, and without his beard, Liangyu looks just like a beautiful lady. Naturally, Lü Da is curious to know what has happened to Liangyu's infected part. Liangyu replies that it has become "flat." The following excerpt will suffice to offer a glimpse of the intimate, erotic tone that this part of the narrative adopts:

> Lü Da asks again, "Is it like a eunuch?"
>
> Without waiting for Liangyu's reply, he takes Liangyu by surprise and suddenly puts his hand to Liangyu's private area: it's indeed "flat," but it also feels like having a vagina-like crevice.
>
> Realizing Lü Da's invasion, Liangyu quickly covers it.
>
> Lü Da thinks to himself, "Could it get rotten into a lady part? If this is true, it will indeed be a heavenly blessed union. Still, this does not

[75] A god in popular belief who is in charge of the registrar of living man's prelife and afterlife.

sound plausible." So he tries to get into Liangyu's bed. But Liangyu would rather die than let him in. He protects himself by holding the quilt tightly to himself.

Lü Da further persuades him: "Brother Li, when you were sick I did take good care of you. How come you can't even share your quilt on a cold night like this?"

Seeing that Lü Da is determined to get into the bed, however, Liangyu can't even gather the strength to resist him – somehow once he is changed into a woman, his strength diminishes into a woman's level as well – Lü Da finally gets his way. In this situation, Liangyu can only turn his back against his friend. Though Lü Da attempts several times to touch him, Liangyu hardly guards his groin with all the strength that remains.

Lü Da is amused by this, and laughs: "Brother Li, even though you are a fourteen-year-old boy actor (*xiaoguan* 小官),[76] there is no need to make this fuss." Muttering this, he intentionally barges towards Liangyu, which causes the latter to stay vigilantly awake the whole night. Meanwhile, Lü Da gets a good sleep and starts to plan in his head: "Well, if he hasn't changed into a woman, why would he dodge me like this? I will just wait for a better opportunity when he can no longer defend himself."

One day, under the name of celebrating Liangyu's recovery, he bought some wine, ordered several dishes, and invited Liangyu for drinks.

[…]

After several cups, the slightly drunken Liangyu becomes even more beautiful. Enamored by his beauty, Lü Da thinks to himself, "I heard that in the south men would have sex with men; with a look as this, no man won't let him go. Tonight, whether he is a man or a woman, I will just 'catch a drunken fish'. "

[…]

At this time, Liangyu has already passed out in dead drunkenness. Seeing this chance, Lü Da quietly moves his hand to Liangyu's private area; to his great joy, he is indeed a woman. He immediately jumps over Liangyu's body; this jump wakes up the latter with a jerk.

Liangyu warns him, "Brother Lü, do not mess with me!"

Lü Da replies: "Brother Li, I already know about your circumstances. Even if you later live as a woman, your reputation will already be subject to questioning, having lived with me during the past three or four months. I happen not to have a wife; you and I might as well be a couple. You shouldn't reject it."

[…]

After that, in front of others they are still business partners while in private, they are actually husband and wife. Lü Da has not been with a woman for long, whereas Liangyu has recently transformed into a woman.

[76] "Boy actor" is a popular term used in the Ming-Qing era for pretty youth who engage in homosexual behaviors with men, often elder and of higher social or economic status, for profit.

Needless to say, they are close as glue: they drink by the candles, flirt under the bed sheet, put out the candles, and take off their clothes – what a happy union!

那吕达来看道："如今下面怎么了？"李良雨道："平的。"吕达道："这等是个太监模样么？出他不意，伸手一摸，那里得平，却有一线似女人相似，李良雨忙把手上去掩了。吕达想道："终不然一烂，怎烂做个女人不成？果有此事，倒是天付姻缘，只恐断没这理。"这夜道天色冷，竟钻入被中。那李良雨死命不肯，紧紧抱住了被。吕达道："李大哥，你一个病，我也尽心伏事，怎这等天冷，共一共被儿都不肯？"定要钻来，那李良雨也不知怎么，人是女人，气力也是女人，竟没了，被他捱在身边，李良雨只得背着他睡。他又摸手摸脚去撩他，撩得李良雨紧紧把手掩住胯下，直睡到贴床去。吕达笑了道："李大哥，你便是十四五岁小官，也不消做这腔。"偏把身子逼去，逼得一夜不敢睡。吕达自鼾鼾的睡了一觉，心里想："是了，若不变做女人，怎怕我得紧。我只出其不意，攻其无备。"倒停了两日，不去扰他。这日，打了些酒……

[……]

正是酒儿后，灯儿下越看越俊俏。吕达想道："我闻得南边人作大嫩，似此这样，一个男人也饶他不过。我今日不管他是男是女，捉一个醉鱼罢。

[……]

那吕达轻轻将手去摸，果是一个女人，吕达满心欢喜，一个翻身竟跳上去。这一惊，李良雨早已惊醒。道："吕兄，不要罗唣。"吕达道："李大哥，你的光景我已知道，到后就是你做了妇人，与我相处了三四个月，也为不清，况我正无妻，竟可与我结成夫妇，你也不要推辞。"

[……]

自此之后，两个便做了人前的伙计，暗里夫妻。吕达是久不见女人的男子，良雨是做过男子的妇人，两下你贪我爱，灯前对酌，被底相勾，银烛笑吹，罗衫偷解，好不快乐。(Lu *Xing*:1605-10)

So far, the narrative has long lost sight of its opening moral claim; rather, an inside pry into the nature of this sex transformation becomes its absolute substance, and controversially, probably also its primary attraction. In this part, the female identity of Liangyu is dramatically teased out through the desire of Lü Da. Both Lü Da's psychological brewing for his unabashed sexual advances and Liangyu's failure to defend his privacy are vividly presented.

Here, the originally equal relation between the two becomes replaced by a gender hierarchy in this sexual encounter: Lü Da is portrayed as active, aggressive, and strong, while Liangyu seems to have lost his manly strength as he loses his male organ and is

seen as passive, responsive, and vulnerable. This contrast is not only constructed through action (Lü Da's aggression and Liangyu's recession in this sexual confrontation), but also through words. Almost all the thinking and speaking in this section is attributed to Lü Da, while Liangyu's voice here is merely given a tiny presence. Regardless of their former relationship, after the discovery of Liangyu's female body this friends-made couple soon assumes new positions: Lü Da as a dominant husband with Liangyu as a submissive wife.

The individuals involved in this *nan hua nü* could easily settle down in this newly established "happy union." Yet, the narrative capitalizes on third turn of the plot: the intervention of Liangyu's brother. The story continues: since Liangyu has already been tricked by Lü Da into exposing his female identity, he decides not to hide it any more. This does not mean that he would openly live as a sex-transformed woman; rather, at Lü Da's suggestion ("Men have men's look while women have women's look (*nan shi nanban, nu shi nuban* 男是男扮,女是女扮)", he decides to transperform[77] his recently-acquired womanhood and pass as someone born as a woman. At this point, Lü Da becomes a great help: he not only does Liangyu's hair in a style popular among women and does makeup for him, he also buys him necessities for footbinding. In about a month's time, Liangyu has mastered the skills to pass as a beautiful woman. In the meanwhile, the two move to a new town and start a restaurant there, presenting themselves as a couple.

The narrative then shifts to Liangyu's brother Liangyun and Liangyun's wife, both of whom have not heard back from Liangyu for now half a year. Worried that some misfortune has happened to Liangyu, Liangyun sets out to look for him. One day, he chances upon a female restaurant owner who resembles his brother except for the lack of a beard or mustache. He pretends to order some food while actually carefully examining this woman. At this moment, Lü Da happens to walk out from the room at the back and informs him that this woman is in fact the brother he is searching for. However, Liangyun does not believe this and suspects a hoax. He replies: "Man will be man; woman will be woman. Even when castrated, a man would only become a eunuch. It's never heard of

[77] I choose "transperform" because neither "cross-dress" nor "impersonate" seems accurate in this case, given that Li Liangyu is already believed to have become a woman in terms of both primary and secondary sex characteristics.

that a man will become a woman. This [what Lü Da has informed him] might be too preposterous." Hearing this, Liangyu then explains himself to his brother the whole story. Still, it is not easy to convince him. Liangyun further questions: "You said that you became a woman due to syphilis. This sounds absurd enough! You then claim that you'd been to the underground and Yamaraja sentenced you to become Lü Da's wife. This is even more ridiculous! Even if your body changed into a woman's body, how come your voice has also become weaker, and your beard and mustache are gone as well?" No matter how Lü Da and Liangyu try to convince him, Liangyun still entertains strong suspicion of foul play. He then returns home and conveys what he was told to his sister-in-law, who agrees that the story is too ridiculous. Like a telephone game, they then retell the story to Liangyu's father-in-law and two neighbors, consulting their views on it. All of them express unanimous disbelief towards this. Finally, Liangyun makes up his mind to take legal measures and files a lawsuit against Lü Da, and accuses the latter of "murder for money" based on their intuition that the real Liangyu was robbed and murdered by Lü Da while this story of *nan hua nü* is merely a lie made up by Lü Da to cover his crime.

For this reason, the narrative introduces the last turn of the plot: the legal investigation of Liangyu's *nan hua nü*. The inquisition process is not much different from that depicted in Li Xu's *Casual Remarks*: verifying Liangyu's genital configuration and questioning Liangyu's wife and neighbors. What is worth noting here is that in the narrative, Liangyu's wife is given more authority than anyone else in evaluating her husband's sex identity. She is asked by the county magistrate not only to confirm that the suspect's look (Liangyu) is that of her husband, but also diagnose his real sex identity. It is only until she physically feels Liangyu's genital and admits that he is indeed now a woman that the county magistrate nullifies the murder prosecution and closes the case with the statement, "This Liangyu is the real Liangyu and his *nan hua nü* is also real." He then sentences Liangyu and Lü Da to be wife and husband, whereas Liangyu's wife is free to remarry.

In addition to helping officially bring the *nan hua nü* mystery to a conclusion, the last episode of the plot plays another important role in this narrative: granting this incident of *nan hua nü* unprecedented state attention. Considering it as an omen of extraordinary nature, the magistrate immediately drafts an official report and submits to

the governor of the province, who eventually passes this to the emperor himself. Despite its authenticity, both the content of this alleged report of the magistrate – including a brief summary of the lawsuit and the reading of its implication using the aforementioned yin-yang cosmology similar to that in Li Xu's *Casual Remarks* – and the emperor's response – which reaffirms the national urgency of moral cultivation and policy improvement in order to avoid any risk of disasters – are also quoted in the narrative in its entirety. Moreover, to increase the reliability of this narrative, the author includes another reference, *Faithful Record of Emperor Muzong of the Ming, 1566-1572* (No. 6 in Table 2.2) that has also recorded this incident due to its exceptional nature.

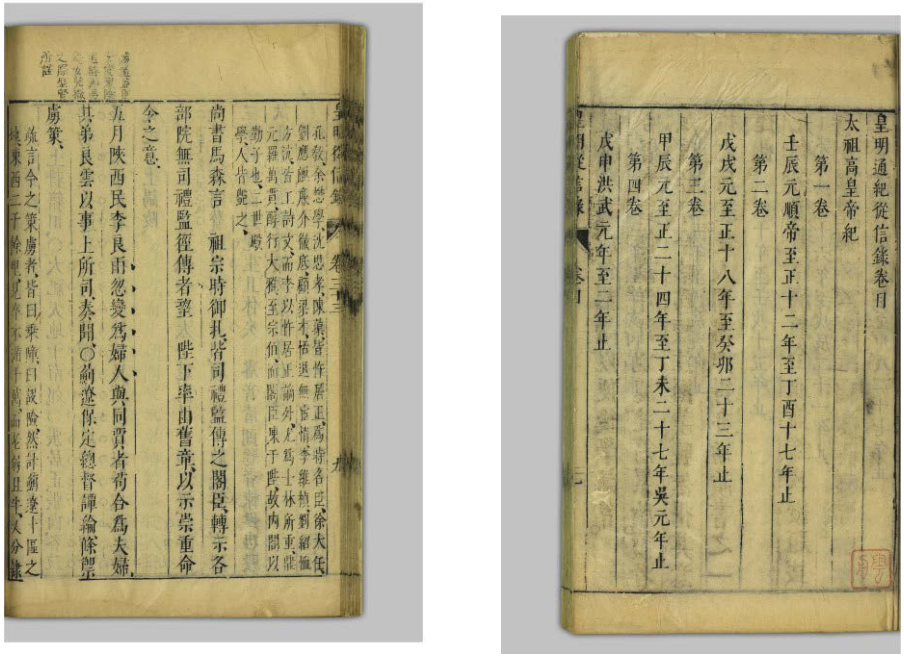

Figure 3.2 Original copy of *Faithful Record of Emperor Muzong of the Ming, 1566-1572* (Left: the entry of Li Liangyu, the 3rd to the 5th column to the left; Right: the contents)

Unfortunately, the final epilogue describing Li Liangyu's idealized post-transformation life somehow considerably discounts its reliability:

> When they are back home from the county court, Liangyu and Lü Da still live together as wife and husband. Later, they have a son. As for Liangyu's brother Liangyun, he still considers Liangyu as a sibling, formerly as a brother, but now as a sister. Of course, there is no reason for Liangyu's wife Han to keep wifely faithfulness, so she remarries, and becomes a good girlfriend of Liangyu. Whenever she and Liangyu think back of their past marriage, they laugh at it as if it were a dream.

> 这边县官将来发放宁家，良雨仍与吕达作为夫妇，后生一子。李良云为兄弟，如今做了姊弟，亲眷往来。就是韩氏，没守他的理，也嫁了一个人，与良雨作姊妹相与，两个尝想起当日云情雨意，竟如一梦，可发一笑。(Lu *Xing*: 1629-30)

It appears that the lives of those involved in Liangyu's *nan hua nü* quickly restored their disturbed rhythm. However, this happy-ever-after ending to Liangyu's *nan hua nü* perhaps is too good to be true. In fact, no other existing references mentioned that Liangyu gave birth to a son while the picture of Liangyu and his ex-wife becoming best girlfriends is more likely a product of the author's creative power than a fact. In any case, this narrative in *Xing shi yan* remains the most extensive, detailed, though highly fictionalized, account among the Liangyu cycle. The distinct discursive gender transition and the subtle psychological change brewed in Li Liangyu are also more elaborately depicted than in any other narrative in our discussion.

To summarize, this long narrative begins with a high claim to unveil social vices; however, the real substance underneath the pretense of moral pursuit is the dramatic experience of Liangyu's sex transformation. The literary practice of wrapping a controversial topic within a moralizing context has been a common strategy employed by the Ming-Qing writers to help legitimize and sugarcoat the sometimes indecent, even obscene, content of their writing. This nuanced depiction of sexual scenes between Liangyu and Lü Da somehow renders the sincerity of moralization and social criticism insincere. The reason why this inconsistency between its claim and its actual substance exists is primarily due to two contradictory tasks that the author undertakes: moral education and commercial success. On the one hand, *nan hua nü* is an attractive topic of extraordinary nature for casual reading, hence a great topic for popular fiction, given its high commercial value. On the other hand, it has to be framed within a more acceptable context than its sex transformation content. The author's goal is to write not only stories that sell but also stories that teach.

So far I have examined a variety of narratives in the Li Liangyu cycle spanning almost a century during the Ming era. Though all dealing with the same *nan hua nü* incident, none of them is repetitive of another. It is precisely this multiformity within uniformity that is the lifeline of this *nan hua nü* narrative. Without the proliferation and reiteration of the narrative, Li Liangyu's sex transformation would not have enjoyed its

present discursive life. It is true that no single narrative should be considered as the original story, the truth. Rather, the original truth is something one can never access except through these multiple copies in the discursive form.

Castration and the conscious making of a woman: homoeroticism and *nan hua nü* in the late Ming and the Qing

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, *nan hua nü* narratives in the Ming are almost dominated by the Li Liangyu cycle. Though these interwoven narratives constituting the cycle display to us various facets of the *nan hua nü* phenomenon, one thing they have in common is that this male-to-female sex transformation has always been set against a default heterosexual backdrop. Even though when in No. 8, *Exemplary Words to the World*, beholding Liangyu's beauty, Lü Da was trying to take advantage of him and thought "Whether he is man or woman, I will just 'catch a drunken fish,'" this act of his does not put his sexual orientation into question, because Lü Da was already clearly defined as a heterosexual man frequenting brothels. However, if we may recall, in the section depicting Lü Da's scheme to access Liangyu's transformed body by half coaxing and half threatening, Lü Da mentions two vital pieces of information for us to understand *nan hua nü* in the Qing: the vogue of boy actors/prostitutes (*xiaoguan* 小官) engaging in commercial homosexual behavior, and the southern customs of homosexuality.

The prevalence of homosexuality is not explicitly the subject of narratives in the Li Liangyu cycle, but it is implied in the underlying social concerns of over-feminization of men. In its introduction, this narrative listed three major categories of men responsible for the dangerous social state of over-feminization: catamites (娈童 *luantong*), fawning men (佞人 *ningren*), and male concubines and maidservants (*qieying* 妾媵). Though the author's real concern lies in the socio-political aspect implicated in the despicable social behaviour of attaining power and influence at the cost of integrity and principle, not in the homosexual aspect, he is still critical of some homosexual individuals, particularly those who cross-dress and adopt feminine ways.

In this section, the *nan hua nü* narratives takes a completely opposite turn: not only is homoeroticism boldly presented and feminization of men eulogized, but more importantly, both homoeroticism and feminization become indispensible components constituting a male-to-female sex transformation. *Nan hua nü* is no longer an unaccountable heavenly sign, as in Li Liangyu's case, but a specific status of being achieved through an extraordinary human deed under certain extreme circumstances. Let us first look at some transitional pieces of this turn from the late Ming.

Liu Menzi, or the male prostitute who becomes a real woman

Among the Ming narratives of *nan hua nü*, there are two that do not belong to the Li Liangyu cycle. The earlier account (No. 3) is a short entry contained in a miscellaneous collection or orally circulating stories and anecdotes entitled *Er tan lei zeng* (Revised and expanded edition of *Talks through Ears*) (1603), written by literatus Wang Tonggui (?1541-?, active around 1620). As its title indicates, Wang intends this as a revision and expansion to the earlier edition *Er tan* (*Talks through Ears*), printed in 1597.[78] According to Wang's contemporaries, the first edition was very popular, to the extent that "every household owns a copy and its price also rises in the market," and it was printed in provinces as far away as Shaanxi. [79] What is valuable about these two collections is that almost all its entries are gleaned from popular talks of the author's contemporary age due to its exclusively oral origin, unlike most other notebook jottings or story collections, which will invariably take material from earlier written sources, to varying extents. It is also because of the freshness and timeliness of its content that these two collections were often drawn upon by later short fiction writers, including iconic *xiaoshuo* writers such as Feng Menglong, Ling Mengchu, and Pu Songling.[80] Written at a time when the talk of Li Liangyu has been widely popular, its entry on *nan hua nü* shows little influence from the earlier cycle and provides a new fresh account of its own. It relates:

[78] The original print was not rediscovered until 1987, almost 300 years after its publication.
[79] See Zhang Wenguang's preface to *Expanded Edition of Er tan* in 1603; "凡例 *Fanli*[Explanary Notes]" section in *Expanded Edition of Er tan* (Wang 1603:1a); and, Lü and Mi (1991).
[80] For detailed discussion of the borrowing of their works from Wang's collections, see the listed entries and its sources in Lü and Mi (1991): 86-94.

> Liu Menzi[81] in Yuezhou [now a city in Hubei province] was as pretty as a woman. People were often confused by his sex because he was no less pretty than a woman at all. Since he didn't want to get a wife, he moved out and lived in a separate house where he entertained his male friends with wine. Most of his guests would stay overnight. After a while, his penis shrank [and in its place a vagina began to take shape]; it turned out that he was actually born with a vagina. So he pierced his ears and bound his feet like women do. Later, a man from Pingjiang took him as a concubine. I've heard that he already gave birth to two sons.
>
> 岳州刘门子姣类妇女，人多惑之，比长不下也。又不欲娶，独处一舍，具酒浆招客，客多留宿者。久之肉具渐缩去，实有牝，乃遂穿耳缚足。平江人纳为妾 去，闻已生两子矣。(18:51)

Wang's tone in recording this talk of a *nan hua nü* individual of whom he has heard seems surprisingly calm and relaxed. He makes no comment, no judgment, and no interpretation, as we often see in other *xiaoshuo* collections. Instead, what we have is a down-to-earth outline of the life of an extraordinarily beautiful male prostitute who transformed into a woman. Even before his alleged sex transformation, the individual Liu Menzi is seen with an extremely feminine appearance that could easily pass as a born woman (see Figure 3.3). The author is also not conservative about Liu's profession: a male prostitute who openly entertains his male friend-customers. We have no way to verify how and whether Liu's penis shrank into a vagina, but unlike in Li Liangyu's case, Wang's record has it that this is not a result of some sudden genital transformation but only because Liu was born with a vagina in the first place. If indeed, as it claims, Liu was born with a hidden vagina that reveals itself only when his penis begins to shrink, then Liu's sex transformation should be considered more accurately as the natural growth of a female pseudohermaphrodite instead of a mysterious sex transformation.

[81] Menzi is his profession (male prostitute who serves men), not his first name. In the past, prostitutes in China by default were meant for male customers. So far, I have not come across any mention of prostitutes in history who serve women.

Figure 3.3 Painting of "Ziyun chuyu tu" (Ziyun freshly after a bath) by Chen Hu (1570-1653)

A famous portrait of the beautiful boy actor Xu Ziyun ("Purple Cloud" [d. 1675?]), patronized by and romantically involved for seventeen years with Chen Weisong (1626-82), one of the most celebrated literati and masters of Chinese lyric poetry during the late Ming and early Qing period. There is no way to find out if this is what Liu Menzi looked like, but this vivid portrait of Ziyun, of similar age and profession, is highly indicative of the feminine appearance of prettier-than-woman boys involved in homoerotic practices. This painting captured the pretty boy sitting on a flat rock with a loose, revealing robe of a flowing flimsy pattern. His body figure resembles that of a girl, with tiny feet and slender limbs. He is supporting his chin with his hand, his still wet long hair tied in a relaxed knot. One can almost imagine the rouge on his face, with a soft bang and delicate facial features; his expression is tender, indolent, and musing.

The curious thing here is that Wang seems to deliberately prove that Liu's sex identity is consistent with his gender performance, and that his anatomy corresponds to his appearance. Wang is in effect offering a biological explanation of the so-called *nan hua nü*: the presence of the female sex organ is not a consequence of, but the reason for, this sex transformation. The sex transformation, as the author suggests, is part of the natural process of the individual's adolescence, the development of his true sex. Viewing the new female identity as the emergence of his real sex rather than the product of any inexplicable force, Liu's *nan hua nü* is able to escape legal complexity and public scrutiny, and becomes much more easily accepted. Thus, with his already feminized appearance and newly revealed female genital, he transitions into a woman with great

ease and legitimacy, while the last information of his concubinage and his procreative fertility further help strengthen the wholeness of his female identity.

Still, the discovery of Liu's true sex cannot nullify his homosexual inclination and previous homoerotic practice. Male homoeroticism is boldly introduced: buffered by his later *nan hua nü*, his feminized looks, his lack of interest in women or getting a wife, and male-male prostitution seem less problematic in this specific context, in which the individual is in fact a woman. The relation between male homoeroticism and *nan hua nü* takes on a certain level of subtlety: Can *nan hua nü* be a pretense to extricate the individual from homoerotic scandal? Or, is male homoeroticism embellished to dramatize the *nan hua nü* incident? How should one understand his pre- (and post-) *nan hua nü* sexual practice and inner feeling about his gender/sex identity? Does he entertain the same modern feeling that he was "born in the wrong body"?[82] How reliable is this homoeroticism-induced *nan hua nü*? In other words, this situation of *nan hua nü* might not be as simple as Wang records it.

"Record of extraordinary love:" the Ming male homoerotic transition to the Qing discourses of nan hua nü

To further examine the relation between male homoeroticism and *nan hua nü*, I will discuss the last narrative in the Ming era, No. 9, "Record of Extraordinary Love (*Qing qi ji* 情奇纪)" in a collection of four stories, *From Cap to Hairpin*[83] (*Bian er chai* 弁而钗) written by an unknown author under the pseudonym "Master of Moon-heart from Drunken West Lake" (*Zuixihu xinyue zhuren* 醉西湖心月主人). This collection contains four standalone novellas boldly exploring male homoeroticism: "Record of Extraordinary Love", "Record of Chaste Love (*Qing zhen ji* 情贞纪)", "Record of Chivalrous Love (*Qing xia ji* 情侠纪)", and "Record of Martyred Love (*Qing lie ji* 情烈

[82] For instances, many individuals that Christopher Shelley mentioned in *Transpeople* (2008).
[83] Caps and hairpins are symbols for adulthood of men and women, respectively. In ancient China, when a boy turned twenty, he would start to wear caps, and a coming-of-age ceremony called "Ceremony of Cap (*guanli* 冠礼)" would be performed; when a girl turned fifteen, she would start to wear hairpins, and a "Ceremony of Hairpin (*jili* 笄礼)" would be performed. Here, sartorial attributes are employed as indicators of the two sexes, i.e., "from manhood to womanhood."

纪)"[84]. As their titles demonstrate, the four tales are organized around the axis of "love (*qing* 情)," [85] an eternal concept which gained increasing discursive currency since the late Ming period with the publication of the pivotal work *A History of Love* (*Qing shi* 情史) (c. 1628-1630), by iconic *xiaoshuo* writer Feng Menglong (1574-1646). *A History of Love* is a copious anthology of more than 870 love stories collected from various classic sources, including folklore, history, legends, and anecdotes. The stories are classified into twenty-four chapters according to subject or theme, each chapter having a subtitle describing the common theme of entries listed under the category – all subtitles contain the word *qing* (love).[86] For instance, the titles of two tales within *From Cap to Hairpin* are direct borrowings from subtitles of this collection: the first chapter, "Chaste Love", and the fourth chapter, "Chivalrous Love."

Perhaps the stories of *qing* in *From Cap to Hairpin* are more directly indebted to two chapters of *A History of Love*: Chapter twenty-two, "Peripheral (Male Homoerotic) Love (*Qing wai lei* 情外类)", and Chapter eleven, "Transformative Love (*Qing hua lei* 情化类)." Chapter twenty-two is of particular significance to our discussion in that it is the only chapter that is devoted to male homoerotic love. The forty-one male homoerotic stories encapsulated in this chapter are categorized into fourteen subsections of *qing*, constituting an independent system of *qing* within the general organic structure of *qing*. Chapter eleven, meanwhile, is noteworthy in that it includes an entry of Li Liangyu, entitled "Transforming into a woman (*hua nü* 化女)" (No. 7 in my list),[87] as the first exemplar of "transformative love," or the transformative power of love. According to

[84] See Vitiello's studies for details.
[85] In translating the concept of *qing* in Chinese context into "love," I am simplifying it for the purpose of analysis. The Chinese concept of *qing* is more complicated than "love" can encompass; it can also, at the same time, mean "passion," "emotion," "feeling." For studies on the concept of *qing*, refer to Martin Huang, "The Cult of *Qing*".
[86] Borrowing Mowry's translation (1983), I translate the titles of the twenty-four chapters into: "Chaste Love," "Destined Love," "Clandestine Love," "Chivalrous Love," "Magnanimous Love," "Passionate Love," "Infatuated Love," "Love of Pathos," "Illusive Love," "Epiphanic Love," "Transformative Love," "Love by Matchmakers," "Regrettable Love," "Adversary Love," "Sprouting Love," "Retributive Love," "Dissolute Love, " "Love as Hindrance," "Implausible Love," "Ghosts of Love," "Alien Spirits of Love," "Peripheral Love (Male Homosexual Love)," "Anthropopathic Love," "Vestiges of Love."
[87] Judging from the wording and content of this entry, it is highly possible that Feng Menglong has cited this entry from No. 4, *Complete Compilation of Popular History and Anecdotes* [1607).

Feng's categorization, Li Liangyu's sex transformation is a consequence of friendship-transformed love and devotion; or, to cite Feng's comment, "Since [they] are best friends with each other, [they] became husband and wife (*ji xiang youshan, ji fufu yi* 既相友善，即夫婦矣)."

Viewed in this light, Feng suggests that the reason for Liangyu's *nan hua nü* consists in his devotion to friendship with Lü Da, or love itself. It is because of love, or *qing*, that sex transformation has happened to Liangyu. *Hua* (transformation) for Feng is viewed through the perspective of *qing* (love/emotion/feeling), rather than omen or retribution. Furthermore, *hua* as sex transformation as in Li Liangyu's case is not distinguished from other types of *hua*, i.e., supernatural transformation in popular belief in general, such as human beings transformed into wind, stone, birds, and plants. According to Feng's comment on this chapter, all these transformations arise from the same force: *qing*.[88] But it is quite unusual, yet at the same time meaningful, that Li Liangyu's sex transformation, *hua,* precedes the rest of the manifestations of *hua* in this section of "Transformative Love" (701).

It is precisely due to the element of *qing* that homoeroticism and sex transformation could be brought into inseparable association in the *nan hua nü* narratives to be unfolded. If the connection between homoeroticism and *nan hua nü* remains implicit in *A History of Love*, given that Feng chooses to include Li Liangyu's entry in one of the main categories of heterosexual love rather than in the chapter specifically devoted to male homoeroticism, "Record of Extraordinary Love", for the first time these two elements, *qing hua* (transformative love) and *qing wai* (peripheral love), are woven

[88] His comment is as follows: "The main characteristic of ch'ing (*qing*) is that it involves motion but not shape. It might suddenly touch a person without his noticing it. It has the characteristics of the wind, and therefore might transform itself into wind. Wind, something that whirls incessantly, is a thing of the same category as *ch'ing*. On the other hand, *ch'ing* sometimes transforms itself into stone, a hard substance. At other times it may transform itself into birds or plants, i.e., things without intelligence. However, when the bird's intention lies in the east, it goes to the east; when its intention lies in the west, it goes to the west – the elusiveness and briskness of the wind are shared by birds! They soar and alight in pairs. And how can man be inferior to birds! Then, again, the camphor tree can intertwine its branches; and two flowers can bloom on a single stem. Although plants are devoid of intelligence, when they imitate human emotion it seems that they too have intelligence. Should a man have no emotion, he would be even lower than the plants. " (Mowry 87)

into a creative combination that has inspired many other, similar narratives in the Qing dynasty.

The protagonist in "Record of Extraordinary Love" is a male prostitute named Li Zhaifan from a Southern province, Fujian.[89] The story begins when Zhaifan is fifteen years old in a moment of family crisis: while on a governmental errand to the capital, his father was robbed of a large amount of official property under his charge that was worth a thousand pieces of gold. The family sold everything to make up for the loss, but there were still a hundred pieces of gold short. To save his father from penal servitude in prison for this dereliction of duty, Zhaifan put himself for sale in the market as a way to finance the lacking amount. He accidentally entered a red-light district known as *nanyuan* (South Hall).[90] The "South Hall," as the narrative explains, "is the place where all the *xiaoguan* (male homosexual prostitutes) entertain their customers." The narrative continues:

> During the Tang and Song dynasties, the state system of official-serving prostitutes was still practiced. In our time [the Ming dynasty], since this system has already been banned, those officials who bring no wives with them when visiting the capital would call [for *xiaoguan*] to serve wine at drinking gatherings [as substitutes for former official-serving prostitutes]. [Those *xiaoguan* on duty] would wear all female clothes inside the outward layer of male attire. When they are asked to serve the night after the wine party, they would take off the outside cover and leave on only the female clothes in red and purple, looking just like prostitutes. They are also ranked according to their talent and look. The lowest-rank boys cost three *qian* (mace) of silver; better ones cost five *qian*; higher rank boys cost ten *qian*. The highest ranked will be someone most talented and most beautiful. This [system of ranking] is also why this place is called the "South Hall."
> 唐宋有官妓,国朝无官妓,在京官员,不带家小者,饮酒 时,便叫司酒。内穿女服,外罩男衣,酒后留宿,便去了罩服,内衣 红紫,一如妓女也。分上

[89] A southern region known for its customs of male homosexual practices during the Ming-Qing era. This is also why male homoeroticism in this period is often euphemistically referred to as *nanfeng*, which is a play on the homonym *nan*, meaning both 南 (south) and 男 (male), and the polysemy *feng* (风), meaning both wind and mode/customs. Therefore, *nanfeng* can mean both male mode (男风) or south wind/customs (南风). As we will see in the following tales, most stories involving male homoerotic practices have traditionally been set in this region.

[90] Similarly playing on the homonym of *nan* 南 (south) and *nan* 男 (male); *yuan* 院 (hall) borrows from *gongyuan* 贡院 (examination hall) to mean "brothel" because, as the author mentions, just like the participants in national service examinations, male homosexual prostitutes used to be similarly ranked. Together, "South Hall" is used as a euphemism for "Brothel of Male Homosexual Prostitute."

下高低,有三钱一夜的。有五钱一夜的,有一两一夜的,以才貌兼全为第一,故曰南院。

Because of Zhaifan's charming appearance and remarkable talents (music, chess, calligraphy, painting, and poetry), he was noticed by a pimp, who bought him on the spot for the price he asked for – a hundred pieces of silver (a thousand *qian*). In this way, Zhaifan successfully paid off his father's debt, yet reduced himself to a dangerous situation, because he had no idea of the place he was going to end up in.

The narrative then switches to Zhaifan's perspective. Zhaifan was astonished to discover all the boys were not only dressed up as girls, they also addressed each other as sisters. Soon he was also given women's clothes to dress up for his first batch of customers. He followed, but when he was asked to serve sex on his first night, he adamantly refused. Unfortunately, he immediately paid the price for his disobedience: the pimp stormed into the chamber, brutally flogged and violently raped him (Figure 3.4, Left). After that, Zhaifan learned his lesson, and behaved himself in serving customers (Figure 3.4, Right). Owing to his extraordinary beauty and talent, Zhaifan rose to become the highest-ranked *xiaoguan* in the "South Hall" and was much sought after by many upper-class men, particularly after some of his poems were adapted into songs that gained instant popularity in the capital.

There happened to be a famed gentleman from a noble family named Kuang Zilong, who was known for his generosity and romantic spirit. Though he was married to a beautiful wife at a young age and to a dozen concubines later, he was still without a son at the age of thirty. For this reason, his wife often urged him to get another concubine. Yet, whenever his wife mentioned this, he always suggested to put it off, saying, "Allow me to take my time to find a refined one." One day, Kuang heard one of Zhaifan's songs in a wine house by chance and became infatuated by it, and was determined to meet its author, Zhaifan. So he paid a visit to the "South Hall." When he finally met Zhaifan in person, Kuang admired him even more. In heartfelt sympathy to Zhaifan's miserable life in the brothel, Kuang came up a plan and, with his influence and wealth, managed to save the former from forced prostitution.

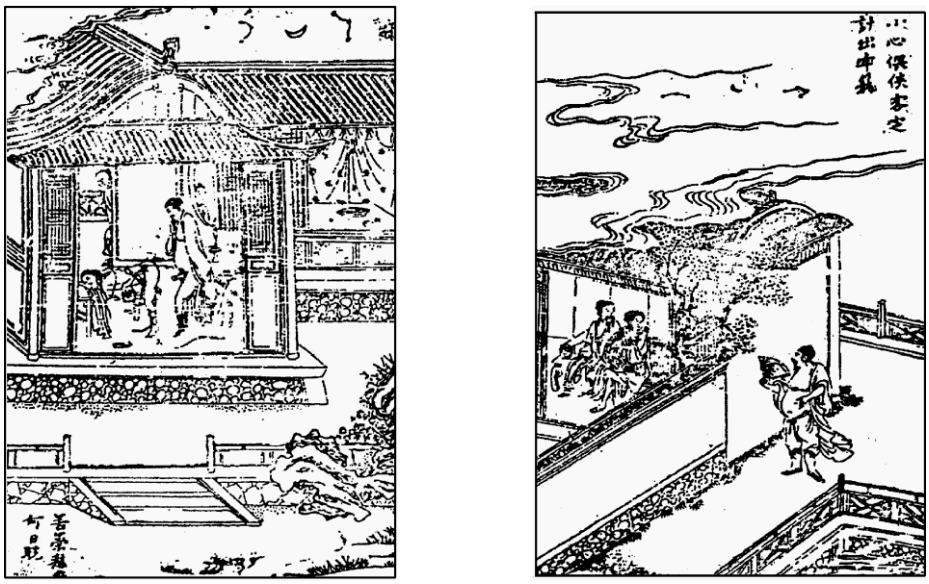

Figure 3.4 Original Illustrations from *From Cap to Hairpin* (1)
Left: Zhaifan being raped by the pimp as a punishment for his disobedience;
Right: Zhaifan, dressed as a courtesan, serving a customer in a chamber, while the pimp eavesdrops outside to make sure.

Zhaifan was then seventeen years old, and in gratitude for Kuang's help, he pledged to serve (sexually) the latter for three years. Not wanting to separate from Zhaifan, Kuang proposed a one-stone-two-birds solution that both allowed Zhaifan to realize his avowal and keep his wife satisfied: Zhaifan would cross-dress as a woman, whom Kuang would take as his new concubine. At first Zhaifan was concerned that this might not work, but when he changed into a woman's hairstyle and complete female outfit, pierced his ears, and bound his feet with the aid of bone-softening medicine, he no longer had any worries: he was "ten time more beautiful than a woman," at which "Kuang was ravished with joy." Gladly, Kuang introduced Zhaifan to his wife as his new concubine. Like all those who met Zhaifan in the female gender, Kuang's wife was struck by his/her beauty and never suspected his real sex. A year later, Kuang's wife gave birth to a son.

During the period he was assuming this new identity, Zhaifan spent most of his time in the house, for fear that his identity would be discovered. Before long, almost three years had passed, and Zhaifan was about to bring to fruition his pledge when suddenly the Kuang family was involved in a devastating political scheme, resulting in Kuang and

his wife being imprisoned in collective punishment while Zhaifan, as a concubine, was not sentenced.

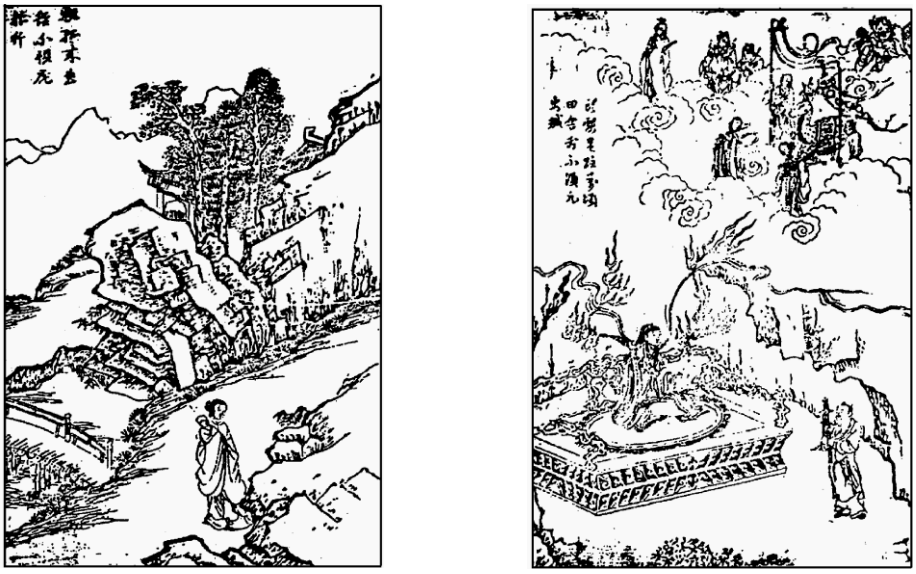

Figure 3.5 Original Illustrations from *From Cap to Hairpin* (2)
Left: Zhaifan holding the rescued child in female identity
Right: Zhaifan returning to the world of immortals

With remarkable courage and wisdom, Zhaifan managed to save Kuang's only son from this political trauma (Figure 3.5, Left). To protect the child's safety, Zhaifan remained dressed as his nanny for the following fifteen years until the child grew up and took first place in the national civil service examination. Finally, when his mission of raising the child was accomplished, Zhaifan removed his female attire and disappeared, leaving behind a letter clarifying everything. At the very end, the story reveals that Zhaifan was in fact a Taoist immortal who was destined to experience the human world as both a man and a woman for thirty-five years. When his arranged time was up, he returned to his world of immortals (Figure 3.5, Right).

Whether due to the thematic breakthrough or the refined language (which might be less visible in my cursory summary), this narrative is indeed a remarkable piece of its kind. Yet, in terms of writing *nan hua nü*, I regard it as a transitional piece bridging into the Qing narratives. My reasons for this grouping are four-fold:

1) When dealing with the *nan hua nü* issue, the story drastically departs from the Li Liangyu cycle and takes up the homoerotic theme that marks most of the Qing narratives. In this narrative, the transformation of Zhaifan into a woman is no longer considered as an omen, or as punishment for sexual misbehaviors; rather, it is a fully conscious act of human will and agency. What is more, the occasion of the male-to-female transformation is contextualized for the first time in a homoerotic aura: the decision to transform into a woman is out of both profound homosocial gratitude and homoerotic *qing*, or love. However, the homoerotic essence of *nan hua nü* is awkwardly superseded, dissolved by re-situating the human act of transforming in an insipid religious context. Overall, though the male homoerotic substance in the first half is delivered with clarity, the latter half, particularly the handling of the ending, veils it in vagueness, hesitation, discomfort, and religious varnish.

2) Its approach to the nature of *nan hua nü* remains conservative compared with the Qing narratives. Although Zhaifan was transformed three times into female roles – first as a prostitute, then as a concubine, and finally as a mother – his transformation is restricted on a social and sartorial level contingent on both the economic and political circumstances and the moral obligations he is under, while his sex identity stays intact at all times. Despite his transperformance for eighteen years (from the age of seventeen to that of thirty-five), deep in his heart, Zhaifan never doubts or questions his male sex identity. In fact, when he looks back at his *nan hua nü* experience, he shows more guilt and shame than identification. As he explains in the letter (which he signed "Male Concubine Li Youxian [his given name, literally meaning "another immortal"]") he left behind before he retreats into the mountains, "With a body like mine, where will I end up? I'm too humiliated to return to my hometown, yet staying here promises nothing for my future. I have been a man for seventeen years and a woman for eighteen years. Thinking back on this, how can I still have the face to live in this world?" Zhaifan's reflection is of critical value in understanding the overall attitude toward *nan hua nü* in this narrative,

because it directly represents the author's view, which begins daring and original, yet recedes into conservatism.

3) *Nan hua nü* is portrayed as temporary and contingent rather than permanent and irreversible. Zhaifan's female identity is constructed through merely performative strategies to fill out social stereotypes of women, such as ear piercing, footbinding, and specific hairstyles, without the bolster of corporeal change of sex. Thus, Zhaifan's female identity becomes fragile and unstable, and can be reversed in the end. In this sense, for Zhaifan, what the female identity provides is merely a temporary lodge instead of a permanent settlement. Particularly, when it comes to the ending, the author justifies Zhaifan's past as a woman with a mythological touch that defines his transformation as a predestined mission, largely invalidating the human agency involved in the process and trivializing any potential meaning of temporary *nan hua nü*. The instability of the female identity and an imposed religious framework marks a noticeable difference from similar narratives from the Qing period.

4) Partially due to the supernatural ending and partially to the conservative approach in general, the theme of male homoerotic *qing* (love) as well as the discursive originality of male romance are notably weakened. For instance, unlike the Qing counterparts, Zhaifan's benefactor Kuang is introduced as someone who is primarily enamored by Zhaifai's lyric talent at first and developed a platonic involvement with him; it is only later, after Zhaifan's completion of sartorial transformation, that the attraction of Zhaifan's beauty and direct homosexual references are brought into view. This restrained take on homoeroticism is further compounded by the supernatural element added at the end, which together are in stark contrast with the bold, straightforward, and realistic style in later Qing narratives.

Male Mencius' Mother: *motherhood, the cult of qing, and* nan hua nü *romance of the Qing*

The first Qing narrative of *nan hua nü* to be examined comes from an early Qing fiction collection, *Silent Operas* (*Wusheng xi*) [1665/6], by the iconoclastic genius writer Li Yu. One of the best and most successful, yet controversial, vernacular writers, essayists, dramatists, opera managers, and publishers of his time, he was renowned, yet at the same time criticized by some conservative scholars, for his originality and nonconformity in literary creation, his promotion of popular literature, his employment of daring, even shocking, themes (including prostitutes and male-male love), and his playful treatment of conventional moral themes.[91] Before the publication of his first short fiction collection, *Silent Operas,* Li Yu had already established his fame with his essays and plays.[92] But the enormous success of his short fiction[93] further secured his place in the market. Despite being repeatedly banned by the state for their provocative content, these short stories continued to gather wide circulation in pirated and reprinted copies under new titles.

Li Yu's romance of *nan hua nü*, "A Male Mencius's Mother Raises Her Son Properly By Moving Houses Three Times (*nan mengmu jiaohe sanqian* 男孟母教合三迁)"[94] (hereafter "Male Mencius's Mother"), quite resembles "Record of Extraordinary Love", except for the religious elements of the plot. A married elder man with good

[91] For a complete study of Li Yu's literary achievement and evaluation in Chinese, Japanese, and European works, see Chang and Chang, particularly 1-46; Sun Kaidi (1981); Shen Xinlin (1992); Fu (2013). For a more brief introduction of Li Yu's literary art, see Nathan Mao's introduction to his translation of *Twelve Towers: Short Stories by Li Yu* (xvii-xxxvi); Patrick Hanan's introduction his selected translation of *Silent Operas* (vii-xiii).

[91] Including the acclaimed essay collection: *Casual Expressions of Idle Feelings* (*Xian qing ou ji* 闲情偶寄) [1644] and a prolifilic prodution of plays: *Adoring the Fragrant Companion* (*Lian xiang ban* 怜香伴) [1651]; *The Misplaced Kite* (*Fengzheng wu* 风筝误) [1652]; *The Destined Marriage* (*Yi zhong yuan* 意中缘) [1653]; *The Jade Hairpin* (*Yu saotou* 玉搔头) [1654].

[93] Including his second *xiaoshuo* collection *Twelve Towers* (*Shi er lou* 十二楼) [c.1658].

[94] The title is based on an old Chinese idiom, "Mencius's Mother Moving Houses Three Times (*mengmu sanqian*i 孟母三迁)." The idiom refers to the legend in which the mother of Mencius, one of the greatest philosophers in Chinese history (second only to Confucius, for which reason Mencius is also known as "Second Sage"), is said to have moved house three times in order to keep her son away from undesirable influences and to find a suitable environment for his education. See Liu Xiang, *Lienü zhuan*.

economic background had a romantic attachment with a pretty boy of quite young age; they became lovers and formed a union, involving the pretty boy voluntarily transforming into a woman. There was a sudden emergency situation that threw the elder man into crisis, putting the life of his only son at risk; at this time, his male lover, the pretty boy, rescued his benefactor's son, maintained his female identity, and raised him as his mother. The son grew up and did well in the national civil service exam, at which time the "real" sex identity of his "mother" was revealed. Nonetheless, the resemblance ends right at the level of storyline. Whether in terms of style or the main message, "Male Mencius's Mother" signals a resolute departure from "Record of Extraordinary Love" in handling the details. It is these details that create a brand new impression of *nan hua nü*, homoeroticism, and their interplay.

This new impression is declared right away with a direct approach to male homoerotic practice in the introductory section. The narrative opens with an intriguing lyric describing an imaginary dialogue with a certain practitioner of male/southern customs (*nanfeng*):

> We know not how the "southern customs" began
> And the trouble of women since was bequeathed to men:
> Penetrating the primordial hole, turn around and face down,
> For lack of a woman, making do with a man.
> "You're missing out on joy – forlorn, alone.
> Tell me, what pleasure do you gain?"
> "It indeed is of intolerable filth and pain,
> Yet, this sensation has a savour all its own." [Hanan 99; with adaptation]
> 南风不识何由始，
> 妇人之祸贻男子。
> 翻面凿洪，
> 无雌硬打雄。
> 向隅悲落魄，
> 试问君何乐？
> 龌龊其难当，
> 翻云别有香。(Li 107)

This is indeed a clever move, because it immediately raises the interests of the audience through citing this doubtful yet harmless lyric, without giving out any personal stance that may seem too harsh. The line expresses a common lack of understanding toward the "southern customs," which, as noted earlier, is a popular way of saying the vogue of male homoeroticism. No one knows the origin of homoerotic practices, but when lust, over-indulgence in sensual pleasure, is recognized as not exclusively "the trouble [caused by] women", pretty boys become similarly liable. Or, as the next couplet explains, homosexual behavior (described in the third line) starts from situations in which women were unavailable. Finding it incomprehensible, the poet then asks an imaginary insider how any pleasure can be gained from such unpresentable practices, which is easily refuted because, as the latter asserts, "this sensation has a savour all its own." By giving the imaginary homosexual a voice to talk back, the last line slightly alters the more critical tone of a reproach into a milder negotiating gesture of acceptance.

This ambiguity in conceptualizing male homoeroticism is also embodied in Li Yu's personal outlook on southern customs. He starts with a rundown of the natural, moral, and proper Way of heterosexuality that harmonizes with the Way of Heaven and Earth. He writes:

> We do not know when the customs began or who invented it, but isn't it strange that it now competes with the Way of Man and Woman as created by Heaven and Earth? …Just look at the places where the male anatomy protrudes and the female recedes – the correspondence is certainly not adventitious. In shaping the male and female anatomies, Heaven and Earth intended that the surplus element should supplement the deficient one and that, when it did so perfectly, pleasure would be the natural result! Surely such enjoyment cannot simply be *willed* into existence! When the sexual intercourse is over, the man's semen and the woman's blood congeal to form an embryo, which after ten months will be born male and female infants. This effect *cannot* be fortuitous. And because the man and the woman are acting naturally, without artifice, in accordance with the mutual interaction of *yin* and *yang*, the meaning of Heaven above and Earth below, and the function of Creation, they can be intimate without

> harm to morality and playful while furthering the cause of propriety. (Hanan 99-100)
>
> 这首词叫做《菩萨蛮》，单为好南风的下一针砭。南风一事，不知起于何代，创自何人，沿流至今，竟与天造地设的男女一道争锋比胜起来，岂不怪异？怎见男女一道是天造地设的？但看男子身上凸出一块，女子身上凹进一块，这副形骸岂是造作出来的？男女体天地赋形之意，以其有余，补其不足，补到恰好处，不觉快活起来，这种机趣岂是矫强得来的？及至交媾以后，男精女血，结而成胎，十月满足，生男育女起来，这段功效岂是侥幸得来的？只为顺阴阳交感之情，法乾坤覆载之义，像造化陶铸之功，自然而然，不假穿凿，所以亵押而不碍于礼，玩耍而有益于正。(Li 107-08)

As Li Yu argues, the sexual act is designed by nature to be conducted between a man and a woman because the sexual organ of each sex is formed in a specific way to facilitate its usage. Only through the natural way of heterosexual copulation would sensual pleasure be immense, moral, and fruitful. Against this natural way of man and woman, he then expounds, tongue in cheek, on his perspective of the southern customs. He points out that there are three things that homosexual intercourse inherently lacks:[95] "complementarity in physical terms, mutual pleasure in emotional terms, and offspring in terms of effect" (100). Given these lacks, one cannot help wondering:

> How did this practice originate, if it brings pain to others and no benefit to oneself? What is the point of it? Why, when two men in medieval times chanced to be standing next to each other, did one of them suddenly take it into his head to do this thing, and why was the other one happy to acquiesce? (Hanan 100)
>
> 至于南风一事，论形则无有余、不足之分，论情则无交欢共乐之趣，论事又无生男育女之功，不知何所取义，创出这桩事来？有苦于人，无益于己，做他何用？(Li 107-8)

Li Yu rests his interrogation against male homosexual practice mainly on the following assumptions: 1) female and male sex organs should complement each other in construction; 2) sexual behavior should bring mutual pleasure to both sides; 3) sexual behavior should bring benefit to both sides. Apparently, it was commonly believed that

[95] This might remind one of Socrates's remarks in Symposium, "A youth does not share in the pleasure of the intercourse as a woman does," which Foucault interprets as the impossiblity of "a community of pleasure" between the man and the boy (*The Use of Pleasure*: 223).

homosexual behavior, for one thing, cannot lead to mutual pleasure; far from generating pleasure, it exerts physical pain on the penetrated male. For another, it brings no benefit to any of them, bringing only humiliation to the penetrated one. Therefore, it is completely pointless and useless.

What is more, male homosexuality seems even more bizarre due to the particular organs involved because "that sinkhole was created to eliminate bodily waste" (100). He further takes issue with this specific organ involved in homosexual intercourse with an interesting reason: how sex organs are positioned in the body. He asks: "The Creator, in first endowing us with physical form, was afraid that men and woman might mistake this orifice for the other during intercourse, and he situated it as the rear. Why then, after it had been segregated to emphasize its inferior status, did men willfully cross the alps and seek out this remote spot for their clandestine purposes?" (Hanan trans. 100) Here, besides earlier aspects of emotional pleasure and social benefit, the author further locates body morphology as the evidence for the illegitimacy of southern customs.

However, surprisingly, after all the critique he has given against male homosexuality, Li Yu starts to justify this practice in certain situations, particularly due to extreme economic conditions ("some elderly bachelor too poor to take a wife who relied on this for sexual relief" or "some pretty boy without enough to eat who relied on it for his survival") (Hanan 100-1). Under such circumstances, then, it will be exempt from criticism. In all situations, especially for those who are married or come from an affluent family, homosexual behavior "is impossible to justify" (Hanan 101). So far, Li Yu's attitude towards the southern mode appears rather ambiguous. But this ambiguity is soon lifted when the real substance of the story, male homosexual *qing* (love) and *pi* 癖 (obsession), is introduced. It turns out that the lengthy discussion of the southern customs in the introductory section works primarily as a narratologial strategy to help the readers psychologically prepare for the extraordinary nature of the forthcoming content: a mixture of male homosexual love, gay marriage, and sex transformation.

The main story is set in the almost default region of *nanfeng* (the southern customs), Fujian. As Li Yu notes, "The practice is prevalent in all parts of the country, but especially in Fujian" (ibid.). How exactly prevalent is *nanfeng* in this region? He lists one example: the *nanfeng* tree[96] specific to this region. He declares, "not only are the men fond of it, even such insentient creatures as plants and trees become infected and take delight in it" (Hanan 101). This *nanfeng* tree is evidently fictionized by Li Yu, but he does successfully make the point to the reader that "if the plants and trees behave in this manner, a similar [*nanfeng*] obsession is to be expected among men" (Hanan 101). Only after all this introductory material has been given does Li Yu finally introduces to the readers our protagonists: a licentiate named Xu Jifang and a pretty boy named You Ruilang. The male homosexual romance is indeed, as the author promises, so extraordinary that it can "make you open your sleepy eyes" (Hanan 102).

Xu Jifang used to be one of the pretty catamites patronized by many older friends. But when he turns twenty and officially comes of age, he realizes he needs to do some serious study in preparation for the imperial civil service examination, so he no longer plays around with older men and buckles down to pitch for a decent career. After a few years of study, he succeeds in winning a licentiate title and establishes himself as a local man of letters. With the pretty face he has, Jifang soon becomes sought-after in the traditional marriage market, for as Li Yu describes, "every woman fell in love with him" (Hanan 102). However, Jifang has been an adamant misogynist. Though "[t]he sight of

[96] According to Li Yu, the *nanfeng* tree, i.e. the banyan tree, grows deep in the mountains. What is interesting about this tree is that whenever "there is a sapling nearby the banyan will actually lean over and try to seduce it. Eventually...its branches will be clutching the sapling in a tight embrace, as it folds the young tree into its bosom. The two will then form a single tree which is impossible to separate…" (Hanan *trans.* 101). This is probably borrowed from the popular legends of intertwined trees and lotuses, also chronicled in Feng Menglong's *History of Love*. The only difference is that, whereas other legends of intertwined trees and plants all work to symbolize heterosexual *qing* (love, passion), Li Yu creatively re-interprets these ancient folktales from the perspective of male homosexual *qing*. It is also worth noting here that even for the trees, *nanfeng* is portrayed as essentially hierarchical (an important element that I will elaborate on later): the big tree (i.e. an older, more powerful male) reaching out for a sapling (i.e. a younger boy of a lower status), trying to seduce the latter.

him may have made the women boiling hot, the sight of them turned him to ice" (Hanan 103). There are seven objectionable features about women he enumerates:

> One. They hide the truth with powder and rouge.
> Two. They employ artifice by binding their feet and piercing their ears.
> Three. Their breasts are superfluous appendages.
> Four. They are confined to the house, tied up like a calabash.
> Five. They have no freedom, fettered by their own children.
> Six. They stain their bed mat and clothes during menstruation.
> Seven. After they've given birth, they're as vast as the open sea. (Hanan 103)
>
> 涂脂抹粉，以假为真，一可厌也；
> 缠脚钻耳，矫揉造作，二可厌也；
> 乳峰突起，赘若悬瘤，三可厌也；
> 出门不得，系若匏瓜，四可厌也；
> 儿缠女缚，不得自由，五可厌也；
> 月经来后，濡席沾裳，六可厌也；
> 生育之余，茫无畔岸，七可厌也。(Li 109-10)

Instead, Jifang enthusiastically extols the advantages of pretty boys, particularly their naturalness and pureness. He asserts, striking a chord with Greek philosophers[97] in an uncanny way: "If a boy's unattractive, he looks it; if he's perfect, he also looks it. There's absolutely no artifice about him; he's natural from head to toe. I can take a boy with me where I wish without scandal or concern – a pure wife for a pure husband. What a wonderful thing that is!" (Hanan 103)

Yet, pressured by the maxim that "the most unfilial act of all is to have no heir," Jifang has to take a wife and have a son. It happens that there is a local wealthy man who admires his looks (and talent), actively approaches Jifang, and gladly marries his daughter to him. Though Jifang does not develop any feeling for his wife, he succeeds in fathering a son two years later while his insignificant wife conveniently dies in childbirth. Now that he has a son for an heir, Jifang finally is free to go after his true sexual

[97] The first two reasons in particular were also commonly shared by ancient Greeks, as Foucault points out, "[Constrasing] everything that is artificial about women with the naturalness of the boys" has been a frequent argument for advocates of the love of boys (The Care of the Self, 199).

preference, and is "constantly on the lookout for an exquisite catamite to take as his second wife" (Hanan104).

After years of seeking, Jifang catches sight of a thirteen-year-old boy of his dream type at a local festival. His name is Ruilang. How pretty is Ruilang? The narrative delineates: "[His] brows were like crescent moons, his eyes like autumn pools, his lips like cherries, his waist like a willow frond – in short, he was a matchless beauty…. [his complexion] as white as white could be" (Hanan 105). The narrative then tells melodramatically of a hackneyed love romance: love at first sight, misunderstanding between lovers and its clear-up, intervention from Ruilang's father, test of love, and their coupling at long last. What is unique about this romance is the comfort and ease that the author has shown in adapting a stereotyped love story into a male homoerotic tale, and how in a homosexual context, heterosexual norms are seamlessly applied while at the same time entertainingly challenged.

For instance, the love story between our two male protagonists Jifang and Ruilang is a traditional Cinderella-type: Jifang is the prince from the upper class while Ruilang is the humble boy who "had no good clothes to wear" yet "drew thousands of eyes in his direction" (106). To use the author's words, when Ruilang went to enjoy the festival, "*he* [himself] had become a festival for the enjoyment of others" (Hanan 106). After an accidental meeting, Ruilang and Jifang fall in love with each other. Ruilang thought to himself that if he ever gives himself to anyone, "it will be him [Jifang]" (Hanan 107-8). On Jifang's side, the desire is even more passionate. Jifang is thrilled that "all the years [he has] spent looking for a lover have not been in vain," and has been brainstorming for ways to "bring him [Ruilang] as [his] wife" and "lifelong companion" (Hanan 108).

However, a man taking another man as wife has not been questioned in the narrative. This is mostly due to the fact that the story is set in a peripheral South off the center, both in terms of power and the grip of norms. It is in this specific area that "this [male homosexual] way of life was prevalent … and was not considered shameful"

(Hanan 110). In effect, male homosexual practice is not only not shameful but is encouragingly ritualized with the assimilation of the entire formalities of heterosexual marriage customs,[98] including that of the bride-price and distinguishing between first and second marriages. Since Ruilang ranks at the top of the local *Honour Roll* of male beauties and remains a virgin, his father demands an exorbitant amount of bride-price for anyone who wants to take his son as a wife. Hearing the high price Ruilang's father asks, many of Ruilang's suitors have backed out. Perhaps there is only one person who is overjoyed at the fairness of the bride-price: Jifang. Determined to "play the romantic lover," Jifang quickly pays the bride-price in full, as he reckons: "[e]ven if I have to sell all my property, I won't mind, just so long as I get in a few days of pleasure before I starve to death" (Hanan 113).

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[98] Many historical and literary sources have recorded the practice of *qi xiongdi* 契兄弟(sworn brothers), an euphemism for male homosexual marriage, in Fujian, the same Southern province where this story is set. For instance, the above-mentioned Ming author of commonplace books Shen Defu offers the following entry on "Sworn Brothers":

> The people of Min [a region corresponding to present-day Fujian] consider homoerotic desire [*nan*se 男色] to be very important. Whether rich or poor, beautiful or ugly, each unites with his kind. The elder one is the sworn older brother, the younger the sworn younger brother. When the elder enters the younger's home, the younger one's parents cherish him as a son-in-law. The younger one's plans for later life, including the expenses for taking a wife, are all managed by the elder brother. Some among them are so devoted to each other that even past the age of thirty they still share a bedchamber as husband and wife.

As Shen notes, in male homosexual marriages, often it is common for the younger boy to marry a woman later in his life, thus forming a ménage à trois. There is a joke translated by Bret Hinsch in his now classic work on Chinese male homosexuality, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve,* that illustrates this unique historical presence of the "husband's husband:"

> There was someone on very good terms with a favorite, and when he grew up he chose a wife for him.
>
> And having done this he moved freely within the family circle and didn't avoid anyone. One day he was just entering the bedroom when the wife's mother chanced to visit, so she asked her daughter,
>
> "Which relative is he?"
>
> "He's my husband's husband," the wife replied. (116)

Hinsch further adds that this "creation of fictive kinship ties as a means of organizing homosexual relations" is not limited to China, and cites similar practices from seventeenth-century Japan and other cultures (131).

Having received the bride-price, Ruilang's father readily gives Jifang his consent. In no time, a lucky day is selected to complete their wedding ceremony. After their marriage, Ruilang and Jifang are portrayed as an ideal couple: "the closest and most loving of couples; one could scarcely do justice to the tender feelings they had for each other" (Hanan 116). Their union could have been a happy-ever-after one except for one thing: a year into their marriage, Ruilang's body starts to grow from that of a boy to that of a man. The narrative amusingly presents the serious problem that this happy couple faces:

> At the time of his marriage, he [Ruilang] was only fourteen, and the organ in his loins was the size of a little finger. When he slept with Jifang, it was passive and unobtrusive, like a woman's. But after a year it suddenly became quite impressive, leaving Ruilang in a fever of sexual desire that became harder and harder to control. In addition there were those five meddling fingers to rub and knead it. Inevitably Ruilang wanted to experiment with that art that we all know instinctively and in which we need no instruction. Jifang feared that the effort might exhaust the boy and would often assist him. But each time he did so, once the task was over, he would sigh heavily.
>
> […]
>
> "This thing here," he [Jifang] said, pointing at Ruilang's organ, "is my nemesis. When we part, this will be the root cause."
>
> Ruilang was astounded. "But you and I are going to share the same bed while we're alive and the same grave after we die! Why say such ill-omened things? What *is* the reason?"
>
> "From the ages of thirteen to fifteen," said Jifang, "a boy hasn't emerged from childhood and has nothing to distract him. If he's with a lover, he'll naturally feel contented, like a woman with her husband. But once the sperm duct is open, his sexual desires will be aroused and he'll start longing for women. And as soon as he does that, he will look on men as the enemy… This organ of yours is growing by the day, so my luck is shrinking by the day. As your semen increases, my pleasure decreases. When I think of that, how can I help [not] feeling unhappy? How can I help [not] sighing?" He broke into sobs. (Hanan 116-7)
>
> 他初嫁季芳之时，才十四岁，腰下的人道，大如小指，季芳同睡之时，贴然无碍，竟像妇女一般。及至一年以后，忽然雄壮起来，看他欲火如焚，渐渐地禁止不住，又有五个多事的指头，在上面摩摩捏捏，少

不得那生而知之、不消传授的本事，自然要试出来。季芳怕他辛苦，时常替他代劳，只是每到竣事之后，定要长叹数声。

[……]

指着他的此物道："这件东西是我的对头，将来与你离散之根就伏于此，教我怎不睹物伤情？"瑞郎大惊道："我两个生则同衾，死则共穴，你为何出此不祥之语，毕竟为什么缘故？"季芳道："男子自十四岁起，至十六岁止，这三年之间，未曾出幼，无事分心。相处一个朋友，自然安心贴意，如夫妇一般。及至肾水一通，色心便起，就要想起妇人来了。一想到妇人身上，就要与男子为仇…如今你的此物一日长似一日，我的缘分一日短似一日了。你的肾水一日多似一日，我的欢娱一日少似一日了。想到这个地步，教我如何不伤心？如何不叹气？"说完了，不觉放声大哭起来。(Li 119-120)

In the first passage, the reader learns the real problem in this scenario: Ruilang's true sexual awakening, which, as the narrative implies, is of an inherently heterosexual nature. As Jifang observes, before a boy's sexual awakening, the boy is satisfied with homosexual pleasure; but after his body matures, he will start desiring women and no longer be contented with the sexual pleasure of men. According to Jifang's model, once Ruilang enters adulthood, just as every other catamite, his true desire will be aroused. Put in a more direct way, this means that once Ruilang's penis grows into a fuller shape, a desire to exercise it, or libido, will have to find a way to be released, whether through masturbation or penetrative copulation with women. The passive role of being penetrated by Jifang from the rear will no longer be sufficient for Ruilang's aroused libido. This is why Jifang declares that Ruilang's developed penis is his nemesis, the fundamental factor that threatens the happiness of both of them, but mostly Ruilang's sexual pleasure, according to the last passage. This is because the growth of Ruilang's penis signifies his growth of sexual power and the rise of manhood.

Though as a boy, Ruilang remains dependent, both socially and sexually, on Jifang as the latter's "second wife;" the possessing of uncontrollable sexual libido gradually empowers Ruilang in his relationship with Jifang. The enlargement of Ruilang's penis starts to put him on an equal footing with Jifang, resulting in the relative weakening of Jifang's power and authority over him. The fear of the empowerment of

Ruilang's sexual organ, and by extension his independence, has led Jifang to position his own power in diametrical opposition to it. Jifang twice contrasts Ruilang's sexual maturity with the power loss of his own: "This organ of yours [Ruilang's] is growing by the day, so my luck is shrinking by the day. As your semen increases, my pleasure decreases." Here, by "luck" and "pleasure," Jifang does not simply mean sexual pleasure; rather, it also implies a more profound social advantage – his role as the dominant one, the penetrating one, in their relationship. Viewed in this lens, what really troubles Jifang is not the physical presence of Ruilang's penis but its symbolic meaning and possible consequences. As Sophie Volpp notes, "it is not the penis but the phallus that troubles Jifang" ("A Male Marriage" 122). The real trouble implicated in the penis scenario lies in an imminent power crisis for Jifang: with the erection of his sexual organ comes Ruilang's sexual independence and power and the waning of Jifang's superiority.

Besides the anxiety that he might lose his dominant, penetrating role due to the growing virility of Ruilang, another risk Jifang has to confront is that, since Ruilang is not as exclusive a devotee to the male customs by nature as himself, it is possible that Ruilang will sexually prefer women over men, and abandon Jifang for a woman when his sexual consciousness awakens. After all, it can be said that Jifang essentially tricked Ruilang into male homosexual practices before the latter consciously realizes his own sexual preference. Now that Ruilang is about to develop sexual consciousness of his own, the luck of Jifang might indeed run out.

However, Jifang's anxiety proves unnecessary, and the impact of his sexual education with Ruilang turns out to be far more life-transforming for both of them than anyone could imagine. Out of complete devotion and gratitude for his patron/husband Jifang, Ruilang resorts to an appalling solution: self-castration. This is not an easy decision. Torn between his filial obligation to his own patrilineal family (*li*, reason/principle) and his commitment to repaying his lover's generosity and love (*qing*, love/emotion), Ruilang chooses *qing* over *li*. This is how Ruilang weighs the situation:

> It's all the fault of this root of evil! Better to cut it off and put an end to all the trouble it's going to cause me. Eunuchs go on with their lives after all. And the world is full of married men who have no children. If I'd married and my wife had been unable to bear a child, I'd be a case in point. My parents can hardly blame me if I decide to sacrifice the chance of having children in order to repay his [Jifang's] generosity. (Hanan 120)
> 总是这个孽根不好，不如断送了他，省得在此兴风起浪。做太监的人一般也过日子，如今世上有妻妾、没儿子的人尽多，譬如我娶了家孝不能生育也只看得，我如今为报恩绝后，父母也怪不得我。(Li 121)

Ruilang clearly has been brainwashed by Jifang's theory of the penis trouble in making this decision to castrate himself. Yet, it is through his unreserved loyalty to Jifang that Ruilang's extreme act comes to be an ultimate expression of *qing,* while Ruilang is established as a martyr for *qing*.

Seizing it as one of the climatic moments of the story, the author Li Yu carefully paints the gory scene of Ruilang's castration in such a vivid detail that, despite its fantastic nature, this episode reads surprisingly realistically. Needless to say, when Jifang discovers Ruilang in a coma, his penis severed from his body and the wound still bleeding, he was terrified out of his wits, but even more intense is his sense of remorse for his earlier discussion of the penis trouble. Nonetheless, just as the Chinese saying goes – "Misfortune might be a blessing in disguise" – in a remarkable way, Ruilang's wound "as if by divine help, closed up in less than a month"; even more remarkably, "the resulting scar resembled a vagina," rendering Ruilang's reckless act of self-mutilation a miraculous work of male-to-female transformation (Hanan 121).

Now that Rulang's sexual organ has been transformed into a female one, Jifang, much like Lü Da in Li Liangyu's case, encourages Ruilang to take the sex transformation to the next level: transforming into a woman in presentation, which involves a formulaic set of changes mentioned in many other sex transformation situations, such as adopting new gender-appropriate clothes, hair style, footwear, name, social role, and skills. Given his already feminine look, Ruilang easily completes his transformation into a woman by taking on a woman's dress and hair style, size-reducing boots he designed; changing his

name to Ruiniang;[99] retreating into the bourdoir to work on needlework, spinning, and embroidery all day long. In other words, though physical castration accidentally transforms Ruilang into a woman on an anatomical level, the completion of his female identity on a performative social level is actualized through purposeful management and assimilation of normative gender stereotypes and social roles.

By becoming Ruiniang, Ruilang becomes not only a real woman but also a role-model wife on his way to become a role-model mother, as the title promises. Not long after his transition into a wifely role, Ruilang proposes they should bring home Jifang's son (who was sent off to be raised by a wet nurse since this child's birth mother died in childbirth), to which Jifang gladly obliges. Just when everything seems to be going in the right direction, the freshly constructed ideal family (a pretty wife, a young son, and a handsome husband) heads into another precarious situation: driven by raging envy, Ruilang's other admirers devise a case against Jifang, their shared enemy, claiming that he executed "illicit castration and unauthorized procurement of a eunuch for improper purposes," resulting in a fatal bamboo beating inflicted on Jifang (Hanan 122).

On his deathbed, Jifang gives his two requests to Ruilang: first, Ruilang msut preserve his chastity for his sake; second, Ruilang must raise his son well to make a name for his family. Following his instruction, Ruilang decides to live for the rest of his life as a woman; more admirably, as a meritorious mother. As a single mother, he painstakingly instructs his adopted son to focus on study, particularly to avoid the bad influences of the viral *nanfeng*, male customs – not an easy task with the enchanting look of the boy. He has to move three times to protect the boy from his schoolmates, teacher, and the magistrate. Eventually, with astounding endurance and patience, Ruilang transfigured

[99] In Chinese tradition, Chinese characters in one's name often indicate one's gender. Here, *lang* 郎 in Ruilang indicates a male gender, while the new element *niang* 娘 in Ruiniang indicates a female gender.

into an exemplary chaste wife and wise mother, raised the boy to become a government official, and fulfilled his promises to his patron Jifang.

What is most unique about this story is the genuine respect shown towards the *nan hua nü* sex-transformed protagonist in the latter half. This respect for Ruilang is primarily constituted of two elements: his role as a model mother and his devotion to his lover/patron Jifang out of true *qing*. The first aspect is demonstrated by the respect and care his stepson shows to Ruilang when the boy accidentally learns of Ruilang's male identity:

> Chengxian [the stepson] treated Ruilang as if she were his own mother, and she received a lady's title [after his promotion]. His whole life he pretended not to know the truth and never mentioned a word of what he had been told. After Ruilang died, he buried him with Jifang and inscribed over his grave the words "Tombs of Madam You". (Hanan 133)
> [承先]把瑞娘待如亲母，封为诰命夫人，终身只当不知，不敢提起所闻一字。就是死后，还与季芳合葬，题曰"尤氏夫人之墓"。(Li 130)

At this point, not only has Ruilang transcended his controversial identity of a *nan-hua-nu* individual, but he is recognized and appreciated based solely on his remarkable deed, regardless of his real sex. The second layer of respect is to be found in the author's critique added separately to the story. The critique is: "If all the world's catamites were as chaste as You Ruilang, the Southern Mode [Customs] would be worth enjoying. And if all the world's lovers were as fond as Xu Jifang, [the act of self-castration of] young Ruilang would be worth emulating" (Hanan 134). Here, the critical attitude toward *nanfeng* the author establishes in the beginning is unwittingly contradicted: the story somehow transforms into an ode to *nanfeng*. The three things that the author accuses the male customs of lacking ("complementarity in physical terms, mutual pleasure in emotional terms, and offspring in terms of effect" (Hanan 100) are all compensated for in the end: the acquisition of a vagina-shaped scar, mutual devotion of *qing*, and successful nurture of a stepson.

Contrary to what the author alleges in the introduction, *nanfeng* turns out to be much more respectable and fruitful than people would assume. It takes a story such as this to prove that male homosexuals can embrace motherhood as exemplary as Mencius's mother, and sacrifice for *qing* to the extent of conducting self-castration and lifelong impersonation. If the respect for Ruilang's praiseworthy motherhood functions as the surface theme of the storyline, the respect for his romantic spirit to *qing* in the author's critique betrays its inner theme: an ode to male homosexual passion. Whether his exemplary motherhood or his loyal *qing*, the construction of Ruilang's *nan hua nü* represents a more open-minded, inspiring (despite the tongue-in-cheek overtone at the beginning of the story) way to imagine, to recognize, and to respect a sex-transformed individual.

This depiction of *nan hua nü* through Ruilang represents, therefore, an evident departure from the Li Liangyu cycle discussed in the first section. The actualization of sex transformation is clearly presented as a result of deliberate human action; the vague implication of male homosexuality emerges as a core theme; and the attitude towards male-to-female transformation also transitions into a more complex, eventually understanding, one. Viewed against the Ming-Qing pieces of *nan hua nü*, such as "Extraordinary Account of Love," the account of Ruilang and Jifang provides more fully developed characters, bolder discussions, and more realistic outlook. Furthermore, Ruilang's transformation is portrayed as a lifelong fact, rather than a temporary solution. In this case, perhaps for the first time, *nan hua nü* becomes not something to be ashamed of and suspected of, but a personal life choice deserving praise: it provides an alternative, though achieved only with difficulty, path to motherhood, to the *cult of qing*, and more importantly, to personhood.[100]

[100] So far, I have selected nan hua nü accounts from the Ming-Qing era. Though my discussion of the Li Liangyu cycle is relatively more exhaustive, I had to be more selective when discussing the Qing narratives, given the length constraint. I decided on "Male Mencius's Mother" because it demonstrates in detail many conspicuous features defining the Qing nan hua nü phenomenon,

Chapter Four

The Allure of the Penis:

"Getting A Son," Morality, and *Nü hua nan*

The child I pray for does not have to be a perfect specimen, sure of success in life. Even if he's some lowly creature, feeble-minded, dead or dumb. I hope you [Buddha] will still give him to me, if only to pass on the seed [of the family line]. (Li "Bodhisattva's Ingenuity," in *Silent Operas*, Hanan, 147)

还求菩萨舍一舍慈悲，不必定要宁馨之子，富贵之儿，就是痴聋喑哑的下贱之坯，也赐弟子一个，度度种也是好的。(Li "*bian nü wei er*" in *Wusheng xi*: 173)

The *nü hua nan* narratives, which foreground the acquisition of a penis rather than its absence, reflect a entirely different approach to interpreting and rationalizing sex transformation of the opposite direction from what was seen in the previous chapter: from female to male, or *nü hua nan*. Though in dynasties before the Qing, *nü hua nan* narratives had already been sporadically recorded, it was not until the Qing era that they appeared in a greater number, conspicuously shaped by an extreme moral milieu, a moral lecturing institution, and the spread of morality books.

Underlying repeated recording and public lecturing practices of Buddhist *nü hua nan*

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including male homoeroticism, castration, assimilation of normative gender stereotypes, and endorsement of motherhood. There are certainly other elements of nan hua nü that this tale fails to address, such as male homosexual violence, the social impact of male homosexual marriage, and the sense of guilt, as illustrated respectively in three other important accounts of nan hua nü from later times during the Qing: "Human Prodigy" in No. 11, Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio "Madame Xing" in No. 16, Residual Redundant Talks of Parasitic Snail, and "Lu Shiye" in No. 17, Random Notes from Curling-up Cottage. Two small tales in No. 14, Occasional Talks from the Studio at the North of a Pond, offer two accounts similar to the case in point. These might be the subject of study for another project.

sex transformation, one quickly discerns within a predominant moral frame the desire to have a son. The allure of sons by and large provides constant fodder for *nü hua nan* narratives to resurface from time to time. This allure is seen on two levels: first, the parental desire to have sons through extraordinary, sometimes purposeful, moral performances; second, the daughter's internalized desire to become a son by the assistance of certain mysterious powers. The formula for a successful *nü hua nan* is quite simple: acquiring a male organ, whether through Bodhisattva's divine power, Buddha's pills, or supreme natural powers such as storms, thunder, or meteorites.[101]

In all cases, a female-to-male, more precisely daughter-to-son, sex transformation has never been unwanted, or unwillingly accepted, by the family involved. Rather, this sex transformation from a girl to a boy has always been a desire desperately craved; its realization represents the fulfillment of a collective wish, the dream of getting a son necessitated by patriarchal kinship institutions. Although, on one side, considering the biological-medical possibility of 5-alpha-reductase (5-AR) deficiency,[102] we should not dismiss completely these *nü hua nan* sex transformations as pure narrative fabrication; on the other side, we also have to recognize that by inscribing them with a particular set of

[101] See Zhang Jie's summary in "Bi-sexed People in Ancient China Part Two," p.32.

[102] According to the American bioethicist and medical expert on intersex and atypical sex character, Alice Dreger, 5-alpha-reductase (5-AR) deficiency "is one of the most striking forms of hermaphroditism because it results in an apparent female-to-male transformation at puberty." She further explains in scientific language, "During fetal development the 'male' child's testes produce testosterone. But in order for the developmental 'message' of the testosterone to be 'heard' in the child, the tissues must have the enzyme 5-alpha-reductase, which converts the testosterone into 'readable; dihydrotestosterone. If this it is lacking, as it is in cases of 5-AR deficiency the fetus will develop female-like genitalia. Therefore 5-AR deficient individuals are born with feminine-looking genitalia, including generally a short vagina and apparent labia and clitoris. At puberty, however, the testes of these individuals produce more testosterone, and for the pubertal changes to occur, the body doesn't need the converting work of 5-AR enzyme. So now the testosterone messages *are* read, and 'masculinzing' puberty occurs. The body grows taller, stronger, more mascular, usually with the addition of significant body and facial fair but with no breast development, and the voice drops. Often at this time, the testes descend into the assumed-labia, and the penis/clitoris grows to look and act more like a penis" (Dreger 39). For more information on 5-AR deficiency, see Griffin, "Androgen Resistance" and Berkow, "Intersex States."

cultural meanings, these *nü hua nan* sex-transformed bodies are rendered into more cultural products of collective daydreaming than empirical facts. It is this discursive and cultural obsession with female-to-male sex transformation (*hua*) in the Qing dynasty that is my main focus in this chapter.

Nü hua nan: a discursive obsession and the pattern in the Qing dynasty

Once again, though pre-Qing official histories also listed more *nü hua nan* cases than *nan hua nü* cases, no other dynasty has made this quantitative gap as striking as the Qing. *Qing shi gao* alone contains more *nü hua nan* entries than previous historical entries altogether. Since historical entries of transgender were usually recorded minimalistically, to better illustrate their dynastic distribution it is convenient to list these transgender accounts chronologically.

Table 4.1 Historiographical entries of *nü hua nan*

Source	**Recorded Year (that the individual transformed)**	**About the individual: name/region**	**Omen reading (notes)**
Pre-Qing dynasties			
1. *Jizhong jinian cunzhen* (Essence from the History Book)	487 BCE	Shanxi region	N/P
2. *Shi ji* (Records of the Grand Historian)	322 BCE	Kingdom of Wei	possible
3. Han shu (Book of Han, 206 BCE-23 AD)	322 BCE	Kingdom of Wei	Yes (Note: Citing *Shiji*)
4. Hou Han shu (Book of the Later Han, 6 AD-220 AD)	/	Xu Deng; Min region	N/P
5. *Jin shu* (Book of Jin, 265 AD-420 AD)	Between 291 AD - 299 AD	Zhou Shining, Anfeng region	yes
6. Ibid.	Between 373 AD- 375 AD	Last name Tang; Nanjun region	No
7. Xin Tang shu (New Book of Tang)	886 AD	Known as Weifen; Fengxiang region	Yes
8. Ming shi (The History of Ming, 1368-1644)	1547 AD	Daughter of a military commander, Ma Lu	No
The Qing dynasty			

9. Qing shi gao (Draft of the History of Qing, 1644-1911)	1676	Daughter of Peng Wanchun	No
10. Ibid.	1685	Daughter of a Lei family	No
11. Ibid.	1706	Daughter of a Tan family	No
12. Ibid.	1793	Mo Eryang	No
13. Ibid.	1793	Wife of a Wang family	No
14. Ibid.	1818	Daughter named Chuntao from a You family	No
15. Ibid.	1841	Nanxiang region	No
16. Ibid.	1847	Daughter of a Lu family	No
17. Ibid.	1851	Daughter of a Du family	No
18. Ibid.	1860	Daughter of a Zeng family	No
19. Ibid.	1863	Dongnan region	No

As clearly shown in the above list, *nü hua nan* cases recorded in less than two centuries during the Qing (from 1676 to 1863) outnumber the total recorded in a time span of nearly two millennia (from 487 BCE to 1547 AD) before it. One might reason that this was probably due to advances in easier diagnostic methods or in the knowledge of sex anatomy. If this is indeed the case, one would expect to notice a noticeable increase in the *nan hua nü* cases in the same period as well. However, this same increase in number did not happen to *nan hua nü* entries in *Qing shi gao*; its number remained steadily tiny, with merely two official entries. This uneven textual distribution of *nü hua nan* and *nan hua nü* is further confirmed by the overwhelming popularity[103] of female-to-male narratives in non-historical transgender sources. In fact, this sex disproportion became even more salient outside historical texts: my survey of story collections written in the Qing dynatsty yields 21 popular narratives of *nü hua nan*, in contrast to only three popular narratives of *nan hua nü*. What does this disproportion tell us, then?

A simple explanation of this favoring females changing into males over the other way around would be the well-known Chinese patriarchal belief of "*nan zun nü bei* (man honorable woman base)" and gender inequality. But there must be more to it besides this traditionally sexist preference of men over women, because the gender bias was not

[103] The Ming dynasty is an exception, because the Ming sources actually produced more popular narratives of male-to-female sex transformation than female-to-male sex transformation. This aspect has been analyzed in detail in the previous chapter.

something newly invented in the Qing dynasty. Why had earlier dynasties in which the Confucian system honor men, regulated women, and favored sons over daughters, not leaned towards *nü hua nan* narratives as the Qing did?

In order to seek answers to these questions, I will conduct a close reading of the narratives themselves. For this purpose, the analysis will part at first from the historical sources and turn to personal narratives that offered more substantial details about the *nü hua nan* situation rather than the bare data of year, name, age, or region. One of the early-Qing personal narratives entitled *Renshutang biji* (Notes from Hall of Mercy and Forgiveness) (preface dated 1675) recounts:

> There was a solider with the last name Zhuang who died at a fairly young age and left his wife widowed. They had an only daughter, who was already betrothed to another family. But when the daughter turned 12, she suddenly transformed into a boy. There was a saying among their neighbours that because his wife could keep her wifely fidelity even in property, heaven will not terminate the line of the Zhuang family.
> 庄浪红尘驿军庄姓者，有妇而寡，仅生一女，已许字人矣。至十二岁，忽变为男子。里中人咸云：驿卒之妻贫能立节，天盖不欲斩庄氏之嗣也。[104] (25:65a/b)

This short piece was written by the scholar-official Li Shihong (1618-1697), who lived during the transition from the Ming dynasty to the Qing. There is no exact date of the publication of his collection of notes, but it would be either the year 1675 (as he dated the preface) or slightly later than that. He explained how this collection came into being: "In spare time [after having meals], [I] would write down one or two stories from past and present. [Gradually,] the jotting developed into quite considerable length, so [I] organized it into a book of [three] volumes" (25:74a). He further affirmed his position as "exterior" to the narratives by assuming the role of their objective and faithful reporter who refrained from giving any personal comment or judgment.

Therefore, Li's account uses a descriptive mode to narrate the case. The narrative

[104] This narrative recurred and was acknowledged as the source in *Chi bei ou tan* by the famous Qing scholar Wang Shizhen. See Wang Shizhen, vol 24:575.

begins with a brief description of the situation in which the transformation occurred and ends with a public interpretation of this incident. Yet, his description seems concerned more with the pre-transformation situation and the post-transformation interpretation than the transformed child her/himself and the transformation itself. How did this transformation happen? How did the child feel about this transformation? These were not the issues with which this narrative concerns itself, probably not being something about which the writer and people around the child particularly cared. This was most likely because the sex-transformed subject was only important because his/her body occasioned this miracle of transformation, a karma from heaven earned by his/her mother's exemplary wifely fidelity: a miracle indeed.

Though this narrative rendered the subject position and agency of the *nü hua nan* individual an impossibility (primary aspects in contemporary transgender studies), it nevertheless laid out several core elements in comprehending *nü hua nan* narratives in the Qing dynasty in general. First, *nü hua nan* arose from a dilemma in a family: the no-son-only-daughter situation, in which the anxiety of failing to produce male progeny to continue the family line is implied but strongly suggested, possibly self-evident for readers at that time. Second, the girl was betrothed to another family, and would be married off quite soon, given that it was common practice to have girls married off around the ages of 13-15 during this period. This directly called for an urgency to find a solution to the no-son dilemma. Third, at this point, the miraculous sex transformation happened unexpectedly and solved the dilemma. Four, in their collective attempt to make sense of this incident, the folks brought up an exemplary moral performance, in this case the wife's fidelity, and attributed the happy incident to this moral excellence.

These major components outlined in Li's narrative underlined a general narrative pattern[105] shared by the majority (that is, 13 out of 21 narratives) of the Qing narratives of

[105] Charlotte Furth also points out a common set of themes in her very brief discussion of female-to-male sex transformation based on four sample narratives (only one of them, an adapted

nü hua nan. To better summarize these components, I parse out four major common plots that these narratives often employed:

i: A daughter and an heirless situation for her family;

ii: Marriage date is approaching (sometimes not mentioned);

iii: The actualization or discovery of the girl-to-boy sex transformation;

iv: the girl's family welcomed the transformation; in the meantime, the marriage is cancelled or annulled given the circumstances (if involving marriage).

v: Invoking moral virtues to rationalize the transformation

A quick look at some similar tales will help to elucidate this pattern. For concerns of length, I list only three short narratives and attach the rest in the appendix:

a). One night, in Mudu, Suzhou city, a girl sat in the yard, and suddenly she was hit by an unknown item from heaven and died on the spot. Her parents were old and had no son but this girl. They cried for help and tried everything to save her. Soon the girl came to life, and laughed: "I am now a man." They examined her body and what she said proved to be true. The family didn't regard her as a human monster, but rather were secretly delighted that they got a son instead. This is indeed very extraordinary![106] (Source collection completed a bit later than 1679)

苏州木渎镇有民女，夜坐庭中，忽星陨中颅仆地而死。其父母老而无子，止此女，哀呼急救。移时始苏，笑曰：'我今为 男子矣。'验之果然。其家不以为妖，而窍喜其得丈夫子也。奇已！("Hua nan (Transforming into a Man)" Pu 1566)

b). There was an old man with the last name Huang. He was a man of exemplary filial piety and rectitude, but he was very poor. He was a teacher in a county school. He was widowed and left with no son, except for a 14-year-old daughter called Sigu 嗣姑 (meaning "heir" and "young girl", respectively) who had been studying with him in the school since she was little. The daughter once embroidered a portrait of Baiyi dashi (White-Robed Guanyin),[107] and been

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retelling of Li Shihong's accounts, was cited in full in her article"Androgynous Males and Deficient Females." However, she touched these narratives only in passing and failed to provide a detailed analysis. See Furth, "Androgynous Males and Deficient Females", p. 488.

[106] From Chapter 6 "Changing into man", *Liaozhai zhiyi* (Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio), finished after 1679 and printed in 1740 by Pu Songling (1640-1715).

[107] Baiyi dashi is one embodiment of Guanyin, or Guanshiyin (literally meaning Observing the Sounds (or Cries) of the World) one of the most popular bodhisattva in East Asian Buddhism. Guanyin was widely worshipped as not only a goddess of mercy and compassion, but also as a

praying piously to her. One day, she dreamed that the Bodhisattva summoned her by name and conveyed to her, “Filially pious and upright is thy father, [hence he] should deserve a son. Yet, he is too old [to have a son]. What should be done then? Thou might as well change into a boy.” The Bodhisattva then touched her body and gave her a red pill to swallow. The daughter [soon] felt a fever all over her body. [She] slept in a coma for seven days, and surprisingly, changed into a boy![108] (Source collection prefaced 1694)
有黄翁者，为人孝义，家贫，为乡塾师。无妻无子，年且六旬，有一女嗣姑，年十四，幼在塾随父读书。尝自绣 白衣大士供奉，礼敬甚虔。一日，忽梦大士呼其名告曰：‘汝父孝义，合当有子，奈年老何？汝可变为男。’遂抚其身，啖以一红丸。女觉遍身发烧，昏迷不醒者七 日，竟化为男子。(Dongxuan zhuren 3:15a)

c). In Lanyi County, Henan Province, there was a girl who has been engaged to another family. She has no brothers and her father is a very benevolent man. Then, the girl became ill for a few days and suddenly transformed into a boy. When she told her parents, they checked her body and thus believed her words. So they sent someone to let her fiancé's family know about this. The fiancé’s father replied, “This is all because of your good deeds. I happen to have a feeble daughter, whom I’d like to be married to him. And we will still be in-laws. Won’t this be nice?” The old man was overjoyed at this, and the marriage bond between the two families still hold. Later, the newly-weds had many children. Since the wife had always been weak in body, the husband (the girl) did all the weaving, sewing and other needlework for her. This is because although the girl was changed into a man, he hadn’t forgotten his former training when he was a girl[109]. (Preface dated 1891)
河南兰仪县乡间某氏女子，已许嫁矣。某翁无子，性好善。其女病数日，忽化为男。言于父 母，验之信。乃使人告之夫家，其亲家翁曰：‘此翁为善之报也。吾有弱女，愿即以嫁之，亲者无失为亲，不亦善乎？’某翁大喜，仍谐二姓之好。后生子女，而母 故荏弱，凡衣缕缝纫之事，父辄任其劳。盖素习女红，虽为男子犹未忘故技也。(8:11a)

We see that though the details varied from account to account and the sequence of the major plots was not always exactly the same, the five-part pattern on the whole applies. For example, in a), the narrative takes the form of:

i. an old couple without sons

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savior, a protector of women, and a goddess for granting children, particularly sons.

[108] *Shuyi ji* (Records of Telling the Supernatural) Chapter 3 by Dongxuan zhuren (Master of the East Room).

[109] *Youtai xianguan biji* (Notes from the Celestial Place in Youtai Mountain) by Yu Yue (1821-1907), Chapter 8.

iii. the girl proclaimed that she was transformed into a boy

iv. the old couple were delighted at her transformation

whereas, in b), we see:

i. an old widowed man without sons

vi. rationalization of the transformation by the Bodhisattva

iii. actualization of the transformed through a magical pill

Another version of this account was available in vol. 3 of a *xiaoshuo* collection entitled *Gusheng xubian*[110] (Leftovers of an Ancient Urn: A Sequel Compilation), by another official-literati, Niu Xiu 钮琇(?-1704), printed at around the same time as, and possibly slightly later than, this tale. The reason I suspect Niu's account might be written at a later time is that it adds a considerable amount of information after the sex transformation:[111]

iv. the annulment of a betrothed marriage.

The first part of Niu's account is very similar to account b), but the second part followed up the transformation and situated the incident within a marriage scenario. It appears that Niu may well have picked up the same source account, but delivers it in much more refined language and with more detailed information.

Finally, in c), the major plot points develop in the following sequence:

i. marriage is pressing

ii. only daughter situation happened to a benevolent man

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[110] *Gu* 觚 is an ancient type of urn used for drinking wine. It was used as a euphemism for political issues by Confucius in *Analects* (6.25, see Yang ed. and annotate p.62)which later was extended to mean history. Accordingly, the leftover of *gu* was used to mean what's been left out in official history, i.e., popular history.

[111] Niu's account explains that Sigu had already been betrothed to a Tan family. When Sigu's father informed the Tan family of this incident, the latter not only refused to believe it but put up a lawsuit in the local court. The court then arranged an inspection (the information on how the inspection was conducted was not given) to verify. The result confirmed the sex transformation, so the marriage plan was annulled. It also mentioned that this legal case was witnessed by a huge crowd that gathered from nearby. Though its reliability is highly questionable, the author alleges that in the year 1676, a friend of his named Sun Jing'an happened to pass by where Sigu lived, so he paid a personal visit and saw the transformed girl, who was dressed in male attire and hat, yet her female appearance was still recognisable. The account ended with a poem composed by Sun Jing'an for this meeting, in praise of Sigu's feminine beauty while expressing his amazement at her transformation.

iii. the girl transformed into a boy
iv. original marriage arrangement annulled

However, this narrative does not stop at this point; rather, it picks up the marriage plot, immediately placing the transformed girl into the role of a husband. As if to reinforce a happy ending, the narrative continues to picture a happy-ever-after-female-to-male-sex-transformation future: a firm family line (many children), a complementary couple, and, most extraordinarily, a capable husband (who saved his wife from weaving, sewing and other needlework). Hence, from this perspective, the transformed individual embodies a double miracle: first, a miracle for her/his natal family as a son in need, then another miracle for her/his family by marriage as an ideal son-in-law.

The last narrative is of particular interest to me in that it resounds with the moral tune of Li Shihong's narrative. The reply from the girl's in-laws, "This is all because of your [the father's] good deeds", refers this narrative again to the moral system. Viewed from this point, it pinpoints the moral aspect of this narrative, that the transformed body becomes most intelligible only when it is understood in moral terms. Associating the *nü hua nan* transformation with exceptional moral performance (whether chastity, benevolence, filial piety, or rectitude, as I shall elucidate later in this chapter) announces a paradigm shift in the epistemology of *nü hua nan*, and marks a permanent departure from earlier cosmological omen-reading traditions.

This shift away from the yin-yang cosmological omen reading of *nü hua nan* did not begin in the Qing; in the late Ming records, it had gradually started to fall out of favor. However, the moral turn in viewing was most likely a distinct Qing invention. Even in the few personal narratives of *nü hua nan* produced in the Ming dynasty, although the older omen-reading was no longer attached to them,[112] there was no mention of karmic retribution for moral performance either. Compared with the Qing account of Li Shihong, three accounts written in the late Ming dynasty, not that long before Li's, nevertheless,

[112] While it is still attached to *nan hua nü* cases.

read very differently in comparison.

Before the Moral Turn: Two Ming Versions of *Nü hua nan* in Comparison

The first two Ming narratives were very concise, reminiscent of the minimalistic style of historical writing. They were actually penned by a knowledgeable historian and Confucian scholar called Tan Qian (1593-1657). Tan introduced two incidents of *nü hua nan* in his collection *Zao lin za zu* (Miscellaneous Records from Zaolin[113]) under the section head "*nü hua nan*":

> In the 7th year (1511) of the Zhengde period (1505-1521) a woman named Gao Sijie ("fourth sister") from Taiping qiao area in Pingliang fu region (in Shanxi province) transformed into a man and grew a beard and took the name Gao Lei (thunder). In year Wuchen of the Chongzhen period (1628), a woman with the last name Mo from Huating region transformed into a man, [so she] switched to gentlemen's clothes and hat.
> 正德七年，平凉府太平桥下女子高四姐化为男子，生须，名高雷。崇祯戊辰，华亭莫氏女化为男子，遂儒服裹巾。(Tan vol. 3 "*Yi* 义 [Righteousness]:" 6b)

As these two narratives were penned by a Confucian scholar versed in historical records, it is not surprising that they are quite plain and succinct. Though the incidents were dated 1551 and 1628, respectively, the preface to the collection written by Tan's friend Gao Hongtu was dated 1644 – the year that would see the rise of the Qing dynasty. In this sense, these two narratives offer us the last glimpse of *nü hua nan* accounts in the Ming before they were submerged by the surge of the Qing moral accounts. Despite the succinctness of this passage, several important details were given: 1) The procedure of changing the name – from an evidently female name ("fourth sister") to a masculine one ("thunder"), so as to match with her new sex identity. 2) The change in facial characteristics accompanying the sex transformation: growing a beard. By introducing this concurrent change in secondary sex characteristics, this narrative resembles a more

[113] The name of a small county in Shandong province where the author chose to live, probably to hide from the peasant rebel and civil war ongoing from 1628 to 1644 which led to the rise of the Qing dynasty.

scientific version of female-to-male transformation at puberty, a major type of male pseudohermaphroditism known as 5-alpha-reductase (5-AR) deficiency. Thus, this adds much credibility to these narratives. 3) The change of attire in accordance with the new sex. In a time in which dress code is highly differentiated by one's sex, sartorial changes are also necessary to complete a successful transformation of identity.

Overall, these two pre-Qing *nü hua nan* narratives were not only untainted with the tendency to add mystic and moral interpretations, as the Qing *nü hua nan* narratives often did; they were also marked by a form of presentation that was more straightforward and authentic. Instead of trying to make sense of, or justify the transformation, they held on to details of the social implications of the transformation itself – name change, change in appearance, and change in attire – and left open its meaning and interpretation. This mode of merely presenting necessary information, as dissociated from any interpretive attempts, was also adopted by the other Ming narratives of *nü hua nan*.

The last Ming narrative of *nü hua nan* that I will quote was included in the encyclopedic collection *Bai shi hui bian* (Anthology of Popular History and Anecdotes), printed in 1607 and compiled by the prolific independent historian Wang Qi (1529-1612). This was the earliest personal narrative of *nü hua nan* in my examples. It presents an intriguingly divergent situation:

> There was a Xiao family in Guangzhou city. One day, a maid in this family was found pregnant. Master Xiao suspected this was the result of her adultery with some male servant, so he summoned the maid for interrogation. After a tough inquisition, [finally she] confessed, "[I was] pregnant because I had an affair with Miss Daniang." Miss Daniang was the 18-year-old daughter of Xiao who was already betrothed to the Wang family. [It was then known that] the daughter had begun to gradually transform into a man when she was 16, but no one in the family knew about it.
> 广州有萧某家者，有侍婢忽有妊，萧疑与奴仆私通。苦诘之，则曰："与大娘子私合而孕也。"大娘者，即萧之女，年十八，向许嫁王氏子。自十六年，渐变为男子而家人不知也。 (172:20a/b)

Here, sex transformation is said to have happened gradually during two years, instead

of the sudden transformation described in Li Shihong's narrative. The sex transformation was not necessitated by the anxiety over the lack of an heir; it was disclosed after a mistaken adultery scandal. Interestingly, the subject of the transformation was kept lurking behind the scenes and is introduced through the note-like information inserted after the maid's confession. Even so, the subject remains central to the narrative because she is the center of the whole story.

It is also worth noting that, rather than re-directing the sex transformation into an epistemic realm external to the subject as in previous narratives, Wang's story draws attention to the desire of the subject: it was Miss Daniang's affair with the maid that marked her transformation into a man. The openness of the female-to-male transformed subject, as I will soon demonstrate, was seldom present in the Qing personal narratives of *nü hua nan*. As demonstrated in the previously cited personal narratives from the Qing, this aspect of desire was simply not there. The predominant heir-gaining motif demanded a focus on the interests of the family or clan; thus, the story essentially was not about how the individual was transformed, but about how the fate and identity of the family was transformed as a result of this transformation of sex. Under these circumstances, the desire of the subject seemed utterly irrelevant, because the desire to transform from a female to a male arose less from the *nü hua nan* subject than from the family. The desire for *nü hua nan* was not that of a female subject desiring to a male, but that of the family desiring a son in place of a daughter.

The common strategy to express the desire for a *nü hua nan* transformation as exterior to the subject also helps to explain the fact that the moral performance of a family member was also chosen to account for the transformation. In this case, it appears that the whole situation of *nü hua nan* has little to do with the subject herself or the body of the subject: the desire was not hers, and the credit was not hers either. The bodies became not only un-subjected but further un-desired. Instead, as I will argue, as in many of the Qing *nü hua nan* narratives, their bodies were reduced to symbols, installed by a

specific mode of understanding and only able to generate meaning and intelligibility in a moral realm of reference.

Even when the *nü hua nan* individual is seen as the subject and the transformation is brought by a desire, the modern sense of agency and desire in corporal terms remains out of the question. In spite of the presence of the subject, the second Qing group of *nü hua nan* accounts still revolve around the same overarching dilemma and its resolution through proving moral virtues, only this time in the form of the religious-filial piety of the individual herself, rather than the moral virtues of others. Consider, for example, the following story:

> There was a filial girl in my county. She was betrothed to another family. However, her parents were old and the worry that they had no heir to carry their family name weighed on their minds. The girl was also gravely distressed by this, so for years she piously prayed to the gods in heaven day and night. One night, a god with red hair, red beard and a terrifying look, appeared to her in her yard. The god asked her what she wished for; she replied she wished to be a man [so she could] carry on her family line. The god nodded, and vanished in a second. The second day, she felt streams of heated air moving from her stomach toward her private area. [When she] touched there, a penis was there, just like a manly man (*zhangfu*)!
>
> Zuicha zi ("Mr. Drunken Tea", the author) comments: Doesn't this girl belong to the league of Mulan and Tiying?[114] How sincere she is in her intention! This sincerity (*cheng* 诚) can move heaven, and moreover her sincerity comes from her filial piety, so how could heaven not take pity on her? It is probably because [heaven had recognized] her filial piety[; hence, fulfilled] her sincere wish that the marvelous divine creation would change a woman into a gentleman in such a genuine way. If this were not all because of her filial piety, she would just be a human monster/anomaly (*renyao* 人妖), and what value would that have?[115]
>
> 邑有孝女 某，已许字于人矣。其父母老而无子，以嗣续为忧。女抑郁不乐，遂日夜虔拜北斗，诚敬有年。一夕神降于庭，赤发朱髯，面貌狞恶，问何所求，女对以愿化男子以 承宗祧 。神颔之，遂不见。次日觉腹中暖气蒸蒸，

[114] A girl in the Han dynasty who tried to sacrifice herself in order to save her father from legal penalty, and hence was revered and praised by later generations for her filial piety.
[115] Entitled "woman changing into man" in In Chapter 2 of *Zuicha zhiguai* (Strange Stories by Drunken Tea), finished in 1892, by Li Qingchen.

下达隐处，扪之则阳在下也，俨然丈夫矣。”

醉茶子曰：女岂木兰、缇萦之流与？何其志之诚也！夫诚能格天，况诚而出于孝，天有不悯之者乎？而造物之巧，卒能易巾帼为须眉，盖许其孝而成其志矣。若非孝，则人妖耳，又何足贵？(Li *Zuicha zhiguai* 2:56)

Unlike the aforementioned account of Wang Qi, the sex transformation is indisputably attributed to the filial piety (*xiao* 孝) of the transformed individual in question, not to others. The moral virtue highlighted here is her filial piety. The rhetorical question at the very end of the writer's comment concludes with a strong emotional force that the moral reading is taken for granted and filial piety is the one and only quality that distinguishes this particular individual from other human anomalies. Filial piety became her ticket to upgrade from a supposed monster to a human being, from the abnormal/unintelligible/excluded to the normal/intelligible/included. Put another way, filial piety, and by extension moral virtues, overrides all other qualities in defining what a human being means, and thus functions as the distinctive attribute between "Us" and "Other" beings. To be intelligible, a human being must be first and foremost a moral subject. Moral virtue is the *raison d'être*.

However, the pronounced moral motif in effect dissolved an agency that the sex-transformed seems to own as a desiring subject. Her agency turns out to be only superficial in that it does not take on a subject position in the actualization of sex transformation. On the contrary, just as in the other Qing tales, she was reduced to an object that an external miraculous force can transform. Despite the fact that the desire to transform arose from her short-lived agency, the actualization of the transformation was completely dissociated from this agency; instead, it firmly rested on divine intervention. Even the desire that enabled the agency was not necessarily a desire of her own; her desire was symbolic of her parents' desire, and she could only desire that desire of others. Hence, her desire did not come from choice, her agency did not come from power, and her subjectivity did not come with freedom. So, once again, sex transformation of the body is established on a moral ground while female-to-male body transformation is

rhetorically framed to arrive at a moral destination: one has cultivated moral virtues to turn around the predestined lot of fate and be eventually rewarded with (becoming) a son.

Body transformation as rhetorical device: *nü hua nan* and morality in the Qing

The question of why the rhetorical device of *nü hua nan* transformation – interestingly, never a transformation in the opposite direction (*nan hua nü*) – and the moral message it delivered gained such a sudden discursive currency in the Qing period remains. To answer this question, we must examine possible social and cultural realities that might be conducive to its emergence and popularity in the Qing, especially in view of the fact that, even in the late Ming, a few decades before the Qing, the discursive practice to credit moral values for *nü hua nan* was not seen. I propose that at least three main elements contributed to the genesis of this particular discursive practice of *nü hua nan* in the Qing period: 1) a changed social milieu under the Manchu rule through stricter state regulation and intensified moralism; 2) a national agenda to improve social order through the program of "transformation through moral education" (*jiaohua* 教化), including reformulating the system of hammering "sacred edicts" (*shengyu* 圣谕) into the masses through a "local community-based" (*xiangyue* 相约) "public lecture system" (*xuanjiang* 宣讲); 3) state incentives to promote "morality books" (*shanshu* 善书).

1) changed social milieu

The first factor we need to consider is that the social changes resulting from the dynastic transition from the Ming to the Qing in 1644 were seismic. The seventeenth century in Chinese history was widely believed to be a moment of crisis and transformation.[116] In no time, Chinese society was uprooted from relative libertinism, vibrant urban life, and the profuse pleasures of the "floating world"[117] to, first, years of

[116] See, for instance, Chang and Chang, *Crisis and Transformation in Seventeenth-Century China*.
[117] Often compared with the "floating world" (*ukiyo*) period during the Genroku (1688-1703) and Bunka-Bunsei (1804-29) eras of the Tokugawa period in Japanese history. See Chang and Chang: 18-19; Ko: 19-30; 252-254.

upheaval caused by the peasant rebellions, civil wars, massive epidemics, and the Manchu invasion, then quickly to an era of moral conservatism and intense state regulation adopted by the Manchu to reinstate order and enforce discipline. It was an age of transformative transition whose changes were intimately felt in every sphere of social life.[118]

A Chinese society on the verge of fundamental change during the first quarter of the seventeenth century is aptly summarized as follows:

> a thriving commercial and industrial economy; stupendous population growth and intense urbanization; radical views on money, wealth, and luxury, all representing radical departures from traditional dominant Chinese values; new views of life with emphasis on comfort and enjoyment; commercialization of fashion and leisure; new manners with regard to women; liberal attitudes to sex and homosexuality; the emergence of a new Age of Science and Technology among Chinese intellectuals; phenomenal growth of the printing enterprise and attendant growth of popular literacy. (Chang and Chang 1)

In fact, the landscape captured in the above passage was largely true for China in the late Ming period (from the sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century). During this period, society in general was defined by a relaxation of the ideological dominance by the orthodox Cheng-Zhu school of Neo-Confucianism, in place since the late Song period, that emphasized *li* 理 (principle) and condemned *yu* 欲 (desire), promoted rigid conformity, stern ethics, and strict *li* 礼 (ritual). In its place, influenced by Wang Yangming's 王阳明 (1472-1529) school of the mind (*xinxue* 心学)[119] and a powerful romantic movement known as the *kuangchan* 狂禅 (wild Zen) movement. The latter half of the Ming period witnessed the rise of increasing individualism, intellectual independence, moral nonconformity, and the cult of *qing* 情(passion/feeling),[120] all of which was in stark contrast with the Qing milieu in which the Manchu rulers stressed the

[118] Many scholars have seized upon this transitory age as subject of study. See Frederic E. Wakeman Jr., "China and the Seventeenth-Century Crisis; Albert Chan1982). See Chang and Chang for a detailed case study of this age of transformation captured in the works of the legendary playwright, writer, cultural critic, and essayist Li Yu (1611-80).
[119] Sun Zhimei, *Ming Qing wenxue jingshen* (The Literary Spirit of China: Ming and Qing): 162.
[120] See Martin Huang. "Sentiments of Desire."

institutionalization of orthodox Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism.

However, the cultural and social environment in which these narratives of female-to-male sex transformation were shaped became drastically different from that of the late Ming. The intellectual and social libertinism prevalent since the mid-Ming, which was often blamed for moral decadence and social disorder, was curbed by the Manchu rulers, who reinaugurated the absolute dominance of the Cheng-Zhu school of Neo-Confucianism[121] and adopted an extreme moralism in state regulation, including stricter book censorship, repeated national-scale literary inquisitions, and considerable expansion of the Ming legal code in regulating offences against morality.

Stricter legal regulation of morality, along with many other legislative initiatives, was also on the top state agenda of the Manchu rulers to guard their newly-won state and install absolute authority by implementing harsher legal punishments. For the Manchu rules, strict moral control was crucial to tame their Han subjects, so as to implement a firm rule over this alien nation. This agenda to tighten moral control was probably best seen in several critical changes in the legal regulation of sexuality, given that the realm of sexuality was viewed as the most important content for moral regulation. This was seen by legal scholars as "a watershed in the regulation of sexuality" marked by, for instance, entirely prohibiting prostitution for the first time in Chinese history, and criminalizing with harsh penalties, also for the first time, consensual anal intercourse between males, which was officially prohibited but largely tolerated in practice in the Ming (Epstein 9-10). The establishment of the Qing state power was nothing less than epoch-making in that the new epoch was lamented by the renowned orientalist Van Gulik as a termination

[121] For instance, the first Qing emperor, Shunzhi (1636-1661), quickly rescued the civil examination (which was disrupted by the social upheaval in the Manchu conquest) for which Cheng-Zhu school's version of Confucian canons were the basic texts. A central figure in enhancing the increasing interest in conservative Confucianism was the next Emperor himself, the Kangxi emperor (1662-1722), who took a special interest in Zhu Xi's teachings and gave out an imperial order to publish extensive works by and about Zhu Xi. For a detailed discussion of the intellectual turn to the conservative Cheng-Zhu Confucian School in the Qing, see De Bary, Chan, and Adler, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, Vol. 2, 66-72.

of "uninhibited Chinese sexual life." As a matter of fact, 1644 was the year that Van Gulik chose as the endpoint of his classic study, *Sexual Life in Ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society from ca. 1500 B.C. to 1644 AD*. At the very end of his book, he nostalgically examined "the ephemeral, elegant fin-de-siècle society [in the late Ming]" that was "swept away by the Manchu conquest." He concluded, not without sentiment:

> With the crumbling of the Ming Empire the robust pleasures of these full-blooded men and women faded away, their buoyant spirit evaporated, sex tending to become a burden rather than a joy. After 1664 AD, when the Manchus had conquered China, the [Han] Chinese withdrew into themselves, they walled in both their homes and their minds…. (332-33)

Indeed, although the Qing rulers decided to keep the Ming Code (*Da Ming lü* 大明律), they substantially expanded the section of substatutes (*li* 例),[122] kept adding new amendments, and implemented harsher punishments for crimes.[123] Working in tandem with the encouraged dominance of orthodox Confucian ethics, the legal apparatus helped the Qing rulers to successfully achieve a stricter moral control of both intellectual and social lives.

2) jiaohua 教化, or *transformation through moral education*

If legislative measures and scholastic turns to the high classics mark the efforts to restore social order and consolidate power on the state and upper-class levels in the early Qing, it is through the reformed system of *jiaohua* that the concern of the upper class could reach the commoner-subjects and moral seeds were sown deeply at the base of society. This strategy of *jiaohua* was not exclusive to the Qing government; emperors in the Ming also adopted similar measures, but they had been implemented neither with the

[122] In the Qing dynasty the substatutes gradually replaced legal codes inherited from the Ming Code. Maram Epstein comments, "[T]he substatutes promulgated in the eighteenth century indeed constituted the living law of the dynasty" (26).

[123] The criminal code relating to this study in particular is the increased harshness on crimes against filial piety, which was of prominent importance as an ethic that guided the society. In fact, the Qing government self-proclaimed their "governance of filial piety" (*xiaozhi* 孝治), see Epstein, 70-119. For changes in legal terms under this guideline, see Epstein, 88-84.

same operational refinement and continuity nor to the same scale as in the Qing. Among the content of moral education, moral qualities exemplified in the aforementioned *nü hua nan* tales, such as filial piety, rectitude, and wifely fidelity, were all given especially rigorous emphasis.

These and similar moral values were first and foremost reinforced through the institution known as *xiangyue xuanjiang* (community-based public lectures, or village lectures[124]). The tradition of organizing public lectures for the population based on community units was first adopted by the founding emperor of the Ming, Emperor Hongwu or Ming Taizu ("Great Ancestor of the Ming") (r. 1368-1398), to help promulgate a new set of moral and governmental instructions for the population. For this purpose, the emperor himself drafted two imperial documents of paramount importance: *Dagao* 大诰(Grand Pronouncement) (1385)[125] and later *Shengyu liuyan* 圣谕六言(Six Maxims of the Sacred Edict[126]) (1397). At the same time, the emperor also established a public lecture system, outlining when and how these documents were to be taught in every community.[127] Furthermore, there was an incentive system that was associated with the teaching and learning of moral edicts. For instance, Chapter 78 "Community Teaching(社学 *shexue*)" of *Revised State Regulations of Wanli* 万历重修会典 records in November of 1391:

> [We are] ordered to reward civilians who could recite the *Grand Pronouncement*. Given the emperor ordered all residents in every province, prefecture, and town [and villages] to found schools on a community base, every village shall found a school; every school shall arrange instructors, gather the students, and teach

[124] See De Bary, Chan, and Adler, p. 70.
[125] Later amended by *Dagao xubian* 大诰续编 (Supplement to the *Grand Pronouncements*) (1386), *Dagao sanbian* 大诰三编 (Further Supplement to the *Grand Pronouncements*) (1387). For details of the content and implementation of *Dagao*, see Sakai: 47-51.
[126] Originally included in a longer imperial promulgation called *Jiaomin bangwen* 教民榜文 (Official Proclamation for Educating the People). The Six Maxims have been translated by Victor H. Mair as: 1. Be filial to your parents; 2. Be respectful to your elders; 3. Live in harmony with your neighbors; 4. Instruct your sons and grandsons; 5. Be content with your calling; 6. Do no evil. (Mair 327)
[127] Saikai: 66-67.

> them the *Grand Pronouncement*. So they shall know and abide by it from childhood. Every three years, the instructor shall lead the students to the Ministry of Rites to recite [it]. Based on how much they can recite, they shall be rewarded accordingly.
> 命赏民间子弟能诵大诰者。先是上命天下府州县民，每里置塾，塾置师，聚生徒，教诵御制大诰。欲其自幼知所循守。阅三岁，为师者率其徒，至礼部背诵。视其所诵多寡，次第赏之。 (qtd. Sakai *trans.* Liu et al.: 49)

In addition to community schools, the Six Maxims were also presented to a less literate population via a lower-level institution known as "community pact" (*xiangyue* 乡约). "Community pact" originally meant, literally, the community pact with which people living in the community communally comply. Later, it was extended to mean the head of the community, and then, more broadly, a specific set of consensual rules for gathering, meeting, public lecturing, and other communal affairs. Generally, scholars believe that *xiangyue* utilized by the state as a cultural institution dedicated to moralization began with the promulgation of the Six Maxims at the beginning of the Ming. While this agency had been on the decline by the end of the Ming, it was not only revitalized but fully officially institutionalized, and functioned in its most mature and far-reaching form in the Qing.[128] The second flourishing of *xiangyue* as a semi-official institution for public lectures of morality emerged in 1659, when the early Qing emperor Shunzhi (1644-1661) reintroduced the Ming Six Maxims with slight alterations, along with a set of operational rules for presenting them at the community level. From this stage onward, *xiangyue* was redefined primarily as a state lecturing institution, while its function as a civil institution for community service and affairs gradually dwindled.

In 1670, Emperor Kangxi (1654-1722) expanded the Six Maxims into a more stylistically refined and more elaborate version: the Sixteen Maxims, all seven characters in length and grammatically identical,[129] replaced the Ming version and became widely disseminated up to the end of the twentieth century. It began by stressing the foundational

[128] See Yang Kaidao(1937); Niu Mingshi (2005); Sakai: 487-88.
[129] See Mair: 325-26.

value of filial piety to the maintaining of social order: "1. Esteem most highly filial piety and brotherly submission, in order to give due importance to social relations," which was followed by the Maxim on benevolence. 2. Behave with generosity toward your kindred, in order to illustrate harmony and benignity," and ended with a note on mild and amiable personality: "16. Remove enmity and anger, in order to show the importance due to the person and life" (Mair 325). At the core of these maxims were, as Mair states, "the bare bones of Confucian orthodoxy as it pertained to the average citizen" (Mair 326). Confucian moral ethics, such as filial piety, loyalty and benevolence, that were repeatedly employed in *nü hua nan* personal narratives in particular were all framed as the guiding tenets of its content.

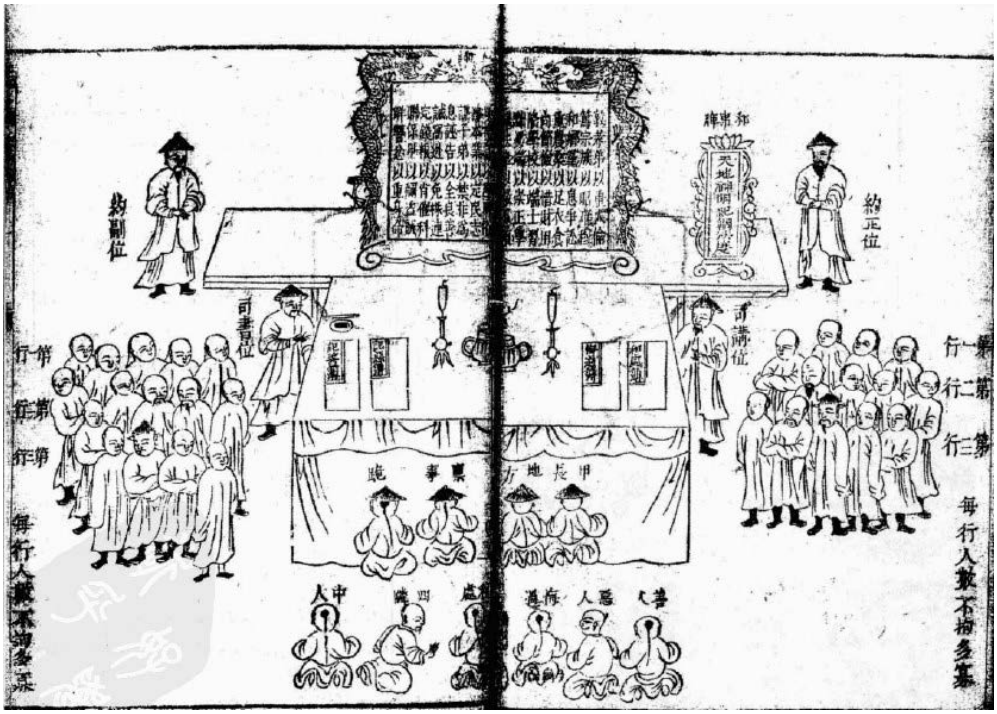


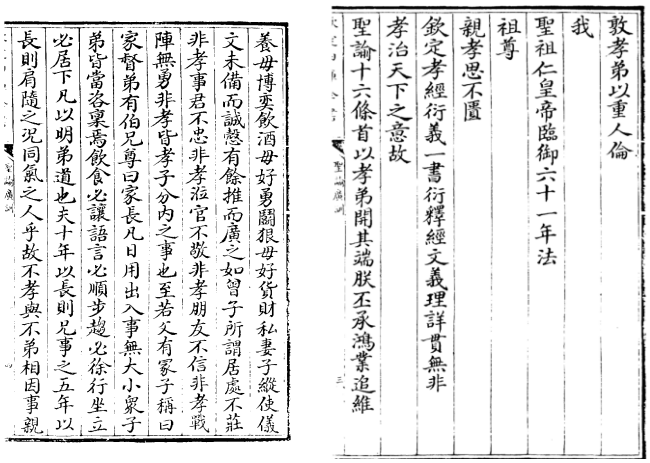
Figure 4.1 The Map of the Kneeling Ceremony for Public Lecturing in Cities and Villages (*Chengxiang xuanjiang guiwaiwei tu* 城乡宣讲跪拜位图) by Li Laizhang 李来章 in *Shengyu xuanjiang yizhu* 圣谕宣讲仪注(Notes on the Ceremony for Public Lecturing of the Sacred Edicts). From Sakai Tadao, *Studies of Chinese Morality Books*, vol. 2, Figure 4 (no page no.).

At the center of this two-page wide map is a huge tall table, on which candles and flowers and possibly other offerings (blocked by the seam) were placed. Behind the table is the podium, on the right

side of it sat a tablet revering Heaven, Earth, and all the gods, and in the middle is a giant dragon-framed tablet on which the Sixteen Maxims (each maxim one line/column) are engraved in giant characters. The two men standing on both sides are the lecturers: the lecturer on the right and the associate lecturer on the left, while the rest are shown either kneeling or bowing in their prescribed places.

With sustained stimuli from the state, by this time the *xiangyue xuanjiang* system also evolved into a more mature form.[130] The moralizing practice of public lecturing imperial texts had undergone considerable growth in the early Ming. Yet, the final major boost that eventually led to the official institutionalization of community-based public lecturing on the Sixteen Maxims came from Emperor Yongzheng (1678-1735), who promulgated a self-penned treatise (over ten thousand Chinese characters in total) that painstakingly dealt with the maxims with nuanced analysis and interpretation, under the title *Shengyu guangxun* 圣谕广训 (An Extensive Instruction on the Sacred Edicts) (1724) (Niu 2005:). The expanded version immediately became the definitive form of the Sacred Edict first proposed by Ming Taizu and established as permanent content in later public lectures. However, the imperial texts did not exclusively constitute the moral content of these lectures. Because, whether the Maxims themselves or Yongzheng's "Extensive Instruction," they were both too abstract and theoretical (see Figure 4.2), and too dry to be delivered directly, lecturers usually supplemented the lecturing with more accessible stories from various sources (see Figure 4.3) in order to better illustrate the moral content and render them more accessible to the less educated majority of the population. These stories were taken particularly from an indigenous genre of Chinese narratives generally known as morality books (*shanshu*).

[130] There existed not only a strict schedule for lecturing but also a highly ritualized ceremony attached to the process. For instance, according to a systematic guide to the rituals of these public lectures written by the town magistrate in Southern China, the ceremony starts on the day before the lecture days. Preparation ceremonies include cleaning the venue, gathering of officials (only in urban locations; respected individuals if in rural areas) to place the book containing the Sixteen Maxims in a sacred niche and to make offering of incenses, candles, and flowers, and etc. Then, on the lecture days, the audience should proceed into the lecturing hall with a specific order according to their status. Before the lectures commence, everyone should perform the ceremony of three kneelings and nine bows, and take seats or stand (see Figure 4.1), again according to their status.

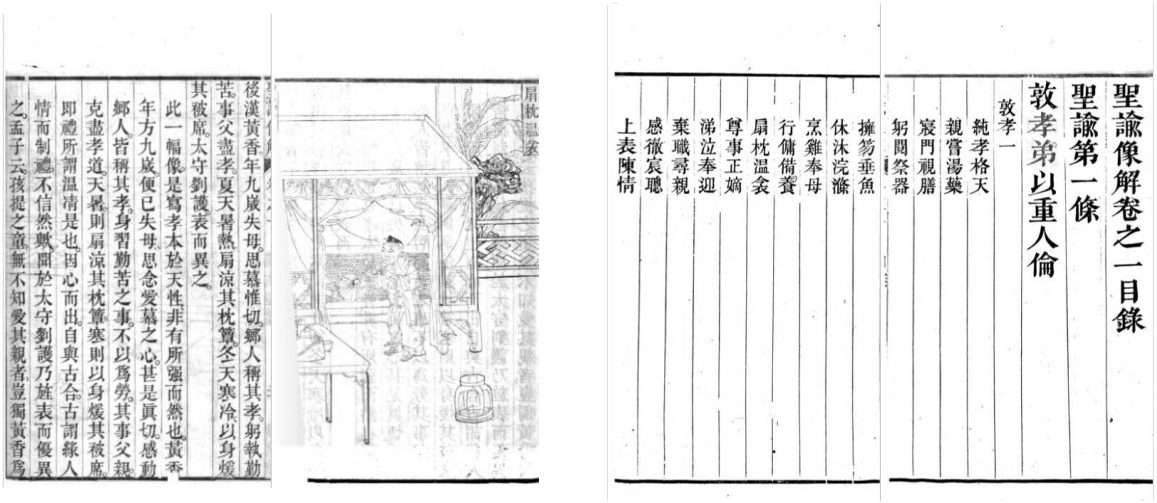


敦孝弟以重人倫
我
聖祖仁皇帝臨御六十一年法
祖尊
親孝思不匱
欽定孝經衍義一書衍釋經文義理詳貫無非
孝治天下之意故
聖諭十六條首以孝弟開其端朕丕承鴻業追維

養母博要歡酒母好勇鬬狠母好貨財私妻子縱使儀
文未備而誠慤有餘推而廣之如曾子所謂居處不莊
非孝事君不忠非孝涖官不敬非孝朋友不信非孝戰
陣無勇非孝皆孝子分內之事也至若父有冢子稱曰
家督弟有伯兄尊曰家長凡日用出入事無大小衆子
弟皆當咨稟焉飲食必讓語言必順步趨必徐行坐立
必居下凡以明弟道也夫十年以長則兄事之五年以
長則肩隨之況同氣之人乎故不孝與不弟相因事親

Figure 4.2: Imperial text of *Shengyu guangxun* (An Extensive Instruction on the Sacred Edicts) (1724), as reprinted in the imperially supervised book collection project "*Si ku quan chu*" (The Complete Library of Four Treasures).

The actual text starts from the second line/column from the right (page left), which quotes the first Maxim on filial piety from the Sixteen Maxims. Under the quote is a five-page long textual analysis of it by Emperor Yongzheng (though only one page is listed here).



聖諭像解卷之一目錄
聖諭第一條
敦孝弟以重人倫
敦孝一
純孝格天
親嘗湯藥
寢門視膳
躬問祭器
擁笏垂魚
休沐浣滌
烹雞奉母
行備備養
扇枕温衾
尊事正嫡
涕泣奉迎
棄職尋親
感徹宸聽
上表陳情

扇枕温衾

後漢黃香年九歲失母思慕惟切鄉人稱其孝躬執勤
苦事父盡孝夏天暑熱扇涼其枕簟冬天寒冷以身煖
其被席太守劉護表而異之

此一幅像是寫孝本於天性非有所强而然也黃香
年方九歲便已失母思念愛慕之心甚是眞切感動
鄉人皆稱其孝身習勤苦之事不以爲勞其事父親
克盡孝道天暑則扇涼其枕簟寒則以身煖其被席
即禮所謂温清是也因心而出自與古合古謂緐人
情而制禮不信然歟觀於太守劉護乃旌表而優異
之孟子云孩提之童無不知愛其親者豈獨黃香爲

Figure 4.3 *Shengyu xiangjie* 圣谕像解(Interpreting the Sacred Edict with Illustrations) by Liang Yannian 梁延年(1681), an early Qing textualized version of *xuanjiang*.[131]

On the right is half of the story catalogue for the first Maxim on filial piety quoted in Figure 4.2, while on the left is both the text of the first story in the catalogue and an illustration of this story (where we see a boy fanning his father's bed, so the latter could sleep in cooler conditions on hot days).

[131] Books that illustrate these Maxims with both textual stories and illustrations were widely popular after this text. In the early twentieth century, imitations of this collection were still printed in large quantities in charity acitivities, such as *Xuanjiang shiyi* 宣讲拾遗(Gleanings from Public Lecturing) by Rucheng leshan junzi 如承乐善君子(1893).

3) *Morality Books*

Morality books are "handbooks written to exhort people to virtue by invoking the idea of karmic retribution and illustrating the consequences of all action," in Catherine Bell's words (160). Most scholars agree that the tradition of morality books dates to the twelfth century, with the publication of two landmark texts: *Taishang ganying pian* 太上感应篇 (Treatise of the Most High on Response and Retribution) (c. 1164) and its companion text *Taiwei xianjun gongguoge* 太微仙君功过格 (Ledger of Merit and Demerit of the Taiwei Immortal) (1174).[132] As their titles indicate, morality books originated from religious traditions: both the "Most High" and the "Taiwei Immortal" to whom the books were ascribed are gods in the Taoist tradition. The original text of the *Treatise* is very brief: it is only 1277 Chinese characters long. The text is purportedly the record of a speech through the divine pen by the god known as the "Most High," and is a brief exhortation on doing good deeds, including performing acts of filial piety, loyalty, compassion, benevolence, humility, generosity, and so forth, because the consequences of evil for both the offender and his whole family are inescapable. There follows a rather comprehensive list of all possible misdeeds of evil men.

In brief, the *Treatise* sketches out a foundational system of human action and retribution based on the number of good deeds and misdeeds, and admonishes the readers on the decisive role that moral performance plays in one's life. This modest *Treatise* was soon expanded into a thirty-volume giant book with extensive commentary and analysis by an unknown author, earning itself an unshakable place in the *Daoist Canon*. In the following centuries, the Treatise continued to gain wide popularity, particularly from the late Ming through the Qing dynasty: hundreds of commentary books, illustrated versions, compendia, and pamphlet brochures were printed in millions of copies. In fact, as Paul Carus, who translated the *Taishang ganying pian* together with Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki in the early twentieth century, states, "Its editions exceed even those of the Bible and

[132] See Sakai; Brokaw, *The Ledgers*; You Zi'an: 49.

Shakespeare" (Carus and Suzuki 4). In fact, by the Qing period, the *Treatise* was known as one of the "Three Scared Scriptures"(*san sheng jing* 三圣经), along with *Yinzhi wen* 阴骘文(Essay on Secret Virtue/Good Deed) and *Jueshi jing* 觉世经(The Scripture to Rouse the World) (Sakai 624).

Guided by the same belief in karmic retribution explained in the *Treatise*, the *Ledger* focuses on the method of calculating good and bad deeds. Unlike the *Treatise* that attracted widespread attention soon after it came out, the social revival of the *Ledger* (before it peaked during the Qing era of imperial morality lecture systems) was initiated by the so-called "morality book movement" beginning in the sixteenth century.[133] Hence, four centuries after its print, the *Ledger* slowly but increasingly reached houses of not only the less educated, but also those of the literati, the officials, and even the emperors. It became such a vogue that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed a flood of new editions, adapted editions, special editions tailored toward particular social groups (such as officials, gentry class, scholars, the merchants, teachers, and wives, to name a few), and collections of various editions.[134]

The ledgers (*gongguoge*, translated also as "Moral Book-keeping" [*Daode jizhang fa* 道德記帳法]), as Cynthia J. Brokaw states, are "how-to" books that describe specifically what deeds one should do to earn reward and what deeds to avoid to escape punishment (3-4). The ledgers usually adopt a monthly calendar to keep tract of the quantity of moral deeds on a day-to-day base (see Figure 4.4), for which reason they are also called moral accounts, similar to those used in commercial bookkeeping. The quantification of moral performance into scores provide a concrete caliber for better gauging, monitoring, and adjusting of one's moral score. On the one hand, the ledger method provides a direct and effective way of mapping out the mechanism of the deeply embedded belief in karmic retribution. One the other hand, it further enhances the existing epistemic tradition of

[133] On details of the morality book movement, see Brokaw *The Ledgers*: 61-109.
[134] In the appendix to *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit*, Brokaw lists 22 extant ledger books (some included in a longer morality book) published between c. 1607-c. 1763

interpreting many things in moral terms, only this time in a supposedly even more accurate method: by the score of moral performance.

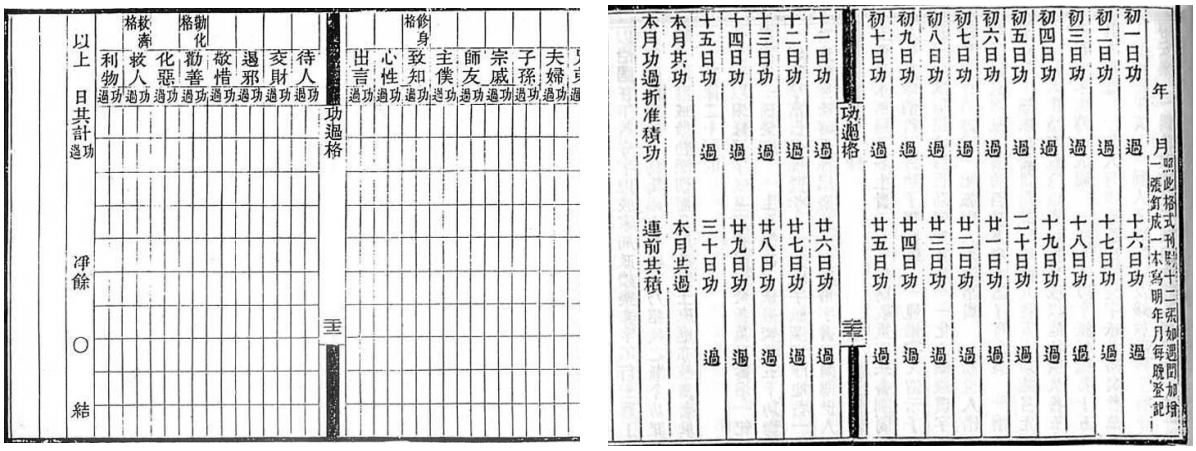


Figure 4.4 Daily ledger (Left) and monthly tally ledger (Right) by Yuan Huang 袁黃(1533-1606).

In the upper section of the daily ledger are running heads (ranging from eight to ten) that various merits and demerits are grouped under. Under each heading, there are two columns of boxes for marking the quantity of merits and demerits, respectively.

The monthly ledger reads, "day of the month: merit__demerit__," then follows "balance of merit sum of this month___," "balance adding merit sum from last month___."

However, before the Qing dynasty, the use of morality books, by and large, was much less tied to political vision and practices. It was not until after the implementation of the state morality lecturing system since Shunzhi that morality books were given their full-blown cultural and social presence that lasted through the twentieth century. While the Sacred Edict was used as the basic text for public lectures, stories from morality books provided sustained fodder for the lecturers to elaborate on the Edict. Following the style of the Sacred Edict, these stories were divided into six or sixteen groups, each group centering on one Maxim, as shown in Figure 4.3. In this way, the tradition of morality books became seamlessly blended into the state project of teaching the Edict. Lectures dedicated to morality books began to be organized regularly, in imitation of and in parallel with the *xuanjiang* system for the Sacred Edict (Sakai 524).

The emperors of the Qing were also whole-hearted supporters of morality books.

Morality books became indispensible components of the political agenda of the state to consolidate power over the population in the name of cultivating morality. Therefore, on the one hand, Qing emperors encouraged mass printing of morality books among the people and granted attractive incentives for those who made great contributions to their promotion and printing (Sakai 619-21). On the other hand, they not only ordered compilation and printing of certain morality books under imperial supervision, but also personally wrote prefaces for some morality books.[135] Under the official encouragement of the Qing government, many religious institutions, distinguished scholars, gentry landlords, affluent merchants, and even commoners, all joined in sponsoring the printing of morality books in addition to the official support. With both high enthusiasm of printing morality books in society and the aid of mature printing technology, especially in mass printing of illustrated books,[136] books in general became more affordable, approachable, and available during the Qing period. Illustrated morality books (sometimes with simplified language) in particular flourished in mass quantities, catering to the less educated such as women, children, and villagers. By the late Ming, many easily accessible morality books, containing famous moral stories and abundant illustrations, became household books. For example, a giant collection of morality books printed in 1836 alone listed in its catalogue 285 morality books, all printed since 1644 (Sakai 639).

Enforced public moralizing lectures not only assimilated numerous stories from these morality books, but more importantly, brought both people from all walks of life and ideas from different traditions together to provide a perfect occasion for the rebirth of morality books as a result of the powerful interaction among religious discourses (Taoist and Buddhist scriptural traditions), Confucian discourses (the Sacred Edict and Cheng-

[135] For instance, the first Qing emperor Shunzhi (1638-1661) wrote the preface to *Quanxue wen* 劝学文(Words to Encourage Study).
[136] See Brokaw and Chow, *Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China*, Chapter One.

zhu school of Confucian orthodoxy), and popular discourses (folk tales, chantefables, fictions, and drama).[137] The dynamics between morality books (the content) and the institutionalized lecture system (the form) ultimately formulated this triple-layered morality that would become a dominant feature in the Qing. The moral realm existed as an intersection at which different streams in Chinese culture merged and their ideological pursuits landed. In turn, the ideological liaison facilitated by moral education (*jiaohua*) itself further contributed to consolidate the overriding moral theme in the social milieu of the Qing dynasty.

As a result, personal narratives produced in the Qing were usually imbued with this extremely moral ethos that defined their time. Short fictions, novels, drama, essays, and even erotic narratives were also mostly bracketed by moral frame tales.[138] Narratives of *nü hua nan* were no exception. Profoundly influenced by the tradition of morality books and the prevalence of nationwide moral lectures, the Qing narratives of female-to-male transformations were primarily shaped and persistently resurged as rhetorical strategies with a moral agenda. Returning to the question posed earlier: why did the female-to-male sex transformation in particular, and not that of male-to-female, become such a favourite moral topic in the Qing period? Morality books provide a key to this.

The Allure of the Penis and Intertextuality: *Nü hua nan* and Narratives of "Getting A Son" (*Dezi*) in Morality Books and Buddhist Stories

The guideline of morality books is karmic retribution, the idea that accumulation of merits will be rewarded while augmentation of demerits will lead to punishment. Personal narratives of *nü hua nan* in the Qing also revolve around karmic retribution: that moral merits will be rewarded by transforming women into men, or more specifically,

[137] What Zhu Xinwu summarized as the "Three Dimensions of Morality Books" (2012: 449).
[138] See Wan, Qingchuan. "明清小说与善书 *Mingqing xiaoshuo yu shanshu* [Ming-Qing Xiaoshuo and Morality Book]."

daughters into sons, as in many of these stories. Men in general were conventionally deemed a more desirable sex to be than women, but in spite of the oft-used standard genre tag "*nü hua nan*", these tales were not so much about how an adult woman transformed into an adult man as about how a young daughter transformed into a young son. What was projected in these narratives was not the modern FTM desire born of an identity crisis, but the parents' desire to obtain a son. This craving for a son was clearly revealed by their joy at discovering this daughter-to-son sex transformation. Craving for sons is not only true for these families; rather, it is a collective social desire.

Favoring sons had long been practiced in traditional patriarchal and patrilineal Chinese society, because they were the ones that could continue the family line, be somebody and bring honor to the family and ancestors, and take care of the parents when they got old. Daughters were not as much use to their natal family, because they married out and became a part of their husband's family; therefore, they were generally thought of as inferior to sons and treated with much less dignity. The contrast between getting a son and getting a daughter was vividly elucidated in an ancient court hymn (c. 10/9th century BCE) from the oldest extant collection of poetry, the *Shijing* (Books of Poetry 詩經:

> Sons shall be born to him: –
> They will be put to sleep on couches;
> They will be clothed in robes;
> They will have sceptres to play with;
> Their cry will be loud.
> They will [hereafter] be resplendent with red knee-covers,
> The [future] king, the princes of the land.
> Daughters shall be born to him: –
> They will be put to sleep on the ground;
> They will be clothed with wrappers;
> They will have tiles to play with;
> It will be theirs neither to do wrong nor do good.
> Only about the spirits and the food will they have to think.
> And to cause to sorrow to their parents. (Legge IV. 306-07)

As this hymn clearly states, from the day they are born, the treatment of sons and of

daughters is to be distinguished, because their future social roles are completely different. Even the daughters addressed in the hymn, those of the royal family, were to sleep on the ground and play with tiles, while the sons dressed in splendid robes and were given scepters to play with. In fact, far less than being desired, daughters should have felt lucky they were kept when they were born, considering the alarming rate of drowning baby girls in the Qing dynasty, despite repetitive exhortations against this practice in religious texts and morality books.[139]

Besides the belief that sons were worth desiring in themselves, having sons was also an absolute filial obligation in Confucianism. As Mencius dictates: "There are three ways to be unfilial; the worst is to not produce offspring." Here, offspring (*hou* 后) refers to sons only; daughters would be married off, so they could not carry the family line, and were therefore traditionally not regarded as offspring. Due to its association with being unfilial, failure to have a son would not only bring the parents an agonizing sense of shame, but could also sometimes plunge the whole family into calamity.[140] For fear of not having them, sons were viewed as fortunes, as the Chinese idiom puts it: "more sons, more fortune" (*duozi duofu* 多子多福). As a symbol for fortune, sons have been so valuable that to acquire them the family sometime would have to earn it somehow, such as to trade for it with sufficient moral performance score.

Therefore, "getting a son" (*dezi* 得子) became a practical reason that motivated the sonless family to exercise moral reflection or engage in various charitable deeds, so as to accumulate extra merits to earn a son, or in our cases, to transform an existing daughter into a son, if procreating a son was no longer feasible (for example, parents who were too

[139] In Yuan Xiaobo's collection of morality books, some specifically admonish families not to drown baby girls, such as *Jie ni nuying wen* 戒溺女嬰文 (Admonishment on Drowning Baby Girls) (57-9). Ledgers also dote out the punishment for drowning baby girls – "drowning baby girls equals a hundred demerits" (Yuan 231) and rewards for saving them – "saving baby girls equals a hundred merits" (Yuan 185).

[140] According to the Qing Code, if there are no sons to inherit the family property, there is a grave risk that it will be divided by other families in the clan, or be confiscated by the state.

old, or if one of them had passed away). For instance, this also explains why, in the Qing narratives of female-to-male sex transformation, the transformations are mainly explained by certain moral merits, such as filial piety, wifely fidelity, benevolence, and so forth, all of which belong to the high-score merit in the ledger system. Filial piety, for example, was believed to be the most creditable good moral deed. There was a popular saying: "Filial Piety is the first among the hundred good deeds (*baishan xiao wei xian* 百善孝为先)." Filial piety also ranked first in the basic lecture texts *Stories of filial piety*, that is, the Six Maxims and the Sixteen Maxims. Stories of filial piety were also everywhere in morality books and also taught continuously in public lectures (see Figure 4.3). Special morality books for filial piety were also many, such as *Ershi si xiao* 二十四孝 (The Twenty-four Filial Exemplars), *Quan xiao wen* 劝孝文(Exhortation Essays on Filial Piety), *Quan xiao pian* 劝孝篇 (Exhortation Writings on Filial Piety), and *Wenchang dijun quan xiao ge* 文昌帝君劝孝歌 (Emperor Wenchang's Exhortation Song for Filial Piety).[141]

Most ledgers listed filial piety as the top entry in the catalogue of merits.[142] Wifely fidelity was similarly valued in the ledgers. Some ledgers would dedicate a special section to different levels of keeping wifely fidelity:

> When your husband has passed away:
> Do not easily reveal your face or speak [to other men] without caution (ten merits each time);
> Destroy appearance and wear no ornaments (a hundred merits);
> Achieve life-long wifely fidelity after enduring many hardships (immeasurable merits);
> Choose death rather than being raped so as to preserve wifely fidelity (immeasurable merits);
> Retaining no evil [sexual] thoughts all life long and control oneself at every moment (immeasurable merits).

141 See Yuan Xiaobo's compilation of these morality books, *Minjian quanshan shu* (Popular Morality Books), pp. 121-24.

142 Usually, one day equals one merit. See *Zizhi lu* 自知录(Records of Self Knowledge), in Yuan Xiaobo:184; *Wenchang dijun gongguoge*, in Yuan Xiaobo: 206.

夫没，
弗轻露颜貌。一次十功。
毁妆勿饰。百功。
苦守节操。无量功。
遇强暴，誓死自全。无量功。
终身无邪念，时刻自持。无量功。(*Wenchang dijun gongguoge*, in Yuan Xiaobo: 262).

Similarly, benevolence and other good moral qualities were all among merit-worthy deeds in the ledger system.

Given its high demand, "getting a son" (*dezi* 得子) became one of the first-tier rewards in morality books, along with "getting wealth" (*defu* 得富), "getting honor" (*degui* 得贵), and "getting longevity" (*deshou* 得寿). To promote the wide range of benefits one could earn from doing good deeds and accumulating merits, morality books also availed themselves of these benefit themes in a unique group of retribution stories.[143] These benefit-themed stories were loosely grouped together by adding the same suffix to the title, "Records of the Divine Efficacy" (*lingyan ji* 灵验记). As the group title indicates, all *lingyan* stories were told to prove that one's efforts in pursuing moral excellence will always be rewarded, that their companion ledger system is truly effective in practice, and that merits will be rewarded, while demonstration of how demerits will be effectively punished are contained in an opposite group of warning tales that record counterexamples for evil deeds. Figure 4.5 provides an example of these *dezi* narratives in morality books.

[143] For instance, *Quan shan lu* 劝善录(Records to Admonish Doing Good Deeds), in Yuan Xiaobo: 275.

Figure 4.5 "The Divine Efficacy: Getting a Son" (*dezi lingyan ji* 得子灵验)

In a tremendously popular late Qing, illustrated, comprehensive edition of *Taishang baofa tushuo* 太上宝筏图说 ("Divine Raft of of the Most High" with Illustrations and Stories) printed in 1892 and compiled by Huang Zhengyuan (1844-1906). "Divine Raft of of the Most High" is another name for "Treatise of the Most High on Action and Retribution." The preface of the original illustrated edition, included in this edition, was dated 1694 (the 33rd year of the Kangxi reign). From Huang, Lei, and Mao, *Taishang baofa tushuo* (or, *Taishang ganying tushuo*): 1:7a/8b.

This "getting a son" entry, as all other entries in the book, contains three parts: first an illustration, then a two-page text (one paragraph of annotation and two stories; partially displayed here), and a four-line poem (not included here). In the illustration, a Bodhisattva, accompanied by a maiden, is holding a baby and riding a cloud. They are both about to land on a magnificent house with a grand gate, a spacious yard with rocks and trees, and two two-store buildings. The text begins with a brief note explaining the importance of having a son and the fact that by putting the Treatise into practice, Heaven will reward people with sons. It then moves on to two stories. The first story tells how a military commander (who is very loyal and brave) serving in Jiangsu province got a second son (the first is physically too weak) and unparalleled family glory by printing copies of the Treatise and reciting it every day. The second one tells of a certain official

who was over fifty years old and, burdened by his lack of a son, got a son by practicing the Treatise and doing good deeds on a friend's advice. Finally, the poem summarizes the stories and restates the importance of the efficacy of practicing the Treatise.

Though there is no explicit content of *nü hua nan* in these morality-book narratives of "getting a son," the pattern roughly resembles that of *nü hua nan*, "getting a son" as a rhetorical strategy to deliver moral content:

i. Introduce an heirless (or lack-of-a-healthy/qualified-heir) situation for the family;
ii. A sudden transformation of the situation: getting a son miraculously;
iii. Justify this miracle by accrediting it to a specific merit, practicing the Treatise.[144]

Or, maybe more likely, it might be *nü hua nan* narratives that drew upon these morality-book narratives, and reshaped them within a sex-transformation frame. This could also yield insight into the question of why some of the narratives would emphasize the moral merits of the parents or the daughter, either described at the very beginning or added at the end. The point had to be made that these families of *nü hua nan* had accumulated a great deal of moral merits before they could be rewarded with this transformation, or upgrade, of replacing the daughter with a son. Though a slightly altered version of "getting a son," *nü hua nan* successfully embodies the "getting a son" reward. Ultimately, the narratives of *nü hua nan* that we have discussed previously are also narratives of "getting a son," similar to those being preached in morality books. Looming behind the smokescreen of sex transformation was the true substance of these narratives: "getting a son" through merits. The only difference between the moral message delivered in *nü hua nan* narratives and that in morality-book "getting a son" narratives lies in that the former kept the precise content of moral merits open, while the latter explicitly prescribed it as practicing the Treatise or other morality books, though

[144] According to the ledgers of merits and demerits, printing, promoting, and circulating the Treatise are all regarded as high-score merits that could bring not only sons, but fortune and honor to the family of the doer.

practicing morality books itself entails practicing concurrently other moral merits.

It seems that these narratives share the same strategy to achieve a similar goal: promoting laudable moral practices. Yet, there exists still another group of narratives to which *nü hua nan* narratives might be more directly tied: Buddhist narratives of "getting a son." Narratives of "getting a son" are not exclusive to morality books; they are also an attractive component for Buddhist texts, a group of narratives that are closely associated with them. Furthermore, as I shall argue, the three groups of narrative, to wit, personal narratives of *nü hua nan*, morality books of "getting a son," and Buddhist narratives of "getting a son" not only intertexually overlap with each other, but are very likely to have shared the same belief in action and retribution, and more importantly, the same pool of themes and sources in their creation. While these narratives might be incorporated into these traditions for their own purposes, they are bound together by two central elements: the allure of sons and moral content. They all exploit the collective craving for sons among people as rhetorical devices to realize their moral missions.

These narratives are embedded in the Buddhist counterparts of morality-book heavenly-reward stories: Buddhist retribution stories. Retribution stories had always been a crucial part in Buddhist preaching, but it was in the late Ming and early Qing that textualized collections dedicated to positive Buddhist retributions emerged. Drawing on the same popular belief of the correlation between human actions and heaven's response (*tianren ganying* 天人感应) as highlighted in morality books, these Buddhist collections of retribution narratives were also often titled "Records of Action and Response (*ganying ji* 感应记)," "Records of the Divine Efficacy (*lingyan ji* 灵验记)," or "Records of Efficacy in Practicing (*chiyan ji* 持验记)." Most of these Buddhist retribution narratives are compilations of narratives gleaned from various sources from ancient time to more recent time, such as religious texts,[145] collections of miscellaneous stories,[146] personal

[145] For instance, the Buddhist encyclopedia *Forest of Gems in the Garden of the Dharma* [*Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林]), 688 AD; Buddhist admonition story book (e.g.: *Casual Records of Immediate*

narratives by Buddhists,[147] and morality books. [148]Their compilers were either renowned Buddhist monks or home practitioners. In much the same way as it was utilized in morality books, "getting a son" was showcased in Buddhist retribution stories as an important way to demonstrate the miraculous power of the Buddha and a great benefit of believing in and practicing Buddhism, and thus to convert people into believers.
In traditional popular belief among the Chinese people, besides practicing filial piety, wifely fidelity, benevolence, and other moral principles prescribed by the Sacred Edict and the Classics of the Confucian tradition, another route to accumulate moral merits and getting a son was by practicing religion,[149] particularly Buddhism.

In fact, if we may recall the narrative quoted earlier in which the young daughter prayed for years to become a son, there is the Guanyin Bodhisattva, who is believed to be in charge of allotting sons to families on earth, and thereby became the most popular religious figure among the people. The Bodhisattva has been gradually referred to specifically as "Guanyin who bestows sons" (*songzi guanyin* 送子观音) until the present day (See Figure 4.6, 4.7). In fact, Guanyin is the same Bodhisattva whom we see holding a son in Figure 4.5. For those who worship Guanyin Bodhisattva, one of the major reasons they wish to invoke her divine power through praying, sponsoring temples and Buddhist events, and doing good deeds in general is "praying for sons" (*qiuzi* 求子). Since "praying for sons" seemed to be a main reason that drove many people, particularly women, to resorting to religion and worshipping Buddha, "getting a son" (*dezi* 得子)

Retribution [Xianguo suilu 现果随录], c. 1617 AD.
[146] For instance, a giant reference book for stories *Extensive Records of the Taiping Era* [*Taiping guangji* 太平广记], 978 AD.
[147] For instance, *Book of Seeking Help from the Self* [*Qiuji shu* 己求书] by Tang Yizhi, completed in the early 17th century.
[148] For instance, *Treatise on Action and Response Expanded and Annotated* [*Ganying pian zengzhu* 感应篇增注], c. 1628); *The All Combined Book for Admonishing* [*Quanjie quanshu* 劝诫全书], preface 1641.
[149] Known as "Moral Bookkeeping of Attending to Gods (事神功格 *shi shen gongge*). See *Wenchang dijun gongguoge* (Yuan, *Minjian quanshan shu* [Popular Morality Books]: 221-3).

quickly became employed as a stock theme in Buddhist sermans and texts to attract non-believers, particularly into believing in the divine power of Guanyin Bodhisattva.

Figure 4.6 "Guanyin who bestows sons"
Dehua porcelain (or, *Blanc de Chine*) from the Kangxi reign (1661-1722) of the Qing.
The Palace Museum, Beijing.

Figure 4.7 "Guanyin bestows sons"
Large colored portrait from the Qing dynasty
Huiyuan Data Center for Buddhism
http://www.zgmzyx.com/html/Home/report/229535-1.htm

Buddhist retribution narratives, particularly those related to Guanyin, incorporated numerous stories of "getting a son," some of the more popular ones of which were further cited continuously by many later Buddhist compilers. Among those often-cited narratives of "getting a son" by worshipping Guanyin is one of particular interest to our discussion:

a Buddhist home practitioner named Zhou Kefu in 1659, though the *Records* clearly attributed this piece to *Book of Seeking Help from the Self* [*Jiqiu shu* 己求书], a book no long extant.[150] I here quote this narrative at length, keeping the way how the original text cites this source:

> In the Qing dynasty, there was someone from Dangtu Prefecture named Yang Huang (courtesy name Xizhou). For generations, his family had taken official posts. [However, though he] planted [many] trees around the graveyard, attended to [ancestors'] tombs with care, diligently studied Confucianism and carefully watched his action, because he didn't agree with the contemporary style of writing essays [for civil service examinations], he didn't succeed in obtaining an official post [as his ancestors did]. It happened that soldiers surrounded his village. Huang told his family in tears: "The tombs of my ancestors are all here; how can I desert them and run away?" So he hid his wife, concubine and son among the trees, while he himself stayed and guarded the tombs. When the soldiers arrived, [they] discovered him among the tombs and were about to take him away. Huang in a rush drowned himself in the river. His son, only ten years old at that time, saw his father drowning himself from the trees. He cried aloud in agony [and] also jumped into the river. This was on the sixteenth day of March in the 3rd year of the Shunzhi reign (1646). Next day, their bodies were seen floating [in the river], hugging each other. Those who witnessed this were all moved to tears. Huang's wife Lu was devastated at both the death of her husband and [the fact that he was] not survived by an heir. She took a vow to practice a life-long fast and brought a statue of Bodhisattva [Guanyin] into the house. [Since then] she had been crying and reciting sutras day and night. Suddenly, one night, [she] dreamed an old lady, bringing with her a baby boy, said to her: "[I will] leave him to you." [When she] woke up, she signed: "I wish concubine Zhang, who is pregnant with Huang's child, could give birth to a son. [If this is the case,] then it will be a blessing from Buddha." [However,] by the end of the year, the concubine gave birth to a girl. Lu cried, "This will be it!" In the following

[150] A book written by another Buddhist householder, Tang Yizhi (1585-c. 1666) in the late Ming and early Qing. Though his exact birth and death dates are given, I found that, in his preface to *Fragrance of Tathāgata* (*Rulai xiang* 如来香), he mentions his age (80) and dated it 1666. His life philosophy and literary achievement were briefly recorded in the Qing *Biographies of Buddhist Householder* (*Jushi zhuan* 居士传) (1775) by Peng Jiqing (1740-1796) and *Records of Saints of Pure Land Buddhism* (*Jingtu shengxian lu* 净土圣贤录) (c.1783) initiated also by Peng Jiqing but completed by Peng's nephew Peng Xisu (1761-1793). Despite being frequently cited in Buddhist texts for its retribution stories, the book unfortunately seems no longer extant aside from the pieces that were cited in other books, based on what I have found so far.

spring, she gathered the heads of the other families of Huang's clan and said, "Since my husband doesn't have a son, our humble land property should be divided among the nephews. I will only need modest clothes and food to raise the daughter." [Finishing this,] she continued to cry. The head of the clan sympathized with her, so he said, "Let's wait until the anniversary of Huang. We will have a Buddhist ceremony. We might as well discuss the division then." When the anniversary day came, all the clan members gathered [at Huang's house]. By the night of, again, the sixteenth of March when the vegetarian dinner for the Buddhist ceremony was done, the daughter started to cry. Seeing she did not stop crying, the concubine (her birth mother) took her away and put her to bed. But [the daughter] was kicking wildly as if in a nightmare, and couldn't wake up. She also started to cry in a very strange voice. At this, the wife Lu anxiously called her name, and only then the baby girl finally woke up. When the wife Lu picked her up with her hands, [the baby girl] no longer had a female body. Lu was shocked, so [she called] other members of the clan to see this. [They saw that] the infant's appearance looked the same, only the private place was now growing a male organ while blood stains still remained where she slept. They were all stunned at this, only then they began to realize the efficacy of the Bodhisattva – how true was the previous dream! They all went to kneel before the statue of Buddha, and changed the name of the infant to "Buddha Bestow" (*foci* 佛赐). On the second day, visitors [to see this] almost crushed the door. Magistrate Zhang came to know of this. The magistrate examined the infant in court, and yet he still didn't believe it. [He then] asked the members of Huang's clan; everyone was telling the same story. [They] further added, "If the infant's transformation wasn't true, wouldn't the nephews want to divide the land and house property?" The magistrate then truly discarded his suspicion. How extraordinary! The day Buddha bestowed the transformation of body was exactly the same day the father and the [elder] son died. Nonetheless, if not for Huang's rectitude in life, his [elder] son's filial piety in accompanying his father in death, not for the crying and grief of his wife that moved heaven, how can one witness such a rare thing that would occurr only once during hundreds and thousands of years! I personally would like to add that, if the Buddha-bestowed transformation hadn't happened while all the clan members gathered [and witnessed], then who would have believed it? (from Tang Yizhi, *Jiqiu shu*)

大清杨璜，字希周，当涂人，世居官。圩栗树坟，业儒励行，厌时文怪谬，趋法先程，坐此困滞。会兵绕其乡，璜泣谓家人曰：「吾祖父丘垄在此，何忍弃去？」因匿妻妾与子林中，以身守垄。兵来见坟内有衣冠者，将执之，璜急赴水死。子甫十龄，自林间见父溺，亦号哭奔投于水，时顺治丙戌三月十六日，越辰，两尸相抱浮出，见者陨涕。妻陆氏悼夫

无后，誓断血肉，迎佛像于家。旦夕恸哭念佛，忽夜梦老妪携一子曰：「遗汝。」醒而叹曰：「愿妾张氏，遗腹生子，则菩萨之赐也。」岁暮，妾生女。陆氏泣曰：「已矣！」丁亥春，集族长告曰：「夫既无子，薄亩当分诸侄，吾得粗给衣食以抚此女。」言终复哭。族长不忍云：「俟小祥为璜作佛事议分。」及期，具会亲族，散斋之夕，亦三月十六日，女哭不已，妾抱就枕。张如梦魇，愦愦不醒。女怪啼益甚，嫡疾呼始觉，抱女入手，则已不复女身矣。陆大惊，家人群往，见面目依然，惟私处生长男根，其旁尚有血痕。众咸诧异，始悟菩萨灵爽，前梦不虚。竞至佛前胪拜，更名佛赐。次日观者阗门，闻县张公，取儿庭阅之，犹未信。问其宗族，异口一词，曰设儿变非真，侄辈不愿分其田宅耶？侯乃不疑。异哉！佛赐变身之日，即父子死难之日。然非璜之生平方正，子之至孝殉父，妇之号泣动天，岂能遘此千百年仅见之事乎！余窃又有说，若佛赐变形，非亲族群聚时，其又谁能信之？(唐宜之《己求书》)

What strikes me the most in reading this narrative are the details it provides, and how reliable it seems with the aid of those details. If one sets the religious content aside, the first half could almost pass as a reliable headline piece in newspapers: in war time, an upright man chooses to guard his ancestors' tombs with his life when facing the raid of an army, while his son follows him in death. Even if its original appeal of the two laudable deaths – the husband for his rectitude (*zheng* 正) and the son for his filial piety (*xiao* 孝) – has been lost to present readers, it must have been powerful to readers of its time: death seemed to be an ultimate, though extreme, embodiment of moral merit, as attested by numerous biographies of (women) exemplars from the Ming-Qing era.

Yet, with the introduction of the statute of Bodhisattva, one realizes that these two merits and the first half of the story are merely a less consequential prelude to set the stage for the central story: the father and the son have to die, so a no-heir dilemma could arise. The rest of the narrative then becomes very familiar. It exhibits precisely the same pattern as the morality-book "getting a son" narratives cited in Figure 4.5, which also roughly corresponds to the group of personal *xiaoshuo* narratives of *nü hua nan*: 1) disequilibrium due to the lack of a (healthy) son; 2) equilibrium resulting from getting a (daughter-transformed) son; 3) justification by moral standards (through moral merit and/or practicing/promoting morality books or attending to Buddha). The dream, the interlude of possible division of the property, and the magistrate's interference were similarly

secondary as supplements to undergird these core elements: the dream as a metaphor for the divine revelation, the property crisis to underpin the direct financial consequence entailed by the no-heir disequilibrium, and official intervention to further strengthen the credibility of this narrative by inviting an authoritative figure.

Besides the similarity of pattern, as in many narratives of *nü hua nan*, the author also adds a concluding explanation to spell out the moral content: "if not for Huang's rectitude in life, his [elder] son's filial piety in accompanying his father in death, not for the crying and grief of his wife that moved heaven, how can one witness such a rare thing that would occurr only once during hundreds and thousands of years!" Here the story lists three seemingly parallel merits of the Huang family in justifying this extraordinary occurrence: the husband's rectitude, the son's filial piety, and, the wife's religious piety (*cheng* 诚). But this is betrayed by the author's personal coda that singles out religious piety and belief in Buddha as more important reasons: it is their common belief in Buddha that summoned the clan to gather to hold the Buddhist ceremony for the dead; without this gathering occasioned by their shared religious belief, the truthfulness of the story will be put into question, which means the entire endeavor of convincing people to believe will be wasted.

Thanks to the news-report-like details, supplementary plots, and coda, this Buddhist narrative of showcasing the power of religious faith by introducing a sex-transformed infant became vastly successful both within and outside of Buddhist tradition. On the one hand, it has become a classic stock type of Guanyin miracles that is still being told and retold among Buddhists to the present day. On the other hand, besides the acknowledged source of *Jiqiu shu*, the same story of Yang Huang and his Buddha-bestowed transformed son are also seen in at least three other sources, with more or less modification in certain details.[151]

[151] For instance, in *Originally Carried by the Ears of Li* (*Yuan li er zai* 原李耳载) by Li Zhongfu 李中馥 (?-c.1674), printed c. 1767; *Miscellaneous Records from Spacious Garden* (*Kuangyuan zazhi* 旷园杂志) (preface 1703) by Wu Chenyan 吴陈琰; *Talks from the Road* (*Tu shuo* 涂说) by Miu Gen 缪艮, printed in 1828.

I would argue that it is precisely its malleability in being employed for different uses that this narrative of the "Buddha-Bestowed" infant *nü hua nan* (daughter-to-son) gained vast circulation and popularity. Yet, the secret of its malleability lies in its rhetorical power generated by utilizing a societal yearning: "getting a son." If the adult *nü hua nan* cases indicate at least empirical existences of transgender, this infant case requires a leap in imagination to believe its authenticity outside the rhetorical realm. Centering on a Buddha-bestowed sex transformation at the infant stage, these narratives declare in the most lucid way that *nü hua nan* is not about desire, subjectivity, agency, or reality. Rather, it is about making the use of the allure of sons, that is, infants with a penis, as a rhetorical device for a personal reflection on this "*dezi*" theme in a masterpiece parody of Buddha-bestowed infant *nü hua nan* narratives by the acclaimed bestselling playwright and fiction writer Li Yu (1610-1680).

"The Bodhisattva's Ingenuity" by Li Yu: Competing Discourse and a Parody of "*dezi*" and *Nü Hua Nan*

Although as discursive creations in a specific cultural field, *nü hua nan* in the Qing were largely defined by specific cultural and historical circumstances of their time, culture and social creations, this is not to say that *nü hua nan* discourses are completely culturally and historically determined. To recognize the shaping force of culture in discursive production is not to deny the individuality of narratives. As mentioned earlier, transgender discourses in imperial China are never uniform, but are competing discourses. This discursive diversity remains salient in even the most uniform Qing *nü hua nan* discourses.

For this purpose, I would like to end this chapter with another *xiaoshuo* by the aforementioned seventeenth-century maverick writer Li Yu. This *nü hua nan* narrative of Li Yu is known as "A Daughter Is Transformed into a Son: Through the Bodhisattva's Ingenuity" (*Bian nu wei er pu sa qiao* 变女为儿菩萨巧, hereafter "Bodhisattva's Ingenuity"), a highly achieved parody of infant *nü hua nan* belief that challenges the

streamlined, standard short narratives of *nü hua nan* "*dezi*". Unlike other *dezi* narratives meant for moral recognition, Li Yu ostentatiously intended this narrative as casual commercial reading for urban entertainment, reinventing the more orthodox theme of *nü hua nan* with remarkable literary talent.

As its title explicitly shows, the story is of the same substance as "Buddha Bestow" in *Records of Efficacy*: old parents without sons, a yearning for a son, religious piety, praying for sons, Buddha's intervention, ultimately getting a son, and living happily ever after. However, through Li Yu's parodic imitation of the conventional *dezi* theme, the symbolic meaning of *nü hua nu* is stretched to extremes, embellished with comic twists and turns, retold with witty and highly readable languages, and brilliantly redefined with a juxtaposition of satire, humor, and imagination. By virtue of the Bodhisattva's ingenuity, or more accurately the author's ingenuity, the allure of sons and the cultural significance of the penis are dramatically articulated in a most original and conspicuous way.

In Li Yu's "Bodhisattva's Ingenuity", the theme of "praying for a son" (*qiuzi*) is declared in the paratext (the accompanying illustration, see Figure 4.8) even before the text unfolds itself. The story presents an old man praying at the bottom to a Bodhisattva above him. The Bodhisattva, addressed as "Bodhisattva Cundi" in the narrative, who is seen with eighteen hands, sitting on a lotus, and surrounded by a halo, is more popularly known as "Cundi Guanyin." It refers to the same Guanyin Bodhisattva mentioned above. Including "Guanyin that bestows sons" and "Cundi Guanyin", the Bodhisattva is believed to have thirty-three "bodies of transformation" (*huashen* 化身) in which she reveals herself. Viewed in this light, Guanyin's divine ability to transform her own body also unwittingly foreshadows and prepares for the *nü hua nan* sex transformation that is to be introduced later.

Figure 4.8 (Left) Illustration of the ninth story, "Bodhisattva's Ingenuity", in *Silent Opera*.
(Right) The calligraphy of the last two lines from the story's opening poem; "却更有时明说与,不须寤后搅思肠"in Chinese. From Li Yu. 无声戏 *Wu sheng xi* [Silent Opera]. 李渔全集 *Li Yu quan ji* [Complete Works of Li Yu] 1991.

To examine it further, this illustration also reveals another important theme of *nü hua nan* narratives: the direct unconscious projection of the yearning for a son, as we see in the dreamy, flowing lines circling the old man and connecting him with the Bodhisattva. The association between inner desires and dream manifestation is also foregrounded by the opening poem and the prologue story. As claimed in the opening:

> *Dreams have always meant the reverse,*
> *And good luck by nightmares is commonly forecast.*
> *But sometimes, too, the message is clear –*
> *No puzzle to solve when the dream is past.* (Hanan 137)
> 梦兆从来贵反详，
> 梦凶得吉理之常。
> 却更有时明说与，
> 不须寤后搅思肠. (Li 173)

Although Li Yu acknowledges the conventional Chinese belief that what happens in dream should be interpreted to the opposite – for instance, if one dreams of becoming rich/successful, he will in reality become poor/failure – he immediately proposed his own

view: that the message in the dream sometimes is not a puzzle but a clear reflection of what one desires. He continues to explain in the prologue following the poem: "You [readers] must recognize that it is not the spirits that deceive us but we mortals who deceive ourselves. Some of the figures appearing in our dreams are manifestations of spirits, while others are the creature of our own psyches" (Hanan 138-9), because "they are simply pandering to your desires. If your desires run to drink, the figures will take the form of Liu Ling or Du Kang[152] bringing wine. If your desires tend toward women, they will take the form of Xishi or Mao Qiang[153] offering sex." After establishing the belief that dreams are direct reflections of desires, the narrative begins to tell two stories of this kind: first, a short prologue in which the projected desire in a dream is difficult to interpret; then, the main story in which the dreams "are extremely easy to interpret, dreams [are] as clear and straight-forward as ordinary dialogue" (Hanan *trans.*142). It is the latter that is the substance of my discussion: the dream of "getting a son" and its miraculous realization through infant *nü hua nan*.

The narrative begins with a salt dealer named Shi Daqing, a *nouveau riche* living off exploiting the salt-workers' work. After a short passage describing how he made his fortune and kept it flourishing, the narrative quickly moves to the no-heir dilemma that defines most *nü hua nan* narratives. In Li Yu's words: "he [Daqing] and his wife enjoyed all the pleasures of the rich bourgeois – all, that is to say, with one exception. Daqing was nearing sixty but had no son" (Hanan 143). The no-son situation is familiar to us, yet it departs from previous ones in that, unlike families of *nü hua nan* in previous cases, Daqing and his wife have no existing moral merit to invoke an instant resolution to their conundrum. Far from being morally exemplary, both personify serious moral flaws: Daqing for his avarice, and his wife for her jealousy.

Why would his wife's jealousy stand in their way of "getting a son"? The narrative then diverts for a while to explain: it is owing to her jealousy that Daqing has not been

[152] Both are famously known for their love of wine drinking.
[153] Both are ancient legendary beauties.

permitted to take concubines for procreation's sake. But now, since his wife is turning fifty and has realized that the chance of conceiving a son herself is unrealistic, she starts to subdue her jealousy and allows Daqing to take concubines. The problem of "getting a son" could well be solved now that his wife has overcome her jealousy and several fertile concubines are brought into assistance. However, this does not seem to help in the least bit. As the author amusingly states: "Strangely enough, however, those concubines, who in other homes were as fertile as hens and duck – conceiving without even sharing the master's bed… – became, on entering Daqing's house, as barren as spayed sows or bitches" (Hanan 144). Still, "no sign of a child ever appeared," a fact that keeps preying on Daqing's mind (ibid.).

Clearly, besides jealousy, another obstacle also needs to be conquered to approach Daqing's dream of "getting a son"; to wit, his avarice. But he is not brought into this realization until later through Guanyin's revelation in his dream. Before reaching the core of the narrative, the dreams and their realization, the writer flashes back to twenty years ago, when Daqing was first converted to believing in Cundi Guanyin, after hearing other people saying that the Bodhisattva was "wonderfully receptive to prayer" and one "would eventually receive what they sought" as long as one is not praying for two things at once. For example, one gets a son if praying for a son, or one gets fame if praying for fame, but never both at once (ibid.). Believing in Guanyin's divine efficacy, Daqing has ever since become a pious devotee, and what he prays is one unmistakable wish: "getting a son." The narrative goes into great detail to portray Daqing's extraordinary religious piety for twenty years: the various mantras he chanted (after which he prayed for a son and kowtowed several times every day) and the strict fast schedule he followed every month with unrelenting determination. Still, for twenty years, "[h]is prayers for a son, however, went answered" (Hanan 146). Finally, on his sixtieth birthday, in disillusioned desperation and misery, the old man Daqing collapsed and delivered in tears the following heartbreaking plea before the Bodhisattva, which vividly captured the social

craving for a son:

> "Bodhisattva, your disciple has served you for twenty years, a very long time, burning incense constantly and worshipping you with innumerable kowtows. Again and again I've pleaded desperately, pestering you with my prayers. Even if I acquired too great a burden of karmic sin in my previous life to bear a son in this one, surely you could persuade the Jade Emperor[154] to grant me this paltry favour? … I beseech the Bodhisattva to extend her compassion to me this once. The child I pray for does not have to be a perfect specimen, sure of success in life. Even if he's some lowly creature, feeble-minded, deaf and dumb, I hope you will give him to me." (Hanan 146-7)
>
> 菩萨，弟子皈依你二十年，日子也不少了；终日烧香礼拜，头也嗑得够了；时常苦告哀求，话也说得烦了。就是我前世的罪多孽重，今生不该有子，难道你在玉皇上帝面前，这个小小份上也讲不来？……还求菩萨舍一舍慈悲，不必定要宁馨之子，富贵之儿，就是痴聋喑哑的下贱之坯，也赐弟子一个，度度种也是好的。(Li 180)

This plea was so sincere and emotional that Cundi Guanyin finally decided to answer him in a dream. Later that night, Daqing dreamed that he stood before the Bodhisattva's mirror and, protesting the injustice done to him, cried his heart out. It was at this moment that Cundi Guanyin at last intervened. Contrary to the commonly believed solemn, intimidating personifications of Buddha, Guanyin in Li Yu's literary imagination assumes a highly humanized and humorous, at the same time, sly and clever presence. Thus, this amusing interchange between Guanyin and Daqing follows, leading to a tentative agreement on "getting a son":

> He cried until his heart was fit to break, when suddenly he heard a voice from the mirror: "Don't cry! Don't cry! Sons are one of the most important things in life, but you either have them or not. You surely don't imagine that I'm like someone who cheats a child out of a peach and then gives him two peaches just because he cries his heart out."
>
> Startled, Daqing approached the mirror for a closer look and found a bodhisattva sitting cross-legged in the middle of it.
>
> "Bodhisattva," he said, "was it you who spoke to me just now?"
>
> "Yes."
>
> Daqing knelt down. "In that case, I beseech you to tell me clearly

[154] In Chinese mythology and religion, the Jade Emperor (*yudi* 玉帝) is believed to be the supreme sovereign of all the gods (including Guanyin), immortals, and humans.

whether I am going to have a son. Free me from any foolish hopes I may have."

"Let me explain," said the bodhisattva, "Wives, money, sons and rank – for mortals, these things are all foreordained in their previous lives…Mere mortals will get some, but not the others; they cannot have them all. Before you were born into this world, you suffered from avarice and you left after asking for a wife and money. You said nothing about sons or rank…that is why you have received neither. I've tried time and again to get the decision reversed, but the Jade Emperor maintains that you are avaricious and ill-treat the poor. You have may twenty years of religious devotion to your credit, but that hardly makes up for forty years of avarice and ill-treatment of others! How can you expect to have a son? You are simply not going to have one. I'm not deceiving you." (Hanan 147-8)

正哭到伤心之处，那镜子里竟有人说起话来道："不要哭，不要哭，子嗣是大事，有只是有，没有只是没有，难道像那骗孩童的果子一般，见你哭得凶，就递两个与你不成？"

达卿大骇，走到镜子面前仔细一看，竟有一尊菩萨盘膝坐在里边。达卿道："菩萨，方才说话的就是你么？"

菩萨道："正是。"

达卿就跪下来道："这等，弟子的后嗣毕竟有没有，倒求菩萨说个明白，省得弟子痴心妄想。"

菩萨道："我对你说，凡人'妻财子禄'四个字，是前生分定的，只除非高僧转世，星宿现形，方才能够四美俱备，其余的凡胎俗骨，有了几桩，定少几桩，哪里能够十全？你当初降生之前，只因贪嗔病重，讨了'妻财'二字竟走，不曾提起'子禄'来，那生灵簿上不曾注得，所以今生没有。我也再三替你挽回，怎奈上帝说你利心太重，刻薄穷民，虽有二十年好善之功，还准折不得四十载贪刻之罪，哪里来得子来？后嗣是没有的，不要哄你。"(Li 180-1)

Here, in the bodhisattva's explanation, the true reason for the lack of a son is located – two severe moral demerits of Daqing's: avarice and lack of benevolence. After this realization, Daqing, in his earnest desire for a son, naturally tries to negotiate a deal out of it. He asks whether there is any way to repent his sins and redeem himself, to which the bodhisattva replies that there is a way, but she feels he will not be able to make the necessary sacrifice for it. Daqing then assures her that, since his days are not long, he is absolutely willing to sacrifice anything to trade for a son, who can at least "make sure [his] bones be buried" (Hanan 148). An old hand at negotiation, the bodhisattva then offers this deal to him: "…Your sins arose from money, and you must redeem with

money. If you are prepared to sacrifice to charity by giving away seventy or eighty percent of all you have – letting no one cheat you, but doing your best to see that the poor really benefit – you will be rewarded with a son" (ibid.). Excited at, but also somewhat suspicious of, this offer, Daqing promises to scrupulously follow the instructions while beseeching the bodhisattva to keep *her* promise. Apparently offended, the bodhisattva gives him these last words before disappearing: "Don't give *me* instructions. Instruct yourself. So long as you keep your promise, I shall keep mine, I assure you" (Hanan149).

The narrative could well have ended as in more traditional "getting a son" narratives – one of Daqing's concubines gets pregnant and gives birth to a son as the bodhisattva has promised, only if Daqing keeps his promise. Nevertheless, already hinted first by the bodhisattva's doubt in Daqing's ability to fully commit to sacrifice, then Daqing's distrust of her promise, which after all might be just a dream, his breach of the pack with the bodhisattva in his dream seems inevitable. As usual a master of imagination and originality, the author sees to it that the morals will not be delivered without many dramatic, entertaining twists and turns for best results. The story provides the reader with several rounds of chess games between Daqing and the bodhisattva in executing the "getting a son" agreement.

The narrative continues as Daqing, assured by the divine promise of being "rewarded a son," takes this dream as a direct response to his prayers. Without delay, he kicks off his charity project and announces to the public a series of redemptive actions, including doubling the salt workers' payment, cancelling existing accounts, and giving out significant donations to the poor and the community to build roads, bridges, and temples. Once his words have been spread, those who seek help swarm his gate, and soon Daqing's wealth has been reduced by twenty percent. It happens that at this time, one of his concubines is reported to be pregnant, and Daqing secretly chuckles himself away. But, now that he sees that a child has already been conceived, he starts to have second thoughts about continuing the charity. He ponders:

> "If it's a girl, I shall have only a son-in-law, but I still have to save up some money for a dowry. If the baby should be a son, he'll certainly want to inherit my property, but if I've given everything away, how will he exist? What's more, I've already given away twenty percent of my property. It's like a judicial flogging: the criminal may be sentenced to a hundred strokes, but after twenty or thirty he will usually be left off by the magistrate. Mercy is a guiding principle for the bodhisattva; she certainly won't be too demanding. I'll just have to draw in my horns." (150-1)
> 就作是个女儿，我生平只有半子，难道不留些孜产嫁她？万一是个儿子，少不得要承家守业，东西散尽了，教他把什么做人家？菩萨也是通情达理的，既送个儿子与我，难道教他呷风不成？况且我的家私也散去十分之二，譬如官府用刑，说打一百，打到二三十上也有饶了的，菩萨以慈悲为本，决不求全责备，我如今也要收兵了。(Li 183)

Merciful as she is, Cundi Guanyin is determined to play the game with Daqing, who has now added a third serious moral demerit to his list: being untrustworthy, offending a major Confucian and popular moral principle of trust (*yi* 义). So she takes her time and responds to Daqing's breach of trust in an ingenuous way. The narrative now shifts to several months later, when the baby is due. Daqing is anxiously waiting outside the bedroom for the baby. When he hears the first cry, he quickly asks the classic question: "Is it a boy or a girl?" only to receive a disappointing reply from the midwife who felt beneath the baby's abdomen: "I think it's a girl." Soon, when Daqing is still in great dismay, the midwife corrects herself and announces to him: "Congratulations! I think it's a boy!" (Hanan *trans.*151-2) At this, Daqing is about to take relief and thank the Bodhisattva when he is asked to have a word with the midwife. Something is wrong:

> "Tell me, Sir," asks the midwife, "do you want to keep the baby or not?"
> Daqing is aghast. "What an extraordinary thing to say! At last, in my sixties, I have a son – that's as rare as a unicorn or a phoenix! Why on earth *wouldn't* I keep him?"
> "But it's not a son." (Hanan 152)
> 婆子道："请问老爹，这个孩子还是要养他起来、不养他起来？"
> 达卿大惊道："你说得好奇话，我六十多岁才生一子，犹如麒麟、凤凰一般，岂有不养之理？"
> 婆子道："不是个儿子。"(Li 184)

Daqing is puzzled and brings up the theme of sex transformation for the first time. He askes sarcastically, "Don't tell me he's turned into a girl again!" Then what he is told

becomes entirely beyond his comprehension. The midwife tries to put the truth nicely, and says, “If it was a girl, I’d urge you to keep her.” With increased irritation, Daqing wonders: “This is even stranger! If it isn’t a boy or a girl, what is it?” This time the midwife has to be candid, and confesses that this question is beyond her expertise: “I’ve been a midwife all my days, and I’ve never seen anything quite like it: I simply can’t make it out” (Hanan 152). She then asked Daqing to examine himself. In stark shock, what Daqing sees is a sexually-ambiguous creature known as a “stone maiden:”[155]

Below the navel,
Between the thighs;
A clove in seed,
Lacking form, a mere trace;
A nutmeg in bud,
Opening outside, closed within.
Neither concave
Nor convex,
But like a wonton rolled out flat.
Round it was,
Yet incomplete,
Like a dumpling newly made.
It fled the bounds of *yin* and *yang*,
And fell between the male and female. (152-3)
肚脐底下，
腿胯中间，
结子丁香，
无其形而有其迹；
含苞豆蔻，
开其外而闭其中，
凹不凹，凸不凸，
好像个压扁的馄饨；
圆又圆，缺又缺，
竟是个做成的肉饺。
逃于阴阳之外，
介乎男女之间。(Li 184)

Suddenly, he realizes it is the trick that the bodhisattva played on him and accepts

[155] One of the five types of “non-woman” (*bunu* 不女) discussed in medical treatises on transgender in the introduction. See Wan, *Guang si ji yao*.

this as “Karmic damnation!” He could have given up on the child if his wife had not shown pity, and decides to keep her despite her sex trouble. Yet, as his wife admits, the child is viewed as less than a human being whose life is preserved only as “an opportunity to save life …and gain some merit in the other world” (Hanan 153). The story does not end here; rather, it returns to Daqing who is once again pleading to Cundi Guanyin. While he confesses guilt in not obeying her instruction to the letter, he recounts all the charitable deeds he did accomplish and complains about the injustice done to him: “Even if you can’t spare a son, you should at least give me a daughter, so that I can have a son-in-law to take care of me in my old age… why come up with this creature, neither male nor female, to succeed me?” (Hanan 154) Crying until mentally exhausted, Daqing drifts off to sleep, when the bodhisattva reveals herself again in his dream. The two starts another round of bargaining the deal of “getting a son.” The bodhisattva defends her creation of this creature: since Daqing did not follow through on his promise, she will not either. Daqing once again inquires if there is still a way to repent and redeem. The bodhisattva gives him a second chance and asserts, “If you are prepared to keep your original promise and sacrifice [seventy or eighty percent of] your wealth to charity, I shall keep my original promise too, and reward you with a son” (ibid.). The old man Daqing reflects, since he still has nobody to inherit his property, he might as well throw his money away and test if her words would come true, so he pledges that he will certainly keep his promise this time.

Daqing soon resumes his interrupted charitable deeds until, three months later, his wealth has gone by half. He reckons that Cundi Guanyin’s promise should exhibit at least some effect by then, so he keeps asking his concubines if they have any signs of pregnancy, but the answer has always been no. Just when he begins to doubt the words promised by the bodhisattva, he inadvertently discovers an astonishing thing: “for some unknown reason, the female organ [of the child] had gradually flattened out, while the male one protruded to fully half its length” (Hanan 156). This child is caught in the

middle of sex transformation. It is then that it occurrs to Daqing that this miraculous sex transformation must be the work of the bodhisattva's spiritual powers, and he wholeheartedly believes, "[i]t was entirely up to her whether the child developed into a male, a female, or a neuter" (Hanan 156). Having learned his lesson from his last breach of promise, Daqing fears that if he stops his charity again, this half *nü hua nan* sex transformation may well be retracted. This time he proactively bustles off to perform more charitable deeds until, a few months later, his wealth is reduced by another twenty and thirty percent. He takes another look at the child and at long last his dream of "getting a son" has come true: "Not only had its sex organ lengthened a good deal, the testicles had also descended" (Hanan 157). His son finally was now "a whole person" (ibid.). Needless to say, Daqing is overjoyed by this hard-earned blessing from the bodhisattva, and offers extravagant Buddhist salvation rites to show his gratitude.

The end of the narrative adds another important detail: naming the child. The child has remained unnamed, hence unintelligible as a human subject, until it fully transforms into a son. Whether first as a sex-deficient "stone maiden," or later as a sex-transforming creature, the child has to wait to settle in a definite and stable sex before it is given a name – a name that signifies its ultimate human identity. As revealed in the story, "while the child was neither male nor female, Daqing had been unable to give it a name. But now that he was certain it was a boy, he chose the name Strange-born (*qisheng* 奇生) because of the strange circumstances of the child's birth" (ibid.). Strange-born later grows up to become an intelligent, good-looking and refined young man, as the narrative continues in an explicitly idealized tone, who becomes a standard successful man according to the social standards of that era. He enters school, receives a good education in Confucian classics, takes the national civil service examination, and eventually becomes a government official. When he retires, his family is still as rich as before Daqing gave away his wealth. For Daqing, the moral student and winner of both Bodhisttava and this narrative, "it was as if he had never given anything away, but had

gained a distinguished son, not to mention a title, at no expense to himself" (ibid.).

So far, the heavenly project of bestowing a son to those who are or have become morally worthy of it is complete; the ingenious strategy of transforming an inadequate female ("stone maiden") into "a whole person" (a son) becomes fully appreciated. At the same time, *nü hua nan* as a rhetorical device for moral education has also been made clear: the *nü hua nan* sex transformation of the child is depicted as a manifestation of the moral transformation of his parents, particularly his father, who is the real protagonist of this moral journey. *Nü hua nan* as a moral rhetorical device is further driven home by a coda containing a long section of the author's comment, much like the personal comments added to other shorter *nü hua nan* narratives. In this section, the author urges his audience:

> Wouldn't you agree that charity carries a high rate of return? Clearly, good works are the magic formula by which a man sows his seed and a woman conceives a child […] Obviously money is an impediment to mankind, and I would urge all of you gentlemen without sons to stop calculating your karma and start giving away some of your money, to make way for a son. (158).
> 可见作福一事，是男人种子的仙方，女子受胎的秘决， […] 可见银子是妨人的东西，世上无嗣的诸公，不必论因果不因果，请多少散去些，以为容子之地。(Li 188)

It is true that the author Li Yu cannot be said to be a moral adherent. Born in the Ming and having lived half of his years into the Qing, he is intellectually a product of the freewheeling aspect of the Ming, particularly Li Zhi 李贽(1527-1602),[156] one of the best-known left-wing intellectual figures and iconoclasts in the late Ming, who personified radical nonconformity and individualism before the Manchu took over the nation. However, having lived through both the moral libertinism of the Ming and the rigid

[156] Li Zhi publicly doubted that Confucian thought, even the Five Classics and *The Analects*, represents the absolute truth: in his famous sentence, "If the truth of Confucius is regarded as the only truth, truth, then, has never existed" (咸以孔子之是非为是非，故未尝有是非). He critiqued orthodox Confucian thought with vigorous vehemence. He deliberately gave his books counter-orthodox titles, such as *Fen shu* 焚书 (Book to Be Burned) or *Cang shu* 藏书 (Book to be Hidden Away).

moralism of the Qing, Li Yu is understood as the epitome of the social and cultural transformation in seventeenth-century China.[157]

In fact, it is this dual influence of Ming libertinism and Qing moralism that enabled Li Yu to take a parodic approach to this highly moralizing *nü hua nan* in the Qing. Through playful engagement with the *dezi* belief, "The Bodhisattva's Ingenuity" holds a mirror up to the social aspirations and cultural traditions that constructed traditional *dezi nü hua nan* narratives. By framing *dezi* as a laughable transaction between the hypocritical moral practitioner and the crafty fictionalized Bodhisattva, Li Yu effectively denaturalizes the logic and rationale underlying traditional *dezi nü hua nan* narratives, providing an idiosyncratic version of competing discourses. Nonetheless, in Judith Butler's sense of parody, Li Yu's discourse also re-produces the cultural aspiration while destabilizing it. Indeed, in this parody, the allure of the male body, or to be more specific, the penis, that defines the *nü hua nan* narratives becomes even more explicit and problematic.

[157] Chang and Chang, *Crisis and Transformation in Seventeenth-Century China*.

Conclusion

The Promise of the Strange:

Transgender in Imperial Chinese as Ethical Objects

By "morality," one means a set of values and rules of action that are recommended to individuals through the intermediary of various prescriptive agencies such as the family, educational instituions, churches, and so forth. It is sometimes the case that these rules and values are plainly set forth in a coherent doctrine and an explitict teaching. But it also happened that they are transmitted in a diffuse manner, so that, far from constituting a systematic ensemble, they form a complex interplay of elements that counterbalance and correct one another, and cancel each other out on certain point, thus providing for compromises or loopholes. (Foucault *The Use of Pleasure*: 25)

Acknowledging the interactive and dynamic forces inherent in "morality," Foucault takes the productive domain where individuals or groups either consciously or unconsciously conduct themselves within margins of variation of transgression "in reference to a prescriptive system that is explicity or implicity operative in their culture" as "the morality of behaviors" (*Pleasure* 25-26). In "the morality of behaviors" the acting individuals does not just operate as agent, but as an ethical subject" that acts "in reference to the prescriptive elements that make up the code" (ibid.). "An ethical subject," in this sense, represents a higher and more sophisticated level of agency and possibility, that contemporary Western transgenderism seems to promise.

However, though profoundly entrenched in "the morality of behaviors," transgender individuals in imperial China are far from being "ethical subjects" that are guaranteed action and agency. Quite the opposite, being constantly projected onto the discursive realm as the subject of "the strange" rather than the creator of discourses, they constitute what I take to be "ethical objects." As ethical objects, earlier Chinese transgenders, such

as *erxing*, *nan hua nü,* and *nü hua nan*, are never subjects, but the objects, of "the morality of behaviors." They are critical to the operation of morality only when they become the content that moral codes are exercised upon. Being ethical objects does not necessarily mean an impossible state of being. Rather, it is through being discursively constructed as ethical objects, that *erxing*, *nan hua nü,* and *nü hua nan* become strong embodied presences of morality and deconstruct its operation by various authors of these competing transgender discourses.

Being an ethical object is one thing. How moral codes and social prescriptive system are employed, sometimes bent, in understanding and constructing transgender ethical objects is another thing. In these ancient and late imperial Chinese transgender discourses that this dissertation examines, the relation of Chinese transgender to morality is of a complicated nature that relies tremendously on its temporal, social, and historical specificity. For instance, though in general, *erxing* exemplifies grave menace to morality by misusing the hidden sex organ, mostly, the penis, to sabotage sexual morality, there are also *erxing* who could transcend the moral frame owing to their priviledged or abject positions. *Nan hua nü* are also situated in moral margins where anxieties over male homosexuality populate. Nonetheless, attributing the grand Confucian moral code of *yi* 义(righteousness) and the sublime emotion of *qing* 情(passion), exercising morality upon *nan hua nü* sometimes grant them fuller personhood by constructing them as loyal homosexual companions and exceptionally self-sacrificing mother figures. Being the most favored ones, *nü hua nan* completely bends moral rules of retribution to comprehend certain biological changes of human bodies against the social apphrension over maintenance of the line of descendents. In bodies of *nü hua nan* one sees not only the potential of understanding transgender but also the potential of being ethical objects.

Transgender narratives in imperial China, particularly in late imperial China of the Ming and Qing discourses of the strange, constantly remind contemporary readers the malleability, constructedness, and the historicity of sex, and of transgender. As

phenomenon of the strange, transgender in Ming-Qing *xiaoshuo* pinpoints a politico-moral action that appropriates and reappropriates difference by (re)figuring and (re)inscribing the body, a certain body part, with moral and cultural meanings. What these transgender invidivuals in Ming-Qing narratives provide us is an intriguing look into the fears, anxieties and aspritions of the past. These competing discourses are the moral "compromises or loopholes" that produce meaningful juxtapositions, or what Donna Haraway has called "the promises of monsters."

Lastly, the dissertation marks an effort to locate both the dissonance and the alliance among earlier and late imperial Chinese transgender narratives, and different modes of moral behaviors that these ethical objects of strange reveal and rely on. Certainly, I am also well aware that my work has its own limitation and constraints. Yet, Chinese transgender studies, and transcultural transgender studies at large, can be greatly enriched if scholars can further explore the potential of the field. With many suggestions offered at the end of my project, I look forward to seeing new efforts at studying Chinese, and transcultural, transgender studies that articulate better recognition of transgender visions in an increasingly multicultural and multinational era.

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