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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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The Literati's Polyphonic Answers to Social Changes in Late Imperial China

Abstract The article aims to rethink the pluralistic intellectual currents and social changes of the last centuries in China: How literati reacted to the historical changes, the economic developments, the collapse of the hierarchical order, and the social mobility from the end of the Ming to the middle of the Qing dynasty. Urbanisation, the great silver inflow, the acceleration of trade, and social mobility raised new challenges to the orthodox view of the world and to Neo-Confucian norms. These new attitudes of the Chinese literati—which can be inferred both from literary and philosophical works—uncover new attitudes in the *mental structure* of the intellectual strata of the time. In the history of ideas we notice a progressive detachment from the orthodox view of the conflictual relationship between principle and desires, especially in the ambit of the Taizhou school. The elaboration of a new anthropological mindset aimed at the rehabilitation of passions and desires culminated with Li Zhi. This trend went on in the Qing period, from Wang Fuzhi to Dai Zhen. In literature, a similar trend, the so-called "cult of *qing*," can be found with the moral justification of emotion-desire (establishing emotion as a genuine and active source of virtue), and with the vitalistic identification of emotions as the source of life and reproduction. Another indication of change is the challenge of common and accepted truisms through the praise of "folly" in real life situations and literary works: To be "crazy" and "foolish" became a sign of distinction among certain intellectual circles, in contrast with the pedant orthodox scholars and officials and the vulgar *nouveaux riches*. The unconventional character of the anti-hero Baoyu is emblematic, with his aversion for any kind of official ceremony and convention, his abnormal sensibility and impractical and naïve mentality, and his consciousness of being different from others. The crisis of the established ladder of values can be seen in the exaltation of "amoral" wisdom and in the presentation of various dimensions of love, from the idealistic sentiment of "the talented student and the beautiful girl" to the metaphysical passion that overcomes death, and to the minimalist concept of "love

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is like food" in a *carpe diem* perspective. And finally another challenge is exemplified by Yuan Mei's reflections on the concept of Heavenly Mandate, retribution, human responsibility, and historical constructions by resorting to "abnormal" phenomena to uncover the absurdity of reality and unconscious imagery. His questions testify the polyphonic debates of the late imperial China, besides established conventions and Neo-Confucian orthodoxy.

Keywords literati, modernisation, desires and principles, Li Zhi, cult of *qing*, foolishness, Yuan Mei, retribution, human responsibility

"Was there comparable change in peasant *mentalité* after the late Ming-early Qing trade expansion?" was one of the questions raised by Evelyn S. Rawski in her survey on socio-economic studies on the Ming and Qing periods.[1] These centuries, considered a key period in modern European history, have been the object of scholarly debate pertaining to whether they could be also considered so relevant and "transitional" in world history.[2] It is possible to talk of multiplicities of modernity in a comparative perspective, seeking to account for the internal historical developments of each society on its own terms.[3] Although until now there are no complete studies on the economic development of China during the process of its integration into the world economy, several signs, such as urbanisation, the wide circulation of silver, and the increased areal specialisation, imply huge transformations.[4] This article reconsiders some changes in literati

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[1] Rawski, "Research Themes in Ming-Qing Socioeconomic History—The State of the Field," 101.

[2] The debate on the idea of modernity in Europe, its myth, and other aspects dates back to the seventeenth–eighteenth century, brought by the controversy between philosophers and theologians. It is well represented by the arguments presented by Löwith Karl, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History*, and Blumenberg Hans, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*.

[3] Ng On-cho ("The Epochal concept of 'Early Modernity' and the Intellectual History of Late Imperial China," 37–61) raises the question if "periodization, as a description of the historical process, is more often than not a provincial endeavor," or can be applied to other parts of the world, and thus can be transposed to China. On China, see Lynn A. Struve, ed., *The Qing Formation in World-Historical Time*, especially Rawski Evelyn S., "The Qing Formation and the Early-Modern Period." Ibid., 207–41. Cf. also Mizoguchi Yūzō, "The Ming-Qing transition as turning point," 528–68.

[4] This great inflow of silver in China was a challenge not only for its silver economy imported mainly from Japan and from America had undergone an unusual monetization process, but also for its social order. China responded with an increase of consumptions but also with exports to

mentalité from the mid-Ming period to the eighteenth century. It will limit its scope to scholars,[5] the social group offering the richest written source base, focusing in particular on the new attitudes, habits, values, and ideas floating around intellectual circles during this period.[6] After providing a general picture of the

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Europe, and especially certain areas of the south-east of the empire experienced an increased urbanization, with vertical and horizontal mobility. Social mobility, through the official way of the state examinations and the unofficial ways of the development of the productivity, the market and the urbanization, and the demographic growth, is the main constant that characterizes the Chinese imperial society. The most active social strata were the so called gentry and merchants. The development of the agricultural productivity, had been supported by the regional specialization and the introduction of new cultures coming from the West and the Americas, and it marked an imposing increment of the mercantile activities and the currencies in circulation, above all in the developed economic areas, centered in the inferior basin of the Yangzijiang. In Santangelo Paolo, "Ming China, Economy and Society: Some Pictures from Jiangnan," 9–55, I tried to explain how the textile industry conditioned local customs, fashion and other aspects of social and economic life. Among the most important contributions, see Li Bozhong, *Agricultural Development in Jiangnan*, 1620–1850; William S. Atwell, "International Bullion Flows and the Chinese Economy circa 1530–1650," 68–90; Atwell, "Ming China and the Emerging World Economy. C. 1470–1650," 376–417; Atwell, "Another Look at Silver Imports into China, 1635–1644," 467–89; Atwell, "Time, Money, and Weather: Ming China and the 'Great Depression' of the Mid-Fifteenth Century," 83–113, esp. 98–103; Evelyn Rawski, "Research Themes in Ming-Qing Socioeconomic History—The State of the Field," 84–111; Ma Ning, *The Age of Silver: The Rise of the Novel East and West, 1500–1800*. Although still bound to the Marxist schemas, worthy of mention are the essays on the "sprouts of capitalism," for the huge amount of materials that have been collected in the following volumes. *Zhongguo zibenzhuyi mengya wenti taolunji*; *Zhongguo zibenzhuyi mengya wenti lunwenji*; *Ming Qing zibenzhuyi mengya yanjiu lunwenji*.

[5] The social group I examine includes the learned elite, although their status varied depending on the level of exams they had passed, their wealth, and family background. For a concept of social group in relation to emotional regimes see Rosenwein's "Emotional Community" (2006). See also Wakeman, "The Price of Autonomy: Intellectuals in Ming and Ch'ing Politics," 35–70.

[6] The term *mentalité* has been criticised as being too vague, and we are aware of the risk of that comes with using generic terms, such as "emotions," "passions," or "feelings," since any definition will be partly intuitive and tautological. However, notwithstanding its misuses and different interpretations, the term can be a useful tool to express the complex notions, beliefs, prejudices, and images shared by most members of a certain society. It also belongs to a structured system of signifiers whose internal networks of relationships are used to "map" the

social and cultural environment, I will examine a new type of individual whose values and character differed from those of tradition and orthodoxy, starting from the rehabilitation of desires, the cult of *qing*, and the "historicisation" of principles.[7] A variety of independent, often critical opinions uncover the search

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structure of other sets of relationships. Employed in this way, this term may be a useful container, which includes "emotions," imagery, collective memory, and all kinds of cultural elements, which are interdependent and often beyond conscious elaborations and philosophical systems (see Paolo Santangelo, "Emotions, a Social and Historical Phenomenon: Some Notes on the Chinese Case," http://acrh.revues.org/7430). I prefer thus to consider the "mental structure," which includes the representation of emotions, collective memory, and imagery (on the author's method of textual analysis see http://paolosantangelo.altervista.org/emotions.htm). With this term one can understand the complex system of various cognitive and practical aspects of the "world of mind and body," which are reflected in the common manner people classify and judge, inside and beyond the rational and conscious theories: The perception of the self, the sense of responsibility, the concepts of health and illness, belief systems, the ladder of values and, most especially, the imagery and representation of the inner reality, states of mind, and sensations that regulate the immediate perceptions of social subjects—the "collective unconscious." This cultural legacy of symbols, values, rites, and local traditions is rather stable, but in the course of time it may be partially modified. Elements felt as inadequate are partially replaced by new elements. Literary works, even more than philosophical theories and moral systems witness few new attitudes of Chinese literati. This approach focusing on emotions takes inspiration from the pioneering work by the historians of the school of *Annales* for European Medieval history (see P. Santangelo, "Transition to Modernity: New Results of Textual Analysis on Emotions and Collective Imagery," 9–30), and has developed in various experiences, from "history of sensibilities" (cf. Daniel Wickberg, "What Is the History of Sensibilities? On Cultural Histories, Old and New," 661–84) to "emotional communities" (see Barbara H. Rosenwein, "Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions," 1–32, online at http://www.passionsincontext.de/, on social groups whose members adhere to the same valuations of emotions and their expression), from Reddy's concepts of "emotive" and "emotional regime" (William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*; and Reddy, "Historical Research on the Self and Emotions," 302–15) to Carol Stearns's "emotionology" (Stearns & Stearns, "Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards," 813–30; see also Rom Harré, "An Outline of the Social Constructionist Viewpoint," 2–14). Cf. Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction*, 237–65. On China, worth of notice is Gao Xiang, "The Rise of a New Tradition: Changes in Values and Life Styles in Late Ming China," 1–29.

[7] One can take in consideration, besides Li Zhi's historical thought, Wang Fuzhi's concept of

for new ideas beyond orthodoxy and tradition.

The economic developments and the increased circulation of silver that characterised the last decades of the Ming dynasty changed the social order. Sources agree in describing the perception of passing from an orderly society, which emerged after the Hongwu reforms, to a more complex, specialized and competitive one, in which handicrafts and commerce played an increasingly important role. For instance, starting in the sixteenth century, in the commercial centre of Lanxi (Zhejiang), according to the testimony of Zhang Mao (1437–1522), the large-scale expansion of markets and production had a deep influence on local customs. Although many families still practiced agriculture and weaving, the traditional virtues of filial piety, social hierarchy, harmony, and the sense of shame declined. As a consequence, he complained the cunning deceived the foolish, the inhabitants of urban centres deceived farmers, the rich dominated the poor, the powerful dominated the weak, and the majority dominated the minority. Other sources concur in their presentation of chaotic social mobility and the consequent changes in social conditions and values during the period, at least from the perspective of outstanding members of the gentry. Commerce and the merchant class gained newfound esteem. For example, Zhao Nanxing (1550–1628) and Zhang Youqu (of the late Ming period), while comparing the activity of the merchants with the function of farmers and artisans, affirmed their identical value. And Li Zhi (Zhuowu, 1527–1602) also wrote:

> What is there of despicable in the merchants? They possess great capital, [but] they face the dangers of the storms and the seas, they are insulted by the customs-attendants, and they suffer every humiliation in the market. Working so hard, and bringing such enormous capital, how much they earn it is [indeed] miserable.[8]

In one of his stories, Feng Menglong (1574–1646) let a high official say that farmers, artisans, and merchants, although despised, did not save up on earnings from their respective jobs.[9] In fact the above statements aimed at modifying the moral image of the merchant and artisan rather than describing their fortunes. Zhang Dai (1597–1689?) introduced some examples of artisans that had created

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the principle changing according to specific actual conditions in time. Dai Zhen identified Dao with quotidian practicality in human relations, and Zhang Xuecheng elaborated a historicistic perspective of institutions and Classics. Cf. Ng On-cho, "A Tension in Ch'ing Thought: 'Historicism' in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Chinese Thought," 561–83.

[8] Cf. Li Zhi, *You Yu Jiao Ruohou* (Another letter to Jiao Ruohou), in *Fenshu*, 2:49; Zhang Jianye, ed., *Lizhi Wenji*, 7 vols., vol. 1, 45.

[9] Cf. Feng Menglong, *Xingshi hengyan*, 17:344.

great fortunes and had become so important they were treated at the same level of the officials and the gentry,[10] and He Xinyin (1517–79) encouraged this social mobility.[11]

Sixteenth century observers generally depict the collapse of the hierarchical order, although, as the Japanese historian Kishimoto Miō writes, the society of seventeenth century Southeast China was in fact reorganised as a new and complex structure.[12] However, unlike Europe, the process of marketing in China did not produce a harsh perception of the contradictions between the merchant class and the imperial authorities for political control, while distinctions between social layers were subject to erosion. In its eclectic opening, the new society overcame the traditional borders between gentry and merchants and, although the gender roles basically remained undisputed, economic growth favoured female education in wealthy families and female work outside home in peasant families and for those who moved to town in the rich areas of southeast China. These phenomena could not but influence the way of life.[13] The new urban society was characterised by a wide circulation of printed texts and an increasing number of readers. The period preceding the recent social and economic changes, according to the physiocratic Confucian ideology, was characterised by the "goodness and simplicity of customs," *chunhou fengsu* 淳厚風俗; this meant a relative equalisation of wealth and some social cohesion. In the rhetoric of those who idealised the "old times," agriculture was considered more important than commerce; everyone had to be satisfied with his own job and status, which was also to be clearly demonstrated by the differentiation of clothing and conduct; women had to devote themselves to domestic activities and weaving; and frugality was the general model, both for great and small families. Li Banghua (1574–1644), for instance, condemned the luxury of numerous inhabitants of the capital city who often kept a standard of living superior to their economic status, especially in relation to marriage ceremonies or funerals; prostitutes and actors—he went on—were mixed with ordinary people, and even poor men decorated their heads with gold and pearls, and common women were dressed like nobles.[14] Analogous complaints can be read on luxury, waste, and squandering noticed throughout many levels of Suzhou society.[15] It is possible that the distrust of many literati towards the circulation of

[10] Cf. Zhang Dai, *Tao'an mengyi*, 5:63.

[11] Cf. He Xinyin, *He Xinyin ji*, 3:53–54.

[12] Kishimoto Mio, *Min Shin kōtai to Kōnan shakai*, XI, 28, 36, 53, 94–99, 267.

[13] Cf. Ho Wai-kam, "Late Ming Literati: Social and Cultural Ambience," 23–36.

[14] Cf. Li Banghua (1574–1644), *Li Zhongwen xiansheng ji*, 6:54b, cit. in Albert Chan, *The Glory and the Fall of the Ming Dynasty*, 314.

[15] Cf. Li Zhi, *Suzhoufu zhi*, in *Fenshu*, 3:30–34.

silver came from the sense of uncertainty due to the great socioeconomic transformations in progress, and to their negative impact on social harmony.[16]

There is, of course, a problem in the credibility and reliability of such sources. The references to the disturbance of social order contained in a number of texts of this period echo many of the criticisms and observations found in more ancient sources, for instance from the pre-imperial era, which recall the typical attitude of the *laudatores temporis acti* (praisers of time past). Moreover, it is possible that such descriptions show an excessive idealisation or oversimplification. It is worth noting, however, that this same image of a radical change was not just present in official documents, such as the imperial annals and the local chronicles, but in the writings and the compilations of private writers, who recalled from the past an orderly society that respected moral and social norms.

Then, with the increase of consumerism, local economies lost their self-sufficiency, while handicrafts and commerce became more important. In some urban areas the quest for pleasure and free satisfaction of desires gained more and more presence, while the ostentation of the luxury replaced the preceding frugality, *jian* 儉. It was like a competition—according to the historical sources—among those who were able to prepare the most refined banquets and wear the most sumptuous dresses. He Liangjun remembers that during his youth banquets had five main dishes and five side dishes for four or six guests, however the families of notable wealth did not organise luxury banquets more than once or twice a year. In the second half the sixteenth century, in contrast, even common people organised banquets of over ten courses, while the rich families' lunches could have hundreds of them. The luxury was such that—He Liangjun lamented—not even Confucius would have been able to revive the frugality of past times were he reborn now.[17] To ascend the social ladder, people of the humblest backgrounds acquired titles of rank and wore suits, once considered a privilege of the upper classes.[18] It is interesting to note the emphasis that the sources put on attire as

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[16] Cf. for instance, three great thinkers of the period: Gu Yanwu, Huang Zongxi, and Fang Yizhi; Cf. W. Peterson, *Bitter Gourd: Fang I-chih and the Impetus for Intellectual Change*, 78–80.

[17] He Liangjun, *Siyouzhai congshuo*, 34:314.

[18] For instance, Fan Lian (1540–?), in his notes of the late sixteenth century, *Yunjian jumu chao* (http://zh.wikisource.org/zh-hant/%E9%9B%B2%E9%96%93%E6%93%9A%E7%9B%AE%E6%8A%84, 卷二〇記風俗 Seen among clouds) reported that poor people, who could not afford to buy silk, purchased elegant second-hand clothes in pawnshops. Furthermore, Ye Mengzhu, in his seventeenth century writings, *Yueshi bian*, noticed that even low-ranking people wore elegant clothes (*Yueshi bian*, 新文豐, *Congshu jicheng, xubian*, 1988, *juan* 8). Online at http://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/%E9%96%B1%E4%B8%96%E7%B7%A8. Cf. Xu Hong, "Mingmo shehui fengqi de bianqian: Yi Jiang Zhe diqu wei li," 105.

expression of social difference. To mention another example, women's fashion had been also greatly impelled by the development of the market and new designs. They stimulated frequent changes in hairstyle and apparel. Colours became more gaudy, the dresses more clinging and tight, and the heels of shoes taller. Gu Qiyuan (1565–1628) observed in Nanjing that at the end of the sixteenth century women's fashion changed every ten years, and that at the beginning of the following century such changes happened every two or three years. Even for men one could see in the market several types of headgear, clogs, and shoes for various seasons.[19] The arbitrary changes in lifestyle, as for instance in the characteristics of clothing, carriages, dwellings, indicated a disturbance on traditional moral and social levels.[20]

In the intellectual field, another fundamental new element was the growth of the Wang Yangming schools. They challenged the orthodoxy of the Zhu Xi's order, and the concept of "innate conscience," *liangzhi* 良知, opened the way to various new routes of self-perfection in new ladders of values. Some thinkers, influenced by the Wang Yangming School's criticism of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy, were inclined to liberate themselves from rules and conventions of behaviour, showing their true personalities, and rejected the ideological dichotomy between principle and desires. Generally speaking, such attitudes were not the expression of a sense of rebellion against the political order, but rather a personal ethical-aesthetic choice that sought mental and emotional freedom. In parallel with the end of the Ming dynasty, against the prevailing academic poetic style of modeling on the ancient (Tang), the literati of the Gong'an circle 公安派, headed by Yuan Hongdao (1568–1610) proposed new languages and styles: They emphasised the changes of literature according to the times, the prevalence of individual personality and the expression of the "creative sensitivity" (*xingling* 性靈) in imitation, and the value of drama at the level of poetry. It is not by chance that the seventeenth century is considered the golden age for autobiographical writing, developing the well-established Neo-Confucian practice of self-cultivation in the writing of moral texts and daily records, chronological biographies, travel journals, and *xiaopin* essays.[21]

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[19] See Ye Mengzhu, *Yueshi bian*, *juan 8*. Cf. also Chang Chun-shu and Chang Shelly Hsueh-lun, *Crisis and Transformation in Seventeenth Century China*, *Culture and Modernity in Li Yu's World*, 149, 154–55.

[20] See the rules in [*Wanli*] Li Dongyang, *Da Ming huidian*, *juan* 61–62 (*Libu* 19–20).

[21] Cf. Wu Pei-yi, *The Confucian's Progress: Autobiographical Writings in Traditional China*; W. T. de Bary, "Neo-Confucian Cultivation and the Seventeenth Century 'Enlightenment,'" 178–88; Rodney L. Taylor, "Neo-Confucianism, Sagehood and the Religious Dimension," 389–415; and Rodney L. Taylor, "The Centered Self: Religious Autobiography in the

We can find concurrent elements both in literary works and philosophical reflections, which contribute to the understanding of some literati's reactions. They show the dissatisfaction with the orthodox moral system in some intellectual circles or the increasing corruption of customs; nonetheless, many scholars were either aware of the limits of the dominant ideology or could not accept it, as it was not sufficient to apply to their reality. The search for a new language for expressing genuine and true emotions, the paradoxical equalisation of madness and foolishness with wisdom, and new perspectives emphasising the role of self were the various ways to seek new values and social relations, as well as new aesthetics, in an attempt to create a new elite, based on a new sensitivity, rather than on money and bureaucratic power.

Many elements discussed here are not new, but their conjoint manifestation is the symptom of an unsatisfactory attitude and of a broad search for new perspectives and morality. We should notice the phenomenon is not limited to the history of ideas and the new perspectives in the ambit of the School of the Mind. At the same time it involves the cult of *qing*, as well as aesthetic and ethical sensibility in the literary production. Some of the themes and voices selected here have not been discussed before, but their contemporary manifestation demonstrate a pluralistic variety of ideas and a convergent attempt to represent the self within society: the late Ming eccentric use of derogatory appellations to challenge common values, the marginal messages from the "Mountain Songs," Yuan Mei's critical reflection on retribution, responsibility, sexual morality, and social hierarchy. They reflect various contradictory and contrasting positions and ideas, often in opposition to the official concept of morality and orthodoxy, making them a multiplicity of discordant opinions that are far from the chorus of a monolithic and conformist society. Can we talk then of a pluralistic society? Obviously we cannot apply the evaluation criteria of modern democracies to a society so different from the modern world. Yet we can surely acknowledge the lively debates that took place despite the authoritarian and intolerant government control. Looking at such debates, we notice attempts to elaborate new conceptions of the individual and its role in society.

The Dignity of the Individual and the Value of Desires

Before examining some of the literary materials, we shall focus on a few innovations that took place in the history of ideas and in the conception of human

Neo-Confucian Tradition," 266–83. See also Jamie Greenbaum, *Chen Jiru (1558–1639): The Background to Development and Subsequent Uses of Literary Personae*.

behaviour. Confucian orthodoxy maintained a moralistic attitude against what was considered the private and egoistic pursuit of profit, lust, and greed (*si* 私, *li* 利, *tan* 貪) of immoral people.[22] This does not mean that Confucian tradition lacks a concrete recognition of the importance of the primary needs of individuals. We can see many examples from the "Analects" all the way to Zhu Xi.[23] A clear distinction was however stressed between *need* and *desire*, vital function and excess: Food and procreation were legitimate needs, based on social requirements, and while excess was discouraged, Zhu Xi distinguished between gluttony and hunger.[24]

It is well known how in modern Europe the doctrine of political and economic freedom was developed on a utilitarian and anti-despotic rationalism.[25] In Ming China, Lu Ji's (*zi* Siyu 思豫, *hao* Xiaoshan 小山, 1515–52) discourse on luxury elaborated an economic analysis which corresponded to the standard of living and

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[22] Compare the three corresponding appetites of drinking, loving, and eating (*potoi, aphrodisia, edodai*) mentioned in Plato (*Laws*, III, VI, IX), in Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics*, III, VII) and in Xenophon (*Memorabilia*, I), with the relative recommendations to avoid excess. Throughout the history of European thinking it is possible to perceive a clash between "real" and "false" needs, "good" needs and "bad" ones, and between "needs" and "desires." Cf. A. Heller, *Il potere della vergogna*, 314–17. See also Santangelo, *Emozioni e desideri in Cina. La riflessione neoconfuciana dalla metà del XIV alla metà del XIX secolo*, 61–69.

[23] See *Lunyu*, 12, 7: "When Zigong asked him about government, the Master answered: 'The government's requirements are sufficiency of food, military sufficiency, and the consensus of the people for the king.' Zigong said: 'If it were not possible to satisfy all three requirements, which one should be renounced?' The Master answered: 'Military sufficiency.'" Confucius answered the next question about which of the remaining two alternatives was more important by saying that it was better to renounce food, because "since ancient times, death has always been the fate of all men, but if the people do not trust the king, the state will not withhold." Other important examples in ancient times are the famous statements by Gaozi (食色性也) and a passage in *Liji* (飲食男女，人之大欲存焉). Zhu Xi, in his notes on the Four Books, does not ignore the importance of the people's primary needs. This tradition is still recalled at the beginning of the Ming dynasty, when Wang Wei says: "If a king wishes that the cosmic energy in this world is in harmony, he must comply with the nature of the masses . . . " (see Wang Wei, *Zhici*, 4a).

[24] Zhu Xi's famous sentence distinguishes between eating for survival (*need*) and gluttony (*desire*): 飲食者，天理也; 要求美味，人欲也 (*Zhuzi yulei*, 1:224).

[25] Cf. for instance Albert Hirschman, *Le passioni e gli interessi. Argomenti politici in favore del capitalismo prima del suo trionfo. The Fable of the Bees or Private Vices* (1714) by de Mandeville is paradigmatic.

to the advanced economic conditions of the Jiangnan region.[26] His arguments justified the pursuit of pleasure, such as ostentatious visits to Xihu, for the positive effects created by the trade of luxury objects, including prosperity, wealth, and employment. The poor benefit from the expenditure of the rich; the splendour of the palaces and the luxury of wagons and dresses redistributes wealth among the various productive strata of the population. Lu Ji also understands that this analysis was suited to a developed economy and an active society like Jiangnan, rather than a poorer region: "Relevant is that from prosperity may derive luxury, while from poverty frugality. The attitude toward luxury or frugality depends on habits stemming from a life in abundance or in poverty. Even if the ancient sage-kings would return now, it would be difficult to prohibit the luxury in the area of Jiangsu and Zhejiang."[27] Other scholars, like Wei Shixiao (1655–1725) and Qian Yong (1759–1844) expressed similar ideas concerning consumerism, market, and profit.[28]

Something analogous took place in the evaluation of emotions, *qing*. Yang Shen (1488–1559) was one of the first who stated the presence of a moderately positive interrelation between *xing* and *qing* (性情不離): "Promoting nature and neglecting emotions one becomes dead ashes, while being involved by emotions and forgetting nature one becomes as animals."[29] Luo Qinshun and Chen Que provide other important evidence. Luo Qinshun (1465–1547) states:

> The fact that man has desires definitely derives from heaven. Some are necessary and cannot be repressed; some are appropriate and cannot be changed. If those that are irrepressible all conform to the principle of what is appropriate, how can they not be good? It is only heedlessly giving way to passions, indulging the desires, and not knowing how to turn back that is evil. Confucians of the past often spoke about eliminating or restraining human desires and thought it necessary to resort to severe means in order to repress them. But their mode of expression seems one-sided and exaggerated. The desires, together with pleasure, anger, sorrow and joy, are qualities of nature.

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[26] Lu Ji, *Jianjiatang zazhu zhaichao*, 3–4, cit. in Xu Hong, "Mingmo shehui fengqi de bianqian: Yi Jiang Zhe diqu wei li," 103.

[27] Lu Ji, *Jianjiatang zazhu zhaichao*, 4. The original text reads: 要之先富而後奢，先貧而後儉 奢儉之風，起于俗之貧富，雖聖王複起，欲禁吳越之奢難矣.

[28] Cf. Zanasi Margherita, "Frugality and Luxury: Morality, Market, and Consumption in Late Imperial China," 457–85.

[29] Yang Shen 楊慎 (1488–1559), *Xing qing shuo*, *Sheng'an ji* (Siku quanshu. 集部，別集類，明洪武至崇禎，升菴集，卷五 Yang Shen's Collected works). The original text reads: 舉性而遺情何如曰死灰，觸情而忘性何如曰禽獸.

> Can pleasure, sorrow, anger, and joy also be eliminated?[30]

Chen Que (1604–77) dared to speak openly of desires: "Basically there is no principle in the human mind, as heavenly principle comes from human desire. When appropriate, desire is principle. Without desires can be said there would not be also principle."[31]

The moral "relativism" of some thinkers of the Wang Yangming schools should be understood within the framework of Buddhist and Daoist influences that stressed the importance of the attitude of the mind-heart.[32] According to some thinkers of the so-called Taizhou school, like Wang Gen (1483–1541), He Xinyin, and Li Zhi, the self first of all consists of natural needs, which are physical as well as selfish inclinations, and considered the motivations for self-improvement. Wang Gen's ideas of individual autonomy, self-respect, self-love, self-interest, and self-preservation differ from theories elaborated by Western thinkers, such as Thomas Hobbes: Self is not seen as a unity at war with others, but the social being projected to self-perfection, or the microcosm which is part of the macrocosm. Self is seen as the root, and society as the branch.[33] He Xinyin placed a good deal of weight on "personal feelings and temperament" (*yiqi* 意氣) and, as he did not accept the identification of passions with selfishness, considered them to be part of human nature.[34] He reiterated Mencius' admonishment to the king to consider people's desires worthy of satisfaction and went on to develop a conception of "training desires" (*yu yu* 育欲), in which self-fulfilment meant the fulfilment of the needs of others, and the desires of individual people became universalised.[35] Either way, the individualistic discourse developed in the ambit of the Taizhou

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[30] Luo Qinshun, *Kunzhi ji*.

[31] See Chen Que, *Chen Que ji* 陳確集, *Bieji* 別集, 5, *Longyan* 聾言, 4, *Wu yu zuo sheng bian* 無欲作聖辨.

[32] See for instance Li Zhi's quotation from *Daodejing*, 59, where he is proud of sharing the dust of the crowd and visiting the pleasure quarters of Macheng (Li Zhi, *Fenshu*, *Zengbu*, 1:259).

[33] For Wang Gen, "The cosmos lies in me and the myriad changes are from myself" 宇宙在我, 萬化生身, quoted by Yu-Yin Cheng, "Changing Cosmology, Changing Perspectives on History and Politics: Christianity and Yang Tingyun's 楊庭筠 (1562–1627) Reflections on China," 516. See also de Bary, "Individualism and Humanitarianism in Late Ming Thought," 163. Shimada Kenji (*Chugoku ni okeru kindai shii no zasetsu*, 230–69) was the first scholar to emphasise the Taizhou thought's promotion of self to its extreme.

[34] The original text reads: 性而味，性而色，性而声，性而安逸，性也.

[35] Cf. *Mencius*, 1b, 5; Cf., He Xinyin, *Cuantong ji*, cit. in *Mingdai sixiang shi*, ed. Rong Jiaozu, 229; He Xinyin, *He Xinyin ji*, 2:40–41, 3:72, cit. in *Zhongguo lishi shang de renxing lun*, ed. Jiang Guozhu, and Zhu Kuiju, 277.

school was generally not in contrast with contemporary social organisation. Their idea of *qing* was not contrasted with moral principles, but was considered the source of morality—the best means of consolidating human bonds.[36]

Li Zhi extends He Xinyin's discourse on desires, and does not stop short of recognising the basic vital needs. He extends this category to positive desires and goes on to praise "selfishness" as the starting point of any social process:

> The wise have taught that "one succeeds by not being troubled [overdoing things]" (*wuwei er cheng zhe* 無爲而成者). But now the expression "not being troubled" has come to mean "absence of mind-heart" (*wuxin* 無心) [. . .]. If he does not use his mind-heart, the peasant leaves the field untilled, the craftsman works shoddily, and the scholar is not up to his job. How can something be obtained without the use of the mind? Commentators assure us that the so-called "absence of mind" is not a real lack of mind, but only an absence of selfish feelings (*wu sixin* 無私心). Yet the mind of man is characterised by "selfishness."[37] [. . .] Desire for goods, for sexual satisfaction, for education, for a personal career, for the amassing of wealth; the desire to buy land or houses for one's descendants; the request for geomantic protection to bring good luck to one's children—all of these things are productive and keep life going in this world, all of these things are loved and practised by the people, all of these things are known and openly discussed [. . .][38] The concrete principles of human relations consist of clothing and food. Without these items there would be no relationships [. . .] Scholars should recognise the true essence that lies behind these relationships, and stop quibbling over them [. . .].[39]

Li Zhi's recognition of desire as being positive in nature, and his paradoxical praising "selfishness" indeed represent a conscious change in the perception of individuality and society.[40] Li's discourse starts from a demolition of the bases of traditional morality. Traditional morality does not take account of the real nature of human beings, which operates in the pursuit of a vital space. This lack of perception is destined to become the source of hypocrisy: Everybody openly

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[36] Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900–1950*, 41.

[37] Cf. Li Zhi, *Cangshu*, *Deye ruchen houlun*, 32:544.

[38] Cf. Li Zhi, *Fenshu*, *Shuda*, *Da Deng Shiyang*, 1:4.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Cf. Li Zhi, *Cangshu*, *Deye ruchen houlun*, 32:544; Li Zhi, *Fenshu*, *Shuda*, *Da Deng Mingfu*, 1:40, and *Da Deng Shiyang*, 1:4.

speaks of the knowledge of Dao, goodness, benevolence, but underneath there is in fact the pursuit of wealth and success.[41] Is it not a coincidence that Li Zhi choose the term *tongxin* 童心, rather than the one most widely used, the Mencian "innocent heart of the child" (赤子之心).[42] In fact, the true selfishness is being cloaked in moral superiority, acting on the authority of the "common good" and administering ethical guidance that seeks to impose rules and sacrifices on the rest of humanity. Li Zhi's anti-moralism comes from here; he does not condemn Confucian ethics or the Buddhist doctrine in themselves, but only for their ignorance of man's essence.

This means a radically different perception of human character, as personal identity is no longer related to the "moral self" according to the Classics, but to a "natural self," free from ideological incrustations. "Natural self" corresponds to genuine human nature; the child-mind, neither good nor bad, corresponds to the individual's desires: appetite for food, attraction for beauty, shelter from the cold, desire for elegance, quest for comfort, the fulfilment of one's ambitions: "The pursuit of profit and the evasion of damage correspond to the common feelings of human beings."[43] If this is the original nature, there is no moral rule above or against it, and Dao is identified with the daily demands of the human being, therefore a moral system could never be considered superior to man and his needs and desires.[44] This leads to the conclusion that the Dao, which is considered the truth, and the moral system are just the ways of concrete human beings; there is not one Way, the Ways being many since human beings have their own specific personalities.[45] His paradoxical exaltation of "selfishness" was not a purely ethical

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[41] Li Zhi, *Xu Fenshu* 續焚書, *Sanjiao gui ru shuo* 三教歸儒說, 2: 76. The original text reads: 陽爲道學，陰爲富貴.

[42] As Erica Brindley (*Individualism in Early China: Human Agency and the Self in Thought and Politics*, 126) notices, "Yang Zhu and Mencius might have actually agreed with each other in their hopes that individuals might rediscover from within their innate power of *xing*. Though each author allegedly attributed very different qualities to *xing* and understood the innate self to be capable of completely different goals, each of their emphases on individualized, natural sources of authority as determinants for behavior appears to be similar and significant." Leaving out the question on Yang Zhu's egoism and hedonism (Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China*, 53–59; and Philip Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, 24, 9), the "recovery model" of self-cultivation could be useful for Li Zhi, obviously in a different direction from Zhu Xi's.

[43] Li Zhi, *Fenshu*, *Da Deng Mingfu*, 1:41. The original text reads: 趨利避害，人人同心.

[44] The original text reads: 人即道也，道即人也，人外無道，道外亦無人.

[45] Li Zhi, *Fenshu*, *Lunzheng*, 3: 87. The original text reads: 夫道者，路也，不止一途.

or cynical discourse, but was the premise for a radical transformation in the perception of the individual and society. Like in Liniang's contrast between the natural and the cultivated in the "Peony Pavilion," the passions and desires that every man of the road experiences in his everyday life are identified with the true rites, and the true morality.

Moreover, values and virtues are neither absolute nor immune to change over time. Li Zhi targeted dogmatism and fundamentalism in his criticism against the orthodoxy, whose proponents wanted to impose moral and legal standards on the basis of past doctrines. Thus, following Li's critique, if Confucius had been able to return to the present he would not have used the parameters he adopted for his time. The Classics and the tradition can only offer suggestions that we must develop and complete with our experience and creative intuition:

> The judgment on right and wrong among men basically does not have a definitive character. This judgment depends on men, and there is not a definitive conclusion. The lack of a definitive judgment means that the evaluations of right and wrong run parallel without being in contradiction with each other. Therefore, what today is right or wrong can be precisely what for me, Li Zhuowu, is right or wrong; it may also correspond to the common judgment of thousands of generations of sages and of the great personages of the history; but it may also correspond to the opposite opinion that I hold, by overturning the one given in the past until today. I therefore believe that my value judgment is valid. I do not discuss for the Three Ancient Dynasties. But, during the three successive dynasties, Han, Tang and Song, for over eleven centuries not a single judgment on the right and wrong has been formulated. Why nobody has been able to do so? Because all have [always] borrowed what they thought would have been the judgment of Confucius on what is right and wrong, and so nobody has ever exercised his own judgment. So how do you rely on the judgment of others for the evaluation of right and wrong? Disputes on the right and wrong are like the passing of years and seasons, or the alternation of day and night, and cannot be reduced to the unit. What was right yesterday, is wrong today. What today is wrong, will still be right tomorrow. If we could revive Confucius today, we would not know how he himself would judge right and wrong. Therefore, how can we arbitrarily condemn or appreciate everything on the basis of a supposed definitive criterion? [. . .].[46]

And again, stressing the influence of circumstances and time in our perception of

[46] Li Zhi, *Cangshu*, *Shiji liezhuan zongmu qianlun*, 1:1.

reality and moral choices, Li Zhi goes on:

> A period of order is cyclically followed by a period of disorder. From the time of the Warring States on, I do not know how many times we have had [periods of] order and chaos. In case of disorder, it was quite lucky to escape with one's life. In the fortunate times of order, it was enough to fill one's stomach, no matter how simple and poor the food was; and if one could rest in peace, who could have cared whether it was a magnificent and spacious mansion? Those were times of extreme roughness, extreme barbarity—undoubtedly not refined conditions. No one loves roughness; but circumstances could not but be brutal. Even in cases of extreme barbarity, one who lives in that environment does not realise it [. . .].[47]

The concept of universality and respectability of the desires felt by everybody constitutes the core of a form of "individualism," or "personalism" that identifies the basis of the general (*gong*) in the particular (*si*). Li Zhi not only recognised that the reviled desires were positive in nature, but he set out to praise "selfishness" as the spring of action and social welfare:

> The human mind is selfishness: Without selfishness, there is no mind. He who works the land must have an interest in the harvest so that he works diligently; he or she who works at home must have an interest in accumulating wealth in order to shrewdly manage the household affairs; the student must have an interest in passing his exams in order to study well. Likewise, if a functionary was not interested in receiving his pay, he would not have sought the job [. . .].[48]

When Li Zhi speaks of profit, interest, self-advantage, dress, sexual activity, and career, his scope is beyond the classical natural needs for living and procreation inscribed in society; the discourse concerns the projections, wishes, and desires everybody nurtures, from the peasant to the scholar. In an open and developed society, what is individually ("selfishly") yearned for is understood as a "necessity." The constant reference to man's fundamental appetites goes *beyond the mere*

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[47] Li Zhi, *Cangshu*, *Shiji liezhuan zongmu qianlun*, 1:2. See also Li Zhi, *Fenshu* 焚书, *Zhanguo lun* 战国论, 1:261.

[48] Cf. *Cangshu*, *Deye ruchen houlun*, 32:544. Li Zhi's praise of "selfishness"—considered the basic extension towards self-realisation—recalls Bernard de Mandeville's praise of private vices in his paradoxical *Fable of the Bees: Or, Private Vices, Public Benefits*, a masterpiece on human nature, psychology and of social science, published at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

reference to concepts already known in antiquity, as it attributes an important dialectical function within social relations to the constitutive nature of desires. Li Zhi, as well many thinkers of the Taizhou school, had opened a new way. Wang Yangming started with the priority of *liangzhi* over doctrine and scholastic teachings. Wang Gen divorced sagehood from the appurtenance of the ruling class, and focused on the concept of *ziran*, "spontaneity," as the true response to one's innate moral nature, the natural expression of self. Their respect for individuality was based on the belief in man's natural feelings. As Takehiko Okada notes, "arguing for the freedom and equality of man, they strove for the emancipation from traditional mores which were, in their view, restrictive of human freedom. They regarded traditional morality, status ethics, and moral principles as restrictions of the individual."[49]

We can call these perspectives an anthropological innovation of Li Zhi. It marks the beginning of the transition from the system of "moral subject of roles"—the orthodox Confucian definition of the individual in the society—to the system of an "individual subject of desires," which is the basis of a new morality of respect of individuals in a community.[50] This new concept of self and of the individual is not influenced by Western elements, but is the extreme result of a process in which traditional elements in Chinese thought were combined: The Daoist care for the body—which is considered part of the cosmos, the Buddhist freedom from conventions and rules, and the syncretism of non-orthodox elements concerning the innateness of emotions and desires. Various elements concur in this trend from the late Ming period, such as the rehabilitation of passions and desires, the reversal of values (*qi* versus *li*, desire versus heavenly principles), and the critical reflection on the five relations hierarchy, especially between ruler and subject, and male and female.[51]

Man could never be sacrificed in the name of an idea or a community. Going on

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[49] Takehiko Okada, "Wang Chi and the Rise of Existentialism," 139. See also de Bary, "Individualism and Humanitarianism in Late Ming Thought," 145–247.

[50] For the concept of "individualism," see Donald Munro, *Individualism and Holism: Studies in Confucian and Taoist Values*. Yu Ying-shih, ("Individualism and the Neo-Taoist Movement in Wei-Chin China," 121–55) stresses the rise of individualism at the end of the Han dynasty, the attention to the freedom and independence of the individual above social order, the search for singularity and eccentricity against conformism, and spontaneity and feelings against social roles and rituals.

[51] Cf. P. Santangelo, "Transition to Modernity: New Results of Textual Analysis on Emotions and Collective Imagery," *International Communication of Chinese Culture*, special issue "Emotions and Collective Imagery in the Transition to Modernity," 9–30, and P. Santangelo, *L'uomo fra cosmo e società. Il neoconfucianesimo e un millennio di storia cinese*.

with his argument, Li Zhi even vaguely advocates for a new form of government, in which men are autonomously governed according to their own specific dispositions, and people are not tyrannised by the sovereign.[52] Li Zhi proposes that each man rule himself autonomously, no longer bound to the prohibitions of the authorities.[53] Emblematic is "The ideal order is one in which the authorities' interventions are reduced to a minimum. The ideal government is that which you do not notice. The ideal doctrine is that which cannot be heard."[54] This is the consequence of his system, where neither sage nor doctrine had a monopoly of truth and wisdom: "Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism constitute a single doctrine because at their origin all aim to understand the Dao."[55] Indeed, the plurality of doctrines is positive because it offers a variety of paths that everyone follows according to his own tendencies, habits, and education:

> Common to all men is eating to satisfy their appetite: The southerners eat rice, and find it tasty, while the northerners millet that they find equally tasty. Therefore nobody from the north to the south envies the other, and if a northerner had to emigrate to the south, or vice versa, he would not refuse to eat the food he finds on the spot. Thus, the Dao in Confucianism and Daoism is like rice in the south and millet in the north. If one of the two is sufficient even if you do not prefer it, why reject it? Why? Both being suitable to satisfy appetite, for those who are really hungry there is no question in choosing.[56]

All men are potentially good and sagacious, therefore they do not need models and masters. All true sages, from Confucius to Buddha, would have refrained from imposing rules on their disciples, because the moral laws which come from outside are nothing but empty words for deceiving the people.

> Sages do not burden men with duties, because all human beings can be wise. Therefore Wang Yangming stated that all streets are crowded with saints, and the Buddha taught that, being the mind the Buddha and the Buddha the mind, all men are Buddha. If everyone can be a saint, the saint will not have anything

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[52] Li Zhi, *Chu Tan ji*, *Shiyou* 10, 20:358.

[53] The original text reads: 以人治人，以人本自治; Li Zhi, *Ming Deng Dao Gu Lu*, *xia*, in *Li Wenling ji*, 19:575. The original text reads: 人能自治，不待禁而止之也.

[54] Li Zhi，*Fenshu*, *Song Zheng Dayao Xu*, 3:113. The original text reads: 至道無爲，至治無聲，至教無言.

[55] Li Zhi，*Xu Fenshu, Sanjiao gui ru shuo*, 2:75. The original text reads: 儒、道、釋之學，一也，以其初皆期於聞道也.

[56] Li Zhi，*Fenshu, Ziyou jie lao xu*, 3:110.

> to teach except the truth of not thinking of him/herself. Therefore I do not wish to speak. If anyone can be a Buddha, Buddha will not have to save any living beings. [. . .] Realising that all are Buddhas, we are ready to share the good with others; who would then claim to possess the monopoly of the good? And if others share this good with me, who would claim to be the only one to have this good? That is why it is said that from peasants to potters, from fishermen up to the emperor, there is none from which we cannot fail to learn. [. . .] If we can learn from common people like peasants, potters, and fishermen much more than we can draw from all those sages, why then limit ourselves to the study of Confucius in order to be orthodox? [. . .][57]

This important convergent trend contributed to the elaboration of a new representation of human nature and personality, and aimed at the rehabilitation of passions and desires, culminating with Li Zhi.[58] To sum up the process of rehabilitation of desires and passions, we can single out the following innovative themes that legitimise them on the basis of morality itself, of cosmological and natural order—or even challenge the traditional relationship between principle-emotion:

1. Moral justification of emotion-desire: Emotion promotes virtue (情=仁)

Qing is no longer contrasted with moral principles, but is considered the source of morality (see also item 3, 真情). It is the indispensable feeling behind the virtuous relationships between father and son, lord and subject, elder and youth, and so on. In the first preface to the "Anatomy of love passions," *Qingshi*, Feng Menglong states that a secret love affair can become universal emotion (私情化公) and then, in support of emotions, stressed the link between them and Confucian virtues: "The son has affection toward his father, the subject toward his ruler, and we can see any other human relationship from this perspective . . . . "[59] We can read also in the Preface of the *Yuerong bian*: "Therefore, all loyal subjects, filial sons, upright officials, and chaste wives are, without exception, persons rich in emotion."[60]

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[57] Li Zhi, *Fenshu, Da Geng sikou*, 1:31.

[58] For Li Zhi see also Zuo Dongling, *Li Zhi yu wan Ming wenxue sixiang*, and Lee Pauline C, *Li Zhi, Confucianism and the Virtue of Desire*, 7–9, 70–71.

[59] Feng Menglong, *Qingshi*, 序 1 吳人龍子猶序 (Preface by Long Ziyou, a man from Wu). The original text reads: 子有情於父，臣有情於君。推之种种相，俱作如是观 . . .

[60] Online edition: http://zh.wikisource.org/zh/%E6%82%85%E5%AE%B9%E7%B7%A8. The original text reads: 故凡忠臣孝子，義士節婦，莫非大有情人.

2. Vitalistic justification of emotions: Emotions convey life (情=生)

The force of *qing-yu* gives constant birth to the world, and life and reproduction in the universe are based on desire: "Without *qing* universe would not produce anything, and without *qing* all things and beings would not continuously reproduce themselves mutually. Producing and reproducing is without end because *qing* is never extinguished. If the four great elements are all illusion, only *qing* is real."[61] And again "*Qing* starts with the relations between male and female."[62] For Luo Rufang (1515–88), the concept of *qing* 情 is inseparable from *sheng* 生. A cosmogonic narrative is at the basis of Feng Menglong's "Anatomy of love passions" 情史, for instance in its prefaces and its chapters on the miraculous power of *qing* (情靈) and its metamorphoses (情化). This perception is shared by the priority of the male-female relationship in Li Zhi, but also by the death and resurrection of Liniang in the "Peony Pavilion," and by the materialisation of desires in *Liaozhai zhiyi*. This trend goes on in the Qing period, and Yuan Mei is convinced that desire is not the dangerous enemy as depicted by orthodox Neo-Confucians, but on the contrary lies at the foundation of human actions and life: "Love for goods and for sexual pleasures are the desires of human beings [. . .] Without feelings and desires, the human race would have become extinct long ago."[63]

3. Nobility of pure emotions: genuine and naturally moral emotion (真情)

"Genuine love" is the innate and moral link which unites all beings: "Concerning the origin of loyalty, filial piety, chastity, and heroism, acting from morality is inherently forced, while from emotions it is genuine and sincere."[64]

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[61] Feng Menglong, *Qingshi*, 序 1 吳人龍子猶序 (Preface by Long Ziyou). The original text reads: 天地若無情，不生一切物。一切物無情，不能环相生。生生而不灭，由情不灭敌。四大皆幻设，惟情不虛假.

[62] Feng Menglong, *Qingshi*, 序 2 江南詹詹外史述 (Preface by the unofficial historian Zhanzhan of Jiangnan). The original text reads: 情始于男女.

[63] Yuan Mei, "Collection of poems and compositions from the cottage of the Xiaocang Hill," in *Xiaocang shanfang shiwenji*, 22:4, cit. also by Schmidt, *Harmony Garden: The Life, Literary Criticism, and Poetry of Yuan Mei (1716–1798)*, 59–60. The original text reads: 好貨好色人之欲也 . . . 無情欲則人類久絕.

[64] Feng Menglong, *Qingshi · Qing zhen lei*, 情史·情貞類, 敘 (On Chastity). The original text reads: 自來忠孝節烈之事，從道理上做者必勉強，從至情上出者必真切.

4. Active moral function of emotions: the best way of moral realisation (情教)

Practicing the "doctrine of love," or "sentimental education," is the way people are spontaneously induced to be virtuous, without any pressure of duty ("I wish to establish the doctrine of *qing*, to teach all who are living: The son will feel *qing* for his father, the minister will feel *qing* for his ruler, and this feeling will be extended to any other relationships."[65] "The Six Classics all teach by *qing*").[66]

5. Reversal of values: challenge to the social hierarchy and to the priority of principle (情 >< 理)

Tang Xianzu contrasts passions and principles in favour of the former. After celebrating the exceptional power of love passion, even stronger than life and death, Tang concludes that people cannot understand the affairs of this world. And because one is not able to thoroughly explain them, one always resorts to principle in investigating them. Principle, however, does not work in this case (the love affair between Du Liniang and Liu Mengmei), and how can one know if passion is the only way to understand?[67] It is not by chance that Liniang discovers love reading a Confucian Classic, by means of her free interpretation that challenges the orthodox exegetical tradition.[68] She starts to vent her emotions in the abandoned garden, fulfills her imagined love and sexual desire in her dream, and although she dies for love, she can recover her freedom as a wandering soul (游魂). This way Hell is presented as more humane than the Confucian world, and even the flower spirit is sympathetic to her longing for love. Moreover, in the "Peony Pavilion," by refusing to obey her father's order to leave her lover and go back to the condition of family daughter, Liniang defies the patriarchal system and wins. This

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[65] Feng Menglong, *Qingshi*, 序 1 吳人龍子猶序 (Preface by Long Ziyou). The original text reads:我欲立情教，教誨諸眾生。子有情于父，臣有情于君。推之種種相，俱作如是觀.

[66] Feng Menglong, *Qingshi*, 序 2 江南詹詹外史述 (Preface by the unofficial historian Zhanzhan of Jiangnan). The original text reads: 六經皆以情教也.

[67] "嗟夫，人世之事，非人世所可盡。自非通人，恒以理相格耳。第雲理之所必無，安知情之所必有邪!" *Mudanting ji tici*, in *Tang Xianzu shiwenji*, *juan* 33, also in *Mudanting*.

[68] Cheng Yu-Yin (2013) notices in the following: "One day, while reading the *guanju* chapter, she sighs and comments: "Here we may observe the full extent of love as understood by the sage (*shengren zhi qing jin jian yu ci* 聖人之情盡見於此). As human beings felt (*huai* 懷) in ancient times, so they feel today, and how should it be other than this? This is the first time in her life—as well as in the text—that the word *qing* is used. Interestingly, Liniang would compare her *longing* with that of a sage's *qing* in antiquity and see no distinction between them."

does not mean that she finally reaches a reconciliation between the subjective reasons of passions and the objective reasons of society, drawing a balance between erotic pleasure and mundane reality.[69] Tang Xianzu seems influenced by Li Zhi, who at that time argued that the relationship of husband and wife should prevail over that of father and child. *Mudan ting* was undoubtedly influenced by this debate and by the Taizhou school.[70]

Furthermore, we should consider that according to Zhu Xi, the cosmic energy (*qi*)—of which every being is composed—is differently pure: Literati and males at the top of society were composed of the purest *qi*, while people of lower strata and women were endowed with a less pure energy. This means a legitimation of social hierarchy by the cosmological system. The challenge to the world order and social-moral hierarchy was expressed in the revival and reappraisal of the statement of the poet Xie Ximeng, a disciple of the famous Neo-Confucian thinker Lu Xiangshan (1139–93), to his master: "*The marvellous and splendid energy of the universe is always concentrated in the woman and not in the man.*"[71] This statement smacked of sacrilege and subversion, because it referred to the Neo-Confucian cosmological conception but overturned its universal order. On several occasions in his works, Feng Menglong cited Xie's proposition with slight variations, although he was not the only one. The rediscovery of this quotation and the rise of the new anti-rigorist and non-conformist trends of the late Ming period made it proverbial also throughout the next dynasty.[72] This erosion of the correspondence between the hierarchical order of society and moral prestige can be found among many writers at the end of the Ming dynasty. Zhang Dai (1597–1689?) presented some examples of artisans that had created considerable fortunes and became so important they were treated at the same level of the officials and the gentry, and He Xinyin (1517–79) encouraged this social mobility.[73]

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[69] Li Wai-yee, *Enchantment and disenchantment: Love and Illusion in Chinese Literature*, 50–64.

[70] Lu Tina, *Persons, Roles and Minds*, 125–26, and Cheng Yu-yin, "Tang Xianzu's (1550–1616) Peony Pavilion and Taizhou Philosophy: A Perspective from Intellectual History," 3–29.

[71] The original text reads: 天地英靈之氣，不鍾于男人而鍾于婦人.

[72] Feng Menglong, *Qingshi*, 4:132; 5:154; Feng Menglong, *Xingshi hengyan*, 11:226.

[73] Cf. Zhang Dai, *Tao'an mengyi*, 5:63; Cf. He Xinyin, *He Xinyin ji*, 3:53–54. Feng Menglong (1574–1646), in one of his stories, has a high official say that farmers, artisans, and merchants, although despised, did not save up on the efforts of their respective jobs. *Xingshi hengyan*, ed., *Jianshantang*, 17:344.

Moreover, in Feng Menglong's preface to "Mountain Songs" (山歌) the reversal of values is expressed by resorting to the aforementioned pure and genuine emotions: "Borrowing from the genuine love between man and woman as an antidote for the fake medicine of moralistic rules."[74]

Gu Yanwu (1613–82), Huang Zongxi (1610–95), and Wang Fuzhi (1619–92)—the three great thinkers straddling the end of the Ming and the beginning of the Qing dynasty—had developed their thought systems in the tradition. Yet the collapse of the glorious Ming dynasty and the Manchu invasion were an occasion for a reflection on the history of the empire and its destiny. Other trends carried on a strong interest for what is practical and useful against metaphysical and doctrinal speculations. The perception of history as continuous change, and its acceptance as a natural phenomenon led many thinkers to focus attention on contemporary events and on remedies. An example is the programme of the Fushe 複社, "to recreate the ancient teachings," *xingfu guxue* 興復古學: This did not mean restoring the ancient institutions, but creatively rethinking the lessons of the past in order to cope with contemporary problems using new solutions. What is worth noting is that all these answers were elaborated in the ambit of Chinese tradition, and they were not influenced by any Western ideologies.

Thus this essay focuses on some of the literati's reactions to the great social changes at the end of the Ming and the beginning of the Qing dynasty, stressing some specific new ideas and attitudes. Urbanisation, the great inflow of silver, and the acceleration of trade and mobility raised new challenges to the orthodox view of the world and the Neo-Confucian order. At the end of the Middle Ages in Europe, in front of analogous changes in Italy and Netherlands, intellectuals elaborated new cultural trends, such as Humanism, and new literary forms appeared. In China, we can notice several new intellectual answers in philosophy (Yangming schools), literature (Gong'an school and boom of autobiographical writings), the existential (cult of *qing* and new concept of self), and politics (Gu Yanwu, Huang Zongxi, and Wang Fuzhi).[75]

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[74] Feng Menglong, *Shan'ge*, "Preface." The original text reads: 借男女之真情，發名教之僞藥. The title can also be rendered as "Clandestine Love," since the main topic is related to illicit relations. In fact, the humorous tone was shared by popular songs and jokes, which were often classified together (cf. Kathryn Lowry, *The Tapestry of Popular Songs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century China: Reading, Imitation, and Desire*, 14). On the so-called trilogy, see Hsu Pi-ching, *Beyond Eroticism: A Historian's Reading of Humor in Feng Menglong's Child's Folly*, and "Feng Meng-Lung's Treasury of Laughs: Humorous Satire on Seventeenth Century Chinese Culture and Society," 1042–67.

[75] On a more active concept of people's political responsibility, expanding the decision-making power in the private sector and local public opinion, see Mizoguchi Yūzō, "The Ming-Qing Transition as Turning Point," 528–31, 341–43, 566–68.

6. Values, tastes and virtues are neither absolute nor metahistorical.

Huang Zongxi, at the beginning of his preface of 1693 to the *Mingru xue'an* starts with his new ontological and epistemological concepts: All reality and phenomena correspond to the transformation of *qi*, and consequently the minds of people continuously vary and change. But it is the activity of the mind that allows man to understand and act: The mind is the subject, it does not need a ruling principle, and the search for principles in fact is the mind's search through and toward different phenomena. Here we can find the influence of Wang Yangming in highlighting the priority of the mind, but also the overcoming of the identity of mind and principle. By denying a basic identical moral rule in human minds, which are different and changeable, Huang in fact seems to reach analogous conclusions as Li Zhi: Principles are not outside human life and history, and they are not inborn and immutable.

In parallel with the end of the Ming dynasty, against the prevailing academic poetic style of modeling on the ancient (Tang), the literati of the Gong'an circle 公安派, headed by Yuan Hongdao (1568–1610) proposed new languages and styles. They emphasised the changes of literature according to the times, the prevalence of individual personality and the expression of the "creative sensitivity" (*xingling* 性靈) in imitation, and the value of drama at the level of poetry. We already have seen in previous Li Zhi's quotations that rites and social practices are not metahistorical rules abstractly imposed from the past, but the practices that are common to all people and what is fitting to individual tastes, coming from genuine and natural self (真己). All other rituals are imposed from outside, artificial, and thus are inhumane.[76]

The study of history, according to Huang Zongxi allows one to inquire into different experiences and thus understand human nature, especially the multiplicity of transformations of the human mind according to different situations, times and conditions.[77] Huang and his school thought that historiographic writings were the

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[76] Li Zhi, *Fenshu*, *Siwu shuo*, 3:101. On the "four interdictions" see *Lunyu*, *Yanyuan*, 1. The original text reads: 從外而入者謂之非禮. See also footnote 48.

[77] "That which fills Heaven and Earth is Mind. Its transformations are unfathomable and cannot assume but myriad forms. The Mind has no original substance except what is achieved by its efforts. Thus, to exhaustively comprehend principles is exhaustively comprehend Mind's myriad manifestations rather than the myriad variations of all phenomena. [. . .] But the recorded dialogues of the former scholars show that each of them was different, although they all reflected the mind-in-itself, which is always changing and quite without rest. One's insistence upon fixing the situation will turn out to be quite futile and useless." Huang Zongxi, *Mingru xue'an*, *Zixu*, trans., Julia Ching (*The Records of Ming Scholars by Huang Tsung-his*, 41) with small changes.

main source for seeking the heavenly principles, as the latter were intrinsic in human life. Outside human affairs (*renshi* 人事) the principle of righteousness (*yi li* 義理) cannot be found. Parallel to the "historicisation" of principles was the analogous re-interpretation of the Classics by the West Zhejiang School. Both Zhejiang schools concurred to cancel the transcendence and essentiality of principles, using the relativisation of values according to time and occasion: Natural principles of essentiality were reversed as empirical principles depending on whether they were experiences or classics.[78] Two other thinkers have contributed to a new approach to texts. Gu Yanwu transformed the study of Classics into a textual philological analysis. Wang Fuzhi, introduced the dichotomy of the "merits rooted in virtues" (明德爲本) and the ability of ruling people,[79] as well as two levels of values: The evolution of *qi* which involved good and evil, and changes and assemblies of *qi* related to human beings.[80]

The Praise of Folly: A Challenge to Human Nature and Personality

Among the ways to turn upside down the hierarchy of values and roles we may consider the use of irony, the representation of absurdity, such as the prise for

As Zhang Zhiqiang writes, concerning the East Zhejiang scholarship, "History is the human mind presented through human lives, and human lives presented through human minds. Learning meanings and principles by studying nature and destiny thus shared the same fundamentals and content as studying history, and that is why the study of history can help govern a society, that is, nature and principles were accessible through human lives. In reverse, one can also say that the reason for studying history is that it can access nature and destiny, and thereby change human lives, that is, the so-called 'know all the changes through history and research relationships between Heaven and human beings.'" In Zhang Zhiqiang and Huang Deyuan, "From the 'Alternative School of Principles' to the Lay Buddhism: On the Conceptual Features of Modern Consciousness—Only School from the Perspective of the Evolution of Thought during the Ming and Qing Dynasties," 69, online: http://www.jstor.org/stable/40343909). The same article explains (pp. 68–69): "Varying minds are presented as varying things in the world."

[78] Zhang Zhiqiang, "From the 'Alternative School of Principles' to the Lay Buddhism: On the Conceptual Features of Modern Consciousness—Only School from the Perspective of the Evolution of Thought during the Ming and Qing Dynasties," 73.

[79] Wang Fuzhi, *Du sishu daquanshuo, (Daxue)*, 1: 48–49.

[80] Wang Fuzhi, *Du sishu daquanshuo*, 10: 660–63. The coordination of desires could produce harmony, ibid., 4:247–48.

obsessions, foolishness and unconventionality. Variations on the concept of "foolishness" can be found both in English and Chinese. The term can mean the "lack or retardation of mental brightness and understanding," partial or total mental deficiency, the "lack of judgement and wisdom," excessive emotional involvement, foolishness, and madness: In other words, fools are not compliant with "common sense" and are thus unintelligible to many members of society. These two levels are relatively distinct, although contiguous, and reveal important information on values, as well as new models of personality, such as unconventional characters.[81] Mental deficiency was equated to turbidity and obtuseness in the *hun-ming* 昏明 dyad, while traditionally madness has been considered an illness and deviance.[82] Thus these attributes are generally pejorative, either concerning intellectual ability, cognitive or evaluative functions, and behaviour. However, in the Chinese Middle Ages, the same terms were used to describe a few cases of extraordinary individuals, endowed with a special aesthetic sensibility, for "aesthetic" and "literary" folly.[83] This folly, involving neither murder nor violence, manifested excessive passions, unusual beliefs, and abnormal perceptions of reality, either against social conventions or against common sense.

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[81] See my preface in Frances Weightman, *The Quest for the Childlike in Seventeenth Century Chinese Fiction. Fantasy, Naivety, and Folly*, where I discuss the new trend of the "romanticisation" of obsessions, foolishness, and abnormal behaviours as an aesthetic sign of distinction from vulgar people. Cf. also my *Materials for an Anatomy of Personality in Late Imperial China*, 323–80.

[82] For the conceptualisation of madness in Chinese civilisation, see Ng Vivien Wai-Ying, *Madness in Late Imperial China: From Illness to Deviance*. The volume demonstrates how madness was recognised as an illness. The medical classic *Huangdi neijing* describes two in major kinds of madness: *dian* 癲 and *kuang* 狂, the former for overabundance of *yin*, and the latter for an excess of *yang*—until in the last dynasty it became a criminal deviance.

[83] In the *Shishuo xinyu* (A new account of tales of the world, fifth century), various cases of hidden talents—like Wang Zhan considered stupid (痴), but later turned out to be the opposite (8:17). Other personages, who are in fact misunderstood geniuses, are shown as eccentrics. See Wai-Yee Li's opening keynote speech of The Fourth East Asia Conference on Comparative Literature: *Obsession in Context*, Soochow University, Taipei, March 10, 2012, "*Chi* 癡, *pi* 癖, *shi* 嗜, *hao* 好: Genealogies of Obsession in Chinese Literature" (http://www.scu.edu.tw/english/complit/handouts/Keynote.pdf). However the aesthetic pride for eccentricity as sign of distinction is clearly manifested later, from the Ming period, although precedents can be traced back to the late Tang and Song dynasties. Han Yu (768–824) regularly used the term *kuang* in a positive sense to celebrate subjectivity, attributing it to himself and to other men of letters. Over time these terms gradually became an expression of a growing individualism among the better-educated strata in the richer areas of China.

Terms such as *chi* 痴, *kuang* 狂, and *pi* 癖 later acquired an important role in the positive representation of distinctive personalities with passions and obsessions. The so-called *chiren* 痴人, who is affected by foolishness and obsession, can go to the extreme by putting his obsessions on display as the sole purpose of his life. One can become "mad with amorous passion" (情痴) or have a mania for books (書痴), or have other fixations, such as a special passion for collecting rare rocks (石痴), or for the cultivation of flowers (花痴), as do several protagonists of literary works in late imperial China. We can see for instance the "love of flowers" (爱花), which had become increasingly popular, not only among men of letters, but also among ordinary people, especially during the Ming era. In Feng Menglong's short story "The old gardener meets an immortal" (灌园叟晚逢仙女, 醒世恒言第四卷), Qiu Xian, owing to his immoderate passion for flowers, neglects his farm work, breaching the social rules that moderate farmers' activities. Zhang Dai (1597–1689?), in the *Tao'an mengyi* 陶庵夢憶 (Remembrances of Tao'an's dreams) describes the maniacal passion of one named Jin Rusheng in treating his innumerable flowers and his struggles against their parasites.[84] Zhang Dafu (1554–1630) extolls an unexpected aspect of the personality of a high official, Wang Xijue (1534–1611), well known for his courage and his rigorous principles.[85] Wang's naivety and innocence, which he displays in his passion for chrysanthemums, is contrasted with the sterner facets of his personality. This phenomenon was manifested as part of the so called "cult of *qing* 情" or "cult of passions," and was an important intellectual and literary movement developed in the late Ming dynasty, aiming at revaluating emotions against the traditional diffidence for passions and desires (*qing*).[86] We can draft the following list of terms

[84] See Zhang Dai, *Tao'an mengyi*, *juan* 1.

[85] Wang Xijue had to resign because of his opposition to the powerful prime minister Zhang Juzheng and, after the latter's death, was responsible for implementing highly rigorous policies.

[86] This movement has been discussed rather broadly in literature. I will only mention Chaves J., "The Expression of Self in the Kung-an School: Non-Romantic Individualism"; Gōyama Kiwamu, "Kōrōmu ni okeru nyonin sūhai shisō to sono genryū" (He Shanjiu, trans., "*Hongloumeng* de nüxing chongbai sixiang ji qi yuanliu," *Hongloumeng xuekan*, 32, 2, 1987), *Chūgoku bungaku ronshū*, 12, 1983; Gōyama Kiwamu, "Min Shin jidai ni okeru jōshi to sono bungaku," *Itō Sōhei kyōju kinen Chūgokugaku ronshū*, 1986; Guo Yingde, *Chiqing yu huanmeng*; Li Wai-yee, *Enchantment and Disenchantment: Love and Illusion in Chinese Literature*, and "The Rhetoric of Spontaneity in Late-Ming Literature"; Martin W. Huang, "Sentiments of Desire: Thoughts on the Cult of Qing in Ming-Qing Literature," 153–84, and *Desire and Fictional Narrative in Late Imperial China*, 23–56; Huang Weizong, "'Bian er chai' he 'Lin Lanxiang' zhong de 'qing' yu tongxinglian,"41–66; Wang Gang, *Langman qinggan yu zongjiao jingshen: Wanming wenxue yu wenhua sichao*; Anthony Yu, *Rereading the Stone:*

involving the above concepts:

	痴 "infatuation"
	情種/風流/冤家 "unconventional," "passionate," "lover"
Cult of *qing*	狂/瘋/癲 "unrestrained"
情教	癖/嗜/凝 "obsession," "addiction"
	呆/蠢/愚 "foolishness"
	奇人 "eccentric"

In much of Ming and Qing literature, a state characterized by the absolute refusal to compromise with reality, related for instance to infatuation, dysfunction, worldly incompetence, naivety, or inability to relate to society, is somewhat celebrated, and is reminiscent of the Daoist "child" who has not yet fully established himself as an adult. It is not by chance that the title of "Child's Folly," *tongchi* 童痴, is used for three of Feng Menglong's anthologies, the *Tongchi sannong* 童痴三弄, i.e. "Hanging Twigs," *Gua zhier* 挂枝儿, "Mountain Songs," *Shan'ge* 山歌, and "Treasury of Laughs," *Xiaofu* 笑府. The term *tongchi,* "child's folly," used by Feng Menglong and recalling Li Zhi's "childlike mind" (童心), combines the notions of childishness and of foolishness, rejecting the moral rules (*daoli* 道理) for a "good name," *meiming* 美名, that destroys the original genuine soul, *tongxin* 童心.[87] Madness could be seen as a challenge to the foundations of ordinary constructions, and in fact *chi* here means rebelling against conventions and orthodoxy.

The long wave of this literary trend, which was also the expression of a new sensibility, continued during the Qing dynasty. Writers used *Kuang* 狂 to describe a large variety of meanings. *Kuang* indicates an excess of any emotion, mainly in the case of love, and it is also used to express an immoderate emotional response, especially if combined with another specific term, such as "surprise," "joy," "wildness," or "sorrow." At times *kuang* can also be translated as "violent," "unrestrained," or "arrogant." In the *Honglou meng*, for example: "For no reason,

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Desire and the Making of Fiction in Dream of the Red Chamber, 80–108; the paragraph "The Ethos of Qing in the Late Ming Period," in Richard Wang, "The Cult of *Qing*: Romanticism in the Late Ming Period and in the Novel *Jiao Hong Ji*"; Paolo Santangelo, "Emotions and the Origin of Evil in Neo-Confucian Thought," 184–316, "Reconsidering the 'Cult of Qing' in Late Imperial China: A 'Romantic Movement' or a Conveyer of Social Values?" 133–63; Shi Hualuo, "Zhongguo yu Ouzhou 'aiqing' gainianhua de zongjiao yingxiang," 47–71.

[87] Li Zhi, *Fenshu*, *Tongxin shuo*, 97–99.

he sought out melancholy and regretfulness, sometimes appearing foolish as if he were crazy."[88] The term can be rendered, according to the context or compounds, as "crazy" (瘋狂，癲狂), "wildly arrogant" (狂妄), "irritable" (狂躁), "fickle" (輕狂), "violent" (狂烈), or "frenzied" (狂亂). Thus, in the following examples from Pu Songling's (1640–1715) *Liaozhai zhiyi* (Strange tales of the *Liaozhai*), the term can be translated as "fickle": "An came into the room little by little. The girl stood up and put on a serious face and said: 'You crazy man (狂郎), what do you wish to achieve by entering my room?'" In another passage, the term means something between "crazy" and "fickle," with a nuance of "audaciousness" in regards to the protagonist of another story, who is eccentric, and does not care about trifling things and conventions (不拘小節), and thus does not fear ghosts: "When Qi came closer, he saw under the candle that the young lady was as beautiful as a fairy, so he hugged her to his bosom. The girl smiled and said: "You crazily audacious man (狂生), don't you fear ghosts? You'll get yourself killed!" Qi forced her to undress and she did not quite reject his advances."[89] The same term can be used in its original meaning of "mad and wild" in the medical sense, but also as "having an excessive interest in something," synonymous with *pi* 癖, "obsession" and "addiction," such as in the term "alcoholism" (酒狂).[90]

As Judith Zeitlin notes, the term *pi* is charged with strong emotion and with a wide range of implicit meanings. This was particularly true during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the concept of obsession had deeply penetrated into all aspects of literati life.[91] Xie Zhaozhe (1567–1624) stresses the variety of human addictions and fondness and lists some historical examples in a hierarchy based on values.[92] For instance, Xie states that activities appreciated by the gentry, such as roaming through scenic areas and reading new books that have never been seen before, come from good natural dispositions and cannot be considered

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[88] Cao Xueqin, *Honglou meng*, 3:52. The original text reads: 無故尋愁覓恨，有時似傻如狂.

[89] Pu Songling, *Liaozhai* tales "The Flower Fairy" (5:636) and "Zhang Aduan" (5:628), respectively.

[90] Cao Xueqin, *Honglou meng*, 38:563.

[91] See also the compounds such as *pixing* 癖性, which may indicate the foolish inclinations of a "strange" person like Baoyu (see later), *gupi* 孤癖, literally "eccentric and peculiar tastes," synonym of *gupi* 孤僻, *guaipi* 怪僻, and *yupi* 迂僻, in the meaning of "strange" and "unsociable." While *gupi* 孤癖 stresses the peculiar and strange tastes of an eccentric subject, *gupi* 孤僻 emphasises the eccentricity of an unsociable person. See Cao Xueqin, *Honglou meng*, 5:90, 63:962, 74:1126, 41:615. See Zeitlin's essay, "The Petrified Heart: Obsession in Chinese Literature, Art, and Medicine," 1–26.

[92] 人之嗜好故自迥異.

insane.[93] He distinguishes the above predilections from others that, although not harmful are however maniacal, such as raising geese (蓄鵝), braying like donkeys (作驢鳴), watching ox fights (看斗牛), or collecting stones (好石). He describes other attachments that hinder consciousness in dealing with people (處世大覺妨礙), such as obsessive fondness for cleanliness (好潔), taboo characters (好忌諱), or ghosts and spirits (好鬼). Finally he lists those strange tastes (逐臭) and fetishes for silk wrappings of bound feet (嗜足紈), bedbugs (嗜臭蟲), earthworms (蚯蚓), or females' menses (嗜女人月水).[94] Other obsessive attachments can be for a musical instrument (癖嗜琴), for money (錢癖), or by possessing a strong homoerotic inclination (斷袖之癖). To him acceptable and decent manias were those for books, paintings, epigraphy, calligraphy, stones, flowers, musical instruments, tea, and to some extent wine.

One can find one of the finest poetic incarnations of the relationship that blossomed between Xing Yunfei, a rock collector, and his stones in a story written by Pu Songling.[95] In the chapter of "A Survey of Talks Old and New," *Gujin tan'gai*, which presents various kinds of obsessions, Feng Menglong quotes Yuan Hongdao's judgment, which explains this new individualistic spirit. Citing famous cases of attachment to certain flowers or rocks, Yuan Hongdao considers such attitudes basically to be expressions of love for oneself: "[In the cases of] the chrysanthemums of Tao Qian, the plum flowers of Lin Bu, and the stones of Mi Fu, they actually do not mean a love for chrysanthemums, plums, or stones, but they all are rather the love for oneself."[96] As Judith Zeitlin has noted, the obsession is a function of a greater understanding of oneself.[97]

Moreover, although literally *dai* 呆, *chun* 蠢, and *yu* 愚 indicate a lack of understanding or an abnormal perception of reality, implying a negative judgment, their use varies in accordance to circumstances, tone, and the emotional condition of the subject. Feng Menglong, in his *Gujin tan'gai*, presents several examples of such a "Romantic" trend, where to be "crazy" and "foolish" is a sign of distinction: A whole chapter (the third) is dedicated to "infatuation-insanity" (痴); another (the fourth) to the state of being "naïve-foolish-dull" (愚，蠢，呆，糊涂); and another

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[93] 樂好游涉山水; 喜未聞見新書;自天性不足爲病.

[94] 近于僻矣而未害也; See Xie Zhaozhe's *Wuza zu*, 7:33b–34a, in *Xuxiu sikuquanshu* (Four Treasures, Sequence), 1130. 子部. 雜家類, 481–82; *Biji xiaoshuo daguan*, 3726–27.

[95] See Pu Songling, *Liaozhai* tale "Shi Qingxu" (11:1502).

[96] The original text reads: 陶之菊，林之梅，米之石，非爱菊梅与石也。皆吾爱吾也. Feng Menglong, *Gujin tan'gai* (*Gujin xiao shi*), Zhang Wanjun, ed., *Shi*, 9: 324.

[97] Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale*, 70.

(the ninth) to "obsessions" (癖).[98] These character traits are not only presented for entertainment; they seem to be considered crucial in differentiating the personalities of those who bear these characteristics from "ordinary people." The fashion of affecting aesthetic eccentricities was so widespread that Feng Menglong distinguishes the "true foolishness" from the fashionable affected and insincere state of folly: "To be really insane and do not pretend to be [. . .]."[99] This means that such states were not just the product of a literary creation, but could be highly sought after—at least within some intellectual circles. In the minds of the truly "infatuated," as Xie Zhaozhe states, "even if life and death are very important, what one is fond of is much more important."[100] Zhang Dai, as well, considers strong passions and manias (*pi* 癖) to be a sign of "genuine character" (*zhenqi* 真氣) and an attestation of good friendship, even if these traits are seen as flaws and defects (*ci* 疵).[101] The impact of Li Zhi's ideas, as well as the strong reaction of the orthodoxy against him, demonstrate how in fact the *kuangshi* 狂士 became a kind of role model for young people from high-ranking families who, dissatisfied with their lives or failure to pass exams, disdained pursuing a career as a bureaucrat. Thus, the Feng Menglong depicted the Song dynasty poet Liu Yong as a hero "mourned by famous courtesans," free from ambitions and remote from the intrigues of a political career, who preferred to lead a romantic life among courtesans—themselves paragons of fidelity and humanity.[102] Comparable to Liu Yong in their non-conformist behaviour are the depictions of Tang Yin and Lü

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[98] Contrasted with *mingli* ("reasonable," "understandable") (*Honglou meng*, 100:1488), *hutu* can be rendered also with "senseless," contrasted with "lucidity" (神志安定), and often may be used as self-derogatory (*Honglou meng*, 8:141; 85:1297), or as an offensive reference (*Honglou meng*, 65:1000; 65:997; 65:1001), as opposed to *mingbai*. *Hutu* can even be used for mental sickness, like in the case of Baoyu and Daiyu (*Honglou meng*, 96:1432; 97:1443).

[99] The original text reads: 惟不自謂癡乃真癡. *Gujin tan'gai*, 1995, *Mi dian shi*, 3:81–82. Huang Ching-sheng (*Jokes on the Four Books: Cultural Criticism in Early Modern China*, 100–101) speaks of "self-expression had become a matter of style," or "eremitism had been a part of convention of self-fashioning for so long that had become institutionalised, a mere dramatic gesture orchestrated to catch public attention." On true and fake "mountain men," see also Hsu Pi-ching, *Beyond Eroticism: A Historian's Reading of Humor in Feng Menglong's Child's Folly*, 126–28.

[100] Xie Zhaozhe, *Wuza zu*, 7:37 b, 3734.

[101] Zhang Dai, *Tao'an mengyi*, 4, *Qi Zhixiang pi*.

[102] Feng Menglong, *Gujin xiaoshuo*, 12.

Nan.[103]

Banqiao zaji, a 1693 *biji*, presents a certain Zou Gonglü from Wuxi, who pretended to be crazy by immersing himself in wine, spending money without restraint, and enjoying his life in the gay quarters wearing a red silk turban, paper-made garments, and high-heeled shoes.[104] Another typical personage of the refined and variegated life of Jiangnan cities was Zhang Kui (*zi* Xiuwo). He was well known in Suzhou for his refined tastes (for music, plays, flowers, incense, tea, and special delicacies), his strange character, his disorderly life, his homoerotic love affairs, and his disregard for money, which caused him to become extremely poor. Despite such scandalous and strange behaviour, "his contemporaries did not laugh at him, but did not take him into consideration either."[105]

Pu Songling also reverses the relationship between wisdom and foolishness. In the story "The Flower Fairy" (Hua Guzi) he states: "The foolish are extremely wise, and the indifferent are the most passionate."[106] Furthermore, in his commentary to "Abao," Pu Songling explains that "When a person is 'foolish' in nature, his mind is attentive (lit.: concentrated [by passions]). Thus, one 'foolish' in books must be good at writing; one 'foolish' in art must be good at crafts. Those downcast and unsuccessful in the world are all those who think they are not 'foolish.' And moreover [truly foolish] are those who waste fortunes, such as the debauched who tirelessly run after women or those who ruin their families through gambling, these are really idiots' affairs! This explains why the real fools are those who abuse their astuteness. How can Sun Zichu [the hero of 'Abao'] be called a 'fool?'"[107] *Ning* 凝 is synonym of "fixation" and "obsession," *pi* 癖. Pu Songling thus distinguishes between three categories: Normal people characterised by mediocrity; those who are prey to inexhaustible passions and thus lead a non-conformist life for better or for worse, some being overwhelmed by lust or gambling, ambition or greed (real foolishness together with extreme cunning); and the other group, who are the truly wise as they are spurred on by folly to achieve great things.

The hero of "Abao" illustrates this paradox. He is ridiculed by his companions and the woman he loves because of his naivety, which borders on catatonia. Here the author does not describe the inner reactions of the main characters, but they are clear from the consequences narrated in the story. For fun the girl promises to

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[103] Heroes respectively of *Jingshi tongyan*, 26 and *Xingshi hengyan*, 29.

[104] Yu Huai, *Banqiao zaji*, repr. in *Congshu jicheng*, 19.

[105] Ibid., 18. The original text reads: 時人共非笑之，弗顧也.

[106] The original text reads: 憨者慧之极，恕者情之至也.

[107] Pu Songling, *Liaozhai zhiyi*, 2:233–39, "Abao," 238.

marry him if he cuts off a finger, and he immediately complies with the girl's suggestion. In another story, Qiao Danian is ready to cut off a piece of his flesh for the woman he loves,[108] while others might drink poison or shorten their lives to satisfy the object of their passion. However, those suffering from this "sickness" are not mere buffoons, or ridiculous characters in a play, but appear on the whole as positive heroes, as innocents, with a heart and soul so pure as to appear paradoxical.

In "Yingning," a young fox-woman is considered by everyone to be stupid, because she laughs so readily and without any apparent motivation, but in the end, she demonstrates that she possesses great wisdom, virtue, and goodness.[109] Folly is therefore a non-conformist attitude, one that is free from hypocrisy, ulterior motives, and selfishness. In Pu Songling, those who are the victims of such folly, such as bookworms, usually have no grasp of practical, everyday life, or of women and their psychology. In his commentary to *Xiangyu* 香玉, Pu Songling seems to echo Feng Menglong's *Anatomy of Love* (情史類略): "When passion reaches its peak, it is possible to communicate with spirits: Flowers are transformed into fairies and are united with men, and men, after their death, love the flowers with their souls. Isn't it profound the love that binds them? If one dies, the other does likewise, and not because of the moral principle of a widow's chastity, but rather the dying for love."[110] This "madness" is thus judged positively—although the term is originally negative—with aesthetic connotations of sickness, imbalance, excess, and disproportionate attachment to trifles.[111]

In the *Liaozhai* tales, the challenge that comes from such mental attitudes is not directed against Confucian virtues—as indeed these are often eulogised—but rather against conformity and hypocrisy, arrogance and corruption, and some gender stereotypes. The message is however destabilising in its play between the normal and abnormal, the objective and subjective, and the control and freedom of desires. Some other characters, like Du Shaoqing in *Rulin waishi* (The scholars), are considered "different from others" (不同), "strange men" (奇人), and "uncommon" (不俗), because they are indifferent to honours and money (功名富貴) while freely practising art or whatever it is that they like. Du Shaoqing is a another example of this type of behaviour with his bohemian rejection of conventional wisdom and his denunciation of the careerism of his day, and yet, despite this apparent unconventionality, his lifestyle is orthodox. A paragon of

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[108] See Pu Songling, *Liaozhai zhiyi*, "Liancheng," 3:362–67.

[109] See Pu Songling, *Liaozhai zhiyi*, "Yingning," 2:159.

[110] The original text reads: 情之至者，鬼神可通，花以鬼從，而人以魂寄，非其結於情者深耶？一去而兩殉之，即非堅貞，亦爲情死矣.

[111] See Pu Songling, *Liaozhai zhiyi*, "Xiangyu," 11:1555.

honesty and generosity, he is endowed with an extreme sense of filial piety. He shares with many eccentrics a great sense of hospitality, and his munificence with friends and guests is such that he is said to be an "extraordinary man" (非等閑).[112] He thereupon loses most of his wealth on account of his liberal nature and becomes poor. His excessive benevolence would make him "the most eccentric person since antiquity." His cousin Du Shenqing is in turn described as refined and romantic, endowed with a chivalrous spirit, talented, and effeminate. Du also likes to be appreciated for being benevolent but is still rather cautious in economic affairs. And yet it is not by chance that he says of Du Shaoqing: "My cousin has a weak point: Whoever claims to have once met his father, even if he is a mere dog, will gain his respect."[113] Filial piety is probably the most important Confucian virtue, and emphasis on it should come off as too orthodox for an "eccentric."

This "romantic" language flourishes again in the most famous novel of the Qing dynasty, "The Dream of the Red Chamber," *Honglou meng*. In the first poem the author calls himself "foolish":

> Pages full of silly nonsense,
> Written with bitter tears.
> All call the author *foolish* [. . .].[114]

When Cao Xueqin (1715?–1763) embarks on a metaphysical classification to distinguish different kinds of human beings according to the influence of cosmic energy, this classification is reminiscent of Pu Songling's distinction: The majority of people receive both positive and negative influences and do not differ greatly in their mediocrity. In Cao's short metaphysical framework, he does not confine himself simply to contrasting the two energies, but rather embarks upon a far-ranging exposition enabling him to explain the causes of character differences among men. In the periods when good energy predominates, peace and order reign in the Empire and evil energy is unable to darken the splendour of the atmosphere. Cao Xueqin then proceeds to describe the effects these elements have on men's characters and lives. The men and women who are infused with positive energy at birth become great sages (大仁), whereas those born under the influence of negative energy become great criminals (大惡). These, however, are the extreme cases. For the majority (大眾), who are neither great sages nor great criminals, there are innumerable possibilities according to the myriad combinations

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[112] Wu Jingzi, *Rulin waishi*, 44:540.

[113] Ibid., 31:382.

[114] Cao Xueqin, *Honglou meng*, 1:3. The original text reads: 满纸荒唐言，一把辛酸泪! 都云作者痴 . . . .

of good and bad energy. Among them, some uncommon beings born under the influence of negative energy in a period dominated by good energy will be extraordinary people and stand out from the mass of the common and mediocre. They will show a more brilliant intellect than others but, at the same time, they will also manifest extreme passions.[115] Because in the cosmological order, was not the original stone of the main character a "useless" stone?

In particular, two words are very important in the rhetoric of love and the more general cult of *qing*. In the passage narrating the dream of the protagonist, Baoyu 寶玉, from chapter five, the "love folly," *chiqing* 痴情 and "lust of intent," *yiyin* 意淫, are both mentioned with their strong emotional and controversial charge. The Disenchantment Fairy warns Baoyu:

> In your case, since birth you have an innate *obsessive passionate* nature we call "lust of intent." This "lust of intent" can be grasped by the mind but not transmitted by the mouth, apprehended intuitively but not expressed in words. As you alone can understand this attitude, you will be a good friend to women in inner apartments, but outside, in society, you cannot avoid being mischaracterised as abstruse and eccentric, and to be mocked, ridiculed, and stared at with anger and contempt by people.[116]

Perhaps one of the most puzzling aspects of Baoyu is his infantile soul, where he nurtures his aesthetic and sentimental disposition, and thus his refusal to become an adult, as the world of adults for him means one of men and women, of cynicism, ambitions, and greed.[117] Moreover, Baoyu's strange personality, marked out by his so-called "lust of intent," incomprehensible to common people, is manifested in various his behaviour, such as "eating rouge," "crying without apparent reason," "treating maids as equals," and "talking with non-human beings." These are all transgressions that go against gender roles, the social hierarchy, and behaviour norms. On account of his blind dependency on such desires he is described as having foolish inclinations (*pixing* 癖性).[118] Baoyu's spontaneous and unrestrained nature is partly responsible for his peculiarity, but this "diversity" also concerns social roles (安分守理). It is said that "he considers his brothers and sisters all alike, without any distinction between the close and the distant."[119] And later

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[115] Ibid., 2:29.

[116] Ibid., 5:92.

[117] On the legacy of Li Zhi's theory of *tongxin* on Cao Xueqin, see Zhang Jinchi, *Honglou guankui—Zhang Jinchi lun Honglou meng*, 180.

[118] Cao Xueqin, *Honglou meng*, 9:155.

[119] Ibid., 5:81. The original text reads: 視姊妹兄弟皆出一意，並無親疏遠近之別.

in the novel: "Baoyu is after all a person who cannot adhere to his social position and rules, but rather blindly follows his own desires; this is why he expresses his crazy inclinations."[120] His misconduct concerns both omissive and active dispositions: He is indifferent to career prospects and social status as well as the future of his family.[121] Moreover his extreme sensitivity is not necessarily followed by a corresponding sense of responsibility. Those who have an infantile behaviour, according to psychologists, avoid responsibility by essentially extending their childhoods into adulthood, and are obsessed with youth, fun, adventure, and even high-risk activities. All this can be explained by the morbid sensitivity with which he has been endowed since birth. Thus, Baoyu is "endowed with a natural temper, completely foolish and eccentric."[122]

His sensitivity and predisposition for love are a kind of burden that he always carries with him. A manifesto of his uniqueness can almost be read in the mentioned passage concerning the Disenchantment Fairy's warnings. This burden keeps him far away from the adults' society, from their responsibilities and hypocrisies, and from social rules and duties. Most people, therefore, do not understand him and his behaviour. His sentimentality and his attachment to the feminine world are the essence of his "diversity," and allow him to transcend traditional values and orthodox rules, as well as to follow his own rhythm, beyond the morality and economic interests that guide the choices of men. His isolation is worsened by the difficulty he faces in identifying himself in society, and his lack of self-perception. He does not feel any obligation to follow a bureaucratic career—be it for the sake of family or lineage—and he is very ambiguous in regards to gender roles, causing confusion in his sexual identity on more than one occasion. This "diversity" of Baoyu is well represented by the allegory of the superfluous stone that lies at the "root of passions," and thus he is the ideal and the most successful heir to the late Ming "fools."

We can summarise five main aspects belonging to an unconventional character like Baoyu, which also can be considered emblematic for an ideal anti-hero:

> 1) **An aversion to any kind of official ceremony and convention**, and a preference for a new alternative ritualism. Certain ceremonies, in fact, Baoyu both understands and takes part in, as they are considered aesthetically and authentically valid, like the burial of flowers.[123] This unconventionality is

[120] Ibid., 9:155. The original text reads: 寶玉終是個不能安分守理的人，一味的隨心所欲，因此發了癖性.

[121] Ibid., 36:428, 435–36.

[122] Ibid., 5:81. The original text reads: 況自天性所稟，一片愚拙偏僻.

[123] Cao Xueqin, *Honglou meng*, chap. 23. On aversion towards ceremonies and conventions,

manifested not only in his propensities against gender and social roles, his refusal to take exams, pursue a career, and adhere to traditional family values, but also in his rhetoric of spontaneity that implies a sense of self-differentiation (see also item 4) and a negation of certain cultural norms.[124]

2) In the description of Baoyu, his **abnormal sensitivity** is clearly portrayed, and the novel is full of examples of his excessive sensitivity. This aspect can be seen in other literary characters. Thus "foolishness" may have both emotive ("very emotional"—not always appreciated) and unorthodox implications, and may be expressed with other terms (such as *qing* 情 or *duoqing* 多情).[125]

3) In contrast with his acute and abnormal sensitivity, Baoyu shows an **impractical and naïve mentality**. *Dai* 呆 is linked with other synonyms to define this aspect of his personality.[126] Everybody considers him foolish and stupid, with an eccentric temper (性情乖僻), and his reactions being markedly different from others 祿蠹.[127]

4) **Consciousness of being different from others**, above "career worms" (祿蠹)—"vulgar" or "ordinary" (俗,車載斗量) people, who judge him "uninteresting" (沒味兒的): He finally refuses both the official career and married life.

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see for instance: "Baoyu had an inveterate aversion towards entertaining literati or men in general. What he hated most was putting on a ceremonial dress to pay calls, return visits, or offer congratulations or condolences" (那寶玉素日本就懶與士大夫諸男人接談，又最厭峨冠禮服賀吊往還等事) (*Honglou meng*, 36:523); "Xiren was well aware of Baoyu's eccentric disposition. Whenever he heard hypocritical compliments and wishes, he detested their emptiness" (*Honglou meng*, 36:529).

[124] Wai-yee Li, "The Rhetoric of Spontaneity in Late-Ming Literature," 32–49.

[125] For instance, "Furthermore, sister Feng was passionate, and if they had been together, it would have been a good thing" (且又是個多情的，若果聚合了，倒是件美事) (*Honglou meng*, 4:71). For a passionate and sentimental person (with deep feelings/love). 深於情者, see also Shen Fu, *Fusheng liuji*, 1:8; Pu Songling, *Liaozhai zhiyi*, 12:1639, Ji Sheng.

[126] See, for instance, Cao Xueqin, *Honglou meng*, 56:860.

[127] See for instance: "One of them laughed: 'No wonder they call *Baoyu* a handsome boy; he is a fool on the inside, just like those things that are pleasing to the sight but foul to the taste—he must be relatively stupid. He burns his own hand and then asks others if it is painful—is that not stupid?' And the other in laughter added: 'The last time I came, I heard that many in his family bear a grudge against him. He is truly a fool!'" (這一個笑道："怪道有人說他們家寶玉是相貌好，裏頭糊塗，中看不中吃的，果然竟有些呆氣。他自己燙了手，倒問別人疼不疼，這可不是呆子？"那個又笑道："我前一回來，聽見他家裏許多人抱怨，千真萬真的有些呆氣") (*Honglou meng*, 35:518).

5) Suspicion and scorn around him. Baoyu and all other eccentric personalities are objects of ridicule: Their behaviour cannot be understood by common people, and we can often find the association of the two attributes "eccentric" and "laughingstock" (with terms like 怪物 and 笑具): "In the world you will not avoid to appear as an unpractical and eccentric person, and will be mocked and stared at with anger by people" (*Honglou meng*, 5:93).[128] Even those who love him, like Baochai, call him with the humorous appellation of "busy with nothing" (無事忙), and "rich and noble idler" (富贵闲人). In fact, if we consider the description of Baoyu's personality, we can find that he is said to be *yu* 愚, but paradoxically he is described at the same time as a very intelligent fellow: "high natural endowments and a clever disposition [. . .]" (寶玉 [. . .] 天分高明、性情穎慧) (*Honglou meng*, 5:87), or "intelligent and clever" 聰明靈慧 (*Honglou meng*, 5:88).[129]

Baoyu's values evidently do not correspond to those of his contemporary: The first four items listed above all refer to a value ladder unfitting to either official order or the life of the people. What is important for the main character is frivolous and useless for others, and vice versa.[130] So most people cannot understand him, laugh at him, and consider him foolish and stupid. The various synonyms all presume a lack of "common intelligence."[131] Baoyu's behaviour is difficult to comprehend, and thus it provokes, on one hand, people's laughter (笑道, 嘲他) and, on the other, their resentment (抱怨) and even malevolent suspicions (嫌疑). All these apparently negative judgments (crazy and silly, strange and eccentric) express both the impossibility of communication and understanding among people of different personalities and values. At the same time, however, a different model of personality is presented—one with antagonistic principles compared with the orthodox and well-established hierarchy of values in society. We must not underestimate his failure to succeed both in a bureaucratic career and in his family life.

Writers such as Tang Xianzu, Cao Xueqin, Pu Songling, Yuan Hongdao, Zhang Dai, Wu Congxian, and Zhang Chao criticised conformism and admired eccentricity.[132] Yuan Hongdao presented the biography of Xu Wenchang (*Xu*

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[128] Cf. Feng Menglong, *Jingshi tongyan*, 18:619, 621, 624, 629; The original text reads: 然于世道中未免迂闊怪詭,百口嘲謗,萬目睚眥.

[129] See also Cao Xueqin, *Honglou meng*, 88:1336. Cf. my *Materials for an Anatomy of Personality in Late Imperial China*, 368–75.

[130] Cao Xueqin, *Honglou meng*, 90:1358.

[131] The original text reads: 糊塗，呆氣，呆子，呆頭呆腦，頑劣，異常，淘氣，憨頑，迂闊.

[132] Zhang Chao in his "Dark Dream Shadows," *You mei ying*, *juan* 1, states an important

Wenchang zhuan) as a model of the new trend: A scholar who indulges in wine and gives free rein to his passion of travelling to enjoy landscapes while directly describing all his experiences in his poems.[133] Wu Congxian, in *Xiaochuang ziji*, claimed that:

> Throughout life what one cannot free oneself from is madness, and what one cannot cure is obsession. According to Tang Xianzu, man cannot be exempt from infatuation, and in the opinion of Yuan Hongdao, man cannot be free of obsession; therefore it is unnecessary to give over one's infatuations and to cure one's obsessions.[134]

"Folly" became a kind of allegoric connotation for a heightened state of emotion, especially in the case of love-passion, and some scholars even used the term *chi* 癡 as a pseudonym.[135] The terms *kuangshi* 狂士 or *chiren* 癡人 were often used as synonymous with *fengliu* 風流, a romantic, straight, and elegant hero. Feng Menglong portrays himself in his youth as being "foolishly passionate," *qingchi* 情癡:

> When I was young, I was foolishly passionate (情癡), and when I met my friends, I behaved with great sincerity, confiding my good and bad luck with them [. . .].[136]

This shift in terminology, from undesirable attributes to attributes of self-distinction, expresses a change in at least part of the elite. This fashion was certainly a literary vogue, a kind of conventialisation in language and behaviour.[137] We are aware that literary personages and plots may be extreme and exceptional

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concept which is expression of the cult of *qing*—"Passion must near foolishness to be authentic" (必近於癡而始真)—where two notions are emphasised: "genuine passion" and "foolishness." This statement recalls Feng Menglong's use of the compound *qingshi* in his preface to the "Anatomy of love passions": "All love passions are insanity" (凡情皆癡也) (*Qingshi*, 7:194).

[133] The original text reads: 放浪麴蘗，恣情山水.

[134] Wu Congxian, *Xiaochuang ziji*; or in *Siku cunmu congshu*, section *zi*, vol. 253; online http://www.yuncheng.com/reader/#20050/7003100/2, 2:7.

[135] See Yagi Akiyoshi, "*Ryōsai shii* no chi ni tsuite" 聊齋誌異の癡について, *Geibun kenkyū*, 94, who has written an extensive study on the term *chi* in *Liaozai zhiyi*, and "*Liaozhai zhiyi* de chiren qunxiang: Jiqi yu Mingmo Qingchu de sichao guanlian," 1–6.

[136] See the beginning of the preface to the *Qingshi*.

[137] Cf. Paolo Santangelo, *Materials for an Anatomy of Personality in Late Imperial China*, 352–76.

cases; however, this trend was also an expression and promoter of a new sensitiveness, related to the so-called "cult of *qing*," which manifested in the same period. Distinction through eccentric behaviour and refined tastes exhibited expertise in evaluating food or other items, for example by visiting beautiful landscapes, appreciating good tea and wine, treasuring elegant women, and collecting antiques and other rare objects. "Mad" and "foolish" eventually came to mean an eccentric mental attitude, with emphasis on an inclination for strong love passions that may manifest through specific "manias," such as collecting and tasting objects of cultural and aesthetic value. This trend of appreciation of distinction instead of conformism may be understood as sign of a new attention to the individual and their character, and thus a response to the identity crisis of the literati and their marginalisation in political life. This perception of marginalisation started with the great economic changes in the second part of the Ming dynasty and went on during the Qing.

The examination system's rigidity and the new possibilities of social mobility offered by economic development contributed to a sense of instability. It is not by chance that in this period the most disparate conceptions on destiny were elaborated, and that various philosophical systems combined moral effort and self-discipline with elements of popular ethics and religiousness. Typical are the ideas of Yuan Huang (1533–1606), which suited the ambitions of social ascent of the common people, by resorting to the retribution mechanism to affirm the power of the individual to modify his own destiny.[138] For many literati and ambitious people, the pursuit of civil service careers was the main objective of their life. It often became a lifetime obsession and a constant source of anxiety, frustration, hope, joy, and despair. This attitude is expressed on many occasions in narrative works and in allegorical poems, where the literati's worries were sublimated into the weeping and sighing of deserted or misrecognised wives. This link between literature and politics and the ambiguous substitution of feelings is acutely pointed out by Stephen Owen as *emotional power*: "Traditional Chinese literature and civilisation cannot be understood without grasping the unique *emotional* power which government and public service exercised over men's lives and imaginations. That power is sometimes expressed directly; sometimes it is only implicit; it lurks behind the celebration of drunken insouciance or the joys of retreat no less than it dominates the plea for preferment [. . .]."[139]

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[138] Cf. Brokaw Cynthia J., *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit: Social Change and Moral Order in Late Imperial China*.

[139] Stephen Owen, *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics. Omen of the World*, 252. See also Yang Shuhui, *Appropriation and Representation: Feng Menglong and the Chinese Vernacular Story*, 119–24.

The worry for career and success was thus stressed by the increased mobility process, and attempts were elaborated to draft the characters of a new elite. Families of officials increasingly devoted themselves to commerce, and members of merchant families undertook bureaucratic careers. Competition for wealth and for power thus intensified.[140] Contemporaries saw such changes as symptoms of the moral and social decadence: "In antiquity—Gui Youguang (1506–71) wrote—the four principal social classes each had their own clear functions, but subsequently the distinctions of status between the literati, the farmers, and the merchants collapsed."[141] Numerous intellectuals blamed the behaviour of the "new rich," who ignored the norms of social distinction.

Some scholars wanted to distance themselves from the hypocrisy of other men of letters, conformist and moralistic officials (道學先生), and "rotten scholars' (腐流); some others looked down on the vulgar tastes of the *nouveaux riches.* For all of them, instead of condemning the above manias as frivolous and foolish (in the literal sense), the praise of obsessions and unconventional attitudes and behaviour was a sign of distinction. This tendency, at first an object of attention within the circles of poets and thinkers of the Neo-Daoist tradition, became more broadly fashionable with the development of connoisseurship and collecting in the late Tang and Song dynasties. It was however in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that, with the "glorification of obsession and foolishness," such manias and excessive behaviours not only became valuable, but also a legitimate means of self-expression. The above statements seem to correspond to an attempt among intellectuals to elaborate a new range of qualities for another *élite*, which was different from both the emerging class of the *nouveaux riches*, who were merchants and financial dealers, and from the traditional higher officials and those who had been successful in the upper examinations. The difference was based on their refined tastes and sophisticated behaviour, as well as their their disdain for traditional careers.

Reversing systematically the usual meaning of terms like stupid-clever, foolish-wise, normal-abnormal, or sane-insane, these writers not only challenged the orthodox ideology and its hierarchy of values, the accepted "common sense," and gender and social conventional stereotypes, but went in deeper to question the conceptual and logical order in language and imagery.

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[140] See Fang Yizhi, *Huozhi lun*, *Fushan wenji*, *qianbian*, 3:3a, 6b, i; cf. W. Peterson's translation (Peterson, W. trans., *Bitter Gourd, Fang I-chih and the Impetus for Intellectual Change*, 76–77).

[141] Cf. Gui Youguang, *Zhenchuan xiansheng ji*, 13:319. Cf. also Ho Ping-ti, *The Ladder of Success in Imperial China*, *Aspects of Social Mobility, 1368–1911*, 72. The original text reads: 古者四民異業，至於後世，而士與農、商當相混.

Everyday Life May Be Far from Orthodoxy: The World of Sensations and "Amoral" Wisdom

In the first part of this essay I mentioned Li Zhi's recognition of the reviled desires as positive in nature, and his paradoxical praising of "selfishness."[142] This intellectual atmosphere in defiance of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy can also be found in more well-known literary works. An emblematic document, which is a deep mine of information on the evaluation and representation of love in the late Ming Jiangnan society, is undoubtedly "Mountain Songs," *Shan'ge* 山歌, a collection of folk songs edited by the famous writer Feng Menglong. As already mentioned, the debate opened by the Gong'an circle, headed by Yuan Hongdao, emphasised the changes of literature according to the times, the prevalence of individual personality and the expression of the "creative sensitivity" on imitation, and the value of "popular" genres such as narrative and theatre. With this innovative work—mainly written in the Suzhou dialect—Feng Menglong aimed at revitalising poetry with the power of popular songs. This collection is significant to the understanding of the characteristics of the mobile and articulated society of Jiangnan and the vitality of its intellectual world. The songs deal with the lives of common people: women (often prostitutes), boatmen, peasants, hunters, fishers, and paddlers. Their spirit is far from the orthodox moral intents that Zhu Xi advocated for when interpreting the *Shijing*, and their language is often vulgar and full of crude expressions or salacious double meanings.

Shan'ge can be considered "marginal" if compared with other contemporary writings. This marginality is significant, for it helps us to understand some aspects of the society that do not conform to its orthodox and official façade. Comparisons and symbolic allusions are shaped on the most common experiences of everyday life, inspired by working tools like water wheels, spindles, mills, game and leisure items such as cards, dice, *weiqi*, common objects like lanterns, doors, rooms, and things in nature such as fish, silkworms, chickens, willows, and flowers. The following are just a few examples of the first verses of songs that employ comparisons:

情哥郎好像狂風吹到阿奴前	My lover approaches me like a **storm**	6:141
結識私情像投壺	Having an affair is just like a **target-pot for throwing arrows**	6:148
姐兒生來像香筒	By nature she is like an **incense stand**	6:152
結識私情像荷包	My secret female lover is like a **pouch**	6:153

[142] Cf. Li Zhi, *Cangshu*, *Deye ruchen houlun*, 32:544; Li Zhi, *Fenshu*, *Da Deng Mingfu*, 1:40, and Li Zhi, *Fenshu*, *Da Deng Shiyang*, 1:4.

結識私情像氈條	My secret female lover is like a **blanket**	6:154
結識私情好像鞋子能	My secret lover is like a bedroom **slipper**	6:156
結識私情像夜壺	My secret female lover is like a **chamber pot**	6:164
結識私情好像鍾子能	My secret female lover is like a **cup of wine**	6:172
結識私情像流星	My secret lover is like **fireworks**	6:176
結識私情好像雨傘能	My secret lover is like an **umbrella**	6:177
姐兒胸前有介兩箇肉饅頭	She has two meat-filled **steamed buns** on her chest	6:181
郎撐船，姐搖船	He propels the boat with a **pole** while she **rows**	6:192 B
郎聽姐兒借箇星	He wanted to borrow "**this thing**" from her	7:201
姐兒生來像箇綽板能	She is from birth like **castanets**	7:212

This "demythicisation" and "vulgarisation" of love through the rhetoric of metaphors belongs to Feng Menglong's literary program in search for a new language to express authentic emotions. In fact, this language produces the image of an "objectivation" and "somatisation" of love, where emotions appear as sensations and the partner as a common tool or a specific utensil. Human feelings and sensations emerge just under the surface of these everyday objects, and with them they appear as common goods, necessary and usual affairs, such as work, leisure or food: love passions, attraction and loneliness, hatred and jealousy, fear of rumours and social sanctions, happiness and sorrow. The symbols that pervade the entire collection, the euphemisms, metaphors, and comparisons, mostly imply desire. Homophonous expressions—through assonances referring to different spellings and meanings—are often used to create double entendres, somewhat *risqué* jokes, and plays on words. Thus, the image of love expressed in these songs is different from the other images coming from other literary works. Against the ideal of "the talented student and the beautiful girl" (佳人才子), social rules are almost completely ignored in favour of an erotic and aesthetic dimension.

Against Tang Xianzu's love—which wins over death—the songs offer a kaleidoscope of concrete and immediate passions. The minimalist interpretation of love in these songs could be summed up in the statement "love is like food," something concrete that should be consumed soon, and its ephemeral nature emerges in the phrases "love is like fire" and "my beloved is like a flower." This representation of love differs from others Feng Menglong himself puts forward in his short stories and *Qingshi*. It is not, however, in contradiction with them if we take into consideration the main purpose of *Shan'ge*: The genuine emotions

(*zhenqing* 真情) are expressed by the authentic language of the common people, which is coherent with the aims of the cult of *qing*. For example, Waiyee Li's sophisticated discourse inserts such concepts into the dialectics of "high and low diction," as exemplified in scenes 7 to 10 of *Mudan ting*. According to her, the interplay of high and low languages of *qing* reflects late-Ming debates on the love phenomenon, which involves sexuality, sensibility, sentimentality, and philosophical reflection: "The assimilation or appropriation of a vulgar, low diction into a varied fabric made up of sentimental, romantic, philosophical rhetoric becomes a mark of genuine emotions (*zhenqing* 真情). Genuineness in this context is a kind of second innocence, since the author (or character) self-consciously traverses boundaries and encompasses opposites of experience. In being realised both through refinement and vulgarity, both the life of the mind and physical existence, the claims of genuineness incorporate the sublime and the grotesque."[143] Since love is expressed in its simplest form, and physical desire plays an important role, most songs present strong passions, barring perhaps the cases of prostitute encounters. These passions cannot be reduced to desires without sentiments, or—borrowing the expression used in the seventeenth century novel "The Romance of the Embroidered Screen," *Xiuping yuan* 繡屏緣—to a relationship where "desire arrives before passion."[144] "Mountain Songs" aims at describing and expressing this essential, mundane, and *trivial* element in the love phenomenon with *trivial*, direct, and genuine language.

Feng Menglong's "Preface" is explicit in his search for genuine emotions, as we already quoted: "Borrowing from the genuine love between man and woman as an antidote for the fake medicine of moralistic rules." What is surprising is that the search for a new language to express true and essential feelings leads to an apparent simplification of the phenomenon, an "anti-Romantic Romanticism," which purposely avoids any sublimation in order to reduce love to an everyday need, while still offering a gallery of both heroic and cynical, stable and ephemeral cases. Love becomes a universal need beyond moral and social rules. To summarise this we may borrow Zhu Guangqian's words (*Tan xiuyang*): "Covering a very trivial thing with an extremely refined façade, namely something that is 'outside shining gold and jade, and inside cotton waste.'"[145] The songs describe this essential part

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[143] Li Waiyee, "Languages of Love and Parameters of Culture in *Peony Pavilion* and *The Story of the Stone*," 249. My reflections are indebted to this article and to the following by Halvor Eifring.

[144] *Xiuping yuan*, 6:126. See also the electronic text in http://open-lit.com/listbook.php?cid=6&gbid=541&start=0. The original text reads: 情未至而欲先之.

[145] Zhu Guangqian, *Tan xiuyang*, in *Zhu Guangqian quanji*, vol. 4, 109–11. The original text reads: 它是替一件極塵俗的事情，掛上一個極高尚的幌子，「金玉其外，敗絮其中」.

of love, the cotton waste.

From an ideological point of view, most feelings expressed in the songs are subversive if we take into consideration that the official stance was a refusal to recognise a moral legitimacy to desires, as they did not fit into the cardinal five relationships and hierarchical interrelations. But in this collection of "folk songs" heroic and selfish passions, desires and lustful thoughts, and sincerity and treachery are all voiced and accepted with great tolerance. Although women are often the main protagonists, little room is given to traditional female virtues like chastity and obedience: Instead, women's wishes, needs, and hopes simply find a means of expression. Thus, if *Shan'ge* is a "marginal" work in the complex framework of Chinese literature, it cannot be considered marginal in its effort to express the codes of emotions in a new way, and to transmit them to the readers with great immediacy. The localism of the dialect is in fact a means to give voice to the cosmopolitan culture of Suzhou and the ambiguities of its "floating world" as one of the models for the intellectual community of the whole empire. The representation of passions and desires here offers an unusual perspective when compared with the image coming from most other official and private sources in post-Confucian society.

The "subversive" lyrical element is evident in both the content and the expository language. Songs often turn the picture of the world and humanity on its head, and what emerges goes against common knowledge. They reveal the banality of certain clichés, and force the reader to reconsider uncontested beliefs regarding gender differences and family: For example, the notion that a flirtatious woman is more seductive than a modest one, that it is up to the man to take the initiative in matters of love while the woman is passive and timid, that women are more faithful than men, that strict mothers are able to control their daughters' behaviour, that young people are more dissolute than their parents, and so forth. Thus, songs challenge readers: Is it really true that a woman can have only one husband, as there is only one sky? That a man can have more than one concubine and not the other way around? Or even that the foundation of marriage is procreation? The songs move from social satire to critical self-reflection, sometimes poking fun at certain steadfast personal beliefs, at that sort of unwavering moralism of those who judge others too harshly, without taking into account individual circumstances.

If we take into consideration the situations that appear behind the parallels and innuendos of the songs, we notice that the hilarity coming from the double entendre and the metaphors is tolerant toward transgressions in sexual morality, while at the same time sarcastic towards institutions and orthodoxy. Humoristic elements are based on double meanings and hints at eroticism, but also on iconoclasm. To get an idea of this type of humour, we can read the song 4:99A, *duo* 多. Here, besides the joke on the number of lovers, the main point is the

de-sacralisation of puritan rules and the sacralisation of carnal love: The appeal to Arhat and Bodhisattva and the comparison of this "lustful" woman with Malangfu 馬郎婦, an incarnation of Guanyin, who was supposed to have taken on a human form as a charming girl who attracted men and had sexual relations with them, but ultimately making them lose all their lustful desires after their encounter.[146]

147 Everyone insults me, saying that I have slept with a thousand lovers.
148 But if you calculate precisely, the number of lovers with whom I have slept is no more than five hundred.
149 Look! The daughter of your eastern neighbour became a Buddha after sleeping with one thousand men.
150 So, compared with her, I should at least become an arhat.
151 [Comment] Hail to the majestic Golden-Chain Bodhisattva![152]

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[146] *Malangfu* is an incarnation of Guanyin, who is supposed to have taken on human form in Shaanxi. According to the legend, she was a charming girl who attracted men and had sexual relations with them. The miracle consisted of the fact that all these men, after having intercourse with her, lost all their lustful desires. Finally she married a young man, a certain Ma, but died on the evening of the wedding, and became a Bodhisattva.

[147] The original text reads: 人人罵我𡳞千人. *Ze* 𡳞: vulgar term meaning "sexual intercourse." Usually is not even found in monolingual dictionaries, with the exception of the *Kangxi zidian*, 520, and the *Hanyu dazidian*, 3:1996 but with a different meaning. It is not even present in dictionaries of the Wu dialect (吳方言詞典，明清吳語詞典). According to Zhang Huiying: "Shan'ge Zhu"(1–4), *Chūgoku gogaku kenkyū.Kaipian*, 10–13, (1992–96)1994, it is a homophone of *chuo* 戳, and is used as a vulgar term in Suzhou slang (音同"戳"，吳語用作褻語).

[148] The original text reads: 仔细算来只𡳞得五百箇人.

[149] The original text reads: 爾不見東家一箇囡兒𡳞子一千人了得佛做.

[150] The sentence should be read as a rhetorical question: "Who will ever take away Lohan's position from me?" The original text reads: 小阿奴奴一尊羅漢穩丟丁.

[151] The same Bodhisattva is mentioned in a story collected by Feng Menglong, in the *Gujin xiaoshuo*, 29. Anthony C. Yu ("Rest, Rest, Perturbed Spirit! Ghosts in Traditional Chinese Prose Fiction," 397–434) has emphasised the compatibility of religious attitude with biting satire and exuberant humour in the *Xiyouji*, in line with the iconoclastic tradition of "jeering the Patriarchs and abusing the Buddhas" (呵佛罵祖) (Repr. "Religion and Literature in China: The 'Obscure Way' of *The Journey to the West*" in Yu Anthony, *Comparative Journeys: Essays on Literature and Religion East and West*, 179–81). The original text reads: 南無黃金瑣子骨菩薩.

[152] See the legend of the "Chain-Bones Bodhisattva" (鎖骨菩薩) in Li Fuyan's "Xu xuanguailu," quoted in *Taiping guangji*, 101, "Yanjiu furen." This is the same legend that mentions the generous girl who never refuses to sleep with those who ask her to: People consider her a

Otherwise we can enjoy Feng Menglong's comment to another song (5:112), a masterpiece of irony on self-deception, where the wife is appreciated above any other woman. It is one of the rare notes on the human condition, hovering between a longing for freedom and the fear of solitude: The abandonment of free and libertine life is determined by a health contingency, rather than by a moral conversion or a deep love for a wife:

My dear wife
[153] There are many stars in the sky, but there is only one moon.
[154] A cock cannot be a goose even if it is as white as snow.
[155] If you cook congee or rice, in the end, it is best to use rice from your own rice field.
[156] If you fall ill, in the end, the only person you need is your dear wife.
[157] [Comment:] Suddenly he has started to speak like an orthodox moralist, but his "healthy" days still outnumber the other ones!

In other cases the comic effect comes from the subversion of the typical gender hierarchy, as in the case of the widow with seven husbands (5:133), or the couple

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lascivious woman, but in fact she is a great saint, as she is so benevolent as to submit to any desires in the world (世俗之欲,無不徇焉). Thus she becomes a Bodhisattva whose bones are joined like the links in a chain. This story recalls the analogous Guanyin reincarnation of Malangfu, in the following song, as well as the devas of pleasure (*huanxi fo* 歡喜佛) in the Lamaist representation of male and female deities, which embrace each other in love, and also the concept of "enlightenment through love," based on the paradox that "without detachment one cannot be attached; without attachment one cannot be detached" (不離則不即，不即則不離). On the use of the *Surangama sutra* (*lengyan jing* 楞嚴經) to extinguish the fire of lust, and courtesans, see Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century*, 188–89, 272. This song belongs to the volume, edited by Oki and Santangelo, printed for the series on emotions and states of mind, *Shan'ge, the "Mountain Songs." Love Songs in Ming China*.

[153] This allegory appears at the beginning of many songs and here alludes to the rarity of faithful wives. The original text reads: 親老婆天上星多月弗多.

[154] The original text reads: 雪白樣雄雞當弗得箇鵝.

[155] The original text reads: 煮粥煮飯還是自家田裏箇米.

[156] The original text reads: 有病還須親老婆.

[157] The original text reads: 忽然道學，還是無病的日子多. This is Feng's ironic joke: The subject of the song usually ignores morals and commits adultery, except for a few days when he is sick. 忽然 (suddenly) may also be interpreted as expressing the contrast between the earlier mountain songs, which tolerate adultery, and this "moral" song.

at the temple where the wife prays to the gods for her secret lover (1:40).

In sexual matters the *carpe diem* principle seems more accepted at the individual level than any strict Puritan or Confucian notion of gender separation, which nevertheless formally prevails in society with the veneration of women's chastity and the warning against desires.[158] Common topics include the wisdom and determination of women, for example the daughter who is smarter than her parents by meeting her lover against their will, and the cunning lady who can cheat on her husband and go on her dates with her illicit lover. A justification for the transgression is easily discovered.[159] The only warning seems to be that all transgressive behaviours must be done secretly: "In the front (in public) they are separate, but at the back (in secret) they are tied" (當面分開背後聯) (*Shan'ge*, 6:163); "to have secret dates as furtive thieves in the darkness with no lamp oil" (竊盜無油暗裏偷) (*Shan'ge*, 2:68B).[160] The hostility against sexual pleasures is evident in the capillary social control, embodied by the parents' severity with their daughters, as well as in the omnipresence of the neighbours' ears and eyes, or the "troublesome men" who have nothing to do and refer to the husband his wife's secret affairs (有閒人搬來我裏箇聽).[161] It is also evident in the fear for the social sanction of becoming the object of rumours and gossip (惡風聲): "But outside they say that they will discover our illicit love, / speaking unpleasant words with their mouth askew like the crooked lips of oil pots" (1:29), or "weak people offer presents to their neighbours, / while strong people curse them. / Both are behaviours of women who are involved in secret affairs" (*Shan'ge*, 1:29A).[162]

Interestingly, new attitudes are manifested here for what concerns the ladder of values, the representation of emotions, and the rhetoric of love. Humanity as

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[158] See the song 1:7: "Passed twenty years, I am twenty one years old / I would be foolish to not get a lover, at this age / After passing thirty years, the flower will soon wither, / and then it will be useless to invite a man even with both hands."

[159] For instance, in song 1:29D, the girl says to her lover: "You must get hold of stolen things to catch a thief. / you must capture both of them to catch their adultery. / 'Darling, you and I are like one person who shares one gall and one heart. / Why should we fear that other people can catch the two of us?'" And furthermore, 'The Ancients' words are not worth obeying! / Why is one pretty girl allowed to marry only one man? / If Tang Empress Wu could change the law of the great Ming, / who in the world would dare to arrest adulterers?" (*Shan'ge*, 1:29E).

[160] See also Feng Menglong, *Shan'ge*, 6:141.

[161] See for instance Feng Menglong, *Shan'ge*, 7:208: "When our affair was just at the beginning and nothing had happened yet, already a troublesome man came and told my husband about it [. . .]."

[162] See for instance Feng Menglong, *Shan'ge*, 6:155. For a pun, see also Feng Menglong, *Shan'ge*, 4:111.

presented by the songs does not feel the need to censure its feelings, but rather worries only about the practical results of its behaviour, that is, the fulfilment of their desires whilst avoiding the negative effects of transgressions, such as social sanctions and the ever-present watchfulness and tongue-wagging of the neighbours. Even when the character is a woman cautioning her lover to be prudent, she is not morally torn or ashamed of intimacy or of violating the Confucian rules of conduct. Such female protagonists are solely concerned about social decorum and saving face. Human weak points, like female or male inconstancy and infidelity, are simply presented with a smile, without moralistic judgments:

> The young woman's heart belongs to her favourite lover.
> But while she is waiting for him, a second man comes along:
> If dumplings are not available, simple noodles will do.
> I take you for now, and we enjoy love and sexual pleasures, creating a scene with "wind and clouds."
> [Comment] Where is her favourite lover, while she "takes comfort" with the other?"[163]

We can suppose the songs reproduce some scenes of everyday life in Suzhou, such as the environment, material culture, and work and leisure times. We cannot deduce which section of the population is being described, as we know that such songs are not a direct popular self-presentation: Even if originally they were sung by peasants and other workers, most of these songs have been re-elaborated in the realm of courtesan culture, and written in the ambit of literary circles. Thus, can we say these lively pictures offer instead an idealised representation of the popular world, which however reflect the intellectual atmosphere where the songs passed from an oral to a written stage. The irony, values, style, and contents all express behaviours and personality types that are very far from the orthodox and official morality, and show a consistent detachment from traditional Confucian rules.

Similar attitudes can be found in other comic texts written by Feng Menglong, such as the collections of jokes and situations under the titles of "Treasury of Laughs," *Xiaofu* 笑府, and the "Sack of Wisdom," *Zhinang* 智囊. The "Treasury of Laughs" collects 700 odd jokes, which induce laughter at the expense of a broad cross section of late Ming society. Buffoons include people from all walks of life, from beggars and street vendors to officers and officials; even the emperor and the sage Confucius are indirectly mocked. And they include people of all ages, from

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[163] Feng Menglong, *Shan'ge*, 1:14. The original text reads: 姐兒心上自有第一箇人，等得來時是次身，無子餛飩面也好，捉渠權時點景且風雲。點景時第一箇人何在?

young children who cannot play along in their parents' worldly games, to elderly people who will not give up those games of folly even when death has caught up with them. The jokes reveal strains in all sorts of human relationships: parent-child, husband-wife, master-servant, teacher-pupil, doctor-patient, clergy-patron, between siblings, among social peers, and so on. The jokes also expose tensions in various aspects of Ming society—within the political, educational, and judicial systems, within intellectual circles, between the sexes, and among different classes. By illustrating how negative emotions such as greed, jealousy, pride, shame, stinginess, and affectation work against spontaneity, honesty, honour, generosity, and piety, the "Treasury of Laughs" lays bare the human follies that rupture the fabric of society in the final decades of the Ming. Therefore this collection is important not only as evidence of the sense of humour in the period, and the relation between playful and serious utterances, but also as a testimony of the social and intellectual reality, and as a satire against the social, political, and cultural history of Ming China, while providing the material for Feng Menglong's "teaching" of *qing* 情, which in this case characterises such behaviours as human emotional responses to particular circumstances.

In many episodes described in the above and in the following work, quickness of perception or discernment, as well as astuteness and acumen, are particularly appreciated, especially when this ability to find a solution to concrete problems is also capability to express oneself in an amusing way. This is the case in the other work, the "Sack of Wisdom," *Zhinang*, where in fact what is praised is wit. No less sarcastic than the "Survey of Talks Old and New," *Gujin tan'gai*, the objects of the satire and laughter are always the pedants and inflexible Confucians, although the tone here seems more solemn, as most of the episodes are framed in a historical context. Feng Menglong offers a multifarious exhibition of examples of *zhi* 智, and "wisdom" is used not only in a moral sense, that is *xian* 賢, "wise and virtuous."[164] Often *zhi* is rather the practical and quick ability—based on the freedom of individual judgment—to overcome difficulties, and therefore "applied intelligence," including scheme, strategy, and cunningness: Social conventions can be forgotten in order to face particular situations and to preserve general well-being.[165] Instead of praise for the old sage philosophers, or for the enlightened or the immortals (聖人, 真人), we mainly find the treatment of the practical ability of men and women of various social origins in solving every kind of problem as admirable, whether it is in everyday life or in military strategy, in

[164] Among the cases of moral wisdom, see the wife of a common man (*Le Yangzi qi*, 25:1526–28) and the wife of a general (*Li Kan fu*, 25:1590–91); moral integrity is behind two refusals to carry out the Emperor's orders due to the officials' great prudence in *Ci lianshu* and *Ci mijie* (2:104–6).

[165] See Hanan Patrick, *The Chinese Vernacular Story*, 83.

political and administrative questions, or in judicial cases, which somewhat recalls the legacy of the "strategy school" on one hand, and some ideas from the Wang Yangming schools on the other.[166]

The above non-fictional works on humour and wit collect folksongs and jokes, as well as oral tradition documents considered trivial by scholars. All of them belong to popular entertainment expressions in the quarters of pleasure: They are typically set in the context of informal conversations, singing, joking, and drinking contests, and preserve a vast array of taboo materials that were marginalised by mainstream culture as beyond the bounds of "decency." They share a facetious attitude, non-canonical content, and non-orthodox perspectives, where hedonism paradoxically has a dialectical relationship with didacticism. These texts can be read in different ways, either as dangerous social criticism, works of entertainment re-elaborated by non-conformist young scholars, or even as a literary experiment and aesthetic manifestos, though they nevertheless share a fundamental and common humour. And whatever our interpretation, they all display a deep sense of humour steering towards the realm of human affairs and behaviour, as the limits

[166] In some stories wisdom is good discernment and prudent decision, in other stories it is far-sightedness (識之遠), or it is the ability to control negative emotions, such as anger or fright, and in some other stories it is even the cunning skill to cheat people. For instance, see the role of common people in *Suzhou di* (8a:541–42) or in *Yushitai laoli* (3:220–21), of a monk in *Huai Bing* (17:1083), and of an actor in *Zhongmou ling* (20:1193–94). For female protagonists, see the previously mentioned wife of Le Yangzi (*Le Yangzi*, 25:1526–28), the wife of a general (*Li Kan fu*, 25:1590–91), and a prostitute who cunningly helps the Chinese army to vanquish Japanese pirates (*Wang Cuiqiao*, 26:1594–97). Many stories deal with the strategic ability to take advantage of the enemies' weakness in order to defeat them, as in *Zhou Fang* (22:1287–88), *Li Jing* (22:1298–1300), *Cao Wei* (22:1317–19), *Zhao She* (22:1279–81), *Tang Taizong* (22:1293–96), *Liu Qi* (22:1310–15), and *Wu Chengqi* (22:1337–39). For examples of ability in managing financial problems thanks to one's experience, see *Liu Yan* (2:146–47) or *Zong Weimin* (11:773–79). *Xiang Minzhong* (10:701–3), *Gao Ziye* (9:632–34), *Yang Pingshi* (9:639–40), *Yang Maoqing* (9:640–43), *Cangjin* (9:646–48), and *Linhai ling* (10:734–35) are examples of wise solutions to judicial cases. On the wisdom of fathers in their decisions concerning their children, see the stories *Pei Kuan*, *Li You* (2:150–52), and *Fan Li* (6:372–76). Scheming officials who are able to avoid troubles thanks to their cunning back-up plans are described in *Li Hang* (2:99–101) and *Ye Nanyan* (3:227–29). *Pei Jin Gong* (3:220–21), *You Weng* (5:325–28), and *Li Guang* and *Wang Yue* (23:1378–80) show the ability to control anger or fright, while *Yongjia chuanzi* (27:1666–68) or *Yishu* (28:1733–34) present the skill in cheating people. Most of these stories are written with irony and humour. All quotations refer to the *Zhinang bu*.

of humans beings are seen by laughing at their contradictions.[167]

They also share an attitude towards wisdom that has been mentioned in other works. Rather than talent in learning and wisdom, in Feng Menglong's collections the mental qualities mainly concern the cunning ability to achieve one's aims, using tricks and stratagems (機謀) to obtain them, and simultaneously making sure to avoid trouble with others. The resort to tricks also appears frequently in the songs, where the constant aim is to meet with the lover—considered a good in itself—and stratagems are necessary to achieve the purpose. Thus this attitude would often appear to be praising deceptive, false, and flexible traits.[168] Consequently, the author refrains from censuring what would normally be considered immoral, and describes, without condemnation, women actively pursuing extramarital relations. Humour often consists of the subversive description of reality.[169]

Yuan Mei's Challenge on Traditional Concepts of Morality, Religion, Retribution, Cosmic Order, and History

The new issues raised by some Ming and Qing writers do not only concern the perception of love and sexual morality. Literary works also express a certain

[167] On humour in Chinese culture, besides the classical essays by Herbert Giles, "Wit and Humor," in *A History of Chinese Literature*, 430–36; George Kao, ed., *Chinese Wit and Humor*; and C. T. Hsia, "The Chinese Sense of Humour," 30–36; see the item "Ku-chi" 滑稽 (modern *huaji*) in Nienhauser, ed., *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature*, 482–84; Pi-Ching Hsu, *Beyond Eroticism: A Historian's Reading of Humor in Feng Menglong's Child's Folly*, 21–28; Pi-Ching Hsu, *Feng Menglong's "Treasury of Laughs": A Seventeenth Century Anthology of Traditional Chinese Humour*, 10–33; Paolo Santangelo, *Laughing in Chinese: Emotions behind Smiles and Laughter: From Facial Expression to Literary Descriptions*, 5–203, 253–89 and, for the modern period, Christopher Rea, *The Age of Irreverence: A New History of Laughter in China*.

[168] There are countless songs dealing with the stratagems and cunning ways to hide social transgressions. An example, in 1:3A, reads: "Young man, you don't know shame. / Why did you look back at me after you passed by the gate of our house? / The spinning eyes of my husband are not blind. / If you wish to meet me, why don't you go through the back gate?"

[169] To give an example, in *Shan'ge*, 6:177A, the woman is said to hide her adulterous affair (symbolised by the image of "heaven without the sun") from her husband (who in Confucian iconography is compared to heaven), and she encourages her lover not to be afraid of the illicit relation: "Cheating Heaven, the weather is fine inside of me (晴 is a pun for 情, and thus means 'I have a secret affair with another man'). / She says to her lover: 'Although this is an affair like heaven without the sun, you need not fear it' [. . .]."

dissatisfaction towards the official concept of the cosmic order. Yuan Mei (1716–98), for example, shares with his contemporaries the same basic concept of the world and nature: The universe consists of a psychophysical energy, or *qi* 氣, that passes through different phases and alternately follows the two complementary and opposed poles of yin and yang. This *qi* is the fundamental element that pervades everything, from the air and the light, ethereal spirits and souls, to the heaviest metals and rocks. Each being and everything follows this trend and comes into existence thanks to the condensation of this *qi*, while its dispersion corresponds to its end or death. Once he quotes the couplet: "Born from an embryo, born from an egg, born from liquid and born from transformation, the cycle of birth is endless. The way of Heaven, the way of Earth, the way of humans and the way of ghosts, the ways are infinite." And in the same tale he summarises the central idea of the *sanjiao*'s syncretism.[170] When a person reaches the level of an immortal, saint or Buddha, he has to transform into a baby. Haven't you heard that Confucius is also a boy scholar Bodhisattva? Mencius said: "Isn't a saint a man who hasn't lost the innocence of childhood?"[171]

Yuan Mei is an emblematic scholar for his aesthetic cultivation of late Ming legacy and for his scepticism towards traditional values and beliefs. Contrary to the pattern of many other writers of his day, he enjoyed success at the imperial examination at a very young age and embarked on a brilliant bureaucratic carrier. At the age of only thirty-three, he resigned from his official duties to devote himself fully to enjoying his life, writing, and travelling.[172] He was a famous poet—in his poetry he advocated the theory of *xingling* 性靈, "personal innate sensibility," directed a school for young women poets, presided over a troupe of actors, and dedicated himself to the care of his garden, Suiyuan 隨園.[173] He had travels and adventures with beauties and actors. Yuan Mei celebrated the all-pervading force of *qing* and identified "sensibility" with "naturalness" or "emotive nature" (*xingqing* 性情, *qingxing* 情性). This compound, which can be

[170] Brook, "Rethinking Syncretism: The Unity of the Three Teachings and Their Joint Worship in Late-imperial China," 13–44.

[171] Yuan Mei, *Zibuyu*, "Crane Carrying the Carriage" 仙鶴扛車, 7.

[172] On his travels, see Schmidt, *Harmony Garden: The Life, Literary Criticism, and Poetry of Yuan Mei (1716–1798)*, 105–24.

[173] This notion was well known in past literary criticism, in works such as *Wenxin diaolong* and *Shipin*, but was re-elaborated as a theory by Yuan Hongdao (1568–1610) and became very important in his school. The topic has been the subject of many debates among scholars. See for instance Wang Yingzhi, "Yuan Mei xingling pai zai jindai de yingxiang," 78–84. Cf. also Guo Yingde, *Chiqing yu huanmeng*, 43.

traced back at least as far as Liu Xie (circa 466–520), was formed by the combination of two concepts often contrasted in the Neo-Confucian tradition, i.e. "human nature" and "passion," and his attitude has been said "quasi-romantic."[174] Yuan Mei's hedonistic ideal of life, that reminds the refined world of Yuan Hongdao and his brothers or Li Yu, consists of the pleasures of keeping a good table, of feminine beauty, of travelling, of enjoying fine painting and literature; the company of friends, the presence of plants and flowers, and elegant and precious ornaments and tools:

> I love fine flavors, female beauty, building, traveling, good friends, exquisite flowers, bamboos, waterfalls, stones, ancient jades and bronze vessels, calligraphy and paintings by famous artists, but I also love books. My love of books is not different from these other loves, so why do I use this word just for my books? Female beauty is suitable for young people, food for the hungry, friendship for comrades, traveling for good weather, palaces, houses, flowers, rocks, and antiques for those who have just started buying them, but once the desire is past, they lack true flavour. Books are suitable for youth, middle age, old age, sickness, hunger, cold, wind, and rain.[175]

Yuan Mei carried on the new ideas and sensibilities of the late Ming. Concerning desires and freedom of love, Yuan Mei is convinced that desire is not the dangerous enemy as it is depicted by orthodox Neo-Confucians, but on the contrary lies at the foundation of human actions and life: "Love for goods and love for sexual pleasures are the desires of human beings [. . .] Without feelings and desires, the human race would have become extinct long ago."[176] Although Yuan Mei too acknowledged the necessity of moderation—coming from one's ability of distinguishing the real conditions and possibilities—he considers personal taste as the ultimate criterion of judgement, independent from current opinions, habits, and authorities.[177] His poetic inspiration always refers to feminine beauty, and

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[174] Waley, *Yuan Mei Eighteenth Century Chinese Poet*, 174.

[175] Yuan Mei, *Suohao xuanji*, *Xiao cangshanfang wenji*, 29:1755, and in *Yuan Mei quanji*, 29:504, Schmidt trans., *Harmony Garden*, 89, note 140. On the pleasure of reading see also Waley, *Yuan Mei Eighteenth Century Chinese Poet*, 85–86, 162–63.

[176] Yuan Mei, *Xiaocang shanfang shiwenji*, 22:4, cit. also by Schmidt, *Harmony Garden*, 59–60. The original text reads: 好貨好色人之欲也. . . 無情欲則人類久絕.

[177] Cf. Gōyama Kiwamu, "En Mai no kō shoku ron," 146; See for instance Yuan Mei's advices on the choice of wife or concubine: Subjective taste and aesthetic evaluation is more important than feet size or virginity. Cf. Gōyama Kiwamu, "En Mai no kō shoku ron," 155–56.

follows his concept of human nature, which is identified with the tendency towards physical and spiritual pleasures. He praises erotic poems in the "Classic of Odes" as paragon of poetry, and advises his friend—who recommends him to take care of his health—"bedding in oblivion" (*wowang* 臥忘) instead of the well known Daoist and Neo-Confucian practice of "sitting in oblivion" (*zuowang* 坐忘). Yuan Mei reproaches Buddhism for its hermetic and "barbarian" language, its exploiting men's fear of death, its superstitious beliefs in retribution, and above all its condemnation of desires and passions. Buddhism—he states—not only fails to eliminate them, but increases them through the system of prayers and supplications. In so doing, it hampers the very reasons that make life worth of living. Furthermore, if its ascetic precepts were actually enforced, in a few decades human beings would be extinguished, and the world would be populated solely by animals. In several poems and in various essays, the writer celebrates his indefatigable "research of flowers."[178] It is not by chance that his image has been associated with the mythical White Monkey (he gained the reputation of being the reincarnation of the mythical White Ape or gibbon, 猿) owing to his extraordinary sexual vigour.[179]

> Eyes naturally love beauty (*haose*)—he wrote in a poem—as well as the mouth loves what is tasty (*haowei*). Penitence is pointless, and makes mouth and eyes useless.[180]

Concerning Daoism, Yuan Mei refuses popular beliefs he considers superstitions. He also criticises Confucianism—whose social rules he accepts as valuable—for its moralism, which is against desires and thus against the true human nature. The Neo-Confucian condemnation of "attraction for female charm" (*fengliu* and *haose*) degrades man into a wild animal.[181] He is very critical of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy and social conventions, and challenges the idea of "transmission of the Way," *daotong* 道統. In general he seems against the hierarchical order associated with Confucianism.[182] Very interesting in this respect is a collection of fantastic

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[178] Yuan Mei even allowed the publication of his personal letters, aware that it would compromise his scholarly reputation. See the splendid essay by Gōyama Kiwamu, "En Mai no kō shoku ron," 127–65, which is very helpful for understanding Yuan Mei.

[179] Cf. Gōyama Kiwamu, "En Mai no kō shoku ron," 134–36.

[180] "有目必好色，有口必好味。戒之使不然，口目成虛器。" *Tao Yuanming youhuojiu*, in "Collection of poems from the cottage of the Xiaocang Hill," *Xiao cangshanfang shiji*, 15:21. Online http://www.doc88.com/p-5159505779873.html (15:34).

[181] Cf. Gōyama Kiwamu, "En Mai no kō shoku ron," 136–47.

[182] See Yuan Mei's criticism of the Confucian ideal of moral purity in his composition *Qing*

and supernatural stories titled "What the Master Would Not Discuss" (子不語), by Yuan Mei.[183] Its title, *Zibuyu*, is taken from a passage of *Lunyu* 論語 (7, *Shu er* 述而), which reads: "The Master did not discuss strange phenomena, heroic enterprises, armed rebellions, spirits, or invisible powers."[184] His collection of tales brings to mind certain aspects of so-called visionary literature and Gothic literature, although its differences do not in any way make it secondary to these Western genres.[185] Yuan Mei's choice of the *zhiguai* 志怪 genre is not casual. In fact Yuan inherits its style and contents, but the way he deals with his stories is extremely critical and original. He resorts to the "strange" and "abnormal" not only as literary device to attract the reader, but mainly because they challenge the epistemologic habits of the day, in addition to retribution-based beliefs. This is a collection of fragments of humans' paradoxical existence, where the subconscious life emerges

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shuo, "On Purity" (*Xiaocang shanfang wenji*, 22:4–5, *Xuxiu Siku*, vol. 1432: 238–39, *jibu*). Cf. Li Yanyan, "*Zibuyu* dui chuantong xisu de panni yu fansi," 39–40; Schmidt, *Harmony Garden*, 58–78, 17, 553. Cf. also Santangelo in cooperation with Yan Beiwen (1213), footnote 58 concerning Wu Sansi in the tale "Two Accounts from the 'Secret Records of the Konghe Residence," 24, p. 2002. On *daotong*, and on Yuan Mei's criticism of Buddhism and of Neo-Confucianism for their distrust of desires, cf. Schmidt, *Harmony Garden*, 64–67.

[183] Yuan Mei, *Zibuyu*, repr. in *Yuan Mei quanji*, vol. IV. *Zibuyu* is a collection of 746 short stories, covering the span of 24 chapters.

[184] The original text reads: 子不語 怪、力、亂、神. On the attitude of Confucius see for instance Lei Daihao, "'Zi bu yu guai, li, luan, shen' lun," 34–38; Wang Qinghuai, "Zibuyu guaililuanshen zhengdu." The question of the exclusion of some topics however was not ignored. Gu Kuang (Tang dynasty), in his preface to the *zhiguai* collection *Guangyi ji* gives a completely different although isolated interpretation, by sustaining that there is a textual mistake in the Confucian maxim: *buyu*, "to not talk about," which should instead be *shiyu*, "to demonstrate and talk" (古文「示」字如今文「不」字，儒有不本其意，云「子不語此」，大破格言，非觀象設教之本也). See Cheng Shude, ed., *Lunyu jishi*, vol. 2, 481, and http://open-lit.com/listbook.php?cid= 0&gbid=151&bid=7770&start=0.

[185] This Western genre embodies an appreciation of the joys of extreme emotion, the thrills of fearfulness and awe inherent in the sublime, and a quest for atmosphere. It combines elements of both horror and romance and includes English Gothic and parallel Romantic literary movements such as the *roman noir* in France. The early masterpieces of this genre are considered to be Friedrich Schiller's "The Ghost-Seer" (1789) and Matthew Gregory Lewis' *The Monk* (1796). Cf. Wright Angela, *Gothic Fiction*; Braun F., *Terms of Address: Problems of Patterns and Usage in Various Language and Cultures*. What makes this genre obviously different from the analogous Chinese phenomenon, however, are the characters and the cultural basis of Gothic literature, the role of suspense, and its late-Romantic revival.

in the apparent normality of everyday actuality, and destroys the Apollonian vision of the social-centred Confucian perception. Granted that we cannot take narrative discourse alone as a logical reflection of an author's philosophical theory, and the possible inclusion of stories of other authors in the *Zibuyu*, it pays to perform an overall analysis of this collection to find the prevailing attitude throughout it.

The story of the love between the young Quangu and the student Chen condemns the strict moralism of the local functionary, a tool used to oppress the people and the embodiment of lack of humanity. The official described here is emblematic of Yuan Mei's position that moralism is nothing more than hypocrisy: The heroism of the girl fighting for an illicit love affair is contrasted with the cruelty and moralism of the magistrate.[186] Hypocritical moralists often hide behind the good reputation enjoyed by officials, and wrong judgments result from strict moralism.[187] Yuan Mei contrasts the hypocrisy of moralists with the coherence of the foxes by depicting a fox who follows Confucian ethics in his own personal life ("true Neo-Confucianism" 真理學, lit.: Learning of the True Principle), in sharp contrast to Neo-Confucians, "Learning of the Nature and Principle," *xinglixue* 性理學.[188] When the fox's own grandson offends a servant girl, behaviour certainly considered unacceptable according to Confucian rules, the fox punishes him. On the other hand, most Neo-Confucians, despite saying they believe in Confucian morals, commit all sorts of crimes. Therefore, they do not practice what they preach. In another satirical story against Neo-Confucian orthodoxy, "A Fox Spirit and a Ghost Enter the Stomach" (狐鬼入腹, 14), the academician Li, fond of the Neo-Confucian orthodoxy (好宋儒理學) and very strict in rejecting any temptation, becomes possessed by a ghost and a fox spirit, which lodge themselves inside his stomach until the ghost finally makes him die.

Yuan Mei goes further, as he shows sympathy for women and the low strata of society, including prostitutes and servants.[189] His *pietas* for those unlucky beings,

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[186] Yuan Mei, *Zibuyu*, 16:381, *Quangu*.

[187] See "The Real Judge Bao Changed into Fake One" 真龍圖變假龍圖, 9. For instance, the abovementioned "Quan Gu," 16, condemns the cruelty and moralism of an orthodox Neo-Confucian officer; 替鬼做媒, 4 supports the re-marriage of widows; "Retribution for the One Who Introduced the Practice of Foot Binding" 裹足作俑之報, 9, criticises the practice of footbinding; "The Ghost Clerk Who Was Fond of Wine" 鬼差貪酒, 7 and "White Rainbow Spirit" 白虹精, 6, are critical of marriages arranged for social and economical status. See also Wang Yingzhi, "Yuan Mei *Zibuyu* de sixiang jiazhi," 181–82.

[188] Yuan Mei, *Zibuyu*, "Confucian Fox Scholar" 狐道學, 22.

[189] For examples of stories with characters from the dregs of society, see "The Magistrate of Pingyang" 平陽令, 2; "The Prostitute Fairy" 妓仙, 11. Several stories are dedicated to wronged female servants such as "Having Not Yet Enjoyed Great Fortune" 大福未享, 1; Chenzhou

especially women who have been the object of violence and persecution, come out in many stories.[190] The author's indignation for rules of chastity and the condition of women—who may have no other choice but to hang themselves if unjustly accused of adultery—is evident in "Thunder Struck the Soldier" (雷誅營卒, 4), or in "Chaste Woman Tian" (田烈婦, 1).[191] Some stories illustrate the strict rules of the patriarchal family system with blatant sarcasm. A pond, the Bloodied Pool, *xiewuchi* 血污池, is in Hell for those individuals, men and women, who were cruel and unjust with servants and concubines during their lifetimes:

> All the women in there treated their maids and their husband's concubines cruelly when they were alive. Those who beat maids and concubines until they bleed are thrown into this pool, and whether they are standing in deep or shallow water depends on the amount of the blood those maids and concubines lost.[192]

This punishment can be a heritage of the traditional hostility toward of the so-called female jealousy. In other cases Yuan Mei's sympathy for humble people is more evident. After describing the collapse of a house and the miraculous survival of the two inhabitants, Yuan Mei states: "The man was a servant and his lover was a prostitute. Even though they were mean people, the gods had protected them too."[193] Yuan opposes the pillars of the official historiography and orthodoxy, such as the prevalent opinion on the legitimacy of the "orthodox succession," *zhengtong* 正统, on the basis of the concept of the Heavenly Mandate. And he rejects the vulgar didacticism of the "praise and censure" method, *baobian* 褒貶, adopted by historiography. His interest for history is evidenced by his poetic production.[194]

School 陳州考院, "Zhao Wenhua Intervenes in the Netherworld" 趙文華在陰司說情, 10; "The Student Song" 宋生, 15; "Master Wu Went to the Netherworld Twice" 吳生兩入陰間, 22; For those about concubines, see "Gao Zu of the Han Dynasty Killed the Emperor Yi" 漢高祖弒義帝, 1; "Thunder in Lime Kiln County" 石灰窑雷, 8; "Leading the Ghost to Take Her Revenge" 引鬼報冤, 20. On Yuan Mei's unconventional view of women see Schmidt, *Harmony Garden*, 129–85.

[190] See for instance "A Woman Caught by a Hairy Man" 大毛人攫女, 7.

[191] On rules of chastity, see "Chaste Lady Voices Her Grievance" 貞女訴冤, 22.

[192] "Master Wu Went to the Netherworld Twice" 吳生兩入陰間, 22.

[193] "God Protects Not Only Noble Men" 神佑不必貴人, 22:438.

[194] See *Suiyuan suibi*, *juan* 2–5, mostly dedicated to official histories, their mistakes and contradictions. Cf. especially "Zuoshi bubi zibiao mingmu," 4:6 (*Xuxiu Siku*, vol. 1148: 198,

Throughout his stories Yuan Mei challenges the basis of the moral Confucian order and the Buddhist beliefs: He hints his doubts about the arrogance of power in imposing the official morality, the expectation of retribution, the meaning of destiny, the role of Heaven, and thus about official historiography;[195] he points out some contradictions of the karma, denouncing the actions of fake Bodhisattvas, and he questions the epistemological ability of human beings on the logic of events. So, indirectly, his stories mirror some of the main themes debated among the intellectuals of the period. The role of "strangeness" is fundamental for Yuan Mei in a different way than for other authors of the same genre. He resorts to the "strange" and "abnormal" not only as a literary device to attract the reader and share with them the astonishing process of reality, but mainly because said topics challenge the common way of thinking, as well as the retribution belief, society's epistemologic habits, and historiographical traditions.

Abnormal events, ghosts, invisible powers (*yinwei* 陰威), the dark world of death, the netherworld, diseases, hallucinations, and dreams raise serious questions about personal identity, moral responsibility, and the questions are interwoven with the role of Holy and magical. On one hand the "abnormal" phenomena are the subjective products of our imagination, the illusory creation of our beliefs, and the companion of our weakness and loneliness. They are the basic drivers of our behaviour. On the other hand they are also the evil hidden inside each of us. The alienation of human nature, and its repulsive aspects emerge from the ghosts' continuous threat against people's health. Moral and physical evil pervades the world, and not only this world, because greed and snobbism reign even in the netherworld, not to mention the difficulty to obtain justice and to avenge the injustices.[196] All the phenomena seem a projection of the dark side of human beings and society. Thus, the underworld and the haunting of ghosts are the

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zibu). Cf. Yang Honglie, *Yuan Mei pingzhuan*, 201–51; and Schmidt, *Harmony Garden*, 342–59.

[195] The author's critical attitude is extended also to historiographical works: The problem of true and false in history is raised in several tales, though the questions are indirectly posed. In "Gaozu of the Han dynasty killed the Yi Emperor" (漢高祖弒義帝, *Zibuyu* 1) the discovery of a previous existence allows to rediscuss an episode at the beginning of Han dynasty: It was Gaozu [Liu Bang] of the Han dynasty, not Xiang Yu, who gave orders to kill the Emperor Yi. Gaozu murdered the Yi Emperor in secret, but he turned the accusation against Xiang Yu and pretended to send forces together with other dukes to suppress Xiang Yu under the excuse that he was responsible for the death of the Yi Emperor.

[196] See for instance Yuan Mei, "At the Audience with Bodhisattva Dizang" 地藏王接客, *Zibuyu*, 9.

regression into the turbid labyrinth of the hidden and subconscious dreads. The representation of the dark side of the human soul, death, sickness, and hallucinations disrupt the certitudes that usually are shared by people, and their horror manifests the apparent absurdity of existence. But they also enter deeply into the religious experience: Why people need to seek hope, healing, protection, miracles, and comfort; the consequences of faith and those who takes on the charge of answering and satisfying such demands; how the powerful management of people's fears, beliefs, and expectations is carried on in society. Moreover, a series of epistemological questions are embedded in and behind the narrative discourse on the human ability to distinguish true from false, to give meaning to existence and to special events, and to elaborate a reasonable and consequential past.

People look for security in a superior order through the intermediation of Daoist and Buddhist monks, magicians with their spells, and perform exorcisms and sacrifices to appease the spirits and the ghosts or obtain help in life. Literati too look for analogous safety through their adherence to the Confucian system and the umbrella of Heaven's Mandate. But in *Zibuyu* ghosts are not the means of a superior justice for redressing an ancient wrong. They often look like the blind executors of a vendetta for a wrong, the memory of which is lost, or the persecutors of an innocent victim whose supposed guilt is to be attributed to something done in a previous life, even centuries before. Sometimes, in fact, Yuan Mei reflects upon the actual contradictions concerning the common formula that doers of good or evil will get their "just deserts," *shan'e huofu* 善惡禍福, and seems torn between real life—where the virtuous may have a lucky or unlucky life, and bullies too may have a lucky or unlucky life—and the yearning for the consolation of justice. In the "Story of Yingguang Studio" (影光書樓事, 5) the Daoist monk is unable to rid a woman of a ghost possessing her and says: "This is caused by karma for a wrongdoing [of your wife towards the ghost] in a previous existence of over two hundred years ago, and the ghost has finally found your wife. The longer the hatred has been festering, the harsher the retribution is. I am powerless to do anything."

The above questions demonstrate just how conflicting the opinions of contemporary literati were on this topic. For instance, another author of the same genre, Pu Songling, expressed a different thought: "In such a huge disaster, only the filial descendant survived. Who else can say that the god of Heaven doesn't know right from wrong?"[197] Again, in the first story of his collection, Pu Songling exploits the rather common theme of the honest official appointed to a position in the underworld to reaffirm his faith in worldly morality. Song Tao, in his exam

[197] Pu Songling, *Liaozhai zhiyi*, "Flood" 水災, 4.

composition on the theme of the connection between intention and responsibility (有心無心), writes: "When a good deed is done with the intent of receiving a reward, even though it is an act of good, it is not to be rewarded; when an evil deed is done without intent, then even though it is an act of evil, it is not to be punished."[198] We can see how different the concept of retribution was between Yuan Mei and Pu Songling.

The second question, thus, concerns the consistence and morality of retribution, the effects of forgiveness and repentance, and the personal responsibility for an act done by somebody who is not exactly the same individual they were at the time of the crime. Is guilt just the legacy of karma from previous lives? This apparent contradiction is pointed out in some plots, but without any attempt at explanation or justification: While the vengeance of the vigilant ghost seems to answer to a basic sense of justice, the recipient of punishment is not always an appropriate target, as they are not actually the murderer, villain, or their direct descendant. Sometimes it seems that retribution is just a mechanical rule that balances events, beyond any personal responsibility: Even an unwilling accident is followed by another unwilling accident, like in the case of "From the Window: Looking at Retribution" (旁觀因果, 5). One day an old florist kills a manure-carrier by accident, and several years later he will be killed in an accident by a wealthy boy—the reincarnation of the manure-carrier. Nobody could put together the two events, as the reincarnation of the manure-carrier into a wealthy boy seems very strange: "can the manure-carrier cultivate himself to be reborn into a rich family?" Only by looking at the whole story from outside, through the window, may one discover the supposed hidden thread that links such absurd connections.

Here the main discourse is not on the degree of a subject's responsibility—as we expect—but on the mysterious ways Destiny operates, or better on the manneristic reconstruction of a predestined sequence to explain events, which otherwise are completely senseless. In another story, Zhang Dali had been the assistant minister of the Ministry of Punishments in his previous life, and was responsible for the capital punishment of two innocent people. When the real criminals are discovered, Zhang is only deprived of his official position. He was still considered an honest and upright official during his life, and moreover he is reborn as a human being. The ghosts of the wrongly punished men then claim: "We should like to ask: How can a severe grievance like being unfairly punished by dismemberment be appeased only by deprivation of one's official position? We come here to demand Dali's life."[199] The sinner does not appear to obtain any

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[198] Pu Songling, *Liaozhai zhiyi*, "Exam to Become City God" 考城隍, 1.

[199] Yuan Mei, "He Hua Er," *Zibuyu*, 22:425. The original text reads: 凌遲重情，可是奪職所能蔽辜否？我故來此索命.

forgiveness from destiny, and even repentance and the conversion to a moral life seems not able to redeem him from punishment, which is automatic, as in "The Thunder Struck the Soldier" (雷誅營卒, 4). In another story the premature death of a fifteen-year-old boy challenges the idea of retribution. The boy's father complains to the thunder god—who has killed his son—who in the end accepts his arguments. The absurdity of the death is therefore exposed, and looks analogous with the counterpart question raised in the West: *Si Deus est unde malum? Et si non est, unde bonum?* (If God exists, why is there evil? If God does not exist, why is there goodness?).

Yuan Mei's relativisation of the karmic principle (因果報應) and of the widespread formula of the effects of good and bad actions (善惡禍福) is evident in the paradoxes of the legacy of karma from previous existences: Ghosts seeking revenge for ill done unto them are often the absurd trigger for a series of casualties.[200] The "deregulation" of the cause-effect relationship can be seen in "Not Only Virtuous Men Become Immortals" (成神不必賢人, 22) and in "The Inebriated City God" (城隍神酗酒, 9), where events without any apparent interrelation are thrown together. The dynamics of many tales consist of the dialectic confrontation between the sense of justice and the search for safety. It is the subjectivisation of these basic feelings versus the uncertainty of retribution that challenges the concept of self, thus the sense of responsibility and the whole traditional perception of history.

Some plots directly challenge the cause-effect relationship: Even sequences of events which seem to lead clearly from one to the another are thrown into doubt by alternate interpretations—fortuity, chance, or coincidence may be just as reasonable an explanation to make intelligible reality and history.[201] Hence, the connection between cause and effect comes across as nothing but a simplistic hypothesis which over-focuses on the contiguity of phenomena, among an infinite number of other possible interrelations.[202] The vulgar explanations and general

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[200] Yuan Mei, "The Cave of the Red Flowers" (紅花洞), *Zibuyu* 7:11.

[201] Exemplary is Yuan Mei's poem translated by Schmidt, *Harmony Garden*, 58: "Does the wind really love blowing flowers all over the ground? / Do clouds begrudge the moon its place in the sky? / If you think about our lot in life this way, / The whole world is indifferent, everything happens by chance."

[202] According to Hume, we cannot prove that there is a necessary connection between a cause and an effect, like we cannot prove that there is a necessary connection between our perceptions and reality. The only cause-and-effect relations which we can confirm by experience are those of contiguity in time or place, temporal precedence, and constant conjunction. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*. For the online edition, belonging to the "Online Library of Liberty," see: http://oll.libertyfund.org/index.php?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=342 &Itemid=27.

beliefs that attempt to comfort and warn the masses are destined to fall into contradiction, as they prove to be all too simplistic and reductionist.

Only insight that overcomes our narrow perspective can help us accept the ultimate reality, which is identified as the so-called destiny. Yuan Mei reminds that "Fortune loves to make fun of people" (造化弄人).[203] Or, quoting the *Daodejing* 道德經, he says that our ideal expectation does not correspond with reality: "Heaven and Earth do not manifest humaneness, and they regard all beings as trivial as straw dogs."[204] These sentences probably do not reflect Yuan's position, and seem to dialectically play between those who consider heaven and destiny amoral and those who follow the popular naïve beliefs in spirits or have consolatory trust in the moral heaven.

The narrative tone and the way the stories are presented cast some doubts upon the satisfactory running of the universe. We cannot say for sure if destiny is the moral and rational order working under Heaven's will, if Heaven has a will, or if destiny is merely a symbol for a mystery which cannot be grasped by the human mind, because either an overriding plan or a non-logical reality that works differently from human expectations. One of the stories of *Zibuyu*, "Two Gods Fighting Each Other" (兩神相毆, 3) is a kind of parable where amoral Destiny or Fate (素大王, i.e. 數) and moral Principle or moral Destiny (李大王, i.e. 理) confront each other, and where in the end the former wins 7 to 3. This means that in the world justice triumphs only thirty percent of the time. Here Yuan Mei seems to disconsolately, or better, dispassionately conclude that human affairs are uneven, and among them there are still many unpaid injustices; in fact, one individual's poor life is in fact a small matter compared to the multitude of other unfair cases. It is a natural law from time immemorial that [moral] Principle cannot defeat [amoral] Destiny. The allegory of the competition between the two gods seems to stress that fate is much more effective in its process than the reasonable and consolatory retribution of human behaviour, in a way that is beyond our comprehension. Such reality cannot be explained but with the wisdom of hindsight. Take the emblematic case of a man—in another story—who at a certain moment of his life could be considered protected by the gods because he escapes a great danger. However, sometime later the verdict on his life and his destiny are completely overturned: Could it be that he was saved only to suffer a worse, or at least a different, death?:

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[203] Yuan Mei, "Two Wang Shihongs" 兩汪士鋐, *Zibuyu*, 13.

[204] Yuan Mei, "One Must Swallow the Iron Pills Before Entering the Court in the Netherworld" (閻王升殿先吞鐵丸), *Zibuyu*, 16:312. The original text reads: 天地不仁，以萬物爲芻狗.

> Master Ye of Jing County was on his way to Anqing with some others to do business. As they were sailing across a river, they ran into strong winds and half of the several dozen men on board drowned. However, when Ye fell into the river, he saw a man in red come towards him and, holding him in his arms, lift him from the water. Thus, he survived. Ye thought that because he had received the help of a god, he would become rich and noble in the future. However, not long after, when he was at home, he was careless with fire and burnt to death.[205]

Enlightening also is another story on the Genesis and Pangu, which raises the general issue regarding the connection between moral responsibility and destiny, and where the theoretical dilemma of the history of humanity and of periodical cycles is discussed. The King of Piqian 毗騫國王, talking to the merchant Fang Wenmu 方文木, poses a series of rhetorical questions about the most common beliefs of the time concerning history and individual existences, none of which had a satisfying answer: a) the lack of consistency of the relation between virtue and good luck, and evil and bad luck, respectively; b) the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of gods and spirits; c) different results in the search for immortality; d) the supposed connections of beauty-unluckiness and talent-unluckiness; e) the contradiction between the possibility of divining the future and the impossibility of controlling destiny; Heaven's ability or not in carrying out justice.[206] The king explains that "Everything happened by chance, according to shifts in the cosmic psychophysical energy (*qi*), and evolved to be half-bright and half-dark, sometimes right and sometimes wrong. Just like water spills to the ground, sometimes taking on a square shape and sometimes taking on a round shape. Just like when children play chess and they place the pieces randomly, as they please." This answer is far less reassuring than the concept of retribution in destiny and life. And, after offering a simple explanation for predestination, the king adds, "So humans" intentions do not often conform to those of Heaven. The people in the world of the living are always in a hurry, but they are only wooden puppets controlled by a secret puppeteer. Success and failure, cleverness and clumsiness are all predestined long ago, but human beings don't know that."[207]

The final answer simply stresses the human inability to understand the flow of reality or the mystery of life and death. This sentence introduces us to the last question raised by Yuan Mei on the actual ability of men to understand reality, past

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[205] Yuan Mei, "Saved from Drowning Only to Burn to Death in a Fire" 火焚人不當水死, *Zibuyu*, 3.

[206] Yuan Mei, "Following the Settled Case of Pangu and the Genesis" 奉行初次盤古成案, *Zibuyu*, 5.

[207] Ibid.

and future. Man is eager to understand events that happen around him, to justify or condemn others' behaviour, to reconstruct people's lives, the past and the present, and to elaborate history. Man tries to understand happiness and sadness, luckiness and unluckiness, success and accidents. Even if the "memory" of a wrong can be seen as transcending the short life of the individual, death and disasters present in Yuan Mei's discourse are seen as a temporary change of a more complex universal transformation process. The author hints that any attempt to judge and to explain another's life is destined to fail, or it is relative to a certain moment or circumstance that may change it completely.

However happy or tragic the end of a story, it is only a provisional ending. In his narration, the author seems to hint that however a story ends, it implies the interpretation of a person's phase of life or period in history, a temporary analysis, and this reconstruction of reality is simply the production of a side-perspective, a teleological attitude of the interpreter with a justification or consolatory aim. Therefore, what seems like a happy ending now may later turn into tragedy, as everything is subject to change over time and under new circumstances, and thus may call for other possible interpretations and hypotheses.[208] The incompatibility between man's expectations and his perception of reality and history is a key point in this narrative. The search for righteousness and the thirst of justice are insuppressible among human beings, but their sense of right and wrong is practical, contingent and changeable, and therefore incompatible with the natural process of events.

The reference to the taboo topics that the Master did not discuss means the author's consciousness of his own destabilising discourse, his stress on the free dominion of fantasy, and his seductive invitation to the reader to an adventurous journey into an unknown land. This approach, however, is not only a creation of fantasy, but allows the author to adventure in the dangerous recesses of the self, expressing the "anxiety of existence." It is a sort of allegoric reflection on the relative and polyphonic essence of human beings, the multiplicity of selves from a psychological and moral responsibility perspective, and a challenge to the traditional biographical and historical perspective for the unreliability of the floating destiny. Yuan Mei seems to support the inability of men to understand the complexity of reality, as well as the transitoriness of any judgments or explanations.

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[208] On the contrary, as Leo Chan explains for Ji Yun's tales, "The principle upon which stories of supernatural logic work is, basically, one of elimination: After all the natural alternatives have been explored and proven inadequate, the supernatural explanation is introduced not only as viable, but as challenge-proof, and the only possible ground for refutation is that what happened was a coincidence." Leo Tak-Hung Chan, *The Discourse on Foxes and Ghosts: Ji Yun and Eighteenth Century Literati Storytelling*, 50.

Many stories have shown how the reassuring belief in a retributive universal order is naïve and simple, as well as the failure of any belief in protecting or threatening supernatural powers. But few stories convey a tragic sense, which however rarely brings lament on the absurdity of existence. The limitedness of human mind does not permit understanding of the superior process of the universe and presses men to look for protection and consolation. Besides the reference to the absurd and the inexplicable process of individual and collective destinies, the attention to souls beyond their bodies is a metaphor to explore the dark and hidden sides of human beings, and the mystery of their invisible hearts-minds, which are not often conform to external appearances. Even ghosts and spirits uncover what is not visible to human eyes in the interplay of reality and illusion.

I focused on these few examples, but many other cases can be detected: the debate on the dignity of the individual and the value of desires, the praise of folly as a challenge on current concept of human nature and personality, the search for genuine feelings in the world of sensations and "amoral" wisdom, and finally the challenge on traditional concepts of responsibility, retribution, and cosmic order. We can understand how some literati of late imperial China were aware of changing times and society, and how they reacted by trying to challenge the established conventions and Neo-Confucian orthodoxy: The ladder of values and the conceptual system are called into question, new elements for standing out are looked for, the moral rules are deeply discussed, the relation between principle and emotions is reversed, and all main ideas and concepts, from love to destiny, individual responsibility, and retribution become object of debate. Li Zhi's "utilitarian," Dai Zhen's "empirical," and Yuan Mei's paradoxical approaches could have a reformative impact, more than the traditional concept of moral innateness. These new approaches—like some ideas of writers from the end of the Han to the Jin and Wei dynasties—redefine the role of "self" as individual centre, recreating a moral code based not on the moralism of disinterest and the rhetoric of the "public" against the "private," but precisely on the effective self-centredness of the individual. On these realistic bases freedom and tolerance, as well as respect and sympathy for fellow men, may develop according to these authors. Only by anchoring behaviour and social conventions to the awareness of the deepest motivations and to the experience of one's needs it is possible to restore a coexistence among humans based on mutual understanding.

The voices presented here might only represent themselves, in the sense that we are not able to say how much they reflected general opinion. We cannot conclude whether they represent a new society, or the majority or minority of it. We can affirm, anyway, that they present various—often independent and critical—positions and ideas, creating a multiplicity of opinions in a quasi-pluralistic society. This variety was represented even more lively in literary works. Here the continuous negotiation between the official rules and personal

ambitions and desires uncovers the multiplicity of solutions, but also the distance between the orthodox morality and the conscience of people, at least in the most advanced areas of the empire. Orthodoxy and heterodoxy were still clearly distinguishable, and the authority of *zheng* 正 was often enforced with authoritarian and intolerant determination by the bureaucratic power. Nonetheless, they could circulate down to the present day. Ideologies and doctrines spread in a variety of nuances, syncretic interactions and contrasts. Moreover, especially in this period, the new attempts to elaborate systems focused on the individual and its importance offer original concepts on personality, nature, and the relationships between subjects and society.

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