

University of Pennsylvania

**Authorial Disputes:
Private Life and Social Commentary in the *Honglou meng***

A senior thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for Honors in History

by

Carina L. Wells

Philadelphia, PA
March 23, 2003

Faculty Advisor: Siyen Fei
Honors Director: Julia Rudolph

Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Acknowledgements..... | i |
| Explanatory Note..... | iv |
| Dynasties and Periods..... | v |
| Selected Reign Periods of the Qing Dynasty..... | vi |
| | |
| Introduction: The <i>Honglou meng</i> Reconsidered..... | 1 |
| Chapter 1: Status Anxiety and the Examinations: Discourse on Male Duty | 28 |
| Chapter 2: Love or Duty?: The Conflicting Depictions of Daiyu and Baochai..... | 61 |
| Chapter 3: Controlling Women: Shrewish Wives and Shrewd Household Managers...100 | |
| Conclusion: Historical Implications of the <i>Honglou meng</i> | 133 |
| | |
| Bibliography..... | 141 |
| Appendix A..... | 147 |

For my parents

Acknowledgements

When I began work on my honors thesis, I never anticipated the direction which it has now taken. My prior training had been in the realm of social history. Moreover, my work in Chinese history had primarily been concerned with the lives of women in Late Imperial China. When I originally began research on my thesis, I intended to use my thesis as an opportunity to expand my prior investigations of social phenomena such as footbinding, the cult of widow chastity, and women's education. It was only after a semester's worth of work that I began to realize that I was confronted with serious limitations in my intended area of study. Although I am currently studying Mandarin, I am not yet fluent in traditional characters. Consequently, I was unable to a serious study of the social conditions faced by Late Imperial Chinese women because the sources which I needed to consult have not been translated into English.

Faced with this obstacle, my thesis advisor, Prof. Siyen Fei, recommended that I change my topic to focus on the major literary masterworks of the Ming and Qing dynasties, especially the *Honglou meng*. At this point, I began to immerse myself in the world of Chinese fiction. Initially, I was resistant to the idea of producing a work of intellectual or literary history. I constantly struggled with myself as I wondered whether or not anything of consequence could be revealed merely by examining a fictional narrative. It was only in time that I overcame my initial aversion to intellectual history and accepted the importance of examining not only the actual social conditions of a given time period, but also how people felt about those conditions and reacted to them. Intellectual and literary history, specifically in Late Imperial China, presents revealing information on the world in which people live. In order to understand a given society it is

not enough that we know what transpired in daily life, but we must also examine how people thought about their society and their actions within that social framework. I hope that this thesis will shed some light on how members of Chinese society in the eighteenth century felt about the society in which they lived

First, I must recognize those experts in the fields of both Late Imperial Chinese social history and the history of the *Honglou meng*. Without the guidance of their work or the Hawkes-Minford translation of the *Honglou meng*, I would never have been able to decipher the meaning of this massive text and its historical impact. One text in particular has been critical in my work. I spent the entire summer reading the *Honglou meng*, a massive undertaking in its own right, and working on secondary literature, but I still had no idea how I could compile a meaningful thesis based on a fictional work. Faced with a pressing deadline for my outline, I picked up every book in our library on the *Honglou meng* and barricaded myself into my study carrel. Fortunately, in my frenzy, I grabbed a copy of Wu Shih-ch'ang's *On the Red Chamber Dream: A Critical Study of Two Annotated Manuscripts of the XVIIIth Century*. This text, which systematically details the changes made by Gao E to Cao Xueqin's manuscripts, allowed me to make sense of the meaning of the *HLM*. Without it, this work would not have been possible.

Second, I can only thank Prof. Fei for her kindness and patience in advising me. Every time that I sent emails to her proposing grand new directions for my thesis and panicking about my research, Prof. Fei steadied me and provided me with invaluable guidance. Without her stabilizing force, my thesis could easily have gone awry as I fought with myself about the meaning and importance of my topic. She has proved a powerful guiding force in my work whether it be answering my emails at 3 am or

providing me with such words of wisdom as, “The first job for a good historian is always to lure your readers in with a good story (and then torture them with you crazy ideas and esoteric theories).” From the moment I first entered her class on Chinese women as a lowly sophomore, Prof. Fei has pushed me always to expect more from myself and from my scholarship.

I would be remiss if I did not also extend thanks to my Honors Director, Prof. Rudolph. Prof. Rudolph repeatedly challenged me to incorporate more aspects of intellectual history into my argument. Her persistent advice helped me to overcome my initial aversion to that particular historical discipline. I must also express my gratitude to my peer, Ariela Housman. Through three years of classes and a shared, if somewhat inexplicable, passion for Chinese history, we have both challenged and inspired each other. I do not know how I would have made it through the lonely weekends in the library and the late night agony of writing without her companionship in this endeavor. Finally, thanks to the countless others who provided me with support during my work. Their toleration of my reclusive behavior combined with a determination not to let my thesis keep me from enjoying my senior year has kept me sane during a sometimes insane project.

Explanatory Note

Since Pinyin was adopted in 1979 by the Chinese government as the official Romanization system for the Chinese language, most authors have used this system. However, some of the sources which I have consulted are older works which make use of the Wade-Giles Romanization system. Within my text itself, I have converted the names of all historical figures as well as all Chinese terms into Pinyin. In keeping with this convention, I have also standardized the Pinyin Romanization of character names within the *Honglou meng* in order to make them more recognizable to modern students of Chinese. However, I have only standardized the names of those characters whose names were directly transcribed. I have retained the translated names primarily given to maids and servants as translated by Hawkes and Minford. I have retained the names of authors of the sources which I have consulted in their original form. I feel that retaining the Wade-Giles Romanization is justified because it will make the task of those who wish to find and consult my sources infinitely easier. Additionally, in my footnotes I have abbreviated reference to the Hawkes-Minford translation of the *Honglou meng* as *HLM* with the number of the volume from which the citation was taken.

Dynasties and Periods

| | |
|--|------------------|
| Zhou | ca. 1045-256 BCE |
| Qing | 221-206 BCE |
| Han | 206 BCE – 220 CE |
| Three Kingdoms Period | 220-280 CE |
| Six Dynasties Period | 222-589 CE |
| Northern and Southern Dynasties Period | 317-589 CE |
| Sui | 581-618 CE |
| Tang | 618-907 CE |
| Five Dynasties Period | 907-960 CE |
| Song | 960-1279 CE |
| Yuan | 1279-1368 CE |
| Ming | 1368-1644 CE |
| Qing | 1644-1911CE |

Selected Reign Periods of the Qing
Dynasty, 1644-1911 CE

Kangxi period

1662-1722 CE

Yongzheng period

1723-1735 CE

Qianlong period

1736-1795 CE

Introduction:
The *Honglou meng* Reconsidered

Truth becomes fiction when fiction's true;
Real becomes not-real where the unreal's real.¹

It is the story of a rich family on the brink of poverty, a disobedient and unruly son who refuses to obey his father's wishes and who loves the wrong woman, and strong, manipulative women controlling weak, ineffective men. Rebellion, indolence, forbidden love, carnal lust, jealous passion, and corruption: the *Honglou meng* (*The Dream of the Red Chambers*) has all of the elements of a riveting melodrama. Written by Cao Xueqin in 1754 and revised by Gao E for mass printing in 1792, this Chinese novel has understandably captivated the interest of audiences since its creation. Cao Xueqin used this fictional narrative to criticize the traditional social order. Its innovative story lines have been hailed for breaking with Confucian traditions by advocating personal freedom and the pursuit of individual happiness instead of emphasizing family obligations. This tendency was enhanced by the New Cultural Movement in the early 20th Century. With the collapse of the old dynastic system and the rise of Communism, intellectuals, such as Chen Duxiu (1879-1942), increasingly criticized Confucianism.² With these rising attacks on Confucianism, non-mainstream texts such as the *Honglou meng* were embraced and celebrated.

However, not all aspects of the *Honglou meng* have been uniformly praised. It was discovered in the early 20th Century that the later part of the *Honglou meng* had been substantially revised by Gao E. Gao E was more conservative than was Cao Xueqin. He rewrote the ending of the novel in order to support the traditional Confucian social

¹ *HLM*, vol. 1, 55.

² Wm. Theodore deBary, Wing-tsit Chan, and Chester Tan, eds., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), ch. 14 passim.

order.³ Consequently, Gao E has been condemned for his revisions to the novel which later critics felt destroyed the innovative nature of the text. His revisions have been condemned as “a pretty botched job by all accounts.”⁴ He has been lambasted for “disingenuously” altering the text instead of simply correcting errors within the text as would be expected of a modern editor.⁵ According to these early 20th Century critics, Gao E’s version of the *Honglou meng* was completely worthless. The *Honglou meng*, a literary classic, had been destroyed by the deliberate interference of a mediocre writer.

However, this critical stance towards Gao E’s version of the *Honglou meng* prevents us from unraveling the import of these revisions. This mode of criticism is overly focused on the literary and stylistic changes made to the *Honglou meng*. However, the primary changes that Gao E made to the text were not stylistic. Rather, he deliberately rewrote portions of the *Honglou meng* in order to counter Cao Xueqin’s liberal narrative. By changing the original plot lines as presented by Cao Xueqin, Gao E was, in fact, using literary revision as a vehicle for conducting a debate about social issues. The changes made to the *HLM* should be understood not as unauthorized destruction of another author’s intellectual property, but rather as part of a literary tradition in which revision was used as a tool of social commentary among members of the literati-elite.

More than simply understanding literary revision as a method of presenting social commentary, we must understand that all novels in general were used as a forum for discussing issues of private life. It is easy to see Gao E’s reactions to Cao Xueqin’s

³ *HLM*, vol. 1, 40.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵ Wu Shih-Ch’ang, *On The Red Chamber Dream: A Critical Study of Two Annotated Manuscripts of the XVIIIth Century*, (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1961), 234.

opinions on social issues because he directly altered portions of the text with which he disagreed. Although it is less obvious, Cao Xueqin was also reacting to prevailing social currents when he authored the *Honglou meng*. In order to fully unravel the secrets locked inside the *Honglou meng* we must first understand the philosophy which motivated Cao Xueqin to author the *Honglou meng* as a liberal social tract. Then we must explore the social changes which motivated Gao E to revise the plot of the novel in more conservative fashion. A close examination of this aspect of the creation of the *Honglou meng* reveals not only that novels were used as a forum for debating issues of private life in Late Imperial China, but it also reveals the ways in which Cao Xueqin and Gao E's stances on social issues diverged from stereotypical definitions of liberal and conservative philosophy. These divergences indicate that our preconceived notions may not completely capture the intricacy of these philosophies. Ultimately, it is only through the unreal world of fiction that we can understand the reality of private life in Late Imperial China.

I. Fictional Commentary and the *Honglou meng*

Most historians assume that vernacular fiction was little more than an amusing diversion from the harsh realities of daily life. This literary genre developed during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) when writers began to break out of the formal elite language which had previously been used for literary compositions. Instead these innovative authors such as Feng Menglong (1574-1646) composed works of fiction in the vernacular language. Early works were often based off of stories taken from the oral storytelling traditions, but as the genre grew more respectable authors began to compose novels using

vernacular language. The novel format developed during the Ming dynasty, and reached its height during the Qing dynasty(1644-1900 CE).

For authors in Late Imperial China, fiction was serious business. It was a forum for openly debating social issues pertaining to the family. According to Confucian dictates, there was a strict division between elements of public life and matters of the family which were to remain private. For this reason, public texts such as political tracts, religious doctrines, and memorials to the emperor seldom contain direct reference to familial issues. While some texts such as the *Liji (The Book of Rites)* contain prescriptive ideals for how the family should function, men did not openly discuss how their families actually functioned and the ways in which they might have deviated from these ideals. Although writers could not openly discuss issues of private life, they were able to discretely reference these subjects under the guise of presenting a fictional family. In works of fiction, writers were able to address how people reacted to and interacted with prescriptive ideals about familial life. The study of fictional works allows us a window into familial issues which were not otherwise openly debated in public works.

The *Honglou meng*⁶ provides the perfect opportunity to examine the use of fiction to present a social debate. The *HLM* is based around issues of private life. Its intricate plot details the downfall of the elite Jia family and its various causes: the heir, Jia Baoyu, and his refusal to devote himself to his studies, the disastrous love triangle between Baoyu and his two cousins, Daiyu and Baochai, and the machinations of the daughter-in-law and manager of the Jia household, Wang Xifeng. The *HLM* has been hailed as “the

⁶ Hereafter referred to by the abbreviation *HLM*.

most vivid and comprehensive reflection of late imperial culture and social institutions.”⁷ Consequently, this is an ideal novel to use to examine the way that authors dealt with private issues through the medium of fiction.

However, the authorship of the *HLM* is not straightforward. The *HLM* was originally authored by Cao Xueqin (1715-63). He began work on the novel in 1744 and finished work on the first eighty chapters by 1754.⁸ Although some modern critics claim that Cao Xueqin was able to finish the novel before his death,⁹ there is no conclusive evidence that he ever completed the manuscript. In the mid-eighteenth century, the *HLM* existed as a handwritten manuscript consisting only of eighty chapters. Although the *HLM* originally circulated only among Cao Xueqin’s family and friends, it soon began to grow in popularity.¹⁰ At this point, in 1791 Cheng Weiyuan, an accomplished painter and literary connoisseur, asked Gao E, a local exam graduate, to revise the *HLM* in order to create a printed version of the text. Although there were some manuscripts in circulation before the printing of the Gao E edition which were longer than eighty chapters, none of them were as long as the 120 chapter version ultimately produced by Gao E.¹¹ Although there is some enduring controversy over how much of a role Gao E played in reshaping the novel, it is well accepted that he did put his own authorial stamp on the work, not the least by crafting a completed ending to the novel.¹² To a modern reader, Gao E’s extensive work in revising the *HLM* seems to undermine the authenticity of the text. Given his later interpolations in the novel, it might seem impossible to ever

⁷ Anthony C. Yu, *Rereading the Stone: Desire and the Making of Fiction in Dream of the Red Chamber*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), xi.

⁸ Wu Shih-Ch’ang, *On The Red Chamber Dream*, 113.

⁹ *HLM*, vol. 1, 39.

¹⁰ Wu Shih-Ch’ang, *On The Red Chamber Dream*, 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 269.

¹² *HLM*, vol. 3, 14-15; Wu Shih-Ch’ang, *On The Red Chamber Dream*, 275-6.

uncover the exact social viewpoint of Cao Xueqin, the progenitor of the story, was trying to establish, or even to determine how and why Gao E change the plot of the *HLM*.

Without being able to separate these elements, it would be pointless to study the *HLM* because it merely represents the jumbled ideas of two disparate authors.

II. Separating the Authors: Methodology and Constraints

The only viable solution to the issue of separating Cao Xueqin's original material from Gao E's later additions is reading a copy both of Gao E's version of the *HLM* and of Cao Xueqin's original manuscript version of the novel in order to compare the two.

However, the time period that I have chosen to study has presented some unusual challenges in this endeavor. Although I have taken two years of modern Chinese, I am still unable to read an original version of the *HLM*. The *HLM*, like all other works written before the fall of the Qing dynasty, was written in Classical Chinese which differs significantly from the modern version of the language. Although there have been numerous translations made of Gao E's version of the *HLM*, there is still no translation of the entirety of Cao Xueqin's manuscripts so I have been unable to directly compare the two versions of the *HLM*.

Primary sources are of central importance to any historical study. Because I was unable to access the *HLM* in the original Chinese, I sought to overcome this difficulty by grounding my study in the most accurate translated version of the *HLM*. I also focused particular attention to the issues of language, even in the translation, so that it would not compromise my findings. Fortunately, I am focused on plot issues rather than language. Because I am focusing on social issues, it is not necessary to understand the exact Chinese meaning of every word. Instead, it is only necessary that I can determine which

elements of plot originated with which author in order to separate out their individual perspectives on social issues. This focus has made it easier to work with my sources in translation because it is only important that the details of the plot are accurate rather than needing an exact translation of every Chinese term. Additionally, because the changes between Cao Xueqin and Gao E's versions of the texts have been well documented, I was able to consult multiple works to confirm my interpretation of the text. I am confident that my close analysis of an authoritative translation of the *HLM* coupled with a comparison to secondary literature has made it possible to determine the authorship of different elements of the *HLM* despite my inability to work directly with the sources in Classical Chinese.

Because I could not read the *HLM* in Chinese, I have relied upon the English translation created by David Hawkes and John Minford in 1973. The Hawkes-Minford translation is the most authoritative English edition of the *HLM* yet produced. It is also one of the first versions to present the entire text of the 120 chapter version of the *HLM* rather than merely selecting excerpts from the lengthy text and considerably shortening the work. Without the extensive nature of this translation, this study would not have been possible. However, this translation does not preserve either the full text of either Cao Xueqin's original manuscript or of Gao E's version of the *HLM*. It is a translation of all 120 chapters of the Gao E version, but it incorporates portions of the original manuscript version of the *HLM* in the first eighty chapters of the novel.¹³ Furthermore, Hawkes and Minford also undertook to make emendations of their own in order to improve the clarity of the text:

¹³ *HLM*, vol. 1, 18.

In translating this novel I have felt unable to stick faithfully to any single text. I have mainly followed Gao E's version of the first chapter as being more consistent, though less interesting than other ones; but I have frequently followed a manuscript reading in subsequent chapters, and in a few, rare instances I have made small emendation of my own.¹⁴

As a result, Hawkes freely admits, "that this translation in effect represents a new edition of my own."¹⁵

Although these interventions into the text might initially appear problematic, they are easily countered both by an examination of the nature of the translation itself and by a comparison of this translation with secondary literature detailing the changes made to the *HLM*. First of all, Hawkes and Minford's personal interpolations into the text are limited to correcting textual inaccuracies which might impair a reader's understanding of the plot.¹⁶ They have endeavored to render systematic the sometimes inconsistent references to characters of geographic locations present in the original work. Ironically, it was some of these self-same textual inaccuracies, developed during the years when the text was transcribed and transmitted in manuscript form, which motivated the initial efforts to edit the *HLM*. No changes have been made to the general scope of the novel. This nature of the translation is of crucial importance. Because Hawkes and Minford's personal emendations are limited to rendering textual inaccuracies consistent, they have not grossly interfered with the plot of the novel. Therefore, all of the plot elements in this translation come directly out of either Cao Xueqin or Gao E's version of the *HLM*. The only problem that remains is to determine how to separate Cao Xueqin's text from Gao E's revisions.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁵ *HLM*, vol. 2, 18.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

In order to supplement the Hawkes-Minford translation, I have relied heavily upon the work of Wu Shih-ch'ang who wrote *On the Red Chamber Dream*, an exhaustive analysis of the changes made to the original manuscript version of the *HLM* by Gao E. It allowed me to determine what elements of the Hawkes-Minford translation of the *HLM* came from Cao Xueqin's original version of the *HLM* and which came from Gao E's revised version. Because I am concerned with the grand details of plot rather than with subtle details such as how a word was transmitted in a given version of the *HLM*, with Wu Shih-ch'ang's work as my guide, I have been able to tease apart the elements of Cao Xueqin and Gao E's work in the Hawkes-Minford version of the *HLM*. While Wu Shih-ch'ang's work is not unbiased and he clearly is eager to demonstrate that Gao E's work is inferior to that produced by Cao Xueqin, I am convinced that he accurately presents the changes made to the *HLM*. In order to prove that Gao E knowingly altered the trajectory of Cao Xueqin's masterwork and produced a more "mundane" text, Wu Shih-ch'ang strove to document every change that Gao E made to the *HLM*, no matter how seemingly insignificant. Consequently, I have been able to use his work to reconstruct a working model denoting which elements of the Hawkes-Minford translation came from the Cao Xueqin or Gao E version of the *HLM*.

The difficulties in separating the work of Cao Xueqin and Gao E are also made easier by the nature of the *HLM* itself. Because Cao Xueqin's original manuscript only contained eighty chapters, all of the material in the final forty chapters of the Hawkes-Minford translation is Gao E's work. By comparing Gao E's individual vision as represented by the final forty chapters, it is possible to discern to some extent what elements of the plot in the first eighty chapters are from Cao Xueqin's original

manuscripts and which are Gao E's later interpolations. By comparing the text cited by Wu Shih-ch'ang with the Hawkes-Minford translation, I have concluded that while Gao E may have altered minor details in the first eighty chapters of the *HLM*, he did not change many major details of the story outside of his creation of an ending for the novel. As a result, the first eighty chapters as presented by Hawkes and Minford are indicative of Cao Xueqin's initial work, in scope if not in detail, while the final forty chapters present Gao E's attempt to change the *HLM* into a text which appealed more to conservative morality.

Although it initially appears problematic that I have not been able to study the *HLM* in the original Chinese, I am confident that I have been able to overcome these difficulties. Because of the nature of my study, it is not necessary that I understand the direct translation of every word. Instead, I merely need access to the details of the plot and how they changed. Because of the non-invasive nature of Hawkes and Minford's translation, I still have access to these major issues. Additionally, although the Hawkes-Minford version does not present a direct translation of either the Cao Xueqin or Gao E version of the *HLM*, by using Wu Shih-ch'ang's analysis of the changes made to the novel I have been able to determine the authorial origins of individual plot elements. Consequently, I have been able to present a detailed analysis of both the original plot of the *HLM* as authored by Cao Xueqin and of the changes made to that plot by Gao E.

III. Authorship In Late Imperial China

However, simply separating out Gao E's revisions from Cao Xueqin's original work on the *HLM* and analyzing that portion of the novel does not provide the full picture of how fiction was used to present social issues in Late Imperial China. In order to

unravel the full import of the *HLM*, we must recognize Gao E's revised version of the *HLM* alongside Cao Xueqin's original manuscripts as a valid method for presenting debate on issues of private life. In Late Imperial China, revising a novel, as well as authoring one, was a valid method of presenting debate on social issues.

Unlike in modern society where works are protected under copyright laws, authorship in Late Imperial China was not exclusive, especially in the realm of fictional works. Authors did not enjoy elevated status as the original progenitor of a given work or legal protection against the unauthorized alteration of their work. According to McLauren, "Vernacular texts circulated in manuscript form for decades within circles of literati and admirers who felt no compunction about changing the text as it was recopied and passed from hand to hand."¹⁷ Moreover:

In their frontispieces, attributed authors often declared themselves simply compliers, editors, or re-shapers of earlier material. The impossibility of attributing a particular text to a particular author meant that texts were in an important sense "authorless" and thus open to "authoring by other hands."¹⁸

The same basic text was often reworked in order to appeal to different readerships.¹⁹ Novels "served as a favorite medium for preserving the best of earlier writing while incorporating new or revised material to suit the changing tastes of the elite and to express individual sentiments," and "[t]he line between revision and creation [was]

¹⁷ Anne E. McLauren, "Constructing New Reading Publics in Late Ming China," In *Printing and Book Culture In Late Imperial China*, Cynthia J. Brokaw and Kai-wing Chow, eds., (Berkeley: University of California, 2005), 152.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 170.

frequently...hard to distinguish in China's more formal letters."²⁰ It was commonplace to alter older works in order to appeal to a contemporary audience.

Although literary revision of a text in order to produce a new work on the same theme occurred frequently, there were some protestations against such alterations. Many publishers stamped their books with the phrase "Reprinting prohibited."²¹ It is unclear if these attempts to forestall reproduction were based on the belief that authors should have control over the way in which their work was transmitted or if publishers were simply concerned with maintaining a monopoly over the production of a given text in order to maximize their profits. In either case, Chinese authors were never granted legal protection of their work.²² The only texts which received governmental protection from unauthorized reproduction were the Confucian Classics and those publications which might have undermined state authority if they had been freely circulated. As early as the Han dynasty (206 BCE - 220 CE), unauthorized reproductions of the Classics were prohibited, and in 835 CE during the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE), the Wenzong Emperor forbade the unauthorized production of calendars and almanacs.²³ However, as William Alford has noted:

the same laws that so carefully and stringently penalized unauthorized reproduction of the Classics and banned the heterodox neither explicitly forbade the pirating of more mundane works nor set forth sanctions for so doing.²⁴

²⁰ Robert E. Hegel, *The Novel In Seventeenth-Century China*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 60.

²¹ Cynthia J. Brokaw, "On the History of the Book in China," In *Printing and Book Culture In Late Imperial China*, Cynthia J. Brokaw and Kai-wing Chow, eds., (Berkeley: University of California, 2005), 19.

²² *Ibid.*, 19.

²³ William P. Alford, *To Steal A Book Is an Elegant Offense: Intellectual Property Law in Chinese Civilization*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 12-3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

This lack of state concern for the unauthorized pirating or improper editing of other works allowed later writers to significantly alter the older texts without facing public sanctions.

One of the most striking examples of literary revision in Late Imperial China is the novel *Shuihu zhuan* (*The Water Margin*) which is one of the four masterworks of the Ming dynasty. The revisionary process undergone by this acclaimed novel demonstrates that not only was extensive revision tolerated, but that at times the revision was even more highly acclaimed than the original version of the text. The *Shuihu zhuan* relates the tale of a band of 108 outlaws who fight against injustice in the empire. Aside from the depiction of one historical campaign, the *Shuihu zhuan* was originally based upon popular legends.²⁵ It was compiled from at least 10 separate stories and three orally transmitted story cycles which were eventually woven together into one master narrative.²⁶ The *Shuihu zhuan* was finally recorded in written form as a drama during the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368 CE). It was this version of the text which changed the role of the band from that of ordinary brigands to a group of heroic figures who upheld the moral order and killed only corrupt officials.²⁷

The *Shuihu zhuan* first appeared as a novel, the Shi-Lo version, at the beginning of the Ming dynasty. It built upon the earlier drama to create a unified plot which detailed the gradual assembling of the 108 heroes and their subsequent dispersal.²⁸ For two centuries, the Shi-Lo version of the novel was not altered. However, in 1550, Guo Xun, a successful official in the imperial bureaucracy, produced a 100 chapter version of

²⁵ Richard Gregg Irwin, *The Evolution of A Chinese Novel: Shui-hu-chuan*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 23.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 25, 31.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 43, 48.

the *Shuihu zhuan*. He changed the text by inserting a new section²⁹ detailing a campaign against the Liao. The *Shuihu zhuan* was further altered at the end of the sixteenth century when Yu Xiangdong, the heir to a family of literati publishers and an author in his own right, produced a new version of the novel.³⁰ Yu cut the length of the text, interpolated new campaigns, and introduced supernatural elements to the story.³¹ Irwin details Yu's motives for the production of this new version:

His motive, however, was strictly commercial. He apparently hoped to capitalize on the current popularity of the [*Shuihu zhuan*] by bringing out a new edition which preserved the basic story while differing sufficiently from the established version to stimulate sales. He could also offer the novel at a lower price, having conserved both labor and paper by abridging the main text³²

The novel was next altered by Li Zhi (1527-1602) who produced a 120 chapter version of the *Shuihu zhuan* in 1596.³³ This version represents an attempt to combine the Guo and Yu versions of the text and to correct their errors.³⁴

The final changes to the *Shuihu zhuan* occurred in 1644 when Jin Shengtan (b. 1610) created a 70 chapter version of the novel. This version drastically altered the storyline of the *Shuihu zhuan*. Rather than depicting the 108 heroes gradually entering the service of the state, Jin Shengtan concluded the book abruptly with a dream foretelling the execution of the entire band.³⁵ His decision to revise the novel in this manner seems to have been motivated by the social and political events which he witnessed during the fall of the Ming dynasty:

²⁹ Chapters 83-90.

³⁰ Richard Gregg Irwin, *The Evolution of A Chinese Novel*, 66-7.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

³² *Ibid.*, 114-5.

³³ *Ibid.*, 75.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

[W]hen widespread banditry was sapping the strength of Ming rule and laying it open to the overthrow which soon followed [Jin Shengtan]...took violent exception to the viewpoint of the original authors which [Li Zhi] had underlined by including the epithets “Faithful and Just” in his title. Recognizing the literary quality of the novel, he could not, in view of the contemporary situation, condone the portrayal of rebels as heroes more sinned against than sinning. His solution was to eliminate completely the falling action and to substitute a conclusion of his own contrivance.³⁶

Jin Shengtan’s version of the *Shuihu zhuan* resonated with the concerns of his audience.

It was so popular that it obscured the other versions of the *Shuihu zhuan* for almost three centuries.³⁷

In addition to indicating the sheer number of times that a given text could be revised or essentially rewritten, the alterations that the *Shuihu zhuan* underwent also demonstrate the motives which drove individuals to create new versions of a pre-existing text. As with the revision of the *Shuihu zhuan* from drama into novel format in the Shi-Lo version, sometimes a text was rewritten in order to appeal to the tastes of a contemporary audience. Entrepreneurial individuals such as Yu Xiangdou might produce a new version in order to more cheaply mass produce the text or to increase sales revenue by claiming to have produced an entirely new version of the story. Some authors, such as Li Zhi, sought to reconcile conflicting older versions of the story in order to create a coherent storyline. Finally, authors such as Jin Shengtan blatantly altered the text in order to correspond to their views on how society should function. It is important to note that all of these revisions were made by respected writers and that many of them, including the conservative revision by Jin Shengtan, were highly acclaimed. The revisionary process undergone by the *Shuihu zhuan* not only demonstrates that major works of Chinese vernacular fiction were commonly edited and rewritten by various

³⁶ Ibid., 115.

³⁷ Ibid., 87.

editor/authors,³⁸ but it also reveals that these individuals altered the books for a number of different reasons. One must examine motives and goals of the editor/author in order to understand how and why he changed the original text.

The changes undergone by the *Shuihu zhuan* are instructive for our analysis of the *HLM*. Because revision of another author's work was an accepted literary process, later editor/authors could significantly alter an original novel in order to present a vision of society which accorded more closely with their own ideological perspective on private life. These revisions allow us a vantage point to observe the social debates occurring in Late Imperial China. From the changes undergone by a given text, we can surmise which issues were hotly debated and how individual authors reacted to them. Unlike the *HLM*, the *Shuihu zhuan* deals with issues of public morality rather than with issues of private life. However, the fact that the Jin version of the *Shuihu zhuan* was the most highly acclaimed version of the novel shows that revised versions of a given text were not only widely accepted but often critical acclaimed. In this context, we cannot simply discount Gao E's revisions of the *HLM*. In order to fully understand the *HLM*, we should not seek to eliminate Gao E's interpolations in the text as so many prior critics have. Instead, we must examine the lives and social persuasions of Cao Xueqin and Gao E in order to understand both the social message that they hoped to convey through their respective versions of the *HLM*.

IV. Personal Background and Motivations

³⁸ Unfortunately there is no term in either English which fully captures the role of "editors" in the Chinese literary tradition. As I will demonstrate in this introduction, "editors" often had significantly leeway in changing a given text to the point that can almost be considered authors of a new version of the text. I use the term editor/author in an attempt to capture the essence of this editorial freedom.

The portrayal of family issues in the *HLM* was motivated by the desire of each editor/author to promote his own stance on social issues, specifically those related to private life. Cao Xueqin, was relatively liberal, while Gao E took a more conservative social stance. Therefore, the *HLM* is an ideal test case to examine the differing attitudes of liberals and conservatives in Late Imperial China. It has long been assumed that liberals were heir to the traditions of the late-Ming, and that they supported individual freedom, the pursuit of love, and the increased status of women. Similarly, it commonly believed that conservatives fully supported Neo-Confucian ideals. Consequently they have been portrayed as promoting familial obligation, advocating socially useful marriage, and opposing the rising position of women in society. However, the *HLM* reveals that liberal and conservative ideologies were not monolithic. By examining the similarities between Cao Xueqin's narrative and the ideals espoused by authors of the late-Ming and then exploring how Gao E responded to Cao Xueqin's version of the *Honglou meng*, it is possible to increase our understanding of the development of these ideologies from the late-Ming into the mid-Qing.

In order to unravel the social impact of the *HLM*, it is necessary to examine the lives of its two authors, Cao Xueqin and Gao E, to understand what factors motivated their authorial decisions. It has long been accepted that an understanding of Cao Xueqin's biography would enhance a readers understanding of the *HLM*.³⁹ However, few scholars have taken into account the biases of Gao E and the possible reasons behind his decision to alter the text. The different stances towards issues of private life taken by Cao Xueqin and Gao E are reflective of two very different personal histories. Although

³⁹ For investigation into the life of Cao Xueqin and speculation on how this was related to the composition of the *HLM* see *HLM*, vol. 1, Introduction, passim; Wu Shih-Ch'ang, *On The Red Chamber Dream*, passim.

their personal backgrounds did not necessarily determine their views on family and gender roles, they do help to explain their choices in creating their own versions of the *HLM*. Additionally, an exploration of the lives of Cao Xueqin and Gao E reveals issues in the private lives of members of the literati-elite which were rarely discussed in a public forum. Therefore, it not only serves to explain the social stance of each editor/author, but it also presents initial insights into the sort of private issues with which members of the literati-elite were faced. It is only when we fully understand the personal backgrounds of both editor/authors that we can comprehend Cao Xueqin's motivation for writing the *HLM* and Gao E's agenda when editing and rewriting the novel.

V. The Liberal: Cao Xueqin

Cao Xueqin's version of the *HLM* was influenced by his family history. The members of Cao Xueqin's family were not free members of the Chinese literati-elite. One of Cao's ancestors was a Chinese colonist who settled in Manchuria when that area was part of the territory of the Ming dynasty. The Caos were subsequently captured by the Manchus during their initial push to conquer China, and they became bondservants of the Plain White Banner during the Qing dynasty.⁴⁰ Although they were not free members of Chinese society, the Cao family was able to use its ties to the Emperor in order to rise in social status. The Cao family began to rise to prominence with Cao Xueqin's great-grandfather, Cao Xi. Cao Xi's wife served as the wet nurse for the Emperor Kangxi (r. 1662-1722 CE). This imperial connection allowed the Cao family to gain great wealth and status during Kangxi's reign. As a result, Cao Xi was appointed to the post of textile

⁴⁰ Jonathan D. Spence, *Ts'ao Yin and the K'ang-hsi Emperor, Bondservant and Master*, (New Haven: London, 1966), 1.

commissioner from 1663 until 1684.⁴¹ There was no tradition of hereditary inheritance among bondservants. However, because of his connection with the Cao family, the Kangxi Emperor appointed Cao Yin, Cao Xi's son and Cao Xueqin's grandfather, as the textile commissioner of Suzhou in 1690 and later promoted him to the prestigious post of textile commissioner in Nanjing in 1692. In 1704 Cao Yin also began serving in the lucrative post of salt commissioner. These commissioners occupied an elite status within the empire, and had a salary similar to that of a provincial governor.⁴²

Cao Yin's success should have enriched the Cao family; however, when he died in 1712 he left his family with a debt of around 600,000 taels of silver.⁴³ It was only the good favor of the Kangxi Emperor which allowed the family to remain afloat. The Emperor appointed Cao Yin's son, Cao Yong, as textile commissioner of Nanjing and allowed a family friend to repay Cao Yin's debt.⁴⁴ Moreover, when Cao Yong died suddenly, the Kangxi Emperor again favored the family by having Cao Yin's nephew, Cao Fu, declared as Cao Yin's posthumous heir and allowing him to inherit the post of textile commissioner.⁴⁵ However, when the Kangxi Emperor died in 1722, the Cao family's status was seriously threatened. The Yongzheng Emperor (r. 1723-35 CE) openly scorned bondservants and felt that they were a source of corruption in the imperial administration.⁴⁶ The Cao family was further targeted because of their connections to several of the imperial princes whom Yongzheng had imprisoned because he feared they would try to usurp his throne. Consequently, Cao Fu was dismissed from his office as

⁴¹ Ibid., 23-5.

⁴² Ibid., 42-3, 82-3.

⁴³ Ibid., 273.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 266.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 269.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 283.

textile commissioner in 1728 and the Cao family's property was confiscated.⁴⁷ Although the family was allowed to keep some of their property in Beijing, they were never able to regain their former status.

These events had a significant impact on the life of Cao Xueqin. Cao Xueqin was only 13 years old when his father, Cao Fu, was dismissed from office and the family property was confiscated by the imperial government. Although the Cao house was reinstated to some extent when the Qianlong Emperor (r. 1736-95 CE) took the throne in 1735, these early years of relative poverty made an impact upon Cao Xueqin.⁴⁸ Rather than studying for the civil service exams, which were the route to social success for all elite young men, Cao Xueqin, disgusted with seemingly fickle actions of the imperial government which had deprived his family of its status, eschewed study and instead concentrated on his writing.

Cao Xueqin's rejection of societal demands ultimately led him to reject Confucianism. He did not strictly adhere to Confucianism as the ultimate moral doctrine. Cao Xueqin's statements in the *HLM* seem to indicate that he advocated using Buddhist and Taoist elements to attain personal enlightenment. The entire premise of the *HLM* is that a stone is created by the goddess Nüwa when she is trying to repair a hole in the sky. However, the Stone is not deemed adequate for the task.⁴⁹ When the Stone is banished, it suffers from feelings of rejection because it was not chosen by Nüwa to repair the sky and because it develops an attachment to the Crimson Pearl Flower.⁵⁰ In order to awake the Stone to the emptiness and ultimate meaninglessness of these feelings so that it may

⁴⁷ Ibid., 288.

⁴⁸ Wu Shih-Ch'ang, *On The Red Chamber Dream*, 112.

⁴⁹ *HLM*, vol. 1, 47.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 53.

attain enlightenment, the Stone is sent to Earth to inhabit the body of Jia Baoyu.⁵¹ The Stone, in the form of Jia Baoyu is initially prevented from reaching enlightenment by the obligations placed on him by his family. However, he is ultimately able to free himself from these Confucian obligations and find personal enlightenment. This story is inscribed on the Stone itself, which taking animate form, instructs the monk, Brother Vanitas, that

My only wish is that men in the world below may sometimes pick up the tale when they are recovering...and in doing so find not only mental refreshment but even perhaps, if they will heed its lesson and abandon their vain and frivolous pursuits, some small arrest in the deterioration of their vital forces.⁵²

This goal, which advocates that individuals abandon their “frivolous” familial and social obligations is all the more dangerous because after reading the story written on the Stone, the Monk Vanitas experiences his own enlightenment.⁵³ Therefore, it is understood that Cao Xueqin hoped to provoke a similar enlightenment and rejection of Confucian social obligations among his readers.

Cao Xueqin’s philosophy resembles that of many young male members of the literati-elite during the late-Ming. These young thinkers were influenced by the Neo-Confucian theorist, Wang Yangming (1472-1529) who decried the traditional system of elaborate study as the method of obtaining wisdom.⁵⁴ Instead proponents of Wang Yangming’s brand of Neo-Confucianism mixed Buddhist and Taoist elements into Confucianism. Considering, its similarity to the ideas of Wang Yangming, the *HLM* would not have been seen as idle fiction, but rather as a piece written in order to persuade

⁵¹ Dore J. Levy, *Ideal And Actual In The Story of the Stone*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 11.

⁵² *HLM*, vol. 1, 50.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁴ Robert E. Hegel, *The Novel In Seventeenth-Century China*, 42.

others to abandon the demands of the Confucian family system and to pursue personal enlightenment. The *HLM* was a result of Cao Xueqin's personal response to his family's fall from glory. However, the form which his rejection of societal norms took was influenced by social currents which promoted the incorporation of heterodox elements into the Confucian world view. Consequently, Cao Xueqin has long been seen as the heir to the liberal social philosophy of the late-Ming.

VI. The Conservative: Gao E

In contrast to Cao Xueqin, Gao E (1740-1815) was a relatively unremarkable figure in Chinese society. Before he passed the civil service examinations in 1788 and 1795, he supported himself as a tutor; however, after these successes, he served as a minor official in the Grand Secretariat and the Censorate.⁵⁵ He was more traditionally successful than Cao Xueqin and his family suffered no grave loss of status during the Qing dynasty. Therefore, Gao E bore less bitterness and hatred towards the traditional power structure. As John Minford aptly observes, "Cao Xueqin died in poverty in the Western Hills, while Gao E lived on to a respectable old age, a minor civil servant."⁵⁶

Because he had a viable stake in the Confucian social system, Gao E revised many of the more radical elements of Cao Xueqin's story and created a narrative which was acceptable to a conservative audience. His softening of the impact of Baoyu's retreat into Buddhism pleased the Neo-Confucians of the Qing dynasty who sought to eliminate heterodox elements such as Buddhism and Taoism from society. These conservative scholars desired to recapture "original" or "pure" Confucian norms which had not been "sullied" by the heterodox teachings of Buddhism and Taoism "contaminating" Song-

⁵⁵ *HLM*, vol. 4, 20-1.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

Ming Neo-Confucianism.⁵⁷ Gao E also fashioned an ending to the *HLM* which would have suited patrilineal family heads because it promoted the importance of the civil service examinations and depicted Baoyu marrying not out of love, but rather out of family duty. It is clear from his alterations to the text that Gao E did not agree with many of the ideals presented by Cao Xueqin in the original text of the *HLM*. However, this fact alone does not explain why Gao E felt compelled to alter the text when preparing it for publication.

The most obvious reason for Gao E to alter the text would seem to be Emperor Qianlong's Literary Inquisition (1772-1788).⁵⁸ Emperor Qianlong's concerns over heterodox books began when books were being collected in order to produce the *Tu shu ji cheng* (*The Four Treasuries*), an encyclopedic project which compiled complete copies of texts in order to preserve them against possible loss.⁵⁹ At this point, the Emperor discovered books which he felt slandered the Manchu rule and which led him to attempt to discover all seditious and potentially seditious books in order to remove them from circulation. By 1780 Qianlong ordered the officers of the Four Treasuries as well as provincial officials to edit seditious books either by removing the offensive texts from the original woodblocks or by replacing them with a more acceptable text.⁶⁰ Additionally, Qianlong spearheaded the creation of an index which listed all the books to be censored.⁶¹ In this political climate, it was dangerous to promote potentially "seditious"

⁵⁷ Kai-wing Chow, *The Rise of Confucian Ritualism in Late Imperial China: Ethics, Classics, and Lineage Discourse*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 8.

⁵⁸ For discussion of this hypothesis, see *HLM*, vol. 1. 40.

⁵⁹ Timothy Brook, "Censorship in Eighteenth-Century China: A View from the Book Trade," In *Canadian Journal of History*, vol. 22, (Aug, 1988), 177; Luther Carrington Goodrich, *The Literary Inquisition of Ch'ien-Lung*, (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1935), 30.

⁶⁰ Timothy Brook, "Censorship in Eighteenth-Century China," 191.

⁶¹ Luther Carrington Goodrich, *The Literary Inquisition of Ch'ien-Lung*, 34.

works. One man who withheld a book was sentenced to 100 blows and a three year period of exile.⁶² Penalties were even more severe for authors who transmitted banned texts. In this context, it is understandable that in the years following the literary inquisition Gao E might have been hesitant about printing an unaltered version of the *HLM* because it advocated a withdrawal from Confucian social obligations.

However, this does not seem completely to explain Gao E's decision to revise the *HLM*. Qianlong was primarily concerned with suppressing works which suggested that Manchus did not have the right to rule China.⁶³ There is no conclusive evidence that the expression of a heterodox opinion was, on its own, enough justification for a book to be censored.⁶⁴ Despite its unorthodox statements, the original version of the *HLM* did not question the right of the Manchus to control Chinese territory.⁶⁵ Therefore, even in its unaltered state, it would not have been a target of the censors if it had been published in its original form.

Instead of altering the *HLM* out of fear of censorship, it appears that Gao E altered the text because he hoped to impart a specific social message to his readers. From the creation of the Classics onward, it was long believed that literature should serve as a vehicle for moral instruction.⁶⁶ Even vernacular fiction was expected to transmit moral values to its readers. Particularly during the Ming and Qing dynasties, members of the literati began to advocate the use of vernacular fiction to transmit Confucian morals to the populace because fiction was easier to understand than the complex texts of the Classics.

⁶² Ibid., 42.

⁶³ Timothy Brook, "Censorship in Eighteenth-Century China," 178.

⁶⁴ Luther Carrington Goodrich, *The Literary Inquisition of Ch'ien-Lung*, 49.

⁶⁵ Compare Dore J. Levy, *Ideal And Actual In The Story of the Stone*, 28.

⁶⁶ According to Confucianism, in order for society to be properly arranged, people must behave according to a moral code based on ritual (*li*). Therefore, social activity and morality were linked in Chinese culture.

Consequently, the preface to the *Sanguo tongshu yanyi* (*Narrative of the Three Kingdoms*), one of the four masterworks of Ming dynasty fiction, urged readers to pay close attention to the text in order to understand its promotion of loyalty.⁶⁷ Authors were also concerned that texts portraying “immoral” acts would encourage readers to imitate them. Zhang Zhupu (1670-98) expressed this sentiment in his preface to the *Jin Ping Mei* (*The Plum in the Golden Vase*):

The *Plum in the Golden Vase* is a work that women should never be permitted to see...What would be the consequences if they [women] were to imitate, however slightly, the things they read about?⁶⁸

Liu Tingli, a commentator on the *Shuihu zhuan* (*The Water Margin*), had similar concerns:

Those who don't read *Water Margin* (*Shuihu zhuan*) properly, their minds tend to perversity and treachery; those who don't read the *Narrative of the Three Kingdoms* properly their minds tend to political expediency and deception; those who don't read the *Journey to the West* properly, their minds tend to cunning and deluded imaginings. [As for the *Plum in the Golden Vase*] those who read this book and wish to imitate it are wild beasts.⁶⁹

Gao E's version of the *HLM* was decidedly more moralistic and Confucian than was Cao Xueqin's original work. Therefore, it is entirely plausible that Gao E altered the work before publication because its original plot did not serve as a good guideline for human behavior. By revising the *HLM*, Gao E implicitly critiqued Cao Xueqin's liberal social philosophy and gave support to a more conservative interpretation of the social and familial order. Therefore, Gao E is the perfect figure to use to examine the conservative opinion towards issues of private life.

⁶⁷ Anne E McLauren, “Constructing New Reading Publics in Late Ming China,” In *Printing and Book Culture In Late Imperial China*, Cynthia J. Brokaw and Kai-wing Chow, eds., (Berkeley: University of California, 2005), 154.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 154.

VII. Moving Forward: Issues for Further Consideration

The rest of this thesis will be devoted to exploring the attitudes of Cao Xueqin and Gao E on issues of private life. It will follow three particular issues: Baoyu's participation in the civil service examination, Baoyu's love for Daiyu and his marriage to Baochai, and the portrayal of Wang Xifeng. These issues seem to have undergone the most drastic or surprising alterations when Gao E revised the *HLM*. In each of these cases, this analysis will examine Cao Xueqin's original text, and compare it to Gao E's revisions. Each chapter will examine the initial portrayal of these issues by Cao Xueqin in order to establish that Cao Xueqin wrote the *HLM* in order to present a commentary on society. It will also compare his stance on these controversial topics with those taken by liberal thinkers of the late-Ming. It also examines prevailing social currents in order to determine why Gao E felt compelled to alter these elements of the *HLM*. It demonstrates that Gao E's revision of the *HLM* should not be vilified for altering Cao Xueqin's work. Instead, Gao E's revision should be understood as a valid method of presenting a literary criticism of the ideas and values about society and the family espoused by Cao Xueqin in his original manuscript version of the *HLM*.

However, more importantly than restoring Gao E's good name, this thesis also seeks to demonstrate that novels were used as a serious arena to present social debate on issues of the family which could not be discussed in more public works. Cao Xueqin did not compose the *HLM* in a vacuum. His authorial decisions in creating the novel reflect his beliefs about society. Similarly, Gao E's decision to revise the *HLM* was motivated by his personal stance on issues of private life. This thesis will examine these facets of Cao Xueqin and Gao E's writing. Because Cao Xueqin has often been characterized as a

liberal while Gao E has been labeled a conservative, it will compare their stance on private life, as related in the *HLM*, to the work of typical liberal and conservative groups: the literati of the late-Ming and Neo-Confucian family heads of the Qing dynasty respectively. This examination of liberal and conservative social philosophies will lead to a more nuanced understanding of the social debates raging in Late Imperial China. By reading novels as a forum for expressing opinions on issues of private life, we can gain a more nuanced impression of literary culture and family life in Late Imperial China.

Chapter 1
Status Anxiety and the Examinations:
Discourse on Male Duty

‘Speaking of Baoyu,’ he said, in a more serious tone, ‘the boy spends all his time loafing about in the garden – it simply won’t do...If *he* should fall by the wayside, the whole future of the family could be threatened.’¹

These words spoken by Jia Zheng, the reigning patriarch of the Jia family in the *Honglou meng*, reveal the precarious state of the Jia family fortunes. Jia Baoyu, the heir of the Jia family, is an apathetic young man who would rather compose poetry with his female cousins than devote himself to studying for the civil service examinations. Jia Baoyu is openly hostile towards the examination system and the “career-worms” who study for them. His actions openly violated social norms as promoted by conservative family heads and represented a threat to the continued prosperity of the Jia family.

The conflict between Baoyu and Jia Zheng over Baoyu’s reluctance to study for the civil service examinations mirrors the social debates raging in the eighteenth century. Social status in Late Imperial China was based upon a family’s ability to attain and retain positions in the government bureaucracy, positions which were only open to individuals who passed the government administered civil service examination. Consequently, devoting oneself to study was seen as the primary duty of all young men in elite families. However, starting in the late-Ming, young men had begun to rebel against these obligations. Conservative family heads, motivated by increasing threats to the social status of the literati-elite, sought to counter this trend.

In light of the central importance of the civil service exam to members of the literati-elite², it is not surprising that this issue was addressed by both Cao Xueqin and

¹ *HLM*, vol. 4, 44.

Gao E in their respective versions of the *HLM*. Contrary to authors of public texts who debated the problems of the civil service examination and debated such issues as changing the curriculum and format of the exams, neither Cao Xueqin nor Gao E was interested in such issues of policy. Instead, they were focused on the impact that the examinations had on the private lives of young men among the literati-elite. Cao Xueqin, influenced by thinkers of the late-Ming, crafted Baoyu's character with the express purpose of presenting a counterpoint to the belief that young men should devote themselves to their studies. When Gao E revised the *HLM*, he deliberately altered Cao Xueqin's version of the novel in order to create a storyline that was more in line with the conservative social attitudes of the patriarchs. In the ending crafted by Gao E, Baoyu attains the *juren* degree before he leaves his family. Although this action seems extremely uncharacteristic given Baoyu's prior attitude towards study, it reflects deliberate authorial changes on the part of Gao E. The depiction of Jia Baoyu in both versions of the *HLM* should be read as a reflection of the social discourse that was occurring during the mid-Qing about the examination system and the duty of a man to his family.

I. Rejection of Civil Service: Ming Literary Traditions

The civil service examination had long been the primary method of increasing one's social status in imperial China. It was first introduced during the Tang dynasty

² I use the term "literati-elite" to denote those members of the scholar class who had actually held a prominent position in society, usually because of their official positions. There is, as yet, no real consensus on what term is best used to refer to this segment of society. It has alternately been referred to as the gentry and the elite. However, neither of these terms fully captures the literati essence of this social group, the members of which owed their social status more to their success in the civil service examinations than to the possession of independent sources of wealth. Compare Chang Chung-li, *The Chinese Gentry: Studies On Their Role in Nineteenth-Century China*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1955); Ho Ping-ti, *The Ladder of Success In Imperial China: Aspects of Social Mobility, 1368-1911*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962); Wolfram Eberhard, *Social Mobility In Traditional China*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1962)

(618-907 CE). Under the examination system, officials would be chosen from a pool of qualified candidates based on their knowledge of aspects of the Confucian canon and classical poetry.³ The examination system was cemented as the sole path to an official position, and, therefore, to social power during the Song dynasty (907-1276 CE).⁴ During the Ming dynasty (1368-1644 CE) the examination topics focused primarily on the *Four Books* (the *Analects*, *Mencius*, the *Doctrine of the Mean*, and the *Great Learning*).⁵ It was also during this period that the fixed and formal “eight-legged” essay style, which many young men abhorred, was introduced.⁶ It was expected that young male members of the literati-elite would devote themselves to study in order to pass the civil service examinations and secure their family’s status among the social elite.

However, during the late-Ming, many young men among the literati-elite rebelled against the obligation to devote themselves to the civil service examination. Instead these young men sought to devote their time to poetry and women. During a time of relative social prosperity, these young men did not believe that their unwillingness to take the civil service examination represented a serious threat to their families’ social status. Instead of devoting themselves to days of vigorous study, these young men sought personal fulfillment through poetry and women.

During the late-Ming, vernacular literature was one of the most prominent literary genres.⁷ It was through these fictional stories that liberal thinkers of the late-Ming

³ Patricia Ebrey, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 112.

⁴ Patricia Ebrey, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China*, 138.

⁵ Benjamin A. Elman, “Changes in Confucian Civil Service Examinations from the Ming to the Ch’ing Dynasty,” In *Education and Society In Late Imperial China, 1600-1900*, Benjamin A. Elman and Alexander Woodside, eds, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994): 114.

⁶ Patricia Ebrey, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China*, 198.

⁷ Most of the authors of vernacular fiction were *shengyuan* who were unable to attain higher degrees. Although the *shengyuan* have not been considered as part of the literati-elite, it is useful to include their

expressed their personal rebellion against the civil service examination. Vernacular fiction from the late-Ming rejected the examinations as the primarily path to social success. The most prominent author of vernacular fiction during the Ming was Feng Menglong (1574-1646). Feng Menglong was closely associated with the leading literati-elite in Suzhou. During his youth, he was a heterodox figure who frequented the gambling houses and the courtesans' quarters. Although he attained the *shengyuan* at age 20 and devoted the rest of his life to studying for the civil service examination, he never succeeded in passing any further exams.⁸ During his fifties, Feng Menglong finally gave up hope of passing the civil service examinations and accepted the status of tribute student in 1630. Eventually, he was promoted to the position of magistrate of Shouning County in Fujian.⁹ Although Feng Menglong eventually gained office, he spent most of his life locked out of the traditional path to success in Late Imperial China. Consequently, most of his writings convey his discontent with the civil service examinations and promote an alternate way of life. Instead of studying for the examinations, according to Feng Menglong, a man would gain status because of his connections and poetic talent. Additionally, it was no crime for a man to indulge himself with women. This attitude towards the civil service examination is demonstrated in Feng Menglong's *Stories Old and New*, a collection of vernacular stories, published in 1620.¹⁰ Although the genre of vernacular literature implies that the stories would be those taken from oral traditions,

work in this discussion. It must be assumed that although these men were not able to attain high office, that because of their education they also shared the desire to improve their social status as is seen among the literati-elite. Because most successful officials did not have time to write novels, we must use these works as the closest existent approximation to the literati-elite viewpoint. See Feng Menglong, *Stories Old and New: A Ming Dynasty Collection*, Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang, trans., (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000): xx.

⁸ *Ibid.*, xv.

⁹ *Ibid.*, xvii.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, xv.

Feng Menglong extensively modified the stories before he printed them. He authored 19 of the 40 texts in the collection and altered many others.¹¹ Consequently the *Stories Old and New* presents a glimpse into what a low status member of the literati-elite thought about the obligation to study for the civil service examination.

Feng Menglong's stories recognize both the potential for social downfall of members of the literati-elite and the importance of attaining office in order to solidify family status. In the story, "Censor Chen Ingeniously Solves the Case of the Gold Hairpins and Brooches," the Lu family holds high status while Investigation Commissioner Lu is alive. However, after his death, the fortunes of the family deteriorate until they are left with only a dilapidated house.¹² This family decline occurs because Lu's son does not hold office. As detailed in another story, "Zhao Bosheng Meets with Emperor Renzong in a Teahouse," it is only after he was granted an office by the emperor, that the scholar Zhao Xu is able to support his family.¹³ This admission that families often needed to succeed in the civil service examinations in order to retain their social status is a concession to the concerns of conservative family heads who wanted young men to devote themselves to their studies.

However, these stories do not accord with the belief that social status can only be attained through faithful study of the Confucian Classics. Feng Menglong does not promote the civil service examinations as the preeminent route to social status. Instead, he emphasizes how men can use skills such as poetry, which were considered frivolous by conservative family heads, in order to increase their social status. Zhao Xu does not

¹¹ *Ibid.*, xxi.

¹² "Censor Chen Ingeniously Solves the Case of the Gold Hairpins and Brooches," In Feng Menglong, *Stories Old and New*, 51.

¹³ "Zhao Bosheng Meets with Emperor Renzong in a Teahouse," In Feng Menglong, *Stories Old and New*, 205.

attain office because he does well on the examinations. He places first in the examinations, but capriciously he is removed from the list of successful candidates because he miswrote one character.¹⁴ It is only because the Eunuch Miao sees one of his poems on the wall of an inn and recommends him to the emperor that Zhao Xu attains office.¹⁵ It would seem that luck and poetic talent were more important to the attainment of social status in Feng Menglong's estimation than was diligent study. This motif is repeated in the story, "Penniless Ma Zhou Meets His Opportunity through a Woman Selling Pancakes." Despite his talent, the scholar Mao Zhou is only able to attain office when Madam Wang recognizes his skills and puts him in contact with Commandant Chang.¹⁶ Vernacular fiction demonstrates that liberal thinkers such as Feng Menglong valued poetry much more than they did success at composing examination essays.

More than simply asserting that poetry was a valuable endeavor, Feng Menglong insists that men can attain both high office and lead lives of pleasure. "The Courtesans Mourn Liu the Seventh in the Spring Breeze" details the life of Liu Yong who was both a great lover of women and a capable, just official.¹⁷ When the conservative prime minister claims that "[Liu Yong's] all-too-frequent visits to the houses of ill fame are greatly detrimental to the respectability of all officials," Feng Menglong responds to this statement in the marginal notes¹⁸ by asserting that:

¹⁴ Ibid., 196-7.

¹⁵ Ibid., 200.

¹⁶ "Penniless Ma Zhou Meets His Opportunity through a Woman Selling Pancakes," in Feng Menglong, *Stories Old and New*, 113-122, passim.

¹⁷ "The Courtesans Mourn Liu the Seventh in the Spring Breeze," in Feng Menglong, *Stories Old and New*, 213.

¹⁸ Marginal notes were commonly left in Chinese texts by both the initial author of the text and later writers commenting on the text. They were intended to present a guide to the reading of the text in order to elucidate the meaning of a given passage. Consequently, they demonstrate how contemporary readers interpreted the text.

*Lord Guo and Prime Minister Wen were also self-indulgent men who frequented courtesan quarters, but, once they were charged with important missions, they dedicated themselves to the nation to the neglect of their self interests. What does a pedantic Confucian moralist know?*¹⁹

These vernacular stories suggest that authors in the late-Ming rejected the ideal that a man must completely abstain from pleasurable activities and devote himself single mindedly to study. Moreover, Feng Menglong is delighted when Liu Yong leaves office. He writes in the marginal notes, “*What a carefree life! This is better than serving as an official.*”²⁰ Feng Menglong’s work and other vernacular fiction of the late-Ming represents a rejection of the examination system and official duty.

II. Status Anxiety: Literati-Elite in the Qing Dynasty

However, this rebellion made conservative family heads uneasy. This unease was present during the Ming dynasty; however, it became worse when the socio-economic situation changed drastically during the Qing dynasty (1644-1900 CE). Faced with a rapidly growing population that quickly outstripped the increase in the number of official positions in the bureaucracy, the literati elite became uneasy about their ability to retain their prominent position in society. This status anxiety was only exaggerated by the rising power of rich merchant families who were increasingly able to translate their wealth directly into increased social status. Under these conditions, the members of the literati-elite felt their position in society was threatened. As a result, they became more conservative and supported rules that would uphold their traditional power in society.²¹ These conservative literati-elite struggled to force elite young men to give up their indolent life of women and poetry in order to concentrate on studying for the civil service

¹⁹ Italics reproduced as in text. “The Courtesans Mourn Liu the Seventh in the Spring Breeze” in Feng Menglong, *Stories Old and New*, 218-9.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 219.

²¹ Patricia Ebrey, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China*, 228-9.

examinations. Under this increased social pressure, a successful son was primary way to assure that the family would retain its social status.

The civil service examination of the Qing dynasty was very closely modeled after that of the Ming dynasty. It continued to concentrate on the *Four Books* and they emphasized the “eight-legged essay,” a rigid essay format which had to be perfected in order to succeed on the examinations. The examination system was tiered. The lowest degree was the *shengyuan* which was awarded at the prefectural level.²² The next examination was the provincial examination, after which the successful candidate would be awarded the *juren* degree. Finally, candidates who passed the national exams were granted the *jinshi* degree.²³ The attainment of the *juren* was the key turning point in political and social status because it entitled its holder to eventual appointment to at least a minor office.²⁴ This stable system had been the main avenue for attaining social status in China for centuries. Ideally, it ensured that there would be a relatively stable rotation of new families into the ranks of the literati-elite over time because anyone was eligible to take the examinations regardless of family background. Although this system was still biased to favor the literati-elite who had the money to provide their sons with a Confucian education, it did offer all Chinese at least the potential for upward mobility.

²² The *shengyuan* are not included in the category of “literati-elite” because it seems from their social status that their lifestyle was closer to that of commoners than to the elite members of society. The only prevailing commonality between the poor *shengyuan* and the members of the officialdom was their literati status. However, I believe that the differences in lifestyle was great enough to merit their exclusion from this group. I will include all those individuals possessing at least a *juren* degree among the literati-elite because this degree entitled the holder to an eventual position in the bureaucracy. However, I will focus my discussion primarily on those families which held high status posts in the bureaucracy because they correspond to the status of the Jia family in the *HLM*. Compare Ho Ping-ti, *The Ladder of Success In Imperial China*, passim.

²³ Susan Naquin and Evelyn S. Rawski, *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 9.

²⁴ Ho Ping-ti, *The Ladder of Success In Imperial China*, 26.

However, despite the relatively open social system, the literati-elite still held the balance of power in the examinations because they were able to afford to educate their sons.²⁵

It would seem that the literati-elite should have been confident in their ability to retain power under this system. However, the open nature of the civil service examinations, created an extremely stressful environment. Even the most elite families had to produce a successful son each generation in order to remain in power because they often had no source of wealth and power independent of their official position. As a result, “[a]nxiety over status at all levels no doubt underlay the availability of opportunities for mobility... And, given the demographic reality, the inability of those at the very bottom of society to reproduce themselves, and the all too successful ability of the elite household to increase in size, downward mobility was not only a fear but a social fact.”²⁶ These seeds of status anxiety became a full grown fear of downward mobility when coupled with rapid population growth and with the new ability of merchants to translate their wealth directly into social status during the Qing dynasty.

The rapid population growth during the Qing dynasty placed extreme pressure on the examination system. At the beginning of the Ming dynasty, only 65 million people lived in China. However, by the beginning of the Qing dynasty, the population reached 100 million people, and by 1800 the population had grown to more than 300 million.²⁷ This rapid population growth put tremendous strain on the framework of the Qing empire, as, “[i]n time, competition for land and jobs became sharper, landholdings shrank, prices

²⁵ Naquin and Rawski, *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century*, 123.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 126.

²⁷ Ho Ping-ti, “Aspects of Social Mobility in China, 1368-1911,” In *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 1, no. 4 (1959): 357; Naquin and Rawski, *Chinese Society*, 8.

rose, and the state's control over this huge citizenry diminished."²⁸ At the lower levels of society, the masses were negatively affected by rapidly increasing rice prices. Initially this price increase was offset by the growing economy; however, by the mid 18th Century, the living standard began to sink. One official recorded that "[w]hen the rice price was up to 160 copper cash for one peck, all the grass roots and tree bark were eaten."²⁹ Additionally, after 1780 prices began to rise on other commodities in addition to rice, putting further pressure on families struggling to survive. When these farming families could no longer make a living, they were often forced downward into the ranks of the beggars.³⁰ The possibility of downward mobility must have seemed very real to people at the time.

The strain of population increase was also felt by members of the literati-elite. The size of the population as a whole increased at a far greater rate than did the number of official posts.³¹ As a result, any one individual's chances of passing the examinations decreased. This situation was aggravated by the fact that the Qing was not a native Chinese dynasty. The Manchu emperors of the Qing dynasty had to be very careful to retain control of the empire. As a result, the Han Chinese literati-elite were at a disadvantage in the examinations because the Qing government tried to fill as many high government positions as possible with qualified Manchus or Chinese who were affiliated with the Manchu government. Throughout the dynasty, half of the governor-generals were Manchus and only one quarter were Han Chinese officials.³² The literati-elite were,

²⁸ Naquin and Rawski, *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century*, 106.

²⁹ Philip A. Kuhn, *Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 37.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 38,42.

³¹ Naquin and Rawski, *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century*, 124.

³² *Ibid.*, 11.

in effect, competing for fewer and fewer positions in the bureaucracy. This situation threatened both the political and social power of the literati-elite because social status hinged upon attaining a place in the bureaucracy. If literati-elite families could not produce a son who gained office, they would lose much of their social clout.

Consequently, conservative family heads were concerned with producing enough successful sons from among their ranks so that they could keep retain the balance of the positions in the civil service. However, data from the eighteenth century show that there was good reason for the literati elite to be concerned about their ability to hold onto their social status. For this information, I have relied heavily upon Ho Ping-ti's *The Ladder of Success In Imperial China*.³³ Ho Ping-ti has largely based his study upon seventy lists of degree holders, including *jinshi* lists compiled by the imperial government.³⁴ This data allows us to examine the changing composition of the *jinshi* and the fate of the literati-elite as a whole.

The *jinshi* lists detail the social status of the new degree holders' fathers and grandfathers.³⁵ Therefore, they allow us to determine the social status of all successful degree candidates. In the *jinshi* list of 1703, which is the only surviving list from the 18th Century, 9.6% of the *jinshi* were of commoner background, 19.2% had at least one ancestor who was a *shengyuan* or a *jiansheng* (Student of the Imperial Academy), 71.2%

³³ I feel that this reliance on his statistics is justified not only because he produced the seminal work on social mobility during the Qing dynasty, but also because other authors who have investigated social mobility in Late Imperial China have conducted their studies by tracing the fate of a single family over a vast span of time. While this is a valuable method for understanding the fate of individual families, it is not sufficient information to comprehend the fate of the literati-elite as a whole. Compare Eberhard, *Social Mobility In Traditional China*, passim.

³⁴ Ho Ping-ti, *The Ladder of Success In Imperial China*, 98.

³⁵ It would seem impossible to use these lists to determine the social status of the candidates' direct patrilineal ancestors because the emperor often granted posthumous titles to the fathers and grandfathers of degree holders. However, Ho Ping-ti has developed a detailed system of analysis in order to decrease the risk of misidentifying the social status of a degree holders direct ancestors. As a result, I have concluded that it is admissible to use the statistics founded upon this data. See Ho Ping-ti, *The Ladder of Success In Imperial China*, 101-3.

were from families with at least one higher degree holder, and 16.3% were from families with at least one official of high rank. However, according to the next surviving *jinshi* list which dates from 1802, 14.0% of the successful candidates were from a commoner background, 27.5 % had at least one *shengyuan* or *jiansheng* in the family, 58.5% were from families with at least one high degree holder, and only 4.6% were from families with at least family member who was a high official. Throughout both the Ming and Qing dynasty, the percentage of *jinshi* coming from high status backgrounds with relatives who had held official posts of high rank in the previous three generations was only 5.7% of all *jinshi* recipients.³⁶ Because only one list from the 18th Century has survived, it may be unreliable to base conclusions upon this data alone.³⁷ However, the data from the *jinshi* lists accords with that from other sources. The 1804 list of *juren* recipients and new *gongsheng* (tribute students) shows that 23.0% were of commoner background for the past three generations, 31.5% were from families that had at least one *shengyuan* or *jiansheng*, 45.5% were from families with at least one high degree holder, and only 2.2% were from families with at least one official of high rank.³⁸ The literati-elite were no longer able to dominate the examination system.

Some scholars have argued that the low prevalence of high-ranking members of the literati-elite among these successful candidates could be accounted for by the *yin* privilege. This practice was a limited form of hereditary inheritance of official positions granted only to members of the highest echelons of the civil bureaucracy. It allowed the sons of these elite officials to purchase low level official posts without having to pass the

³⁶ Ho Ping-ti, *The Ladder of Success In Imperial China*, 112-3.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 116.

examinations.³⁹ However, during the Qing dynasty, regulations of the *yin* were much stricter than in previous dynasties. The transference of the *yin* privilege from one son to another was forbidden which meant that if the son who had inherited the *yin* privilege died, then the *yin* privilege died with him and none of his brothers could use it to gain entry into the officialdom.⁴⁰ Moreover, although a man might use the *yin* to gain a low level official position, unless he applied himself and rose to a position of high rank, then his sons would not be eligible for the *yin* privilege. Because it had to be re-earned in each generation, the *yin* did not prevent downward social mobility among the literati-elite. When the difficulty of retaining official status was coupled with a growing population, it is small wonder that members of the literati-elite became increasingly concerned that they would lose their social status.

The status of the literati-elite, who were already suffering because of their inability to retain a majority in the civil service, was further threatened by the sale of examination degrees and official rank. The sale of titles began during the Ming dynasty, but it escalated during the Qing dynasty. The Qing government sold the *shengyuan* degree from 1678 to 1682 in order to finance the war efforts in putting down the Three Feudatories Rebellion.⁴¹ Although this practice did not continue after the rebellion was suppressed, it became common practice for the Qing government to sell the rank of *jiansheng* in order to help fund government projects.⁴² It cost only 108 taels of silver to purchase this title.⁴³ Already by 1764, 22.4% of those officials for whom there are

³⁹ Naquin and Rawski, *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century*, 123.

⁴⁰ Ho Ping-ti, *The Ladder of Success In Imperial China*, 151.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴³ Eberhard, *Social Mobility In Traditional China*, 118.

remaining records had purchased their status.⁴⁴ By 1798 the situation had escalated to the extent that 1,437 central offices and 3,095 provincial and local offices had been purchased rather than earned through service. After 1799, even *jinshi* degrees were occasionally on the market.⁴⁵ These changes undermined the importance of the examination system and threatened the literati-elite who had gained their status by dominating the civil service examinations.

These alterations to the integrity of the civil service examinations, which the literati-elite had so long been able to dominate by virtue of their access to education, opened the doors for the wealthy merchant class to purchase the social status which the literati-elite had so closely guarded. Traditionally, merchants had been viewed as the lowest stratum of Chinese society. There had long been barriers to them gaining status through the examination system. Up until the Song dynasty, laws forbade merchants from taking the civil service examinations.⁴⁶ It was only during the Ming dynasty that the law requiring merchants to wear clothing that was inferior to that of farmers was rescinded.⁴⁷ Although these laws had long been ineffective at restricting the actions of rich merchants, they had at least protected the aura of privilege accorded by social status rather than wealth.

Merchants emerged as a financial force to be reckoned with during the Ming dynasty; however, despite their wealth, merchants still needed to gain a position in the bureaucracy in order to become socially respectable. This is evidenced by the preface of

⁴⁴ Ho Ping-ti, *The Ladder of Success In Imperial China*, 49.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁴⁷ Eberhard, *Social Mobility In Traditional China*, 14.

the 19th Century novel *A Revelation of the True Countenance of the Bureaucracy* which states:

The official's status is exalted, his name distinguished, his power great, and his prestige incomparable – this is well known even to youngsters... Since the introduction of the examination system... scholars have forsaken their studies, peasants their ploughs, artisans their crafts, and merchants their trades; all have turned their attention to but one thing – government office.⁴⁸

When the new sale of degrees began, merchants used their wealth to purchase official positions. At the same time, merchants began to imitate the literati lifestyle. Formerly book collecting and the patronage of the arts had been a preserve of the literati-elite; however, the Huizhou merchants became some of the most prominent book collectors and patrons of Confucian scholarship.⁴⁹ These rich merchants gradually came to be accepted as members of the powerful stratum of society, because, “[w]hile an orthodox education, office holding, and the higher examination degrees remained markers of elite status, respect was also accorded to men of leisure whose wealth (however acquired) enabled them to adopt an elite life-style.”⁵⁰ The literati-elite were so anxious about the growing power of the rich merchants that in 1711 they went so far as to break into the prefectural school in Yangzhou, hold the director captive, and accuse the governor-general of accepting bribes when the list of successful *juren* contained the sons of many salt merchants.⁵¹

The ability of wealthy merchants to directly translate their money into power and status in society by purchasing office and adopting the lifestyle of the literati-elite created anxiety among the literati-elite about their ability to retain their elevated social status.

⁴⁸ qtd. in Ho Ping-ti, *The Ladder of Success In Imperial China*, 46.

⁴⁹ Naquin and Rawski, *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century*, 60.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 57.

The population increase during the Qing dynasty which made it more difficult for members of the literati-elite to retain a hold on official positions which were not growing at the same rate as the population. This stress coupled with the sale of degrees which made it possible for rich merchants to translate their wealth directly into social status, created massive status anxiety among conservative family heads.

III. The Importance of Study

The literati-elite responded to this status anxiety by encouraging their sons to study more diligently so that they would be successful in the examinations. Scholars in the late-Ming had already begun to condemn young men who did not devote themselves to their studies and instead amused themselves by writing poetry. Zhang Xuan condemned literate young men who wasted their skills by “being content with being accustomed to the low-grade.” Similarly, Liu Zongzhou (1578-1645), a celebrated neo-Confucian thinker, called men who devoted themselves to poetry “the lowest grade of humans in the universe.” Tu Tianxiang wrote, “If to the end of the year one does not read, then one will daily be associating with petty men. One will fall into their ranks and not know it.”⁵² Conservative thinkers of the mid-Qing identified sons who filled their time with poetry as the greatest threat to the status of the family because, “[t]he pampered upbringing given to sons of elite households was frequently antithetical to the self-discipline and personal exertion required to move ahead in larger society.”⁵³ There was a real fear that as a family gained status its men would be led astray by the pleasures of life and would indulge in writing poetry rather than devote themselves to studying for the examinations.

⁵² Joseph P. McDermott, *A Social History Of The Chinese Book: Books and Literati Culture in Late Imperial China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006), 180.

⁵³ Naquin and Rawski, *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century*, 35.

One example of this phenomenon is the Wang clan. Wang Chongguang, who attained the *jinshi* in 1541, founded a successful clan by developing a set of family rules that stressed obligation to the patriline. His son, Wang Zhiyuan, further elaborated on these rules by prohibiting all young men from leaving the family compound in order to prevent them from falling prey to the vices of the outside world. He exhorted all young men to devote themselves to study.⁵⁴ In the 17th Century, the historian Niu Xiu credited the success of the Wang clan to its devotion to study:

This success is due to its strict family instructions...Those who have attained official ranks are resplendent in official hats and sashes, those who have failed the examinations are doomed to wear short [commoners'] jackets. This sharp contrast in status makes the laggards ashamed. Therefore the father instructs his son, the wife urges her husband that everybody must study hard and make good in examinations and officialdom. This is why the Wang clan has produced so many holders of higher degrees and officials and has become a clan of national renown.⁵⁵

In the sixth generation, the Wang clan reached the pinnacle of its success. They produced 15 degree holders in that generation, including 9 *jinshi* and 4 high officials. However, although the Wang clan became nationally prominent, eventually it could no longer preserve its tradition of austere scholasticism and self-discipline. By the eighth generation, the Wang clan produced no more high officials. This change is perhaps best emphasized by Wang Xiangxian who held a degree but who did not want to work to obtain an official post.⁵⁶ It seems that later Wang clan members preferred a life of leisure to a life of strenuous government service.

This pattern of family decline as men became accustomed to an easy life was not particular to the Wang clan. During the 2nd generation all of the male members of the

⁵⁴ Ho Ping-ti, *The Ladder of Success In Imperial China*, 129-30.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 131-2.

Zhang clan were degree holders and 83% of those men held office. However, by the 7th generation only 30.0% of the men in the family held a degree and only 19.4% of the men held office. By this time no family member held a degree above the *juren* and there were no longer any high officials in the family.⁵⁷ This trend towards family decline as young males chose a life of pleasure was noted by contemporary observers as well. According to Qian Yong (1759-1844), a painter of the Yangtze region:

If a poor scholarly or declined ex-official family produces a young man skilled in practical management, he will almost certainly make a family rich. If a rich or landowning family has a son who loves literature, art, and music, he will almost surely impoverish the family.⁵⁸

This sentiment was echoed by the Qing official Wang Qi when he explained why his family had managed to retain its status:

My late father used to say that, from his twenty years' experience as an official in Fukien and from his twenty years' observation at home, out of some one hundred former official colleagues only the sons of one or two men could surpass them in an official career and only ten or twenty of the descendants could keep up their original family standings through hard work and prudent living. Is it because local official's descendants are naturally bad? [The reason is that] wealth and comforts had weakened their ambitions; even if they did not live an extravagant and dissipated life, they were already good for nothing. In the event that their fathers lost their official posts and were forced to retire to their ancestral homes, they could do practically nothing because of their lack of special skills. The result was that they could only sit and eat away their family resources...Unless they were unusually wise and strong-willed, they were sure to succumb. Besides, their fathers, being themselves local officials, were occupied with legal and fiscal matters; so occupied as a rule that they could barely manage to deal with the high and low and had not time or energy to supervise their children....He warned my brother and me about this repeatedly when we were young. Fortunately, when we grew a little older we were sent back to our ancestral home, thus avoiding such traps and bad environmental influences...For five generations starting from my great-great-grandfather, we have managed to perpetuate our local official career. This is because of our wise ancestral instructions.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Ibid., 139.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 157.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 143.

It seems that the patriarchal heads of literati-elite families were well aware that men had to be made to focus on their studies and kept from wasting their time on diversionary activities such as poetry if the family was to prosper. Indeed, as Charlotte Furth stated, “In sum, for elders the gravest threat to the [*jia*] was not filial defiance and rebellion, but rather hedonism and irresponsibility.”⁶⁰ As a result, throughout the Qing dynasty, patriarchal family heads of the literati-elite responded to increasing social pressure by encouraging their sons to study. Study was not a matter of personal preference, but an obligation placed on elite young men in order to preserve the status of their patriline

IV. The Pursuit of Happiness

Cao Xueqin recognized that social pressure that young men faced during the Qing dynasty to conform to expectations and study for the civil service examination. In the *HLM* he depicts Jia Baoyu in conflict with his family members, especially his father Jia Zheng because he would rather spend his time writing poetry with the girls of the family than studying. However, Cao Xueqin did not ascribe to the social philosophy of conservative family heads who believed that men should devote themselves to study. In the tradition of liberal authors of the late-Ming, Cao Xueqin advocated the pursuit of personal happiness by young men of the literati-elite. This belief that young men should pursue a life which fulfilled them can be seen in his depiction of Jia Baoyu. Cao Xueqin portrayed Baoyu as a sympathetic character, despite the fact, or perhaps because of the fact, that he refused to devote himself to preparing for the civil service examinations. Cao Xueqin intended to craft an ending in which Jia Zheng ultimately accepted Baoyu’s

⁶⁰ Charlotte Furth, “The Patriarch’s Legacy: Household Instructions and the Transmission of Orthodox Values,” In *Orthodoxy in Late Imperial China*, ed. Kwang-Ching Liu, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990): 198.

decision. By doing so Cao Xueqin created a work of fiction which promoted the belief that these young men should not sacrifice their personal desires for the good of the family. Consequently, Cao Xueqin is the heir of the authors of the late-Ming.

Cao Xueqin openly acknowledged the social pressures on a literati-elite family to retain their social status. Throughout the *HLM*, the threat of familial disaster and the decline of the Jia clan always looms overhead. The Jia clan is repeatedly described as in danger of losing its status. The present state of the Jia family is repeatedly contrasted with their glory days when they were favored by the emperor.⁶¹ Although the Jia clan is still extremely wealthy, the antique dealer Leng Zixing states that, “[n]owadays both the Rong and Ning mansions are in greatly reduced state compared with what they used to be.”⁶² He goes on to detail the reasons for this decline:

Both masters and servants all lead lives of luxury and magnificence...But they can't bring themselves to economize or make any adjustment in their accustomed style of living. Consequently, though outwardly they still manage to keep appearances, inwardly they are beginning to feel the pinch. But that's a small matter. There's something more seriously wrong with them than that. They are not able to turn out good sons, those stately houses, for all their pomp and show. The males in the family get more degenerate from one generation to the next.⁶³

These descriptions echo the comments made by conservative members of the literati-elite.

During the first 80 chapters of the *HLM*, Jia Baoyu's family members repeatedly exhort him to study so that he can one day bring honor to the family. When Jia Baoyu is young and he falls asleep in the bedroom of Qinshi, his nephew's wife, he is visited by the Fairy of Disenchantment who attempts to sway him from his dissolute path in order to save his life:

⁶¹ *HLM*, vol. 2, 568-9.

⁶² *HLM*, vol. 1, 73.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 73-4.

It is my earnest hope that, knowing this, you will henceforth be able to... change your previous way of thinking, devoting your mind seriously to the teachings of Confucius and Mencius and your person wholeheartedly to the betterment of society.⁶⁴

Despite the fact that Jia Baoyu seems quite content to spend his days indulging in pleasures with the girls of the household, other characters in the *HLM* believe that he should work harder and devote himself to study. His maid Aroma attempts to convince him that “[l]earning is a good thing. Without it you would fritter all your life away and never get anywhere.”⁶⁵ These exhortations demonstrate that Cao Xueqin recognized that there were individuals in mid-Qing society who believed that a young man must devote himself to a life of scholarship in order to fulfill his duty to the family.

However, despite the fact that he recognizes the pressure on elite families to retain their social status, Cao Xueqin valorizes Baoyu and his rejection of study. He repeatedly depicts Baoyu refusing to devote himself to his studies; however, instead of condemning him for this action, as would have been expected by a conservative narrator, Cao Xueqin advocates this life course. Jia Baoyu was not meant to devote his life to study. It was only because Jia Zheng and Lady Wang’s first son Jia Zhu, a promising young man who was already a Licensed Scholar at age fourteen, died before he was twenty, that the duty to succeed in the civil service examinations fell upon their second son, Jia Baoyu.⁶⁶ Jia Baoyu viewed the examination system with disgust and he disdained those “career-worms” who devoted themselves to attaining office. This depiction of Jia Baoyu is not atypical of young men during the mid-Qing. Even Zhang Xuecheng, one of the most conservative philosophers of the mid-Qing initially rebelled against the examination

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 75.

system and the constrained style of the “eight-legged” essay.⁶⁷ Moreover, it echoes the rejection of the examination system seen among liberal authors of the late-Ming.

Baoyu repeatedly avoids his studies. Instead of being separated from the girls and focusing on scholarly achievements as one would expect, Baoyu moves into Prospect Garden with his female cousins.⁶⁸ After moving into the Garden, he spends his time reading, practicing calligraphy, painting, and writing poetry to the detriment of his studies.⁶⁹ In the beginning of the novel, Jia Baoyu’s strange behavior is mirrored by that of Zhen Baoyu, the son of the Zhen family of Nanjing. The description that the Jias receive of Zhen Baoyu seems to accord highly with their experiences with their own son:

To begin with, although he’s such a big fellow now, he’s never had what you might call a proper schooling. Everyone in the family since his great-grandfather’s time, including the Master, had to do their ten years in the family school; but not him. Baoyu doesn’t *like* to study...Nowadays he spends the whole of his time just fooling around...although he doesn’t go to school, he *can* write a bit. That’s the only thing he’s any good at. He doesn’t like study, he doesn’t care for physical training, and he doesn’t like meeting people. He just spends his time playing around with a pack of maids.⁷⁰

It seems that both Jia Baoyu and Zhen Baoyu would rather spend their time playing with the women of the household, than take up the onerous work of studying.

When Jia Zheng leaves to assume an official post in the provinces, Jia Baoyu completely avoids work. By the time his father returned, his studies should have made him proficient in the majority of the works of Confucian canon and he should have been able to compose a persuasive examination essay based upon this knowledge. Instead, upon Jia Zheng’s return, Jia Baoyu still has not mastered these texts:

⁶⁷ David S. Nivison, *The Life and Thought of Chang Hsüeh-ch’eng (1738-1801)*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), 24.

⁶⁸ *HLM*, vol. 1, 455.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 460.

⁷⁰ *HLM*, vol. 3, 294.

He began to reckon up how much he could still recite from memory. He found that there was little more than *The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, and the two halves of the *Analects* that he could be absolutely sure of. The first half of *Mencius* he knew reasonably well, but certainly not well enough to be able to carry on from any sentence given to him at random. The second half was virtually *terra incognita*. Of the *Five Classics* he was fairly familiar with the *Poetry Classic* because he was frequently having to read bits of it in connection with his own versifying. Though far from word-perfect, he probably knew it well enough to scrape through a test. He could not remember any of the other classics at all, but fortunately his father had so far never asked him to study them, so probably it would not matter. When it came to Old Style Prose, the case was rather different. Over the past few years he had read extracts from the Zou, Gongyang and Guliang commentaries on the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and various Han and Tang pieces, but he had only dipped into them as the fancy took him; he had not done any serious work on them. There was certainly no question of his being able to remember them. There was even less likelihood of his being able to pass muster on the Examination Essay.⁷¹

Although he should have been proficient in all of these topics, Baoyu now had little chance of satisfying his father when he returned home, let alone of passing the examinations. The depiction of Jia Baoyu during the first portion of the *HLM* demonstrates that he is little concerned with the material success and continued prosperity of the Jia family. This representation of Baoyu accords with the viewpoint of privileged young men during the late-Ming who preferred to devote themselves to poetry than to study for the examinations.

Like many of “dissolute” young men, Jia Baoyu’s refusal to study for the examinations centered upon his rejection of the rigid style of the examination essay. The “eight-legged” essay was subject to repeated criticism because its standardized format constrained the literary abilities of the writer. Additionally, it allowed little room for innovation because there was only one acceptable interpretation of the texts upon which

⁷¹ Ibid., 436-7.

it was based. Although he hated studying in general, Baoyu reserved particular hatred for the examination essays:

He had always detested this style of writing in any case. The Sage himself didn't write that way, he argued, so how could one hope to expound the inner meanings of his teachings through such a medium? It was no more than a device used by vulgar fortune-seekers for starting themselves off on the golden road to success.⁷²

Similarly, when Daiyu urges him to continue his studies, Baoyu exclaims:

And those absurd Octopartite essays, which they have the nerve to call "Propagation of Holy Writ", are nothing more than a shoddy way of worming themselves into a job. The whole thing makes me sick! Not content with botching together a few classical tags, they try to hide the fact that they haven't got a single original idea of their own by churning out a lot of far-fetched purple passages – and then they pride themselves on having been "subtle" and "profound". Urrghhh! Holy Writ! Holy Pretentious Humbug I'd call it!⁷³

This view of the examinations is consistent with that held by elite young men who did not want to have to devote their lives to studying simply because it was commanded of them by their family heads. This rejection of the examination system by Baoyu reflects the attempts of many young men to throw off familial obligations and create a life in which they could devote to personal fulfillment.

However, although Baoyu fights against the demands of the examination system in the first eighty chapters, his father, Jia Zheng still staunchly insists that Baoyu should devote himself to his studies. It is only in the later portion of the *HLM* as intended by Cao Xueqin that the pursuit of personal satisfaction finally triumphed over familial duty. It is impossible to know exactly what Cao Xueqin intended for the conclusion of the *HLM* because it is not known if he wrote the end of the novel before he died in 1763.

Even if he did finish the *HLM*, no surviving copies of his manuscripts of that portion of

⁷² Ibid., 437.

⁷³ *HLM*, vol. 4, 52.

the book have survived. However, from hints in the marginal comments of Zhiyuanzhai on the original manuscripts, it seems that Cao Xueqin had intended to resolve the tension between young men and the more conservative patriarchal heads.⁷⁴ Jia Zheng eventually realized that Baoyu's talents lay in poetry rather than in the writing of orthodox examination essays. Rather than thoroughly condemning Baoyu's failure to study for the examination, Jia Zheng tolerated his eccentricities. As stated in the manuscript version of the *HLM*:

Recently as he advanced in age, Jia Zheng had lost all interest in seeking fame or profit. In earlier years he was also by nature an unbridled character fond of wine and poetry. But as he was now living among sons and nephews, he would not but try to keep them on the right track. Seeing that although Baoyu did not like to read books [for the official examination] [*sic*], yet on the other hand he was intelligent and good at poetry. [Jia Zheng] after careful deliberation was of the opinion that after all this could not be taken as a disgrace upon the ancestors. On reflection he realized that most of his ancestors were in fact like that...It looked as if such a state of affairs was really the pre-destined lot of the Jia House.⁷⁵

This change in Jia Zheng's attitude represented a complete reversal from the emphasis on the importance of the examinations that we would expect from the head of literati-elite family, especially the head of a family that was in such danger of social decline. By representing Jia Zheng as accepting of Baoyu's devotion to poetry, Cao Xueqin was, in fact, making a statement against the conservative elements of society who believed that

⁷⁴ Wu Shih-ch'ang has pieced together the intended trajectory for the conclusion of the novel. His analysis is based on copies of the original manuscripts for the surviving portion of the unedited version of the *HLM* and the marginal comments left by the commentator Zhiyuanzhai (Red Inkstone). Wu Shih-ch'ang concludes that Zhiyuanzhai was the literary name for Cao Shi, one of Cao Xueqin's cousins, and that the events of the *HLM* were also partly based off of the events of his life.⁷⁴ Therefore, it is admissible to use Zhiyuanzhai's comments about what would occur later in the book to hypothesize about the intended trajectory of the novel because he had an intimate knowledge of the events which the *HLM* described. Even though it is impossible to know exactly how Cao Xueqin intended to end the *HLM* because all of the existing original manuscripts only have eighty chapters, Wu Shih-ch'ang's work provides a valid starting point for inquiry into the intended trajectory of the novel. See Wu Shih-Ch'ang, *On The Red Chamber Dream: A Critical Study of Two Annotated Manuscripts of the XVIIIth Century*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), Ch. 8 passim.

⁷⁵ Wu Shih-Ch'ang, *On The Red Chamber Dream*, 255.

the only way for a son to fulfill his duty to the family was to succeed in the civil service examination. Cao Xueqin was presenting a critique of the social order that he felt focused too much energy on the examination system.

It is not that surprising that Jia Baoyu was depicted as more interested in poetry and women than in scholarship, when we recall that his character was based in part on Cao Xueqin's life. Although it is inaccurate to see Baoyu as the direct autobiographical portrayal of Cao Xueqin, his attitude towards the examinations does seem eerily similar to that of the author. After Cao Xueqin's family lost status in 1728, they began to place tremendous pressure on him to succeed in the examinations in order to restore the status of his family. However, "[s]ince he utterly detested such a career he defied all exhortations and devoted most of his time to poetry and painting."⁷⁶ Because Cao Xueqin failed to gain an official appointment, the Cao house finally fell from imperial favor, and he was forced to move to a small cottage outside of Beijing where he lived out his life in poverty.⁷⁷ Given these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that Cao Xueqin would depict a young man who was loathe to study and who roundly condemned the examination system.

Although Cao Xueqin understood the pressure on young men to conform and study for the civil service examinations, he did not promote this way of life. Instead, he depicted Baoyu's conflict with the social order in order to valorize his ultimate ability to escape the demands of familial obligation and satisfy himself. This plot line firmly establishes that Cao Xueqin was the heir to the social philosophies of liberal thinkers of

⁷⁶ Ibid., 110, 120.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 122.

the late-Ming who also believed that devoting oneself to studying for the examinations was a waste of time.

V. The Wayward Son

However, the plot of the *HLM* as crafted by Cao Xueqin would have made conservative family heads nervous because the social status of the literati-elite rested upon their ability to produce young men who were successful in the civil service examinations. Consequently, the original trajectory of the *HLM* was altered by Gao E in order to produce a text that was much more conservative and supportive of the concerns of the patriarchal heads of literati-elite families. Many critics have charged that Gao E destroyed the intrinsic value of the *HLM* when he altered its ending. However, rather than fundamentally altering the worth of the novel, Gao E's revision of the book should be seen as both a literary method of debating the social conflict over the examination system and a conservative attempt to promote the importance of young men passing the examinations.

While it is impossible to know exactly how the details of the plot would have played out in the *HLM* as planned by Cao Xueqin, Gao E's ending does contradict many elements of the earlier portrayal of Jia Baoyu. As discussed above, in Cao Xueqin's manuscripts Jia Zheng eventually came to accept the fact that Jia Baoyu would not pass the examinations. However, in the revision printed by Gao E, Jia Zheng appears as a much sterner figure towards the end of the novel. Although throughout the first eighty chapters, Jia Zheng had often lamented Baoyu's failure to concentrate on his studies, it is only in the revised ending that he truly comes to criticize Baoyu. Rather than accepting Baoyu's poetic talent, he scolds him by saying:

You must understand that those verses you write are not going to impress anyone. The only thing the examiners are interested in is a well-written composition. And the effort you have expended in that direction has so far been non-existent.

Now listen carefully to what I have to say. From today, I want you to forget all about your verses and couplets. You are to concentrate exclusively on Octopartite Compositions. I will give you twelve month's grace. If by the end of that time you are still in your present unregenerate state, you may as well give up all together, and I for my part shall have to think again about owning a creature like you as my son.⁷⁸

Jia Zheng, not only scolds Baoyu for failing to concentrate on his studies, but he also laments to Baoyu's teacher, Jia Dairu, about Baoyu's refusal to concentrate on the serious work of the examination essay:

'He is no longer a child, and if he is to shoulder his responsibilities and earn a place in the world, it is high time he applied himself conscientiously to preparing for his exams. At home, unfortunately he spends all his time idling about in the company of children. His verses, the only field in which he has acquired any competence, are for the most part turgid juvenilia, at the best romantic trifles devoid of substance.'
'And he looks such a fine lad,' interposed [Dairu]. 'He seems so intelligent. Why this refusal to study, this perverse streak of hedonism? Not that one should entirely neglect poetic composition. But there is surely time enough for that later on in one's career.'⁷⁹

This criticism is harsher than that which Baoyu is subjected to in the first eighty chapters of the novel. It coincides with the logic of family heads during the Qing dynasty who were concerned that their sons would "waste" their time with poetry and, therefore, fail to study for the examinations. It also demonstrates the fact that family heads felt the lure of poetry to be a very real threat to their ability to convince young men to study the rather dry material upon which the civil service examinations were based. Just as conservative family heads believed that examination success was necessary for the continuation of the family, Jia Zheng states of the men in his family, "[i]f they can pass the examination and

⁷⁸ *HLM*, vol. 4, 45-6.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

become Provincial Graduates, it will help redeem the family from its present disgrace.”⁸⁰

These words sound eerily similar to the concerns of patriarchal heads of literati-elite families that their family will fall from power if they fail to produce an examination graduate. The altered portrayal of Jia Zheng’s attitude towards Jia Baoyu bears out the conjecture that Gao E’s revision of the *HLM* constitutes a conservative reaction to the potentially socially destabilizing ideals presented by Cao Xueqin.

In addition to changing the attitude of Jia Zheng to be more in line with that expected of the head of a literati-elite family in danger of losing its status, Gao E also changed the portrayal of Zhen Baoyu. In the beginning of the *HLM*, Zhen Baoyu appears to be the mirror image of Jia Baoyu. He avoids his studies and spends all of his time with the girls of the household. However, by the time that Zhen Baoyu reappears in chapter 115, he has completely changed his stance on the examinations. Instead of avoiding his studies, he has become a model young man and wholeheartedly accepted his obligation to pass the civil service examinations. Jia Zheng immediately recognizes Zhen Baoyu as a model of male virtue, and he wants Jia Baoyu to learn from him.⁸¹ Zhen Baoyu, for his part, attempts to pass on to Jia Baoyu his newly acquired understanding that a young man must succeed in the examinations in order to restore his family’s status:

‘When I was young,’ mused Zhen Baoyu aloud for his new friend’s benefit, ‘I was blind to my own limitations and entertained ideas far above my station. But then my family fell on hard times, and we have all spent the past few years in greatly reduced circumstances. As a result, although I can hardly lay claim to a comprehensive experience of life’s vicissitudes, I feel I may have acquired some slight knowledge of the ways of the world, some meager understanding of human nature. You, on the other hand, have lived in the lap of luxury all your life, you have lacked for nothing, and you have, I am sure, been able to achieve great distinction in your literary compositions and in the study of public affairs, a distinction that

⁸⁰ *HLM*, vol. 5, 298.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 272.

caused your honorable father to hold you in high esteem, and to view you with great pride and affection.’⁸²

This speech is effectively a moralizing sermon which affirms the idea that an indulgent young man could completely ruin a household, no matter how wealthy or renowned it was, and that a studious young man could bring honor to his family and ensure their continued prominence in society. This belief is made even clearer when Zhen Baoyu continues:

When I was young, I too abhorred anything that smacked of the platitude and the cliché. But I grew older, and when my father resigned from his post and had little further inclination for social entertaining, the role of host devolved upon me. In the course of my duties I observed that each one of the distinguished gentlemen whom I met had in one way or another brought honor and glory to his family name...So gradually I cast off the intractable theories and foolish passions of my youth.⁸³

This statement clearly condemns Jia Baoyu’s pursuit of personal happiness over family duty as the foolish passion of a misguided youth. In order to become a valuable member of society, he must begin to study seriously and gain an official position. Gao E’s altered portrayal of Zhen Baoyu starkly condemns the way of life that Cao Xueqin sought to validate.

Gao E also changed the ending of the book so that Jia Baoyu ultimately attains the *juren* degree. This ending has been regarded by scholars of the *HLM* as the most unsatisfactory aspect of Gao E’s changes to the book because it changed a novel which radically departed from social norms by having the young literati-elite hero renounce his familial obligations in to a more standard moralizing tale. Throughout the beginning of the *HLM*, Baoyu repeatedly condemned the examination system. He even went so far as

⁸² Ibid., 274.

⁸³ Ibid., 275.

to call men such as Zhen Baoyu “career-worms.”⁸⁴ However, in the revised version of the *HLM*, Jia Baoyu takes the examinations and attains the *juren* degree before he returns to the celestial realm from which his spirit was sent down to earth at the beginning of the novel. Baoyu even goes so far as to state to his mother, Lady Wang:

But if I can do this one thing successfully, if I can do my very best and pass this examination, the perhaps I can bring you a little pleasure. Then my worldly duty will be accomplished and I will at least have made some return for all the trouble I caused you.⁸⁵

This statement does not sound like the logic of the young man who used to condemn all worldly pursuits. Rather, it sounds like the arguments used by the patriarchal heads of literati-elite families to convince young men that they must devote themselves to studying for the examinations. Jia Baoyu disappears after the examinations and never assumes a position in the civil service examination. However, because he placed seventh and his nephew Jia Lan placed 130th on the same examination, the emperor declares a general amnesty and restores the property of the Jia clan.⁸⁶ Baoyu does not take up a position in the bureaucracy; however, he saves his family from ruin by passing the civil service examinations. Additionally, Baochai is pregnant when he disappears, so he has also done his duty by providing a male heir to carry on the family line.⁸⁷ This revised ending brings the book back into line with a view of society that accorded with that held by conservative members of the literati-elite. Simply because Gao E’s revisions changed the tenor of the *HLM* does not mean that we should view these changes as invalid. In fact, these alterations to the book are what allow Gao E to contribute to literary discourse about an issue of private life.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 274.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 336.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 349-51.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 372.

VI. Literary Debate

The conflict between Jia Baoyu and his family as depicted in the *HLM* is the perfect literary representation of the social conflict swirling during the Qing dynasty. Young men who continued to support the late-Ming ideals of poetry and personal fulfillment were locked in combat with the conservative family heads motivated by fears of downward mobility who wanted young men to devote themselves to their studies. Cao Xueqin depicted this conflict in order to praise young men who refused to bow to family obligation and devote themselves to study. By crafting an ending for the *HLM* in which Jia Zheng was ultimately convinced that Baoyu should devote his talents to poetry, Cao Xueqin staunchly sided with the liberal thinkers of the late-Ming. In contrast, Gao E's revisions firmly supported the concerns of conservative family heads. Although scholars of the *HLM* have routinely denounced Gao E for the changes that he made to the *HLM*, condemning these revisions without understanding the social situation which prompted them only obscures our understanding of the full import of the *HLM*. Gao E revised the ending of the *HLM* so that Baoyu ultimately recognized his duty to support the family. According to Gao E's masterplan, Baoyu not only took the civil service examinations, but also he passed and he did so well that the emperor restored the status of his family.

A close reading of the *HLM* demonstrates that it was clearly authored by both Cao Xueqin and Gao E to debate on issues of private life. Both editor/authors were reacting to contemporary events to create a narrative which supported their respective social stance. This method of examining the *HLM* also confirms the assumption that Cao Xueqin was a relatively liberal author while Gao E was more conservative in his social philosophy. Cao Xueqin had clearly authored a narrative which supported the belief that

young men should follow their hearts rather than devote themselves to studying for the civil service examinations. Consequently, Gao E had to completely revise the ending of the *HLM* in order to make it accord with the philosophy of conservative family heads.

Chapter 2
Love or Duty?:
The Conflicting Depictions of Daiyu and Baochai

But although there were plenty of young ladies of outstanding beauty and breeding among the Jia family's numerous acquaintance, none of them, in [Baoyu's] view, could remotely compare to Daiyu. For some time now his feeling for her had been a very special one; but precisely because of this morbid sensibility, he had shrunk from telling her about it...It was unfortunate for him that Daiyu herself possessed a similar streak of morbid sensibility and disguised her real feelings, as he did his, while attempting to discover what *he* felt about *her*.¹

'Chai is quite right to behave as she does,' put in Grandmother Jia with a chuckle. 'I don't deny that marriage should be based on affection; but there should always be a sense of proportion. I'm glad Chai sets such a store by dignity, and it saddens me that Baoyu should still be such a silly boy'²

In the *Honglou meng*, Baoyu is caught between his affection for two very different women. Daiyu is poetic and refined while Baochai is a no nonsense girl who is devoted to helping her family. The tension between the two women results in a melodramatic love triangle, which could be seen as merely a literary device to stimulate reader interest. However, in light of the function served by novels as a realm for debating social issues, especially those at the heart of familial life, these two women are more than simple love interests. Each of them stands as a symbol for a different side in a raging social debate about marriage. Should elite young men be searching for an educated literary companion, or a woman who would maintain his household and further his patriline? Liberal proponents of the cult of *qing*³ insisted that young men should be able to marry out of love, while conservative family heads insisted that marriage must be

¹ *HLM*, vol. 2, 85.

² *HLM*, vol. 5, 20.

³ Roughly translated as "human feelings." William T. Rowe, "Women and the Family in Mid-Ch'ing Social Thought: The Case of Ch'en Hung-mou," In *Late Imperial China*, vol. 13, no. 2 (1992): 31. It is also sometimes translated as "desire."

motivated out of obligation to the patriline. However, during the Qing dynasty, these two disparate trains of thought had been combined into the chaste scholar-beauty romance, a literary genre in which men married the women of their dreams, but these women were also their ideal social match. Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of the *HLM* is that neither Cao Xueqin or Gao E was content with this compromise, and they each sought to promote their respective champion in the struggle between love and duty.

Daiyu represents the ideal woman according to the standards of the cult of *qing*, and, as expected, it is her character who is promoted by Cao Xueqin. Daiyu, the poetic, refined, and sensitive orphan devotes herself to poetry and discourages Baoyu from taking the examinations seriously. It is she whom Baoyu loves; however, in the end of both versions of the *HLM*, she is prevented from marrying him. Although she is prevented from uniting with Baoyu by his family, Cao Xueqin portrays Daiyu as a sympathetic figure who the reader concludes should rightly have been allowed to marry her love. In contrast, Baochai is immediately recognizable as the sort of woman that a father would want his son to marry. Unlike Daiyu, she is strong and sensible. Her devotion both to her natal family and to the Jias clearly demonstrates that she would make an efficient household manager. Her actions correspond with the ideal of womanhood promoted by conservative family heads. Fittingly, in Gao E's revision of the *HLM*, it is she who is favored by Baoyu's family and who eventually marries him. By supporting different women, Cao Xueqin and Gao E were able to clearly express their views on this issue which could not be openly debated in a public forum. By casting Daiyu as a sympathetic character, Cao Xueqin gave his support to marriage motivated by

love, while Gao E buttressed the conservative view that men should marry out of family obligation by elevating Baochai as Baoyu's wife.

However, the dialogue between these two differing social perspectives is not as straightforward on this issue as it was in the debates about the civil service examinations. The contrast between Cao Xueqin's and Gao E's versions of the *HLM* is thrown into stark relief by the fact that during the Qing dynasty, the chaste scholar-beauty romance had developed as a compromise between love and duty to the family. In chaste scholar beauty romances, men married women whom they loved; however, these women also happened to be perfectly matched to them and served their family dutifully. Because Cao Xueqin and Gao E both deliberately chose to ignore the typical trajectory of the chaste scholar beauty romance and refused to give the audience the expected happy ending to a love story, it is clear that they were writing to express their personal opinions on this private issue rather than to produce a text which would have pleased their audience.

The conflict between Daiyu and Baochai complicates our understanding of Cao Xueqin and Gao E. The fact that both Cao Xueqin and Gao E did not alter the *HLM* so that it fit within the framework of the chaste scholar-beauty romance signaled that both authors did not believe that love could be reconciled with family duty. Additionally, unlike the liberal thinkers of the late Ming who supported the cult of *qing*, Cao Xueqin did not create an ending for the *HLM* in which Baoyu and Daiyu found happiness in marriage. Instead he portrayed the havoc that the young lovers suffered when their union was prevented in order to present a criticism of the fact that most young people were still unable to marry for love. Finally, contrary to expectations, Gao E retains the description of the lovesickness experienced by both Daiyu and Baoyu which originally made the

reader sympathetic to their plight. Rather than altering large portions of the novel, Gao E edited only small portions of the *HLM* in order to render this malaise more sinister and to promote Baochai as the ideal wife. The issue of marriage reveals the ways that Cao Xueqin deviated from the liberal literary traditions, and demonstrates Gao E's use of a more subtle revisionary technique to bend the plot of the *HLM* to his own devices.

I. The Valorization of Love: *Caizi jiaren* and the Cult of *qing*

In his decision to portray the failed love between Baoyu and Daiyu, Cao Xueqin violated the literary tradition of the cult of *qing* which had been developed by liberal authors during the late Ming. This decision seems perplexing when we consider the fact that Cao Xueqin clearly ignored the dictates of contemporary liberal authors by not allowing Baoyu and Daiyu to consummate their love. However, simply because Cao Xueqin did not follow the trajectory of the typical love story in the *HLM* did not mean that his aims differed from those of the authors of the cult of *qing*. Ultimately, Cao Xueqin still sought to promote the ideal that men and women should be allowed to marry out of love.

In Late Imperial China, wives were usually chosen for young men of the literati-elite by their fathers or their patriarchal family heads. These matches were not made in order to pair up young lovers, but rather to cement strategic familial alliances. However, during the late Ming, this system was increasingly challenged by a group of young male writers from the literati-elite. These young men promoted an ideal of love and marriage which was the pairing of emotional and intellectual equals rather than an act of familial duty. They fought against Confucian sensibilities towards intimate relationships. Desire and sex were valorized in such works of fiction as Tang Xianzu's *Mudan ting* (*The Peony*

Pavilion). Supporters of the cult of *qing* such as Tu Long (1543-1605) criticized Confucian scholars who claimed that they only had sex in order to procreate. Tu Long claimed that this belief, “[was] only an excuse invented to maintain moral order and avoid debauchery.”⁴ During this time period many young men began to have an indulgent attitude towards desire and love which led many of them to pursue romantic opportunities on an unprecedented scale. These young men insisted that they should have the right to marry for love rather than out of duty.

Simultaneously, the ideal of companionate marriage began to develop. During the preceding Tang and Song dynasties, men had turned to courtesans, who were educated in music and poetry, to amuse them and fill their desire for a companion who was their intellectual equal. However, during the Ming dynasty, the boom in publishing meant that more women, especially members of the literati-elite, had access to books. As a result, it became possible for men of the literati-elite class to imagine that they might marry an educated women and pleasantly pass the time with her trading poems and eloquent letters. This ideal of companionate marriage first began to circulate among the literati-elite during the Song dynasty. Li Qing-zhao and her husband, Zhao Ming-cheng, became renowned for their close intellectual relationship.⁵ Although the ideal of companionate marriage had existed in earlier dynasties, it became more prevalent during the growth of the cult of *qing* in during the late-Ming. This viewpoint legitimized women who pursued poetry instead of focusing their sole energies on the upkeep of their husband’s family line.

⁴ Martin W. Huang, *Desire and Fictional Narrative in Late Imperial China*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 6-7.

⁵ Patricia Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 158.

The changing attitude towards the fate of lovers can be demonstrated by the revisions that the *Romance of the Western Chamber* underwent. The *Romance of the Western Chamber* was first written down in the 9th Century during the Tang dynasty. In the original plot of this story, Cai Yingying met the scholar Zhang, who fell in love with her and eventually seduced her. Zhang abandoned her and they both ended up marrying other people. However, later editor/authors in the late-Ming revised this story to fit their ideal image of love and marriage. The revision *Dong xi xiang* (*Mr. Dong's Western Chamber Romance*) provided the lovers with a happy ending. This same happy ending was later used by the playwright Wang Shifu in the Yuan dynasty drama *Xi xiang ji*.⁶ The *Romance of the Western Chamber* was originally a tragic story that indicated the dangers of love by portraying Cai Yingying as lonely and abandoned by her lover. In contrast, its revised state promoted the cult of *qing* by showing that love, indeed, could conquer all.

The popularity of the cult of *qing* carried on into the Qing dynasty; however it was tempered into a new form. *Caizi jiaren* (scholar-beauty romance) represented a compromise between the ideal that men should marry out of love and the concerns of patriarchal family heads that men marry women who would help support the family. In contrast to the works produced during the Ming dynasty which were more erotic in nature and often depicted graphic sex scenes, the cult of *qing* was sanitized in “chaste” scholar-beauty romances. These stories depicted the union of a “smart, capable, and chaste young [woman] who [was] better than [her] male [counterpart] in terms of literary talent, moral fiber, or wit” and “an effeminate scholar-poet who...yields his right to

⁶ Anne Waltner, “On Not Becoming A Heroine: Lin Daiyu and Cui Yingying,” In *Signs*, vol. 15, no. 1 (1989), 67.

polygyny...and allows the woman to take the superior and active role.”⁷ These two individuals are united in their love to each other, and despite the fact that others try to prevent their union, they are ultimately married.⁸ These stories follow in the footsteps of the cult of *qing* by depicting young people defying the wishes of their parents and arranging their own marriages.

However, *caizi jiaren* does not completely obey the ideals of *qing*. Although the stories presented in *caizi jiaren* do not follow the traditional pattern where marriages are arranged by parents, they reconcile with social standards by arranging a match that would have pleased the parents.⁹ According to the definition of scholar-beauty romances, “Love or *qing* refers not to consuming passion but to the self-evident, meant-for-each-other quality that the young man and woman have.”¹⁰ Also as Keith McMahon states, “With its nonparticularized and nonvulgarized action, the chaste romance marks a departure from the norm and a break with the style of the “decadent” fiction of the Ming.”¹¹ However, despite its differences from the literature of the cult of *qing*, *caizi jiaren* must be seen as an heir to its tradition. Despite the fact that it bowed somewhat to conservative morals by abandoning openly erotic passages in favor of creating chaste romances which were ultimately sanctioned by society, it still retained the ideal that young men and women should be matched according to love. *Caizi jiaren* represented a compromise between these two conflicting sets of ideals.

II. Dystopia and Social Criticism: Love in the *HLM*

⁷ Keith McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists: Sexuality and Male-Female Relations in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Fiction*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 99.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 131.

Cao Xueqin, much like the most staunch advocates of *qing*, promoted the pursuit of personal happiness over the fulfillment of family obligations. Therefore, it would have been expected that he, like the late Ming authors of the cult of *qing* or contemporary authors of chaste scholar beauty romances, would have written a story in which the Baoyu was ultimately coupled with Daiyu. However, Cao Xueqin violated the traditional portrayal of works of *qing* by crafting an ending for the *HLM* in which Baoyu and Daiyu were tragically torn apart. By refusing to unite the young lovers in happiness, Cao Xueqin presented a critical commentary on society for continuing to refuse to allow people to marry out of love. Moreover, by adhering to the stylistic portrayal of love inherent in the cult of *qing* and *caizi jiaoren* but making his narrative darker in tone, Cao Xueqin presented a critique on this literary style which promoted the ideal of love, but which had so far been unsuccessful in effecting lasting social change.

Many of the features of the *HLM* correspond either to ideals promoted by the cult of *qing* or to the stylistic features of *caizi jiaoren*. One of these features is the character of Daiyu. She is everything that the proponents of *qing* prized in a woman. She was tutored by Jia Yu-cun¹² and could read the *Four Books*.¹³ When the girls of the Jia household form a poetry club, Daiyu is by far the most talented poet. In a contest in which they each have to write a poem on the topic of chrysanthemums, not only does Daiyu write three poems instead of just one, but also her poems are chosen as the top three poems out of the entire group.¹⁴ She is also able to play and compose music for the Qin.¹⁵ Moreover, she is passionately in love with Baoyu and he feels equally strongly about her.

¹² *HLM*, vol. 1, 70.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁴ *HLM*, vol. 2, 254.

¹⁵ *HLM*, vol. 4, 152.

If the *HLM* were a typical novel in the cult of *qing*, then Daiyu would have married Baoyu.

Another element of the *HLM* which corresponds to the *caizi jiaren* is the symmetry between Baochai and Daiyu:

Baoyu and Daiyu share an 'yu' in their names; Baoyu and Baochai share a 'bao.' The couples are also each defined by a matching pair of substances. Baoyu and Daiyu are a match of 'wood and stone,' Baoyu and Baochai of 'gold and jade.' In terms of kinship, Baoyu and Daiyu are maternal cousins. More precisely, Daiyu is the daughter of Baoyu's *father's younger* sister, while Baochai is the daughter of Baoyu's *mother's elder* sister [sic]¹⁶

This mirroring of two women occurs in many chaste scholar-beauty romances in which a man breaks social standards by taking two women of relatively equal status as his wives, rather than making one his concubine.¹⁷ Usually the husband and his two wives compliment each other in some way. In *Lin er bao (The Son of Good Fortune)* (1672) the man and his first wife are both only children, while he and his second wife have the same birthdate.¹⁸ Similarly, Baochai and Daiyu mirror each other in the *HLM*. Additionally, at one point in the novel, Baoyu dreams of a woman who is half Daiyu and half Baochai.¹⁹ It is commonly understood that this portrayal indicates that the ideal woman would lie somewhere between the two extremes demarcated by the cousins. However, this comment could also indicate, that according to the rubric of *caizi jiaren* Baoyu would ideally marry both Daiyu and Baochai.

The *HLM* also corresponds to romantic novels in its portrayal of the relationship between Baoyu and Daiyu. They have known each other since childhood and have

¹⁶ Keith McMahan, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists*, 186.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 113-8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹⁹ *HLM*, vol. 1, 146.

developed deep feelings for each other. Moreover, they are karmically bound to each other. Baoyu was originally animated as a divine stone created by the goddess Nüwa, and he developed a love for the Crimson Pearl Flower, which was later reincarnated as Daiyu.²⁰ As in many other romantic novels, where the protagonists are commonly stricken by lovesickness which immobilizes them unless they are united with their beloved,²¹ Daiyu and Baoyu are also left listless and downtrodden by their love. This feeling is only exacerbated by their inability to confess their love for each other.²² The frequent quarrels between the lovers are motivated by this lack of understanding about the feelings of the other. Daiyu continually doubts that Baoyu prefers her to Baochai. When Daiyu hears a rumor that the Jias intend to marry Baoyu to Baochai, she determines to kill herself:

Daiyu was resolved that from this day forward she would deliberately destroy her health. She soon lost her appetite, and gradually began to waste away. Baoyu visited her whenever he could after school, but although there were a million things she wanted to tell him, her consciousness that they were no longer children inhibited her from showing her affection...Baoyu for his part would have liked to talk with her sincerely and offer some genuine comfort; but he was afraid of aggravating her illness...Theirs was a case of estrangement in the very extremity of true love.²³

Because the lovers are so emotionally caught up that they can not express their affection for each other and thereby alleviate their own suffering, Daiyu almost ends her own life. She only revives when she overhears the maids Scribe and Snowbright talking about the

²⁰ Ibid., 47,53.

²¹ See "Ruan San Redeems His Debt in Leisurely Clouds Nunnery," In Feng Menglong, *Stories Old and New: A Ming Dynasty Collection*, Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang, trans., (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000); Feng Menglong, "Shengxian," In *Falling in Love: Stories from Ming China*, Patrick Hanan, trans., (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006):1-20.

²² *HLM*, vol. 2, 85.

²³ *HLM*, vol. 4, 210.

fact that the marriage between Baoyu and Baochai was not yet definite.²⁴ Baoyu, for his part, is sometimes given to fits of madness. He himself credits these upsets to his feelings for Daiyu.²⁵ According to the ideals of proponents of the cult of *qing*, the way to cure all of these problems would have been to marry Daiyu to Baoyu and, thereby, cure both of them of their lovesickness.

However, Cao Xueqin did not create an ending which united Daiyu and Baoyu. Instead, he was influenced by events in his own life to create an ending which condemned the fact that most individuals were still unable to marry out of love. Much like Baoyu, Cao Xueqin suffered a failed love affair.²⁶ While we must recognize that the *HLM* is a fictional text and does not reflect Cao Xueqin's personal life, his own failed love disposed him to write a text which was highly critical of the patriarchy for refusing to unite young lovers. Therefore, he depicts Daiyu dying of lovesickness when she is unable to be united with Baoyu.²⁷ When Baoyu learns of her death, he is consumed by madness which makes him act like an imbecile. He "regressed into a worse state of stupor and depression than ever. He was too lacking in energy to move, and could eat nothing, but fell straight into a heavy slumber."²⁸ This ending represents an implicit criticism of the existing social order because the needless death of Daiyu and Baoyu's madness render both of these promising youths useless to society.

III. The Dangers of Love

²⁴ Ibid., 213.

²⁵ Ibid., 338.

²⁶ Wu Shih-Ch'ang, *On The Red Chamber Dream: A Critical Study of Two Annotated Manuscripts of the XVIIIth Century*, (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1961), 120.

²⁷ *HLM*, vol. 4, 377.

²⁸ Ibid., 367.

Given the state of the manuscript when Gao E revised it, he could have easily altered the plot of the *HLM* to fit more with that of the *caizi jiaren* simply by marrying Baoyu to Daiyu, or perhaps, even more radically, marrying him to both Daiyu and Baochai. However, Gao E decided to eschew this option. Instead he preserved the plot line in which Daiyu dies and promoted Baochai as the appropriate wife for Baoyu. This choice is surprising because the “chaste” scholar-beauty romance curbed the more liberal tendencies of the cult of *qing* to make it more palatable to conservative audiences. While this genre might not have been applauded by them, it certainly would not normally have been as roundly condemned as it was by Gao E. In order to understand why Gao E would not unite Baoyu with Daiyu, we must search for the reasons that Daiyu was not viewed as an appropriate marriage partner by conservative family heads.

According to the cult of *qing* and *caizi jiaren*, the lovesickness from which Baoyu and Daiyu suffer is nothing to fear. It is only a symptom of their love for each other which would have been quickly cured by their union. However, behind this innocent lovesickness lurks a more sinister threat. Romantic love was viewed as sexually draining to a man. According to the tradition of the *ars erotica*, if a man gave into his lust for a woman, it was possible for him harm himself or even to lose his life. Given this historical background, it is not surprising that Gao E decided to retain Cao Xueqin’s original plot in which Daiyu was separated from Baoyu. Her love for him often drives him to the brink of madness and would have been interpreted as a threat to his health by conservative family heads.

Sexual manuals and elements of the ars erotica,²⁹ the oldest of which date back at least to the Han dynasty, detailed sexual positions and practices. According to the ethos of these sexual manuals, sex was a necessary part of life, and it even had health benefits:

If you were to abstain from intercourse, your spirit would have no opportunity for expansiveness, and *yin* and *yang* would be blocked and cut off from one another. How could you strengthen yourself thus?³⁰

Specific sexual exercises were listed which men could use to cure themselves of illness. However, sex also had a dangerous side. The *Tianxia zhidao tan* (*Discourse on the Highest Tao under Heaven*) stated that “if he is excessive in sex, illness cannot be controlled and boils and swellings appear.”³¹ Similarly, the *Su Nü qing* (*The Classic of Su Nü*) listed “seven ills” which could be caused by overindulgence in sex. Numerous health problems, such as blurred vision and pain in the lungs, could result from improperly practicing sex. One of the most striking illness was “the hundred blockages”:

The “hundred blockages” result when one has overindulged in sex with women, spending oneself without restraint. Repeated intercourse without the proper measure exhausts the [*jing-qi*]. When one forces oneself to ejaculate, but the [*jing*] is exhausted and does not come forth, a hundred ailments all appear together. One suffers “emaciation-thirst” symptoms and blurred vision.³²

Similarly, repeated ejaculation was said to cause, “deficiency and drawing of the skin, pain in the stalk, dampness in the scrotum, and blood in the semen.”³³ This belief that sexual indulgence caused illness was also present in the historical annals. According to

²⁹ Although sex manuals saw their heyday from the Han to Tang dynasties and were no longer widely circulated during the Ming and Qing dynasties, it is probable to assume that even though these manuals were no longer widely in print for consumption by the elite classes, that the knowledge they contained continued to circulate among the populace.

³⁰ “The Classic of Su Nü (*Su Nü ching*)”, In *Art of the Bedchamber: The Chinese Sexual Classics Including Women’s Solo Meditation Texts*, Douglas Wile, ed., (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 85.

³¹ “Discourse on the Highest Tao under Heaven (*T’ien-hsia chich-tao t’an*)”, In *Art of the Bedchamber*, 80.

³² “The Classic of Su Nü (*Su Nü ching*)”, In *Art of the Bedchamber*, 91.

³³ *Ibid.*

the *Zou zhuan* the physician of the Marquis of Jin diagnosed his master by stating that, “This illness cannot be cured. This is a case of being intimate with a woman; the illness makes one become as if insane.”³⁴

A man could even die from overindulgence in carnal pleasure. The Chinese believed that a man could exhaust his *jing* (life force) if he ejaculated too frequently. As a result, men were advised to suppress their ejaculations in order to allow their *qi* (energy) to circulate within their bodies and to replenish them.³⁵ As a result, men were warned against becoming too infatuated with a woman because then they would be tempted to have sex too often and will be unable to control their ejaculation. The *Fangnei buyi* warned:

A man should not indulge his passion freely, for then it will rob him of his vital essence. Every time a man restrains himself it is as if new oil were added to a lamp about to extinguish. But if a man does not control himself and emits semen every time he sleeps with a woman, it is as if he were taking away oil from a lamp already nearly burnt out.³⁶

Consequently, it was believed that a woman could, in fact, hasten a man’s death.

However, although the beliefs in the sexually endangering power of sex is well attested to in literature from the Han dynasty through the Tang dynasty, by the Late Imperial Period, sexual manuals and the *ars erotica* no longer openly circulated throughout society. Consequently many scholars have overlooked the influence of this philosophy on Gao E. Although the dangers of indulging in sexual love were no longer widely discussed in sexual manuals, elements of this tradition were still present in

³⁴ Keith McMahan, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists*, 33.

³⁵ For a discussion of how often men could safely ejaculate see R.H. Van Gulik, *Sexual Life In Ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society from ca. 1500 B.C. till 1644 A.D.*, with a new introduction and bibliography by Paul R. Goldin, (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 146.

³⁶ R.H. Van Gulik, *Sexual Life In Ancient China*, 196.

vernacular literature, and perhaps even more surprisingly, in works that would normally be associated with the cult of *qing*.

The famed supporter of *qing*, Feng Menglong, repeatedly crafted stories in which the male and female protagonists were struck by a lovesickness which threatened their lives. One such example is the story *Ruan San Redeems His Debt in Leisurely Clouds Nunnery*. In this tale, the talented young scholar Ruan San encounters the young lady Yulan on the street during a festival.³⁷ The two fall in love, but are unable to see each other. As a result:

Memory of the young lady filled him with tender longing...as the days wore on, the lovelorn Ruan San gradually grew emaciated from insomnia and loss of appetite. In less than three months, he became a very sick man.³⁸

Ruan San is so fixated with Yulan, that without her he is incapable of functioning.

Consequently, he decides to consummate their love despite his illness, a decision which results in his death.

Ruan San was afflicted with a prolonged illness brought on by his yearning for this girl. At the rendezvous, he was so overcome by desire that his life was put in jeopardy. As for the woman, tormented as she had been by the lack of a chance to meet him, she now did the best she could to continue to please him and experienced the very height of love. Little did they know that their ecstasy was to end in sorrow. He lost his yang, his life force. In a moment, he ceased to breathe.³⁹

Ruan San's death resonates with the *ars erotica* which warned young men against becoming too obsessed with women because their passion would rob them of their life force. However, Feng Menglong counters this conservative rhetoric by depicting Yulan

³⁷ "Ruan San Redeems His Debt in Leisurely Clouds Nunnery In Feng Menglong, *Stories Old and New: A Ming Dynasty Collection*, Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang, trans., (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 96.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 98.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 105.

preserving Ruan San's patriline by conceiving a son from their union and successful raising him to become Ruan's heir.⁴⁰ Feng Menglong's description of Ruan San's death clearly references the belief that a man can lose his *jing*, his life force, if he indulges in sex at inappropriate times. It also illustrates the motif of lovesickness that is present in many novels of *qing*. However, in light of the tradition of the ars erotica, conservative family heads would not have seen lovesickness as a minor illness that could be cured by uniting the lovers, but rather as a serious threat to a man's life which could only be cured by ending his dangerous infatuation.

The belief that individuals could be so weakened by lovesickness that they might die was taken up again by Feng Menglong in the story *Shengxian* which was published in the collection *Xing shi hengyan* (*Constant Words To Awaken The World*) in 1627. Fan Erlang spots the beautiful young maiden, Zhou Shengxian while walking outside and becomes infatuated. "The two young people in the tea shop gazed into each other's eyes and promptly fell in love."⁴¹ Both Fan Erlang and Zhou Shengxian fall ill when they are unable to find a way to be together. Fortunately, their neighbor Mrs. Wang recognizes that they are suffering from lovesickness and advises Zhou Shengxian's mother to marry the young lovers to each other in order to preserve their health.⁴² Their betrothal effects a miraculous cure. Not only do Fan Erlang and Zhou Shngxian recuperate fully, but they both begin to exhibit virtuous behavior.

Fan Erlang, who used to spend very little time at home, now never went out, but helped his brother look after the tavern. And the girl, who

⁴⁰ Ibid., 108.

⁴¹ Feng Menglong, "Shengxian," In *Falling in Love: Stories from Ming China*, Patrick Hanan, trans., (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 2.

⁴² Ibid., 7.

normally did no needlework whatsoever, was now perfectly willing to sew.⁴³

However, the lovers are not long united. When Zhou Dalang, Shengxian's father, returns home and learns of the engagement, he insists that it be called off. The shock of this news causes Shengxian to collapse and die.⁴⁴ Shengxian's death should be read as an indictment of her father's actions. Her betrothal to Fan Erlang had induced both of them to exhibit socially valued modes of behavior. However, even as this narrative condemns society for keeping lovers from uniting, it perpetuates the belief that love can lead to an individual's death.

Although the *HLM* primarily details the chaste romance between Baoyu and Daiyu, it also contains scenes detailing the dangers of carnal lust. One such incident is Jia Rui's infatuation with his married cousin-in-law, Wang Xifeng. Jia Rui is the grandson of the master of the Jia family school.⁴⁵ He becomes obsessed with Wang Xifeng, who finds him odious. She goes through the pretense of being interested in him and of setting up a romantic interlude with him, but when he returns to the mansion at night she has him trapped outside of the gate to her courtyard so that he must spend the night outside.⁴⁶ Undeterred, Jia Rui continues to pursue Wang Xifeng who decides to further punish him for his lust. When Jia Rui sneaks into her chambers, he believes that he has embraced Wang Xifeng; however, he is tricked. Instead of Wang Xifeng, Jia Rui is holding his cousin Jia Rong who then proceeds to blackmail Jia Rui into paying him 50 taels of silver not to reveal what happened there. Jia Rong then further punishes Jia Rui

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁵ *HLM*, vol. 1, 236.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 245.

by dumping a night pail on his head.⁴⁷ Jia Rui continues to long for Wang Xifeng even though it is clear that she has rejected him. In the end his longing for her leads to illness.

Unable, even now, to overcome his longing for Xifeng...worn-out during the nights by the excessive hand-pumping inevitable in an unmarried man of twenty whose mistress was both unattainable and constantly in his thoughts...what constitution could withstand so many shocks and strains without succumbing in the end to illness? The symptoms of Jia Rui's illness – a palpitation in the heart, a loss of taste in the mouth, a weakness in the hams, a smarting in the eyes, feverishness by night and lassitude by day, albumen in the urine and blood-flecks in the phlegm – had all manifested themselves within less than a year. By that time they had produced a complete breakdown and driven him to bed, where he lay, with eyes tight shut, babbling deliriously and inspiring terror in all who saw him.⁴⁸

Love has transformed a productive member of the Jia household, albeit one who tried to seduce his married cousin, into an invalid who cannot be cured by the attentions of physicians.

At this point, the Jias are visited by a Daoist who brings Jia Rui the Mirror For The Romantic which he claims will cure this illness. The Daoist states that:

It was fashioned...as an antidote to the ill effects of impure mental activity. It has life giving and restorative properties and has been brought into the world for the contemplation of those intelligent and handsome young gentlemen whose hearts are too susceptible to the charms of beauty.⁴⁹

The Daoist instructs Jia Rui that if he looks only into the back of the mirror, then he will be cured. When Jia Rui stares into the back of the mirror, he sees a grinning skull.⁵⁰ Frightened by this apparition he turns the mirror around to stare into its front.

[T]here inside was Xifeng beckoning him to enter, and his ravished soul floated into the mirror after her. There they performed the act of love together, after which she saw him out again. But when he found himself once more back in bed he stared and cried out in horror: for the mirror, of

⁴⁷ Ibid., 247-9.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 250.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 251.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 252.

its own accord, had turned itself round in his hand, and the same grinning skull faced him that he had seen before...

Yet still he was not satisfied, and turned around the face of the mirror once more towards him....He did it three or four times.⁵¹

Jia Rui sexually exhausts himself in these dream encounters and dies. When his family members examined his body, they found him lying in a patch of his own “recently ejaculated semen.”⁵² This incident clearly corresponds to the belief that men could die if they sexually exhausted themselves. Moreover, it also demonstrates the motif of lovesickness which immobilized lovers and often resulted in their deaths. From the encounter between Jia Rui and the Precious Mirror For The Romantic, it is easy to see that the *HLM* contained elements of this earlier tradition which vilified love and its accompanying overindulgence in sex.

IV. Unstable Passion: Gao E’s Rejection of Daiyu

Given the historical background of the *ars erotica*, it is understandable that Gao E, as a conservative editor/author, would have seen Daiyu as a threat to the patriline. Baoyu was already an eccentric and sensitive young man when Daiyu came to live with the family, but her presence seems to have only further aggravated his mental instability. When they are happy together, they seem blissful; however, they often fight, and these conflicts upset both of their delicate constitutions. Their inability to express their feelings for each other leads to repeated misunderstandings. The passion between Daiyu and Baoyu makes both of them lovesick, and consequently presents a threat to the Jia patriline which would have been devastated if Jia Baoyu, the only viable heir, died. In this context, lovesickness was not a minor issue that could have been cured by uniting the two lovers, but a major threat to family stability which had to be eliminated.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

The relationship between Baoyu and Daiyu is clearly unbalanced. Baoyu and Daiyu repeatedly exhibit symptoms of lovesickness. One of the first instances in which the conflicted relationship between Daiyu and Baoyu is fully depicted is after some of Jia Zheng's men steal a purse that Daiyu had made for Baoyu. Daiyu assumes that Baoyu had lost it and whips herself into such a fury that she destroys an unfinished perfume sachet that she was making for him without waiting to hear what had happened to the purse.⁵³ In another instance, when one of Baoyu's maids mistakes Daiyu for another maid and refuses to let her into Green Delights, Daiyu becomes extremely distraught because she can hear Baoyu and Baochai talking inside. Instead of behaving rationally and going home, Daiyu puts her health at risk by staying out in the cold all night.⁵⁴ More disturbingly, when Daiyu learns that the Jias want to marry Baoyu to Baochai, she determines to end her own life: "she did not succumb to her emotions, but set her heart instead on a speedy death and final settlement of her debt with fate."⁵⁵ Perhaps symbolically of her love for Baoyu, Daiyu dies at the exact moment that he marries Baochai. Daiyu is so consumed by lovesickness that she can no longer behave according to social expectations so she kills herself.

It is not only Daiyu who is negatively effected by the intensity of her passion. Baoyu also suffers from the maddening effect of his love for her. During one of their many fights, he states:

If I *do* ever slip up in some way, you ought to tell me off about it and warn me not to do it again, or shout at me – hit me, even, if you feel like it; I shouldn't mind. But you don't do that. You just ignore me. You leave me utterly at a loss to know what I'm supposed to have done wrong, so

⁵³ Ibid., 347-8.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 524-5.

⁵⁵ *HLM*, vol. 4, 340-1.

that I'm driven half frantic wondering what I ought to do to make up for it.⁵⁶

During all of these fights, Baoyu is indeed driven half-mad. When Abbot Zhang proposes arranging a match for Baoyu, Daiyu becomes so upset that she fakes sunstroke. When Baoyu becomes worried and visits her, he is rewarded for his efforts only by having her yell at him. He is extremely upset by her response:

The sense that she had failed him made the annoyance he now felt with her a hundred times greater than it had been on any previous occasion. Never could any other person have stirred him to such depths of atrabilious rage. Coming from other lips, her words would scarcely have touched him. Coming from hers, they put him in a passion.⁵⁷

Baoyu is so upset that he tries to destroy his magic jade by smashing it against the floor.⁵⁸ This action is very serious because the magic jade is Baoyu's link to sanity. Later in the novel, when it is lost, Baoyu loses all of his senses and is reduced to a babbling idiot. Additionally on the night that Daiyu dreams that Baoyu has married someone else, he also suffers from a bad dream. According to his principle maid Aroma:

When [Baoyu] went to sleep in the evening he seemed perfectly all right. But in the middle of the night he started screaming his head off, first about a pain in his heart, and then about being stabbed with a knife⁵⁹

Baoyu himself admits that Daiyu is the source of his illness:

Suddenly Daiyu said:
'Baoyu why are you sick?'
Baoyu laughed.
'I'm sick because of Miss Lin.'⁶⁰

Love has driven Baoyu mad and reduced him to a state where it can not be hoped that he will succeed in the civil service examinations and restore honor to the family.

⁵⁶ *HLM*, vol. 2, 44.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 75-6.

⁶⁰ *HLM*, vol. 4, 338.

Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the Jia family would not want to marry Baoyu to a woman who sent him into such fits of frenzy. It comes as no shock, when Grandmother Jia states:

Ours is a decent family. We do not tolerate unseemly goings-on. And that applies to foolish romantic attachments. If [Daiyu's] illness is of a respectable nature, I do not mind how much we have to spend to get her better. But if she is suffering from some form of lovesickness, no amount of medicine will cure it and she can expect no further sympathy from me.⁶¹

Given how passionately Baoyu and Daiyu felt for each other and their weakened health, it would have been expected that their union would result not in the restoration of their health and their reintegration into productive society, but rather in their deaths. Under these circumstances, Gao E could not have followed the literary mode of the *caizi jiaren* and united Baoyu with Daiyu. In order to reduce Cao Xueqin's criticism of the social system in which lovers were doomed to die because they could not be united, Gao E retained Cao Xueqin's depiction of the lovesickness experience by Baoyu and Daiyu in order to discredit Daiyu as a possible marital candidate.

V. The Ideal Wife

As we have seen, according to the standards set by conservative family heads, Daiyu was unfit to marry Baoyu. Their intense passion created fears that their love would lead to their deaths as they emotionally, and once married, sexually exhausted themselves with each other. Their love was unstable and self-centered. It could not be integrated into the demands of the patriarchal family system. It is clear that Baoyu could not marry Daiyu. However, the question remains, if Daiyu was unfit to marry Baoyu in the eyes of conservative family, why did Gao E decide to elevate Baochai in her place?

⁶¹ Ibid., 342.

In the original version of the *HLM*, Baochai does not appear to be an appropriate match for Baoyu. However, Gao E altered the portrayal of her character to make her a more sympathetic character. It seems that this revision was motivated by the importance placed on the behavior of wives and their ability to influence their husbands to devote themselves to study.

During the Qing dynasty, conservative family heads felt threatened by the cult of *qing*. The idea that a young man might choose his wife, based on the fact that he found her intriguing and loved her poetry represented a threat to the stability of the patrilineal social order which required that wives serve the household. A properly educated wife would view her husband's patriline as her new family and would devote herself to serving it. Harmony was difficult to maintain in the complex families favored by the literati-elite, and a woman who knew how to dutifully serve her mother and father-in-law without complaint was a blessing.⁶² As a result in contrast to the proponents of *qing* who sought to cultivate talented women, socially conservative scholars, such as those of the Han Learning Movement, focused on indoctrinating and educating women in order to fulfill the needs of the patriline.

Wives were outsiders who were brought into the family for the purpose of allowing the family to perpetuate itself. Therefore, they were often blamed for discord within the family. As the modern scholar, Susan Mann articulates:

Chinese women posed an implicit danger to the long-term stability of the family structure. They were the luminal or marginal members who were constantly violating family boundaries: entering and exiting as brides, they produced not only the sons of future generations, but also the bonds of conjugal solidarity that threatened to tear brothers apart.⁶³

⁶² Patricia Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters*, 117.

⁶³ Susan Mann, "Widows in the Kinship, Class, and Community Structures of Qing Dynasty China," In *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 46, no. 1 (1987): 44.

In the series of family instructions entitled, “Report to the Ancestor’s Temple”, Huo Tao (1487-1540) corroborates the view that women have the ability to cause discord within the family:

We ask only that our Ancestors from the spiritual realm aid us descendants in upholding the statutes, and that They correct our wives and daughters. If from this year forward wives are talkative or given to quarrels or slander, let the Ancestors strike them dead to stop their mouths. If husbands listen to their wives and so wrongly blame others so as to justify themselves, spreading slander and causing quarrels and splits to begin, let the Ancestors strike them dead to stop their ears.⁶⁴

This set of family instructions clearly articulates the link seen between women and the potential for discord in the patriline. Although it is a rather early piece from the Ming dynasty, it is emblematic of the viewpoint taken by family heads in the mid-Qing. During this period, “[familial] instructions placed an enormous stress on female propriety as a primary symbol of domestic virtue.”⁶⁵ Scholars such as Chen Hongmou, “thought women should play the major practical role in the sacred task of managing the household, ensuring proper etiquette in interfamilial relations, controlling the household budget, and overseeing servants. Females must therefore be imbued from early childhood with a deep sense of responsibility about such matters.”⁶⁶ Unless they could guarantee that their sons would marry women who were deeply committed to ensuring the continuation of their patriline, family heads feared that their family might fall from its elite status.

In order to ensure a supply of young women who had absorbed the dominant norms of the patriarchy and who would work to ensure the survival of their husband’s

⁶⁴ Charlotte Furth, “The Patriarch’s Legacy: Household Instructions and the Transmission of Orthodox Values,” In *Orthodoxy in Late Imperial China*, ed. Kwang-Ching Liu, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 192.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁶⁶ William T. Rowe, “Women and the Family in Mid-Ch’ing Social Thought,” 14-5.

patriline, patriarchal heads began to promote women's education. The education of women did not seek to form them into independent thinkers, but rather strove to indoctrinate them with conservative values and to provide them with the skills that they would need to be an asset to their husband's patriline. Mann explains, "the cultivation of female talent was not the goal of these educators. More important...was the vital link between women's education, domestic harmony, and political order."⁶⁷ Consequently, conservative scholars such as Lü Gun, Chen Hongmou, and Zhang Xuecheng called for the daughters of the literati-elite to be given at least some exposure to the classical canon because "[t]he Way [*dao*] for the orderly management of the family [began] with women."⁶⁸

One of the first scholars to propose a reformed education for women that focused on cultivating female virtue, was the Ming scholar, Lü Gun. In his text *Guifan* (*Regulations for the Inner Quarters*) which detailed how women ought to be educated, he recounted:

age 5 – starting basic “women’s work” (*nü gong*) such as embroidery
age 6 – reciting the *Book of Filial Piety* and *Analects*
age 8 – having the *Book of Filial Piety*, *Analects*, and *Lessons for Women*
(*Nü jie*) explained⁶⁹

In this set of instructions, Lü Gun openly supported educating women; however, he did not propose giving them an education that was equal to that received by young men. He clearly placed an emphasis on books which would give women a basic understanding of the moral values of the Confucian world system and on the importance of women's work

⁶⁷ Susan Mann, "The Education of Daughters in the Mid-Ch'ing Period," In *Education and Society In Late Imperial China, 1600-1900*, Benjamin A. Elman and Alexander Woodside, eds., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994): 22.

⁶⁸ Lan Ding-yuan, *Nü xie*, In Susan Mann, "The Education of Daughters in the Mid-Ch'ing Period," 22.

⁶⁹ Dorothy Ko, "Pursuing Talent and Virtue: Education and Women's Culture in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth Century China", In *Late Imperial China*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1992): 25.

such as sewing. The relatively socially moderate bureaucrat Chen Hongmou (1696-1771) also promoted literary education for women, with the goal of imparting to women knowledge about how to best fill their social role within the patriarchal family system.⁷⁰

The scholar who has been the most noted for his views on women's education is Zhang Xuecheng (1738-1801).⁷¹ It was Zhang Xuecheng who presented the most stark condemnation of women who focused their talents on poetry, rather than devoting themselves to the cultivation of their husband's patriline. Zhang Xuecheng decried women who wrote poetry because their education was not grounded in the classical learning of the Rites. He wrote that:

The women's learning of ancient times always began with the rites as a foundation for mastering poetry. The women's learning of today is just the opposite: it uses poetry to destroy the rites. If the rites are cut off, we will no longer be able to speak of the human heart and mind or even of human behavior.⁷²

He continued by stating that:

There are some women who are accomplished and elegant and who know literature, and who on that basis claim to be women who can also do a scholar's work. They wear their virtue like their beauty, on their faces. Such women do not know that women originally had their own learning, and that this learning always took the rites as its foundation...To study speech under these conditions is like being a farmer who neglects his fields, or an envoy who neglects to take a ceremonial gift when he leaves the country. How can their work seriously be counted as women's learning!⁷³

⁷⁰ William T. Rowe, "Women and the Family in Mid-Ch'ing Social Thought," 28.

⁷¹ We must be wary of drawing grand conclusions based solely on Zhang Xuecheng's work because he seems to have been a historically anachronistic figure. His work was largely ignored during his lifetime and only promoted after his death. However, because his attitude towards women's education is similar to the viewpoints of so many other conservative scholars in Late Imperial China, it seems valid to use his work as a source for this study. His work may not have had a great impact on social practice at the time, but it was indicative of how members of the literati-elite thought that women should behave. See David S. Nivison, *The Life and Thought of Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng (1738-1801)*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), passim.

⁷² Susan Mann, "The Education of Daughters in the Mid-Ch'ing Period," 26.

⁷³ Susan Mann, "'Fuxue' (Women's Learning) by Zhang Xuecheng (1738-1801): China's First History of Women's Culture," In *Late Imperial China*, vol. 13 no. 1 (1992): 50.

These condemnations demonstrate that not only did conservative members of the literati-elite want to establish a system of education for women that was designed to inculcate them with the values of obedience, deference, and thrift, but also that they were openly critical of women who devoted themselves to practicing poetry. These elegant and refined women might be attractive to educated young men, but there was no guarantee that they would make efficient household managers and would enable the patriline to thrive.

The ideal of womanhood that the conservative family heads of the mid-Qing supported was clearly articulated by Zhang Xuecheng in “A Biographical Sketch of My Elder Cousin’s Wife, Goodwife Xun” (1768). Because this text was an eulogy, it represents more of a description of the ideal of womanhood held by individuals during this time, than it does the actual character of the woman which it purports to commemorate. Although many of the incidents recounted within are undoubtedly taken from factual events, Zhang Xuecheng would have been careful to remove any events which would portray the deceased in an unflattering light.

Zhang Xuecheng never mentions Lady Xun’s education or poetic ability, but rather focuses on how her actions benefit the family. Lady Xun is praised for her devotion to her in-laws and for her frugality. When her mother-in-law falls ill, Lady Xun nurses her until her death. Zhang narrates that:

In her final years, Lady Xun’s mother-in-law was afflicted with an illness of the mouth and teeth that grew increasingly severe, so that whenever she ate, she would clench her teeth and press her lips together. Lady Xun would rise at dawn, kneel down and hold her and feed her, tilting the spoon between her lips.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Susan Mann, trans., “Two Biographies by Zhang Xuecheng (1738-1801)”, In *Under Confucian Eyes: Writings on Gender in Chinese History*, Susan Mann and Yi-Yin Cheng, eds., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 221.

Additionally, when her father-in-law's concubine fell ill, Lady Xun cared for her even though the concubine became an alcoholic in her old age and frequently cursed at her.⁷⁵ These actions represent her devotion to her husband's patriline. Additionally, Lady Xun's skills at familial management enabled her husband to travel in search of an official appointment without worry. Zhang Xuecheng notes that, "[s]he herself ate coarse food as if it were fine wheat. She never took a stitch of clothing for herself."⁷⁶ Finally when her husband returned home:

[S]he held out to him a small account book. Inside she had recorded every cent of income and expenditure, from the assistance she had received from her brother and her niece, to the gifts received from six kinsmen, to the seasonal entertainment and even gifts of wine and food they had given and received, as well as miniscule expenses outside the home...Debts and assets matched exactly. During those three years she had augmented the budget with income from her weaving and sewing. In the home she had neglected nothing, and outside the home she had borrowed nothing.⁷⁷

Without her efforts, the patriline would surely have sunk into debt while her husband was away from home. As a result of her devotion to her in-laws and her skillful management of the Xun household, Lady Xun was applauded as a model of female virtue.

Just as Zhang Xuecheng's work clearly praises wives who devoted themselves to protecting the welfare of their husband's patriline, Shen Fu's *Six Records of a Floating Life* unintentionally portrays the contempt that conservative family heads had for wives who were not skilled in domestic management. This book recounts Shen Fu's life with his wife Yun. When Shen Fu was very young, he became fixated with the daughter of his uncle, Zhen Yun. Shen Fu's description of Yun paints her as the ideal woman according to the cult of *qing*. She was a talented young woman, and she was able both to read and

⁷⁵ Ibid., 222.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 221.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 223.

to write poetry. When it came time for him to be married, Shen Fu refused to marry anyone else, so his parents were forced to marry him to Yun. They spent their married composing poetry. Shen Fu and Yun's life was the model of a scholar-beauty romance.⁷⁸

Shen Fu praises his wife for being selfless;⁷⁹ however, his narrative also contains indications that this was not the case. Instead of observing the bounds of ritual propriety, Yun actually goes so far as to dress up as a man so that she can go outside of the house to observe a festival.⁸⁰ Moreover, Yun's actions lead to direct conflict with her in-laws. Yun was ordered by her father-in-law to compose all of her mother-in-law's letters; however, they had a falling out and her mother-in-law forbid her from writing her letters. When her father-in-law discovered this development, he declared that Yun was unwilling to write the letters and, therefore, was acting in an unfilial manner.⁸¹ Although this may seem a strange reason for her father-in-law to get so upset, we must remember that Shen Fu is recounting the story from his personal perspective which has been obviously skewed by his fondness for his wife. It would seem that Yun was seen as a threat to family unity by her in-laws, perhaps in part because Shen Fu was more devoted to her than he was to them.⁸²

At the same time, Shen Fu's lack of money and his failure to rise above the position of a *yamen* secretary⁸³ earned his father's scorn.⁸⁴ This development further

⁷⁸ Shen Fu, *Six Records of a Floating Life*, Leonard Pratt and Chiang Su-hui, trans., (London: Penguin, 1988), 25-7.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 29, 39.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 73-4.

⁸² Charlotte Furth, "The Patriarch's Legacy," 203.

⁸³ The *yamen* secretary was a member of the personal staff of an official. The ranks of this office were filled by men who had been educated but who had failed the examinations.

⁸⁴ Shen Fu, *Six Records of a Floating Life*, 73.

exacerbated the situation because his parents blamed Yun for failing to motivate him to succeed in society. The modern scholar Charlotte Furth has observed that:

Predictably, the couple's bohemian values and financial incontinence scandalized the older generation, leading eventually to their ejection from the parental home and their separation from their young son and daughter.⁸⁵

Eventually Shen Fu's parents became fed up with Yun when her father-in-law suspected that she was borrowing money, and he ordered her to be expelled from the house.⁸⁶ The conflict between Shen Fu and his parents was exacerbated by his wife's presence. Yun was more interested in composing poetry with Shen Fu than she is in caring for her in-laws. As a result, they came to dislike her and threw her and Shen Fu out of the family home. The familial conflict in *Six Records of a Floating Life* demonstrates the fact that conservative family heads resented the presence of wives who did not devote their skills to the preservation of the family. Although Yun was a model woman according to the cult of *qing* her refined sentiments and love of poetry did not make her a suitable match for Shen Fu in the eyes of his father. According to conservative family heads, love was not a valid basis for marriage. Instead, marriage must ensure the continued success of the patriline.

VI. The Valorization of Baochai

In his version of the *HLM*, Gao E alters the original portrayal of Baochai in order to elevate her character as the ideal woman for marriage to a member of the literati-elite. In Cao Xueqin's *HLM*, Baochai was not a sympathetic character. Baoyu was not in love with Baochai. He was so upset by his marriage to Baochai that he would no longer talk

⁸⁵ Charlotte Furth, "The Patriarch's Legacy," 204.

⁸⁶ Shen Fu, *Six Records of a Floating Life*, 75.

to her about the days before their marriage⁸⁷ Baoyu eventually left the Jia family after his marriage to Baochai without fulfilling any of his family obligations. Additionally, the earlier portions of the novel present an unfavorable impression of Baochai who is condemned for being too self-effacing. When Grannie Liu visits the Jia mansion from the countryside, she is shocked by the state of Baochai's room:

Indoors, however, it was stark and bare. The only decoration in Baochai's room was a vase of the cheaper kind of Dingware on the table, with a few chrysanthemums in it. Apart from the flowers there were only a few books and some tea-things on the table. The bed-hangings were of black gauze, and the quilts and covers were of the same forbidding plainness as the hangings.

'This child really is *too* self-effacing!' Grandmother Jia muttered, evidently shocked by what she saw.'⁸⁸

Grandmother Jia is so unsettled by the severe austerity of the room that she scolds Baochai:

But what would any of our relations think if they were to come here and see this? Besides, it isn't natural for a young girl to be so austere. If *girls* are to live so austere, what sort of a stable ought an old woman like me to live in? Think of the descriptions of young ladies' boudoirs you find in plays and romances – such exquisite refinement of luxury! I'm not exactly suggesting that you should emulate *them* – but you shouldn't fall *too* short, all the same. After all, when the things are there for the asking, it seems silly not to use them. Use them sparingly, by all means, if your tastes are on the austere side; but don't dispense with them altogether.⁸⁹

By placing such a moralizing sermon in Grandmother Jia's mouth, it is clear that Cao Xueqin intended to use the *HLM* as a forum for expressing his own views on women and marriage.

However, Gao E's version of the *HLM* redeems Baochai's character. Gao E draws upon the contemporary focus on the importance of having a capable young woman as a man's wife so that she could devote her considerable talents to the benefit of his

⁸⁷ Wu Shih-Ch'ang, *On The Red Chamber Dream*, 335.

⁸⁸ *HLM*, vol. 2, 295.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 296.

patriline. Baochai is depicted as a sensible and dependable young woman, the very model of the ideal wife. The difference between her and Daiyu is made explicit very soon after her arrival at the Jia mansion:

[T]his Xue Baochai had appeared on the scene – a young lady who, though very little older than Daiyu, possessed a grown-up beauty and aplomb in which all agreed Daiyu was her inferior. Moreover, in contrast to Daiyu with her lofty air of self-sufficiency and total obliviousness to all who did not move on the same exalted level as herself, Baochai had a generous, accommodating disposition which greatly endeared her to subordinates⁹⁰

Unlike Daiyu who occupies herself with poetry and romance novels, Baochai is often depicted sewing. Sewing was seen as critical women's work that contributed to the financial stability of the family unit. At one point, Baochai sat down beside Baoyu and began sewing while Aroma went outside:

Baochai was sitting on the kang inside, sewing. Her lustrous black hair was down up in a simple bun without any kind of ornament...All her clothing had the same sensible rather well-worn look about it.
He saw no hint of luxury or show
only a chaste refined sobriety⁹¹

During a conversation with Daiyu, Baochai chastises her for devoting too much of her time to poetry:

But what am I saying all this for? Spinning and sewing is the proper occupation for girls like us. Any time we have left over from that should be spent in reading a few pages of some improving book – not on this sort of thing!⁹²

Baochai echoes the view of conservative family heads who felt that girls should devote themselves to the preservation of the patriline, rather than indulging in such frivolous

⁹⁰ *HLM*, vol. 1, 124.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁹² *HLM*, vol. 2, 235.

pursuits as writing poetry. This attitude becomes readily apparent when Baochai chastises Daiyu for reading romance novels such as *The Western Chamber*.

So, you see, in the case of us girls it would probably be better for us if we never learned to read in the first place. Even boys, if they gain no understanding from their reading would do better not to read at all; and if that is true of boys, it certainly holds for girls like you and me. The little poetry-writing and calligraphy we indulge in is not really our proper business....

As for girls like you and me: spinning and sewing are *our* proper business. What do we need to be able to read for? But since we *can* read, let us confine ourselves to good, improving books; let us avoid like the plague those pernicious works of fiction, which so undermine the character that in the end it is past reclaiming.⁹³

This passage is somewhat sarcastic in tone and was probably originally authored by Cao Xueqin in order to mock “serious” women for their hypocrisy because Baochai admits to having read such books when she was younger. However, Gao E retained this passage because it contributed to the image of Baochai as a sober and dependable young woman who was devoted to familial ideals rather than to poetry.

Not only does Baochai espouse the belief that a woman should devote herself to the success of her family, but also she avidly follows it in her daily life. In her natal family, Baochai helps her mother run the family:

[W]hen [her father] died and her brother proved incapable of offering their mother any comfort, she laid aside her books and devoted herself to needlework and housewifely duties in order to take some of the burden off her mother’s shoulders.⁹⁴

Despite her young age, Baochai has already stepped forward to assume many of the domestic duties expected of a wife. Baochai has also proved herself capable of convincing a man to behave in order to benefit the family. She repeatedly berates her

⁹³ Ibid., 333-4.

⁹⁴ *HLM*, vol. 1, 118.

errant brother Xue Pan for his failure to dutifully serve the family.⁹⁵ Moreover, Baochai's concern for the security of the family is not confined simply to her natal family, but also extends to the Jias who have provide her family with lodgings. Her perceptive nature allows her to frequently smooth over circumstances which might have otherwise lead to familial discord. When Xiangyun has to leave Prospect Garden to return to her father's family, Baochai eases her departure because she realizes if the servants tell her mother that she did not want to leave the Jia household, then her circumstances at home would become even more difficult.⁹⁶ Because of her capacity to manage people, when Wang Xifeng suffers a miscarriage and can no longer supervise the affairs of the Jia household, Baochai, along with Li Wan, is chosen to help Tanchun manage the family.⁹⁷ When Lady Wang is called away on business, Baochai was given the responsibility of supervising her aunt's chambers, even though she is technically not a member of the Jia family.⁹⁸ Baochai's capable management of both the Xue family and Jia household demonstrates that she is the ideal woman according to the standards of the conservative family heads.

Even in the earlier portions of the *HLM* as authored by Cao Xueqin, Baochai is devoted to preserving the status of her family, and in contrast to Daiyu does not waste her time with romantic fantasies. Consequently, Gao E did not have to drastically revise the *HLM* in order to depict Baochai as the ideal match for Baoyu according to the standards of conservative family heads. In order to complete his promotion of Baochai, Gao E only had to change the ending of the novel. In his original version, Cao Xueqin supported the

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁹⁶ *HLM*, vol. 2, 211-2.

⁹⁷ *HLM*, vol. 3, 46.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

idea that Baoyu's marriage to Baochai was a mistake and that it led to tragedy.

However, Gao E altered the ending of the *HLM* to elevate this formerly undesired marriage into the redemption of the family. By describing Baochai as playing a critical role in convincing Baoyu to fulfill his obligations to the family, Gao E supported the belief that sensible, family oriented women were the ideal matches for young men of the literati-elite.

Gao E's revisions to the end of the *HLM* portrayed Baochai's marriage to Baoyu as the only hope for restoring him to sanity. After Baoyu loses his magic jade, he becomes an imbecile.⁹⁹ At this point, the Jias decide to marry him to Baochai in the hopes of saving him from madness. They use the prophecy that Baochai should only marry a man with a jade to match her golden locket as justification for the match, and they convince themselves that once they are married, Baoyu will be restored to his senses.¹⁰⁰ This issue is vitally important. If Baoyu does not regain his senses, then the Jias will have no promising male heir in that generation and their family line will suffer as a result. Unless someone can restore Baoyu to sanity and help him focus on studying for the civil service examinations, the family can not hope to retain its status among the literati-elite. Although Baochai is ultimately unable to prevent Baoyu from leaving his family and renouncing his ties to the world, she is able to influence him both to come out of his state of madness and to focus on fulfilling his duty to the family.

After he discovers that the marriage was a trick and that he was married to Baochai instead of to Daiyu, Baoyu is distraught. However, rather than letting him wallow in his feelings, Baochai exhorts him to fulfill his duties to the family:

⁹⁹ *HLM*, vol. 4, 314.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 327-8.

Instead of resting and trying to get well, you make yourself iller with all this gloomy talk! Grandmother has scarcely stopped worrying about you for a moment, and here you are causing more trouble for her. She is over eighty now and may not live to acquire a title because of your achievements; but at least, by leading a good life, you can repay her a little for all that she has suffered for your sake. And I hardly need mention the agonies Mother has endured in bringing you up. You are the only son she has left. If you were to die, think how she would suffer! As for me, I am wretched enough as it is; you don't need to make a widow of me.¹⁰¹

This chastisement has the effect of temporarily breaking Baoyu out his gloom over the marriage. Baochai further restores him to his sanity by breaking the news of Daiyu's death to him in an abrupt manner in order to try to sever his attachment to her. Although this tactic may seem heartless, it works. Afterwards Baoyu begins to regain his sanity.¹⁰² From there on out, Baochai continues to chastise Baoyu whenever he gives in to his grief over Daiyu's death:

Baochai knew how strong the attachment was that bound Baoyu to Daiyu, but rather than try to console him, she continued to take him to task in the same pointed manner as before. He, anxious not to cause her any offence, soon put an end to his weeping and tried to moderate his grief.¹⁰³

When Baoyu visits Prospect Garden for the first time after Daiyu's death, Baochai fears that his grief may bring on another bout of insanity, so she deliberately mocks him for being sentimental.¹⁰⁴ This seemingly heartless action is deliberately calculated in order to make Baoyu feel guilty for loving a dead woman more than his wife. After Baochai chastises Baoyu for sleeping outside in the hopes that the ghost of Daiyu will visit him, Baoyu is so full of remorse that he finally consummates their marriage.¹⁰⁵ This union results in the birth of a son who will carry on the family line and succeed in the civil

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 371.

¹⁰² Ibid., 373-4.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 382.

¹⁰⁴ *HLM*, vol. 5, 174.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 184.

service examinations. Baochai's admonitions seem to be largely successful in keeping Baoyu from reverting to an imbecilic state.

However, despite her success in keeping Baoyu from driving himself mad by focusing on Daiyu's death, Baochai is much less successful in remonstrating with him about his need to fulfill his duties to the family. When he says that he wants to become a monk, she chastises him by saying, "Pull yourself together and stop all this nonsense! You know how Mother and Father love you! And Father has told you how important it is for you to succeed in life."¹⁰⁶ Later she reiterates the same advice when he tries to tell her that he despises the civil service examinations:

Since you're stuck for an answer,' Baochai continued, 'you should listen to my advice. Pull yourself together from now on, and work as hard as you can. Do well in the examination, and even if you never achieve anything else in your entire life, that will at least be some return for Heaven's favour and your ancestors' virtue.'¹⁰⁷

Despite her efforts to persuade him that it is important for him to succeed in the civil service examinations, Baoyu becomes increasingly less concerned with the affairs of the world.¹⁰⁸ Although Baochai is ultimately unable to convince Baoyu not to desert his family, she demonstrates the hallmarks of a virtuous wife by attempting to convince him to uphold his family duty. Before he leaves to return to his place in the heavens, Baoyu concedes to take part in the examinations. When he gets seventh place in the *juren* examinations, the emperor decides to rescind the official sanctions against the Jia family; thereby, enabling them to return to their former glory.¹⁰⁹ Ultimately Baochai's efforts were not lost because they resulted in Baoyu's success in the examinations and ensured

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 306.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 330.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 251-2.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 349-51.

the preservation of the Jia family. In his revised ending, Gao E elevated Baochai as the ideal wife. Through her hard work and perseverance, she is able to persuade her wayward husband to put the needs of his family above his own personal desires.

VII. Rejecting Compromise

Given our prior knowledge of Cao Xueqin's and Gao E's authorial biases, it seemed surprising that Cao Xueqin originally created a plot in which Baoyu was not united with Daiyu. This action violated the traditions of literature from proponents of the cult of *qing* and in the genre of scholar-beauty romance. Therefore, Cao Xueqin can not be seen simply as a heir to the literary traditions of the late Ming. Instead of depicting the marriage of the young lovers despite familial objections, Cao Xueqin depicted Daiyu's death from lovesickness. This ending to the *HLM* presented a harsh social criticism. Despite the fact that *caizi jiaren* were very popular during the Qing dynasty, young men and women were still largely unable to chose their spouses for themselves. By portraying Daiyu dying when her love with Baoyu could not be fulfilled and Baoyu as going mad when he could not be with Daiyu, Cao Xueqin implied that unless family heads allowed their children to marry their lovers, then they would never become a functioning part of society.

In light of this Cao Xueqin's authorial intention, it is perhaps even more surprising that Gao E did not alter the trajectory of his plot. Gao E could have easily changed the ending of the *HLM* to unite Daiyu and Baoyu, and thereby make it into a more innocuous chaste scholar-beauty romance. The chaste *caizi jiaren* where the young man and woman chose their own spouse but were still perfect social matches for each other represented a compromise between the erotic love depicted by proponents of the

cult of *qing* and demands of conservative family heads that marriages further the family. However, it seems that while the chaste romances were a fusion of these two groups was still not acceptable to a conservative author/editor such as Gao E. Gao E saw the lovesickness between Daiyu and Baoyu in light of the tradition of the *ars erotica*, and he feared that if they were united in marriage, then it might result in their deaths. As it stood, their passion already deprived them of reason and stability. Therefore, Gao E altered Cao Xueqin's unflattering depiction of Baochai and elevated her as the model of the ideal wife according to conservative ideals. The way in which the love triangle between Baoyu and his two cousins, Daiyu and Baochai, was revised demonstrates that an author/editor did not always have to completely change the narrative structure of the prior author in order to manipulate his writing to serve a new purpose. By manipulating Cao Xueqin's critical portrayal of love, Gao E was able to create a story in which Daiyu, the representative of unbridled and therefore dangerous passion, was exterminated and Baochai, the ideal wife, was promoted as Baoyu's wife.

Chapter 3
Controlling Women:
Shrewish Wives and Shrewd Household Managers

‘Patience won’t let me come near her nowadays,’ said Jia Lian. ‘She has a lot to put up with, the same as me, that she doesn’t dare talk about. I don’t know, I reckon I must have been born under a hen-pecked husbands’ star!’

Xifeng heard this shaking with fury. The couple’s praise of Patience made her at once suspect that Patience had been complaining about her behind her back... Without pausing to reflect, she turned and struck Patience twice before kicking open the door and striding into the room. There without more ado, she proceeded to seize hold of Bao Er’s wife and belabor her, breaking off only to block the doorway with her body in case Jia Lian might think of escaping...

Xifeng’s reaction when Patience dashed off threatening suicide was to ram her head into Jia Lian’s chest and shout hysterically.¹

Wang Xifeng is one of the most problematic characters in the *Honglou meng*. She is a strong, jealous woman who is not afraid to challenge her husband’s right to sexual liaisons with multiple women. Wang Xifeng’s brazen acts fly in the face of Confucian decorum, and under normal circumstances they would earn her the title of “shrewish wife” as well as social condemnation. Given our pre-existing knowledge of Cao Xueqin and Gao E’s literary tendencies and their philosophical allegiances, we would expect Cao Xueqin, as a liberal author, to give Wang Xifeng a more kindly treatment. As has been demonstrated, Cao Xueqin often championed characters who were unpalatable to the upholders of the traditional social order. Wang Xifeng’s ability to upend the patriarchal system by controlling Jia Lian’s actions would certainly have been frowned upon conservative family heads. However, in Cao Xueqin’s original manuscripts, Wang Xifeng suffered a harsh fate as punishment for daring to transgress the normative social order. Surprisingly, it is only in Gao E’s revisions that the grossest

¹ *HLM*, vol. 2, 369-371.

of Xifeng's punishments are expunged and she is portrayed in a more positive, although not a completely unproblematic, light.

At first glance, it is difficult to understand why Gao E, the champion of "conservative" morals, would soften the condemnation of a woman who challenged male sexual prerogatives. Her actions clearly violate the statutes of ancient prescriptive texts, such as the *Liji*, which stated that women must obey their husbands in all matters. Additionally, Wang Xifeng's attempts to prevent Jia Lian from taking a concubine not only violate his right to multiple sexual partners, but also present a grave threat to the patriarchy. By refusing to let Jia Lian take a concubine when she has failed to produce a male heir, Wang Xifeng threatens to sever the Jia Lian's patriline. It seems perplexing that Gao E would be favorably disposed towards Wang Xifeng's character. The revised portrayal of Wang Xifeng seems to be linked to the increasingly important role of women as household managers during the Qing dynasty. Starting in the Song dynasty members of the literati-elite began to emphasize the essential role of wives as "inner helpers."² Many conservative family heads praised the role that women played in managing the household because it allowed men to concentrate on their studies. It is Wang Xifeng, rather than any of the Jia men, who controls the finances and the staff of the Jia mansion. She wields this power with an iron fist in order to manage the crumbling household. Despite the fact that Wang Xifeng's actions as a jealous wife represented a blatant challenge to the patriarchal power structure, Gao E presented her character in a more positive light in order to praise her role in ensuring the continued prosperity of the Jia

² Patricia Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), Ch. 6 passim.

household. In light of this revision, it is necessary to re-evaluate our perception of “conservative” and “liberal” ideals in Late Imperial China.

I. Prescriptive Models: Concubinage and Inheritance

Wang Xifeng’s jealousy represents a serious challenge to the marital hierarchy because it was the duty of men to sleep with as many women in order to ensure that they produced male heirs to continue their patriline. As a result, it is puzzling that Gao E, as a more conservative editor, would have taken action in order to soften the condemnation of Wang Xifeng because a woman who threatened male prerogatives would have been perceived as a threaten to the social order. In order to begin to understand this seemingly mysterious revision of Wang Xifeng’s character, we must first examine the ideal standards of behavior for wives and how Wang Xifeng’s behavior transgressed these ideals.

From the Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE) onward, Chinese philosophers agreed that if the household was in proper order, then the wife would be subordinate to her husband. The *Liji* (*The Record of Rites*), which was compiled in the first century B.C.E., stated that:

The woman follows...the man: in her youth, she follows...her father and elder brother; when married, she follows...her husband; when her husband is dead, she follows...her son.³

Although the *Liji* was a prescriptive text which detailed how people ought to conduct themselves rather than how they actually behaved, it still illustrates that the belief that men should have power over women that persisted in centuries of Chinese tradition. This ideal was further elaborated by Ban Zhao, the famous female author of the Han Dynasty,

³ Robin R. Wang, trans., “The Record of Rites (*Liji*)”, In *Images of Women In Chinese Thought And Culture: Writings from the Pre-Qin Period through the Song Dynasty*, Robin R. Wang, ed., (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), 53.

in her book *Nüjie (Lessons for Women)*, which was designed to instruct elite women.

Ban Zhao (45-114 C.E.) admonished women that, “If a wife does not serve her husband, then the proper relationship (between men and women) and the natural order of things are neglected.”⁴ The belief that men should have control over their wives was prevalent throughout all segments all segments of the elite.

Not only did prescriptive texts state that men should control the behavior of their wives, but also elite men were entitled and even encouraged to take many women into their household under the system of concubinage. Throughout much of Chinese history, the ideal that elite men should have sexual access to multiple partners was prevalent. In early dynastic histories, the emperor and members of his close family are not only married to their spouses, but also have access to multiple consorts. By the Song dynasty, members of the literati-elite were frequently depicted in the presence of multiple women. The number of women monopolized by one man had become an indication of his social status.⁵ Concubinage, the practice of bringing multiple women into the household for male sexual fulfillment, was primarily practiced by members of the literati-elite. Only wealthy individuals could financially afford to support more than one woman.⁶ Because it was a marker of elite status, “polygyny was the most desired and respected form of marriage for men, even if it occurred in only about 10 percent or so of all marriages.”⁷

⁴ Robin R. Wang, trans., “Lessons For Women (*Nüjie*)”,)”, In *Images of Women In Chinese Thought And Culture: Writings from the Pre-Qin Period through the Song Dynasty*, Robin R. Wang, ed., (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), 181.

⁵ Patricia Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters*, 30.

⁶ For a discussion of the difficulties many men faced when attempting to gain a wife and a discussion of how poor men were often forced to “pimp their wives” and engage in a polyandrous lifestyle see Matthew H. Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), Ch. 6 passim.

⁷ Keith McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists: Sexuality and Male-Female Relations in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Fiction*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 22.

However, simply because a man had multiple female sexual partners did not mean that they all occupied an equal status within the household. Women were distinguished by ranks such as the man's wife (*qi*), followed by the concubines (*qie*), and maids (*bi*) who a master could often appropriate for his own sexual pleasure. A man was legally permitted to have only one wife. As stated by the historian Patricia Ebrey, "[m]onogamy, in this model, did not limit a man to one woman at a time, but it did limit him to one wife."⁸ Concubines were not considered wives, even secondary ones.⁹ This distinction may seem inconsequential to modern readers; however, it had profound ramifications for the relative status of wives and concubines within their husbands' patriline. Members of the literati-elite took wives of relatively equal social status. Young brides entered their husbands' households amidst great festivities designed to signal their incorporation into their husbands' patriline. A bride was forced to give up her mourning obligations to her natal family and to assume mourning obligations for her husband's family.¹⁰ This act symbolized her transfer to her husband's household because only full-fledged members of a man's patriline were allowed to observe these mourning rites.

In contrast, a man's concubines were never fully integrated into his patriline. A concubine did not marry into her master's household,¹¹ but rather was sold to him, often by a contract broker.¹² Concubines tended to come from lower class families in contrast

⁸ Patricia Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters*, 47.

⁹ Patricia Ebrey, "Concubines In Sung China", In *Journal of Family History*, vol. 11, no. 1 (1986): 2.

¹⁰ Mourning obligations were a ritual in which an individual would observe certain a period of mourning when a relative died. For a discussion of ancestral rites and their importance for lineage ties in the Qing Dynasty see Kai-wing Chow, *The Rise of Confucian Ritualism in Late Imperial China: Ethics, Classics, and Lineage Discourse*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

¹¹ I will use the word master to denote the male head of household who possessed a concubine. The word master does fail to capture the intimate connotation of the Chinese term used to designate the man relative to the concubine; however, the status of a man in relation to his concubine is closer to that of a master than that in relation to his wife. Siyen Fei, "Thesis Question," Personal Email, (11 Jan. 2007).

¹² Patricia Ebrey, "Concubines In Sung China", 3.

to wives who came from a family of relatively equal status.¹³ Unlike a wife, a concubine retained her mourning obligations to her natal kin and did not adopt full mourning obligations for her master. Her master and his wife would not officially mourn the concubine's death, even if she bore children. Moreover, a concubine's children had to treat her master's wife as their legal mother.¹⁴ However, these restrictions did not cause concubines undue suffering. In fact, many concubines profited from the food, shelter, and protection with which a literati-elite master could provide them. Additionally, there was clearly a legal and social distinction between wives from the literati-elite and concubines of lower class origins. This social distinction is reflected in the fact that it was not legally permitted for a man to change the status of the women within his household. According to a Song legal code:

Anyone who makes his wife into his concubine or his maidservant into his wife is subject to two years penal service. Anyone who makes his concubine or female retainer into his wife or his maidservant into his concubine is subject to a year and half penal servitude.¹⁵

The wives, concubines, and maids whom the master sexually "favored" clearly had distinct ranks within the household. Legally a man could have only one wife; however, he was still permitted to take as many concubines as he could financially support.

It is important to remember that a man was not supposed simply to take a concubine into his household in order to sexually gratify himself, although admittedly many men probably had such selfish motives. As Yenna Wu observed:

Since the main purpose of marriage was to continue the family line, men of wealthier households could take concubines under the pretext of producing male heirs. In fact they were encouraged or pressured to do so if they had not sired a male heir by the age of forty. Occasionally, a wife

¹³ Patricia Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters*, 222.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 228.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

was not only expected to accept the concubine, but also to tolerate her husband's dalliance with maidservants or even singsong girls.¹⁶

Men had an obligation to produce an heir in order to ensure the continuity of their patriline. Not having an heir would have been considered a disaster because “[t]o be without a heir meant that the ancestral sacrifices would be discontinued and that the family property would fall into the hands of strangers.”¹⁷ Men frequently lamented their childlessness. In the collection of tales *Pai-an ching-qi*, Ling Mengchu (1580-1644) described a man without an heir thus: “Among [his] unfilial acts, the greatest is having no descendants.”¹⁸ Because of this intense drive to produce an heir, Chinese sex manuals contain special sections which detail the most advantageous times to have sex in order to conceive.¹⁹ Moreover, men without a son frequently adopted the child of an agnostic relative in order to preserve their family line.²⁰ By the time of the Qing dynasty, all of a man's sons whether born by his wife or by one of his concubines were eligible to inherit equal portions of his estate.²¹ If a man did not have a son by his principle wife, then his concubine's son was able to inherit his duties in the ancestral rites. More than just providing sexual gratification, by producing sons concubines played an important role in allowing for the continuation of the patriline.

Even though a wife was clearly the legal and social superior to a concubine who was ostensibly taken in to produce an heir, jealousy often arose between wives and concubines. Wives were expected to bear the introduction of a concubine without

¹⁶ Yenna Wu, *The Chinese Virago: A Literary Theme*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 23.

¹⁷ Anne Walter, *Getting an Heir: Adoption and the Construction of Kinship in Late Imperial China*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 13.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁹ “Secrets of the Jade Chamber (*Yü-fang pi-chüeh*)”, In *Art of the Bedchamber: The Chinese Sexual Classics Including Women's Solo Meditation Texts*, Douglas Wile, ed., (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 112.

²⁰ Anne Walter, *Getting an Heir*, passim.

²¹ Patricia Ebrey, “Concubines In Sung China”, 4.

complaint. Often, however, a wife was not content to sit idly by while her sexual access to her husband was threatened by the introduction of a young, nubile woman to the household. A wife's frustration at this turn of events is vividly described by Patricia Ebrey:

By thirty-five or forty [a wife's] position is much better. She is mistress of the house, busily engaged in finding spouses for her children and expecting soon to be a mother-in-law when her eldest son gets a wife. But now her husband brings home a seventeen-year old concubine to keep him company at night, believing this to be appropriate to his standing as family head and seeing no reason why his wife should not be satisfied with her highly honorable roles as mother of his children and manager of his household...

First her dignity was injured. The maids and daughters-in-law who had learned to treat the wife as the mistress might now laugh at her behind her back as an unwanted woman. Second, seeing the young concubine would make her only too aware of how her appearance had changed over the years, suddenly bringing home the fact that she was growing old. And third...there must have been an element of sexual frustration as, after many years with a fairly normal sex life, she now found herself with little if any conjugal pleasure.²²

Under these circumstances it is not surprising that a wife would despise her husband's concubine.

A wife's fear that her husband would sexually abandon her in favor of his new concubine increased when her husband spent too much time doting on his concubines. A man's family chose his wife for him. As a result a man was not often completely satisfied with his spouse. However, a man was able to choose his own concubines. Consequently, many concubines their masters' de facto favorites.²³ It is possible that a woman might have become frustrated with the inequality of this system in which a man was allowed to take multiple sexual partners, but she was restricted to the affections of

²² Patricia Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters*, 166-7.

²³ Jonathan K. Ocko, "Hierarchy and Harmony: Family Conflict as Seen in Ch'ing Legal Cases", In *Orthodoxy in Late Imperial China*, ed. Kwang-Ching Liu, (Berkeley: University of California, 1990): 221.

one man.²⁴ Consequently, women vented their frustration with the unequal nature of the marital system by acting as jealous and shrewish wives who sought to prevent their husbands from taking concubines. These jealous wives were seen as a threat to the patriline because their actions, “threaten[ed] to cut off the family line, thereby rendering the family unable to maintain the ancestral sacrifices and depriving [their] husband[s] of [their] share of the inheritance.”²⁵ Such actions would surely have been condemned by conservative family heads who were struggling to maintain the integrity of the patriline.

II. “Shrewish Wives and Hen-pecked Husbands”

Jealous and shrewish wives were frequently depicted in the literature of Late Imperial China. In these stories, the woman is criticized for her jealousy and is made to reform her behavior. Jealousy is unequivocally condemned. In light of this literary tradition of criticizing women who acted upon feelings of jealousy, it is difficult to understand why Gao E would have sought to soften the criticism of Wang Xifeng, a character who bears all of the hallmarks of a “shrewish wife.” A classic example of a shrewish wife is Madame Chunyu from Li Yu’s (1610/11-1680) *A Jealous Wife Becomes A Widow While Her Husband Is Still Alive*. In this story, Madame Chunyu is married to the provincial graduate Mu Zida. Even though he was almost forty years old and without an heir, she forbids him from taking a concubine.²⁶ When Mu Zida pleads with his wife that she needs to allow him a concubine so that he can hope to continue his family line,

²⁴ For literary descriptions of women’s frustration with this inequality, see Keith McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists*, 69; Yenna Wu, *The Chinese Virago*, 72, 173, 199; Li Ju-chen, *Flowers in the Mirror*, Lin Tai-yu, ed. and trans., (London: Peter Owen, 1965), 175.

²⁵ Yenna Wu, *The Chinese Virago*, 12.

²⁶ Li Yu, “A Jealous Wife Becomes A Widow While Her Husband Is Still Alive,” In *The Lioness Roars: Shrew Stories from Late Imperial China*, Yenna Wu, ed. and trans., (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1995), 18.

she replies, “Whose business is it if our family line gets cut off anyway?”²⁷ This sentiment deeply contradicted the beliefs of conservative family heads who were concerned with ensuring the continuation of their family line.

Mu Zida is too weak to face his wife’s wrath so he has to enlist the help of the village’s famed tamer of shrewish women, Master Fei. Master Fei and his supporters storm the house and force Madame Chunyu to allow Mu Zida to take two concubines; however, Madame Chunyu is not so easily outwitted. She still possesses enough wiles to terrify Mu Zida that she will harm his concubines and enough treachery to conspire to keep the concubines locked up at night so that he cannot sleep with them.²⁸ In a move typical of shrewish wives, Madame Chunyu becomes so jealous of Mu Zida’s young, nubile concubines that she beats them and hits Mu Zida with a door bar until “[t]he poor man and his two concubines got such a vigorous flogging from that fierce woman that their skin was mangled and their blood was oozing.”²⁹ She is only subdued by means of an elaborate plot concocted by Master Fei in which Mu Zida feigns his own death.³⁰ Master Fei predicts that when she is “widowed” Madame Chunyu will come to realize the error of her ways in trying to sexually monopolize her husband. She will realize the importance of having a son to protect her in old age and, “[w]hen she remarries, she’ll care less about enjoying herself and more about having a son.”³¹ This prediction proves to be true. Master Fei’s plot comes to fruition, and Madame Chunyu is ultimately reunited with her husband who she had believed dead. She is so chastised when she reencounters Mu Zida that she reforms and becomes a model wife. She serves Mu Zida

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

with devotion and raises the sons born to his concubines as if they were her own.³² In the end, the shrew is tamed and the continuation of the family line is secured.

Variations on the plot of Li Yu's *A Jealous Wife* are prevalent in vernacular literature. In Pu Songling's (1640-1715) *Ma Jiefu*, the hero, Ma Jiefu, finds it impossible to teach Yang Wandan how to tame his vicious wife, Madame Yin, who has beaten his pregnant concubine to death, treated his father like a servant, and caused his brother to commit suicide.³³ However, Ma Jiefu ensures the continuation of Yang Wandan's patriline by taking his nephew Xi'er away from his violent wife.³⁴ Although it proves impossible to rehabilitate Madame Yin, retribution is enacted upon her when she is remarried to a violent butcher who inflicts physical torture on her which mirrors the pain that she had caused the Yang family.³⁵ Pu Songling also details the fictional story of a woman whose violence was reformed by a Buddhist monk in his vernacular story, *Jiangcheng*,³⁶ and that of a woman whose jealousy of her husband's concubine is cured when she falls ill and her husband's concubine cares for her in the tale *Woman Shao*.³⁷ No matter how shrewish the wife, she is eventually tamed and the marital hierarchy is restored.

All of these stories present descriptions of women who prevented their husbands from taking concubines and even went so far as to beat both husbands and concubines. The sheer number of such tales demonstrate that concerns about female jealousy were a

³² Ibid., 55.

³³ Pu Songling, "Ma Jiefu," In *The Lioness Roars: Shrew Stories from Late Imperial China*, Yenna Wu, ed. and trans., (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1995), 73-7.

³⁴ Ibid., 80.

³⁵ Ibid., 81.

³⁶ Pu Songling, "Jiangcheng," In *The Lioness Roars: Shrew Stories from Late Imperial China*, Yenna Wu, ed. and trans., (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1995), passim.

³⁷ Pu Songling, "Woman Shao," In *The Lioness Roars: Shrew Stories from Late Imperial China*, Yenna Wu, ed. and trans., (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1995), passim.

fact of life in Late Imperial China. Additionally, the “happy endings” in which the jealous wife was reformed and she openly welcomed a concubine into her husband’s household show that men wanted to tame these fierce women in order to neutralize the threat that they presented to the continuity of the patriline. The desire of men to preserve their right to take concubines is also echoed in their numerous pleas to women not to become jealous. One such plea was made by Zhou Ji in *Sending Plum Blossoms*:

Dear woman readers, after you finish reading this story, please don’t be so jealous as to cut off your husband’s family line.³⁸

This plea coupled with the frequent depiction of jealous wives being remolded into perfect Confucian wives clearly demonstrates the universal condemnation of jealous wives. Whether wives were forced to reform or pleaded with to allow their husbands to take a concubine, jealousy was clearly depicted as an undesirable trait.

III. Wifely Jealousy in the *HLM*

Wang Xifeng displays many traits associated with the shrewish wife. She exerts significant control over her husband, Jia Lian, and repeatedly thwarts his attempted liaisons with other women. Wang Xifeng uses her power to intimidate the staff of the Jia household in order to restrict Jia Lian’s access to other women. When Jia Lian is about to embark on a journey away from home, she scolds one of his personal servants by stating, “don’t encourage him to get mixed up with bad women. If, when you get back, I find out that you *have* done, I’ll break your legs!”³⁹ In addition to threatening to punish servants if Jia Lian has a liaison with another woman, Wang Xifeng also chastises Jia Lian for his affairs. When Jia Lian begins to eye the maid Caltrop, Xifeng scolds him:

³⁸ Yenna Wu, *The Chinese Virago*, 15.

³⁹ *HLM*, vol. 1, 281.

I should have thought that having just got back from [Hangzhou] and [Suzhou] and seen something of the world, you would have settled down a bit; but I see you are still the same greedy-guts as ever.⁴⁰

Wang Xifeng, like all jealous women in Chinese literature, tries to closely supervise her husband's actions around other women.

To some extent, Wang Xifeng's attempts to control her husband seem warranted. Like most of the men in the Jia family, Jia Lian is not depicted in a flattering light. Although he is part of a literati-elite family, he only holds the rank of sub-prefect by purchase rather than by merit.⁴¹ He fails to control the finances of his family and spends his money too freely. While Wang Xifeng is caring for their only daughter who has fallen ill with the smallpox, Jia Lian conducts an affair with the wife of the cook at the Rong-guo mansion.⁴² The Mattress, as the woman is known, notes the impropriety of their liaison in an attempt to sexually excite Jia Lian:

'Your little girl's got the smallpox,' she murmured. 'While they're worshipping the Goddess, you are supposed to keep yourself pure. Naughty man! You're making yourself unclean because of me.'⁴³

Although she said this in order to entice Jia Lian, it clearly echoes the sentiment of moralists who would have condemned Jia Lian for such actions. Given Jia Lian's actions, it is hard to view Wang Xifeng's rage over his behavior as unjustified.

However, although Wang Xifeng might have been justified in the above case, other actions that she takes against Jia Lian are less defensible. In one instance, Wang Xifeng's anger at Jia Lian's affair causes her not only to attack Jia Lian, but also unfairly to attack her faithful maid Patience. When Wang Xifeng learns that Jia Lian has

⁴⁰ Ibid., 309.

⁴¹ Ibid., 83.

⁴² Ibid., 425.

⁴³ Ibid., 426.

stationed a maid to keep her from discovering him on the night of her birthday, she is furious. She frightens the maid into revealing that Jia Lian is having an affair with the servant Bao Er's wife by insisting:

'There must have been a reason. Tell me. If you do, from now on I shall love you and be your friend. But if you don't, I shall take a knife and cut your flesh with it!'

To reinforce her threat, she plucked a formidable hairpin from her hair and jabbed it violently in the neighborhood of the girl's mouth, causing her to dodge this way and that from it in terror.⁴⁴

When another maid tries to prevent her from discovering Jia Lian, Xifeng hits the girl so hard that she falls over.⁴⁵ When she finally arrives in Jia Lian's compound, Wang Xifeng overhears Bao Er's wife telling her lover that she despises Wang Xifeng and that, "If she *was* to die...you ought to make Patience your Number One. I'm sure she'd be better than this one."⁴⁶ When Wang Xifeng hears this exchange, she is incensed both by Jia Lian's sexual dalliances and by the implication that Patience, a mere maid,⁴⁷ would make a better wife than she does:

Without pausing to reflect, she turned and struck Patience twice before kicking open the door and striding into the room. There without more ado, she proceeded to seize hold of Bao Er's wife and belabor her, breaking off only to block the doorway with her body in case Jia Lian might think of escaping.⁴⁸

Wang Xifeng proceeds to verbally berate Jia Lian, Bao Er's wife, and Patience. She then begins to beat Bao Er's wife. Jia Lian is frustrated with the situation; however, because Wang Xifeng is such a powerful woman, he is unable to take action against her. Instead, he resorts to kicking Patience to express his frustration. Wang Xifeng is so furious that

⁴⁴ *HLM*, vol. 2, 368.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 369.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 369.

⁴⁷ According to David Hawkes' translation, Patience is referred to by the term "chamberwife." She is a maid within the establishment; however, the text implies that she also has a family sanctioned sexual relationship with Jia Lian. Consequently, it is difficult to classify her as either a maid or a concubine.

⁴⁸ *HLM*, vol. 2, 370.

Patience is intimidated by this violence that she runs over and begins beating Patience herself. When Patience is overwhelmed by this unfair treatment and runs off threatening to commit suicide, “Xifeng’s reaction...[is] to ram her head into Jia Lian’s chest and shout hysterically.”⁴⁹ Jia Lian responds by drawing a sword and threatening to kill Xifeng. Finally, this ruckus draws the attention of Grandmother Jia.

It is only at the appearance of outside observers that Wang Xifeng stops behaving like a shrewish woman.⁵⁰ This change of demeanor indicates very clearly, that such belligerent behavior on her part would not have been tolerated by more senior members of the family. Normally such violent behavior on the part of a wife would have earned her at the least a severe censure; however, Wang Xifeng is able to use her popularity with Grandmother Jia to convince her that Jia Lian was the instigator of the fight. As a result, Grandmother Jia scolds Jia Lian instead of the insubordinate wife.⁵¹ Nothing is done to control Wang Xifeng or to prevent her from once again resorting to violence in order to control her husband’s sexual activities. Not only did Xifeng beat Bao Er’s wife, Patience, and Jia Lian, but even more offensive in the eyes of traditional moralists, she got away with her violence. If the *HLM* followed the normal trajectory of the tales about jealous wives, Wang Xifeng would have to suffer a mighty retribution, especially considering the fact that Bao Er’s wife committed suicide in shame after the liaison was uncovered.⁵²

One development which might possibly explain the fact that Wang Xifeng was not made to suffer a harsh punishment for her actions was the changing focus of legislation relating to sexual issues during the Qing dynasty. Because the Qing was a

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 371.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 371.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 372.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 381.

foreign dynasty, its Manchu rulers sought to legitimize their hold on power by promoting Confucian values, which had once been practiced primarily by the literati-elite, among the general populace. In prior dynasties, legislation, including the laws concerning sexual crimes, was status based. Individuals were held to different standards of morality depending upon their position within the social hierarchy. Punishments for the same crime varied according to the social status of the perpetrator and the victim.⁵³ However, during the Qing dynasty, legislation concerning sexual activity gradually became more egalitarian when status based punishments were eliminated during the Yongzheng reign.

One of the main areas affected by this legislation was a master's sexual rights over his female slaves. Sexual relationships between the head of a household and his female slaves had long been tacitly accepted. The Tang legal code only detailed punishments for sleeping with the slave of another man. There was no legal penalty for sleeping with one's own slaves. Moreover, a man who had sex with his maid was described as favoring her (*xing*) rather than as committing a sexual offense.⁵⁴ However, under the Yongzheng emperor:

The sexual use of servile women by their masters was sharply curtailed, and the law obliged masters to arrange timely marriages for female domestic slaves. The law implied that if masters wanted to sleep with their female slaves, they should promote them to legitimate concubine status.⁵⁵

More specifically, masters could be punished for having sex with their female servants.

The 1725 law code stated:

If a head of household engages in illicit sex with a married woman subordinate to his household (*jia xia you fu zhi fu*), then he shall receive

⁵³ Matthew H. Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society*, 6

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

40 blows of the light bamboo...but if he is an official, then instead his case shall be referred to the Board [of Personnel]⁵⁶

This punishment was not a heavy one, but it was a clear departure from previous law codes.⁵⁷ According to this modified law code, it was Jia Lian who was in error when he committed adultery with a married servant. Although Wang Xifeng's violent behavior may not have been in proportion to the offense, according to these new law codes, she was certainly right to scold him for such illegal dalliances. However, while the changing law codes toward a master's sexual relations with his servants help to explain Gao E's decision to lessen the condemnation of Wang Xifeng, it does not absolve her of guilt in other situations.

As violent as Wang Xifeng is violent when she discovers the affair with Bao Er's wife, she is even more vindictive when she discovers that Jia Lian has taken a concubine without consulting her. While Jia Lian is supposed to be in mourning for Jia Jing, the patriarch of the Ningguo household, he secretly takes You Erjie as his concubine. His cousin, Jia Rong, concocts a plan which he believes will allow Jia Lian to take in You Erjie secretly without Wang Xifeng discovering it and flying into a jealous frenzy. Although it is prohibited to take a concubine during a period of mourning, and rather underhanded to take in a new woman without consulting with one's family, Jia Rong insists that Jia Lian will be able to justify his actions if he can produce an heir to carry on his family line.

[B]y the time you've been living together for a year or two, you ought to be able to ride the storm out even if your secret is blown. You'd have to face an explosion from [your father], of course; but you can tell him that you did it for the family, because Aunt Feng is unable to have a son.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 49

⁵⁸ *HLM*, vol. 3, 265-6.

Jia Lian's decision to take You Erjie is even less defensible because she was not a virtuous young woman. She had previously succumbed to the advances of her brother-in-law, Cousin Zhen.⁵⁹ Moreover, Jia Lian violates rules of propriety by promising that he would elevate You Erjie as his wife in the event of Xifeng's death. This action was prohibited by the legal code. Similarly, he also violates decorum by telling his servants to call Erjie "Mrs. Lian" although this title technically belonged to Wang Xifeng.⁶⁰ Jia Lian has clearly failed to follow the proper ritually described procedure for taking a concubine, and thus could be partially to blame for the tragedy which results.

However, despite the fact that Jia Lian has violated propriety by the manner and time of his decision to take a concubine,⁶¹ his actions do not make him as culpable as Wang Xifeng. When Xifeng discovers that Jia Lian has taken a concubine behind her back, she immediately begins plotting a way to rid herself of this unwanted nuisance. She assumes a sweet and charming manner in order to convince You Erjie that she does not want to harm her. Xifeng then proceeds to invite Erjie to live with her and promises to provide her with treatment equal to her own.⁶² Erjie believes that Wang Xifeng wants nothing more than to live amicably and moves into the Jia household. However, once You Erjie is inside the Jia mansion, Wang Xifeng replaces her loyal maid with one who takes every opportunity to make life difficult for the concubine.⁶³ This maid even refuses to obtain essential supplies for You Erjie. She also berates You Erjie for her affair with Jia Lian and fails to take care of her properly:

⁵⁹ Ibid., 271.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 274-5.

⁶¹ Ibid., 349.

⁶² Ibid., 334.

⁶³ Ibid., 338.

[The maid] began to grow more and more careless about serving Erjie's meals. Either they came much too early or much too late, and the food she brought invariably consisted of stale old left-overs...Fearing that if others heard her shouting they would think of her as one of those vulgar, shrewish women who are always quarreling with their servants, Erjie felt obliged to drop the matter and put up with the hardship as best she could.⁶⁴

Surrounded by strangers, You Erjie is left with no one except Wang Xifeng to complain to about her treatment. Wang Xifeng treats Erjie tenderly and says that she will have the servants punished for their behavior, but, of course, she fails to redress the situation.⁶⁵

At the same time as she is making You Erjie's life miserable, Wang Xifeng concocts a plan to publicly humiliate Jia Lian for his actions. She finds Zhang Hua, the man to whom You Erjie had previously been betrothed and induces him to file a lawsuit against Jia Lian for taking Erjie as his concubine.⁶⁶ Wang Xifeng then proceeds to let loose her anger by publicly scolding and beating Jia Rong for his role in Jia Lian's second marriage which, due to her own scheming, has resulted in a lawsuit and disgrace for the family.⁶⁷ A familial crisis is only averted when Cousin Zhen buys off Zhang Hua and convinces him to drop the case. After she learns of this development, Wang Xifeng orders Brightie to have Zhang Hua killed so that he can not divulge her secret. If Brightie had not decided to ignore the order to kill Zhang Hua, then Wang Xifeng would have had his blood on her hands.⁶⁸ When Wang Xifeng's plan to have Zhang Hua sue Jia Lian in order to force Jia Lian to return You Erjie fails, she is forced to search for a new opportunity to rid herself of her troublesome new rival for her husband's affections.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 339.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 339.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 340.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 344.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 358-9.

Wang Xifeng finds her new vehicle for revenge when Jia Lian returns home from his tour of duty and is given the concubine Autumn by his father.⁶⁹

Xifeng detested Autumn but was glad to have her as a means of ridding herself of Erjie. She would ‘kill with a borrowed knife’ – or rather she would watch the killing from a safe distance, like a traveler reclining on a mountainside who watches two tigers tearing each other to pieces in the valley below. And when Autumn had disposed of Erjie, Xifeng herself would take care of Autumn.⁷⁰

Xifeng begins to cultivate suspicion of You Erjie by feigning illness after You Erjie visits her.⁷¹ Once Xifeng had begun to destroy Erjie’s reputation, it was further damaged by Autumn who spread rumors that Erjie wanted to have Jia Lian all to herself.⁷² With her reputation in shatters and with Jia Lian preoccupied by his new concubine, You Erjie has no one to turn to when she is mistreated by the maids. Consequently, she falls ill while she is pregnant with Jia Lian’s son. The doctor misdiagnoses her illness and prescribes a medication which accidentally results in the abortion of the fetus.⁷³ Erjie is so devastated by this loss that she commits suicide. Xifeng then makes a show of weeping over her death in order to dispel any suspicion that she might have been responsible for You Erjie’s unfortunate death.⁷⁴

Wang Xifeng’s actions were as bad or worse as those of other jealous wives portrayed in the vernacular literature. Her jealousy resulted in the deaths of two women and the death of her husband’s unborn son. No matter how many social mores Jia Lian violated when he took You Erjie as a concubine, his transgressions, do not justify Wang Xifeng’s role in the death of his heir. Normally, such a story would end either with

⁶⁹ Ibid., 360.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 363.

⁷¹ Ibid., 361.

⁷² Ibid., 364.

⁷³ Ibid., 365-6.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 370.

Xifeng being reformed into a model wife who accepted her husband's concubine, or she would suffer karmic retribution for her actions. In Cao Xueqin's original manuscript, Wang Xifeng suffers a harsh treatment. In the Register of Twelve Beauties, which is revealed to Baoyu in a dream, Wang Xifeng is described by this riddle:

This phoenix in bad time came;
All praised her great ability.
"Two" makes my riddles with a man and tree:
Returning south in tears she met calamity.⁷⁵

In the original Chinese, this riddle contains the logograph for "divorce" which implies that Wang Xifeng will lose her place in the Jia family. From his research on the manuscript copies of the *HLM*, Wu Shih-ch'ang has concluded that according to the original trajectory of the novel, Wang Xifeng is arrested during the raids of the Jia household towards the end of the book. After she returns from prison, she is unable to regain her influence in the Jia household. Jia Lian regains control of the family and beats his once shrewish wife. Despite the fact that she is a concubine, and therefore, could not actually legally become Jia Lian's wife, Patience is promoted to Wang Xifeng's former place as Jia Lian's mistress. The reversed positions of Patience and Wang Xifeng symbolize the triumph of the good natured, self-sacrificing concubine over the jealous and domineering wife. Eventually, Jia Lian divorces Wang Xifeng and sends her back to her family in Nanjing in disgrace where she dies a violent death.⁷⁶

By contrast, Gao E's revision presents Wang Xifeng with a comparatively pleasant fate. In his revisions, Gao E ignored the references to Wang Xifeng's divorce

⁷⁵ *HLM*, vol. 1, 135.

⁷⁶ Wu Shih-Ch'ang, *On The Red Chamber Dream: A Critical Study of Two Annotated Manuscripts of the XVIIIth Century*, (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1961), 174-8.

which were present in the poem predicting her fate.⁷⁷ The modern critic Wu Shih-ch'ang condemns Gao E's portrayal of Wang Xifeng because, "From the song, it is clear that all the machinations and calculations that [Wang Xifeng] made against others in the end turned against herself. [Gao E] in his supplement again ignores this plot...and makes her die a natural death."⁷⁸ However, Gao E's revision does not completely redeem Wang Xifeng. He retains the description Wang Xifeng's loss of power within the Jia family, and he depicts Jia Lian as being so angry at her that he refuses to summon a doctor to treat her when she is dying.⁷⁹ All in all, this changed portrayal of Wang Xifeng is puzzling.

IV. Household Managers: The Upside of Shrewish Women?

How can we explain the decision of a more conservative author to rewrite the novel so that a woman who presented a serious threat to the authority and continuity of the patriline was no longer harshly condemned? During the mid-Qing several social currents seemed to favor jealous wives. Writers often blamed men for the behavior of such women.⁸⁰ Some men were even sympathetic to the plight of such women who resented the loss of their husbands conjugal affections.⁸¹ However, these authors consisted of liberal thinkers such as Lü Gun (1536-1618), Feng Menglong (1574-1646), Li Ruzhen (1763-1830), and Zhengxie (1775-1840). Therefore, none of these factors adequately explains why Gao E, a social conservative, would have wanted to redeem the

⁷⁷ Ibid., 172.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 172-3.

⁷⁹ *HLM*, vol. 5, 131.

⁸⁰ Yenna Wu, *The Chinese Virago*, 38, 90, 129.

⁸¹ Keith McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists*, 69; Yenna Wu, *The Chinese Virago*, 199; Li Ju-chen, *Flowers in the Mirror*, 175.

character of Wang Xifeng. Instead Gao E's decision to change Wang Xifeng's original fate seems to have been influenced by her role as a household manager.

Starting in the Song dynasty, the role of women as managers of the Inner Quarters began to grow. As observed in Chapter 2, it was important that young brides who were incorporated into their husbands' patriline be prepared to encourage men to study for the civil service examinations. It was also important that these young women be able to manage the household, often without assistance, so that men could devote their time to studying for the civil service examinations. A talented wife was vital to any family's success:

The ideal upper-class wife...was not simply devoted to her husband's family; she had the managerial abilities, literary talents, and interpersonal skills to see that it thrived.⁸²

Women were frequently praised for maintaining peace within a complex household.⁸³

Starting with the Song dynasty, women became responsible for overseeing the financial welfare of their family. Miss Du (1133-1186) supported her family by weaving, even after they became wealthy. Similarly, Miss Xi (1129-1192) was responsible for helping her husband's business, for building up family property, and for making her family into one of the leading families in the prefecture.⁸⁴ Managing the family's finances was a difficult task:

For a landowning family, managing the household budget was a considerable feat: records had to be kept, rents collected, and a large array of expenditures paid out. Counting domestic servants, the size of a household could easily reach 20 or 30 people⁸⁵

⁸² Patricia Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters*, 115.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁸⁵ Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 181.

It took a skilled woman to be able to manage a staff of 20 servants, let alone the large complex of servants which a wife in an elite family would have to supervise.

According to Patricia Ebrey:

A good inner helper, as conceived by male writers in [Song] times, was not passive or subservient. Intelligence, resourcefulness, and energy were all considered positive traits. A wife had a lot to do as household manager...So long as she presented herself as assisting the men rather than pursuing her own goals, she would be respected for competence and efficiency.⁸⁶

Women were still not allowed to wield power in the outside world, but by the mid-Qing it was widely accepted that women should be responsible for the management of the household.⁸⁷

This increased role of women in managing the household which began to come into prominence during the Song dynasty was complimented during the Qing dynasty by a focus on women's domestic contributions to the family. Even as their independence was restricted by such customs as footbinding and the cult of widow chastity, women were beginning to wield greater power in the domestic sphere. Women were expected to work in order to ensure the success of their husband's patriline.⁸⁸ While poor women might have been expected to work out in the fields, elite women sewed and embroidered. Some even reared silk worms, reeled yarn, spun thread, or wove cloth.⁸⁹ Officials frequently praised apocryphal classical models, such as Mencius's mother who supported her son by weaving, and, thereby, allowed him to devote himself to becoming a great scholar. These stories demonstrate the growing belief among conservative thinkers that,

⁸⁶ Patricia Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters*, 129.

⁸⁷ Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 191.

⁸⁸ Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 143.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 144.

“economic success and social respectability depended on women’s work in the household economy.”⁹⁰ Cloth-making and other work within the household was associated with “industry, frugality, and dedicated service to the patriline.”⁹¹ These same attributes which women cultivated through work within the household were essential in a woman’s attempt to manage the family members and servants within the household. Through her own frugality and discipline, a woman was expected to set the standards to which her servants would adhere.⁹² These sacrifices by women were crucial to the economic success of a literati-elite household because they allowed men to devote themselves to studying for the civil service examination.⁹³

Wang Xifeng plays a significant role as the manager of the Jia household. It is she who is responsible for everyday order within the Jia mansion. Wang Xifeng oversees such mundane tasks as ensuring that the women of the household are paid their monthly allowances and that Grandmother Jia’s food is prepared properly.⁹⁴ When Daiyu arrives at the Jia mansion, Wang Xifeng has already prepared cloth to be made into new clothes for her.⁹⁵ When Grannie Liu comes to beg the Jias for money, it is Xifeng who arranges for her to be given 20 taels of silver in order to be able to make winter clothes.⁹⁶ Wang Xifeng supervises the distribution of presents to and from other elite families, and when Aroma’s mother dies, Xifeng arranges to give Aroma 40 taels of silver in order to cover the funeral expenses.⁹⁷

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 148-9.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 166.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁹⁴ *HLM*, vol. 1, 93, 99.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁹⁷ *HLM*, vol. 1, 175; *HLM*, vol. 3, 23.

Because of her managerial ability, Wang Xifeng is called upon to supervise the Ningguo portion of the Jia household during Qinshi's funeral.⁹⁸ The Ningguo household was often noted for the failures of its domestic staff. Upon learning of her new assignment, Wang Xifeng draws up a list of the abuses committed by Ningguo servants which she hopes to eliminate:

1. Because it was so large and motley an establishment, things were always getting lost.
2. Because there was no rational division of labor, it always seemed to be someone else's responsibility whenever a job needed to be done.
3. Because the household's expenditure was so lavish, money was always getting misappropriated or misspent.
4. Because no distinctions were made between one job and another, the rewards and hardships were unfairly distributed.
5. Because the servants were so arrogant and undisciplined, those with 'face' could brook no restraint and those without could win no advancement.⁹⁹

Wang Xifeng immediately sets about reforming the lacksidical staff into a crew of attentive servants. She first breaks their arrogance by instructing them that:

From now on, whatever it is, you do it the way I tell you to, anyone who departs by as much as a hair's breadth from what I say is for it good and proper, no matter how senior or important she thinks she is!¹⁰⁰

Her threat is not an idle one. When one of the female servants is late to work, Wang Xifeng makes an example of her.¹⁰¹ Xifeng has twenty strokes of the bamboo administered and forces the woman to thank her for her punishment. She also tells the household steward to "stop a month's pay from her wages. If anyone is late tomorrow they will get forty strokes and the day after that it will be sixty."¹⁰² This punishment may

⁹⁸ *HLM*, vol. 1, 267.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 270.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 272.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 278.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 278.

seem a bit harsh; however, it was justified because none of the servants were late for work again.

Wang Xifeng divides the servants up into groups and assigns them each specific tasks within the household.¹⁰³ This action immediately improved the management of a household:

Gone now were the days when everyone picked the easiest tasks to do first and the less popular ones never got carried out; gone the convenient disorder in which objects had so easily strayed (no one ever knew how) from the rooms where they belonged.¹⁰⁴

Wang Xifeng dutifully discharges her duties. “Every morning she would be over at the appointed hour to hear the roll-call and would sit there alone in her office”¹⁰⁵ She also checks over all of the requests for money by members of the household and refuses to give them money if their figures did not add up properly.¹⁰⁶ Under Wang Xifeng’s management, the household servants no longer idle about and take advantage of the family’s wealth. She plays a vital role in preserving the patriline by adroitly managing the household in a manner which would have earned her the praise of conservative family heads.

Wang Xifeng’s managerial ability is welcomed in a family in which most of the young men are louts. The elder men are also no help in controlling household affairs. Jia She is absorbed with his concubines, and Jia Zheng is unable to exert control over the household. However, Xifeng’s control over family finances is unproblematic. In order to survive, the family must make unpopular decisions to conserve its waning wealth.

Because no man is willing to exert the necessary effort to restore the family to glory,

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 272-3.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 274.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 274-5.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 277.

Wang Xifeng steps up to fill the void. However, this action is frowned upon because in her effort to preserve the family, she engages in traditionally male controlled activities. She also earns the hatred of many members of the Jia establishment due to her ruthless control over the household finances. Wang Xifeng, herself, notes the difficulties of this situation:

Because of all the economies I've introduced during these last few years there's hardly anyone in this household who doesn't secretly hate me. But it's like riding a tiger: I daren't relax my grip for a single moment for fear of being eaten. In any case, our expenditure is still far above our income. The trouble is, everything in this household from the largest down to the smallest item has to be done on a scale and according to the rules that were laid down by our ancestors; but unfortunately the income from our property is not what it was in their days. If we do economize, the family looks ridiculous, Their Ladyships feel uncomfortable, and the servants complain of our harshness; yet if we don't economize, in a very few year's time we shall be bankrupt.¹⁰⁷

Although it appears that this comment was originally meant by Cao Xueqin to serve as an empty protest by Wang Xifeng trumpeting her own honor, it was allowed to remain in the narrative because it demonstrated the difficulties which women often faced when trying to manage a struggling patriline. Wang Xifeng treads a treacherous line between exerting too much power and earning the disdain of the patriline and failing to exert enough control and, thereby, contributing to the decline of the Jias.

Despite her role in preserving the Jia family by managing its household finances, Wang Xifeng has often been blamed for the downfall of the Jias. The main charge leveled against Xifeng is that she engaged in usury. Xifeng does lend out money at illegal rates. However, she claims that she is only lending out the money in order to try to increase the revenue of the Jia household:

¹⁰⁷ *HLM*, vol. 3, 62.

‘I don’t want it for myself in any case,’ said Xifeng; ‘it was a means of supplementing the housekeeping, because without it our expenditure was so much greater than our income...And so now I’ve got myself a bad name. I’m a usurer. Very well, I’ll call it all in again and stop lending money altogether. I can spend money as fast as anyone else – although if we just all sit back and spend without a thought in our heads for the future I fail to understand.’¹⁰⁸

It is difficult to believe this speech entirely, especially since the character of Wang Xifeng as originally portrayed by Cao Xueqin is power hungry. It would not be out of character for her to lend out the money solely to augment her own wealth. Jia Yun supports this view of Xifeng when he notes:

She’s got nothing to be proud of lending out money – money that’s been handed down in the family...I suppose she thinks she’s being clever, that this is a nice little nest-egg, a clever way to protect her own future. She doesn’t know what a stinking reputation she’s earned for herself.¹⁰⁹

However, Gao E does not allow us to discount Wang Xifeng’s professed motives entirely. It is possible that Wang Xifeng is really operating under altruistic, albeit misguided, intentions.

During the raid on the Jia household by imperial officials, Wang Xifeng’s promissory notes bearing illegal rates of interest are discovered.¹¹⁰ At this point, the official in charge of the investigation immediately wants to confiscate the contents of the entire Jia mansion. It is only the intervention of the Prince of Beijing who prevents the officials from seizing all of the Jias’ assets.¹¹¹ It is true that Wang Xifeng’s usury escalated the scale of the investigation against the Jias, but it was not her money-lending which prompted the investigation. The original motive for the raid on the mansion was to investigate Jia She’s underhanded dealings to acquire rare fans which had resulted in a

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 428.

¹⁰⁹ *HLM*, vol. 5, 99.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 115.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 115-6.

man's death. Wang Xifeng's actions made it more difficult for the Jias regain their former status, but she can not be held solely responsible for their downfall. Grandmother Jia consoles Xifeng that, "This whole nonsense was started by the men," Grandmother Jia consoled her. 'It was nothing to do with you.'¹¹² If events in the male sphere had not caused the investigation, then Wang Xifeng's indiscretion might never have been discovered. Therefore, she can not shoulder all of the blame for the fate of the Jias.

At this point in Cao Xueqin's narrative, Wang Xifeng is stripped of her power within the Jia household, divorced, and sent back to Nanjing to die. However, in Gao E's revised version of the *HLM*, Wang Xifeng is eventually re-entrusted with the management of the Jia household in recognition of the important role that she played in controlling the estate.¹¹³ Although Wang Xifeng's reputation is tarnished and she never regains her former unchallenged control over the household, she does manage Grandmother Jia's funeral.¹¹⁴ Therefore, it is clear that Wang Xifeng's monetary indiscretions, in this case, do not outweigh her crucial role in managing the household affairs. Gao E's decision to reinstate Wang Xifeng as the manager of the Jia household, even after her financial indiscretions contributed to the legal proceedings against the Jias, indicates how important conservative members of the literati-elite felt the position of women as household managers was.

V. Beyond Wang Xifeng

The treatment that Wang Xifeng receives in Gao E's revised version of the *HLM* diverges widely from the way that Pan Jinlian, another shrewish woman from vernacular fiction, was treated. The divergences in how these two characters were treated by

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 150.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 199-207.

conservative authors elucidates the importance placed on the role of women as household managers. It also prompts us to rethink our assumption that conservative family heads in Late Imperial China completely opposed powerful women. To the contrary, while they might not want women to usurp men's dominance over the public realm, conservative family heads put great value upon a woman's ability to control private affairs within the family.

At first glance it is easy to equate Wang Xifeng's character in the *HLM* with that of Pan Jinlian of the *Jin Ping Mei*. The *Jin Ping Mei* was written in 1618 by an anonymous author and it details the life of the sexually indulgent merchant, Ximen Qing.¹¹⁵ Pan Jinlian is Ximen Qing's "Fifth Lady."¹¹⁶ A sexually voracious woman, she attempts to control Ximen Qing's liaisons with other women. Rather than railing against her husband as Wang Xifeng does, Pan Jinlian controls Ximen Qing's actions by acting as his confidant. Ximen Qing obeys her because she knows the controls of his sexual escapades.¹¹⁷ Pan Jinlian's control over Ximen Qing, allows her to exert great influence in the household, even though she is not Ximen Qing's wife. She forms alliances among the women of the household and causes the women to fight amongst themselves. Pan Jinlian turns Ximen Qing against several of his other concubines, and even succeeds in temporarily creating a rift between him and his wife, Wu Yueniang.¹¹⁸

However, although Pan Jinlian is able to control Ximen Qing and wield significant influence within the household, unlike Wang Xifeng, she does not play any role in managing the household. The narrator stated that:

¹¹⁵ *The Plum In The Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei*. vol. 1. Tod Roy, trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), xvii.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 171.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 269.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 209-11, 373.

Although [Wu Yueniang] was the First Lady of the household and occupied the master suite, she was sick so much of the time that she hadn't been able to take effective charge of the household affairs...The household expenditures and receipts were all in the hands of the ex-courtesan, [Li Jiao'er]. [Sun Xue'e] was in charge of the wives of the household retainers who worked in the kitchen, and it was her responsibility to supply the needed food and drink to the separate quarters of the various residents.¹¹⁹

Therefore, it is not fair to compare Pan Jinlian's character to that of Wang Xifeng.

Unlike Wang Xifeng, Pan Jinlian with her propensity to upset the balance of marital relations and to create conflict within the household does not play the significant role in maintaining familial harmony and economic prosperity.

Gao E's decision to change the fate suffered by Wang Xifeng may initially seem perplexing given her role as a shrewish wife in which she continually impinged upon male sexual prerogatives and threatened the continuity of Jia Lian's patriline. In light of this initially puzzling editorial decision by Gao E, we must reconsider our understanding of "conservative" and "liberal" social currents in Late Imperial China. We have long known that liberal philosophers supported women's efforts to expand their influence in the public domain through such efforts as publishing and being treated as "honorary men."¹²⁰ However, as demonstrated by Cao Xueqin, these "liberals" still demanded that women ascribe to the system of concubinage and that they allow their husbands free sexual reign. In the vein of traditional Chinese social constructs, they condemned women for trying to exert power within the home that they felt upset the balance of power. In contrast, while conservative thinkers have often been chastised for their role in perpetuating customs such as footbinding and widow chastity, they simultaneously praised the role of women in managing large households. This social current is

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 208.

¹²⁰ See Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, passim.

demonstrated by Gao E's revisions of the *HLM* where he softens the condemnation of Wang Xifeng's jealousy because of the important role that she plays in ensuring the continued success of the Jia family. Liberal philosophers promoted the role of women outside the home while seeking to maintain male dominance within the inner quarters, and conservative family heads still wanted to restrict the role of women in public life, but they simultaneously promoted the importance of their work in the private realm.

This chapter does not intend to propose that we have wrongly categorized liberal and conservative social philosophies in Late Imperial China. However, the study of issues of private life does reveal that these groups do not always ascribe to the stereotypes which we have established for them. With further investigation into such matters, we may discover that "liberals" and "conservatives" relative degree of liberalism depended upon whether the issue being discussed was a matter of public domain or of private life. Ultimately, we must be careful to examine these philosophies in light of what they meant to practitioners in their own time and not to project our own biases and assumptions onto these designations.

Conclusion:
Historical Implications of the *Honglou meng*

This thesis has taken a two-pronged approach in its study of the revisionary process undergone by the *Honglou meng*. First, it contends that the writing and revision of fiction was a method of presenting social discourse in Late Imperial China. While numerous prescriptive texts such as the *Liji*, familial instructions, and the writings of Confucian scholars set out ideals for how families should function, the inner workings of one's family were largely a private issue, not to be discussed in the public realm. Therefore, until now, scholarship on Late Imperial China has been lacking insight into how individuals interacted with these ideals and responded to them in their daily lives. However, when the mysteries of its authorship and revisionary process are unraveled, the *HLM* provides us with tantalizing clues about the social debates that were taking place during the Qing dynasty about the family system. This analysis suggests that literature, especially when it has undergone a drastic revision, can provide us with clues about how people were reacting to and reformulating social norms relating to private life.

Second, this thesis casts new light onto our stereotypical definitions of "liberal" and "conservative" social philosophies in Late Imperial China. While the liberal author Cao Xueqin did propose that men should seek personal fulfillment and that love should be paramount over family duty, he was not as kindly disposed towards powerful women as one might have expected. In contrast, while the more conservative Gao E insisted that men must devote themselves to study and marry women who would further the fortunes of the patriline, he actually created an ending to the *HLM* which was more favorable towards powerful women. This dichotomy indicates that while our perceptions of these

social philosophies may hold true for some issues, our stereotypes, which have thus far been formed without access to these debates on private life, are not completely accurate.

I. Literary Discourse and Private Life in Late Imperial China

The *HLM* presents a compelling case study for how authors used literature to debate issues pertaining to private life. Prescriptive texts stated how the family should ideally function. Sons should devote themselves to their studies. Husbands and wives should maintain a respectable distance from each other and not indulge too heavily in erotic passion. Women should play an important role in encouraging the success of the family both by motivating men in their careers and by managing the household affairs so that men had more time to devote to their public lives. However, these prescriptive texts merely state the way that society should ideally function. Moreover, this ideal was defined by the small elite group of Confucian scholars whose works were propagated throughout the empire because they accorded with the goals of the Imperial government. There is no hint of how these prescriptions were applied in actuality. Because men in Late Imperial China did not discuss their private lives openly in the public sphere, we do not know if people accepted these prescriptive ideals unquestioningly, or if they reacted against them to create their own image of how society should function. It is only by examining literature, and the discussion of issues of private life contained therein, that we can begin to understand how people dealt with issues of private life.

The process of literary discourse is bound up in two distinct processes: initial authorship and revisionary authorship. First, Cao Xueqin produced his own dialogue with the proponents of *qing* from the late-Ming. Cao Xueqin authored the *HLM* in order to protest what he felt were social injustices. Consequently he created a novel which

insisted that young men should not have to study for the civil service examinations if their talents lay elsewhere, and which condemned society for its failure to unite young lovers. This novel represented the culmination of a liberal philosophy which had developed during the late-Ming under the auspices of the cult of *qing*. This version of the *HLM* went against Neo-Confucian norms of behavior, and it is for this reason that it has been hailed by so many later critics as a revolutionary work. However, Cao Xueqin also interpreted this tradition in his own way. He directly followed late-Ming literary forms by portraying Baoyu's refusal to study for the examinations, and like other authors of vernacular fiction he created a story in which female jealousy was condemned. However, Cao Xueqin did not follow the format of happily uniting the two lovers: Baoyu and Daiyu. Instead, Cao Xueqin broke with traditional forms. He created a tragic ending in which the young pair was torn apart. This unfortunate event prevented either of the young lovebirds from being cured of their lovesickness and developing into productive members of society. This alteration to standard format created a harsh condemnation of a social structure in which most people were still unable to marry for love. Cao Xueqin was not merely the transmitter of late-Ming ideals. He was the heir to that philosophy towards private life, but he also reacted against it and shaped it to present his own social philosophy suited to the circumstances of the mid-Qing.

The second process of literary dialogue which we can see in the *HLM* is Gao E's work revising the novel to make it fit his own social viewpoint. For modern readers, this is a somewhat more difficult to accept. It is well accepted that the primary author of a text often writes it in order to present a social message. Our concept of authorship views later editor/authors who significantly alter a text to be unauthorized interlopers who have

violated the integrity of a work. However, as has been previously demonstrated, the concept of authorship was more loosely defined in Late Imperial China. Many novels, even so called masterworks of Chinese fiction, were edited at some point during their lifespan. As we have seen with Jin Shengtan's version of the *Shuihu zhuan* (*The Water Margin*), these revisions were often widely acclaimed. We can not condemn Gao E's revisions to the *HLM* simply because they would not have been tolerated in a modern environment. Instead, we must examine these revisions as they would have been understood by contemporaries.

Gao E deliberately altered the projected ending of the novel in order to correspond with a more conservative set of social ideals. He altered the novel in order to support the belief that young men must devote themselves to studying for the civil service examinations in order to ensure the continued success of their families, that marriages should be motivated by the needs of the patriline, and that women played an important role in ensuring the survival of the patriarchal family by managing affairs within the inner quarters. In order to make these revisions, he used a variety of techniques ranging from altering the ending of the *HLM*, to subtly altering the portrayal of a given character, and even retaining given plot elements and softening Cao Xueqin's intended sarcasm into a statement which upheld the traditional social structure. Gao E changed the structure of the *HLM* in order to force the characters to behave in a manner which accorded with his social philosophy.

The preceding analysis of the revisionary process undergone by the *HLM* has demonstrated that literature, particularly vernacular fiction, could be used as a venue for authors to propagate their own commentaries on private issues. Cao Xueqin used the

HLM to advocate personal fulfillment, to emphasize the importance of fulfilling love, and to condemn women who abused their power within the family. Moreover, in addition to the fact that the initial author of a given text could use it to promote his own perspective, later author/editors were often motivated to revise a novel because the original social commentary presented in it did not accord with their own views. This motivation is readily apparent in Gao E's revisions of the *HLM*. He changed Cao Xueqin's unorthodox storyline in order to reaffirm the traditional social order. Literature and particularly literary revision must be understood as a valid forum for debating issues of private life. By using the forum of the novel, authors were able to discuss private issues which could not have been openly discussed in public works such as imperial edicts, official histories, or biographies.

II. Liberal and Conservative?: Reconsidering Stereotypes

The discussion of private life presented in the *HLM* also forces us to reconsider our preconceived notions of the meaning of "liberal" and "conservative" in Late Imperial China. It has long been assumed that liberal thinkers during the Qing dynasty, in the vein of late-Ming authors of vernacular fiction, opposed the examination system, advocated marriage motivated by love, and promoted the importance of women. In contrast, conservative Neo-Confucians have been condemned for promoting the importance of family duty, both in the realm of civil service and marriage, as well as for subordinating women to men. However, while Cao Xueqin and Gao E follow these assumptions some of the time, at others, their narratives widely diverge from our stereotypes. This divergence indicates that these two social philosophies are more complex than has

previously been indicated and that they can further explored by analyzing literary debates on issues of private life.

In many respects, the *HLM* provides the ideal test case for examining liberal and conservative reactions to issues of private life. Cao Xueqin was a liberal figure as we have defined one in Late Imperial China. He refused to take the civil service examination and spent his life in poverty writing poetry. In contrast, Gao E was a successful official and a proponent of a more traditional social perspective. Therefore, the two editor/authors were very different individuals with differing social philosophies. Cao Xueqin promoted the “liberal” belief that young men should pursue personal happiness and poetry if they were so inclined, while Gao E took the “conservative” stance that these men have an obligation to succeed in the civil service examination in order to support their patriline. The issue of marriage is not as straightforward as that of the examinations because Cao Xueqin does not completely adhere to the forms of the cult of *qing*. However, although he unexpectedly prevents Baoyu and Daiyu’s union, he does so in order to condemn the fact that people are not allowed to marry out of love. Therefore, he is still supporting a liberal social philosophy. Because Cao Xueqin had already crafted an ending in which the young lovers were severed, Gao E only had to subtly alter the *HLM* in order to fashion a conclusion which reaffirmed the belief that love was destructive to the family and that men should marry women who would protect their family interests. Examination of these two issues demonstrates that the editor/authors of the *HLM* represent two different sides on the spectrum of social philosophies.

However, the portrayal of Wang Xifeng seems to problematize this categorization because Cao Xueqin opposes her as a jealous woman and condemns her to exile from the

Jia family, while Gao E redeems her character because of her critical role as a household manager. Our first reaction to this divergence from our stereotypical view of liberals and conservatives might be to conclude that Cao Xueqin and Gao E were more moderate authors than we have assumed them to be. This conclusion would be an easy one to make because it would allow us to retain our existent concepts of social philosophy in the eighteenth century. However, as we have seen, Cao Xueqin and Gao E ascribed to liberal and conservative social philosophy respectively in their portrayal of other issues.

Therefore, there is little reason to assume that they have abandoned these viewpoints. Instead, we must conclude that we do not yet fully understand these social philosophies. It seems that while liberals supported personal freedom for young men and the freedom marriage for love, they were still concerned about women usurping power within the home which would have compromised this self-same liberty on the part of young men. On the other hand, conservative family heads wanted to ensure the stability of the family. Therefore, they promoted not only the importance of success in the civil service examination and marriage motivated by family duty, but also praised women for their important role in managing the household and, thereby, ensuring the success of the patriline. It seems that while liberal philosophers such as Yuan Mei may have promoted the role of women outside the home in endeavors such as poetry, it was conservative philosophers such as Zhang Xuecheng who advocated increasing the power of women within the home. This observation would not be possible without our examination of literary debates.

In order to fully grasp the richness of literature and culture in Late Imperial China, we must recognize that fictional texts were used as a forum for debating issues of private

life. Because we were previously unable to gain access into these debates, our understanding of liberal and conservative ideologies is still not fully developed. By delving into this literary discourse, we can gain a new understanding of these two social philosophies, one of which was heir to the cult of *qing* and the other of which was based on Neo-Confucianism. However, these philosophies were not necessarily “liberal” or “conservative” in the sense that we now understand those terms. We must come to understand these philosophies in the same manner as their practitioners did. By examining issues of private life as presented in fictional narrative, we can expand our understanding of social philosophy in Late Imperial China.

Selected Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Cao Xueqin, *The Story of the Stone*. vol. 1. David Hawkes, trans. Middlesex: Penguin, 1973.
- _____. *The Story of the Stone*. vol. 2. David Hawkes, trans. London: Penguin, 1977.
- _____. *The Story of the Stone*. vol. 3. David Hawkes, trans. London: Penguin, 1980.
- Cao Xueqin and Gao E. *The Story of the Stone*. vol. 4. John Minford, trans. London: Penguin, 1982.
- _____. *The Story of the Stone*. vol. 5. John Minford, trans. London: Penguin, 1986.
- “Discourse on the Highest Tao under Heaven (*T'ien-hsia chich-tao t'an*).” In *Art of the Bedchamber: The Chinese Sexual Classics Including Women's Solo Meditation Texts*. Douglas Wile, ed. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992: 79-82.
- Feng Menglong. “Censor Chen Ingeniously Solves the Case of the Gold Hairpins and Brooches.” In *Stories Old and New: A Ming Dynasty Collection*. Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang, trans. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000: 48-75.
- _____.¹ “Penniless Ma Zhou Meets His Opportunity through a Woman Selling Pancakes.” In *Stories Old and New: A Ming Dynasty Collection*. Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang, trans. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000: 113-122.
- _____. “Ruan San Redeems His Debt in Leisurely Clouds Nunnery.” In *Stories Old and New: A Ming Dynasty Collection*. Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang, trans. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000: 94-112.
- _____. *Stories Old and New: A Ming Dynasty Collection*. Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang, trans. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000.
- _____. *Stories From A Ming Collection*. Cyril Birch, trans. New York: Grove Press, 1958.
- _____. “The Courtesans Mourn Liu the Seventh in the Spring Breeze.” In *Stories Old and New: A Ming Dynasty Collection*. Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang, trans. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000: 207-221.
- _____. “Zhao Bosheng Meets with Emperor Renzong in a Teahouse.” In *Stories Old and New: A Ming Dynasty Collection*. Shuhui Yang and Yunqin Yang, trans. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000:194-206.
- Li Ju-chen. *Flowers in the Mirror*. Lin Tai-yu, ed. and trans. London: Peter Owen, 1965.
- Li Yu. “A Jealous Wife Becomes A Widow While Her Husband Is Still Alive.” In *Shrew Stories from Late Imperial China*. Yenna Wu, ed. and trans. Ithaca: East Asia Program Cornell University, 1995: 11-56.
- Mann, Susan, trans. “Two Biographies by Zhang Xuecheng (1738-1801).” In *Under Confucian Eyes: Writings on Gender in Chinese History*. Susan Mann and Yi-Yin Cheng, eds. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001: 216-229.
- Mann, Susan and Yu-Yin Cheng, eds. *Under Confucian Eyes: Writings on Gender in Chinese History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
- Pu Songling. “Jiangcheng.” In *Shrew Stories from Late Imperial China*. Yenna Wu, ed. and trans. Ithaca: East Asia Program Cornell University, 1995: 83-94.

- _____. "Ma Jiefu." In *Shrew Stories from Late Imperial China*. Yenna Wu, ed. and trans. Ithaca: East Asia Program Cornell University, 1995: 73-82.
- _____. "Woman Shao." In *Shrew Stories from Late Imperial China*. Yenna Wu, ed. and trans. Ithaca: East Asia Program Cornell University, 1995: 95-106.
- "Secrets of the Jade Chamber (*Yü-fang pi-chüeh*)." In *Art of the Bedchamber: The Chinese Sexual Classics Including Women's Solo Meditation Texts*. Douglas Wile, ed. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992: 102-107.
- Shen Fu. *Six Records of a Floating Life*. Leonard Pratt and Chiang Su-hui, trans. London: Penguin, 1988.
- "The Classic of Su Nü (*Su Nü ching*)." In *Art of the Bedchamber: The Chinese Sexual Classics Including Women's Solo Meditation Texts*. Douglas Wile, ed. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992: 85-93.
- The Plum In The Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei*. vol. 1. David Tod Roy, trans. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Yuan Mei. *Censored By Confucius*. Kam Louie and Louise Edwards, eds., trans. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1996.
- Wang, Robin R., ed. *Images of Women In Chinese Thought And Culture: Writings from the Pre-Qin Period through the Song Dynasty*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003.
- _____. trans. "Lessons For Women (*Nüjie*)." In *Images of Women In Chinese Thought And Culture: Writings from the Pre-Qin Period through the Song Dynasty*. Robin R. Wang, ed. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003: 177-188.
- _____. trans. "The Record of Rites (*Liji*)." In *Images of Women In Chinese Thought And Culture: Writings from the Pre-Qin Period through the Song Dynasty*. Robin R. Wang, ed. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003: 48-60.
- Wile, Douglas. *Art of the Bedchamber: The Chinese Sexual Yoga Classics Including Women's Solo Meditation Texts*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.
- Wu, Yenna, ed. and trans. *The Lioness Roars: Shrew Stories from Late Imperial China*. Ithaca: East Asia Program Cornell University, 1995.

Secondary Sources

- Alford, William P. *To Steal A Book Is an Elegant Offense: Intellectual Property Law in Chinese Civilization*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.
- Bodde, Derk. "Sex in Chinese Civilization." In *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 129, no. 2 (Jun., 1985): 161-172.
- Bodde, Derk and Clarence Morris, eds. and trans. *Law In Imperial China: Exemplified by 190 Ch'ing Dynasty Cases (Translated from the Hsing-an hui-lan) With Historical, Social, and Judicial Commentaries*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1973.
- Brokaw, Cynthia J. "On the History of the Book in China." In *Printing and Book Culture In Late Imperial China*. Cynthia J. Brokaw and Kai-wing Chow, eds. Berkeley: University of California, 2005: 3-54.
- Brokaw, Cynthia J. and Kai-wing Chow, eds. *Printing and Book Culture In Late Imperial China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.
- Brook, Timothy. "Censorship in Eighteenth-Century China: A View from the Book Trade." In *Canadian Journal of History*. vol. 22, (Aug, 1988): 177-196.

- Chang Chung-li. *The Chinese Gentry: Studies On Their Role in Nineteenth-Century China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1955.
- Chang Hsin-chih. "How to Read the *Dream of the Red Chamber*." trans. Andrew H. Planks. In *How to Read the Chinese Novel*. ed. David L. Rolston. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990. 316-340.
- deBary, Wm. Theodore, Wing-tsit Chan, and Chester Tan, eds. *Sources of Chinese Tradition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.
- Eberhard, Wolfram. *Social Mobility In Traditional China*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1962.
- Ebrey, Patricia. "Concubines In Sung China." In *Journal of Family History*. vol. 11, no. 1 (1986): 1-24.
- _____. *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- _____. *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Edwards, Louise P. *Men And Women In Qing China: Gender In "The Red Chamber Dream"*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994.
- Elman, Benjamin A. "Changes in Confucian Civil Service Examinations from the Ming to the Ch'ing Dynasty." In *Education and Society In Late Imperial China, 1600-1900*. Benjamin A. Elman and Alexander Woodside, eds. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994: 111-149.
- Elman, Benjamin A. and Alexander Woodside, eds. *Education and Society In Late Imperial China, 1600-1900*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- Fang Fu Ruan. *Sex in China: Studies in Sexology in Chinese Culture*. New York: Plenum Press, 1991.
- Furth, Charlotte. "The Patriarch's Legacy: Household Instructions and the Transmission of Orthodox Values." In *Orthodoxy in Late Imperial China*. ed. Kwang-Ching Liu. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990. 187-211.
- Gerritsen, Anne T. "Women in the Life and Thought of Ch'en Ch'üeh: The Perspective of the Seventeenth Century." In *Chinese Women in the Imperial Past: New Perspectives*. ed. Harriet T. Zurndorfer. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999. 223-257.
- Gilmartin, Christian K., Gail Hershatter, Lisa Rofel, and Tyrene White, eds. *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State*. Cambridge; Harvard University, 1994.
- Goldin, Paul R. "The Cultural and Religious Background of Sexual Vampirism in Ancient China." In *Theology & Sexuality*, vol. 12, no. 3 (2006): 285-307.
- Goodrich, Luther Carrington. *The Literary Inquisition of Ch'ien-Lung*. Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1935.
- Hamilton, Robyn. "The Pursuit of Fame: Luo Qilan (1755-1813?) and the Debates about Women and Talent in Eighteenth Century Jiangnan." In *Late Imperial China*, vol. 18, no. 1 (1997): 39-71.
- Handlin, Joanna R. "Lü'Kun's New Audience: The Influence of Women's Literacy on Sixteenth-Century Chinese Thought." In *Women In Chinese Society*. Margery Wolf and Roxanne Witke, eds. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975: 13-38.
- Hegel, Robert E. *The Novel In Seventeenth-Century China*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1981.

- Ho, Clara Wing-chung. "The Cultivation of Female Talent: Views on Women's Education in China during the Early and High Qing Periods." In the *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 38, no. 2 (1995): 191-223.
- _____. "Encouragement from the Opposite Gender: Male Scholars' Interests in Women's Publications in Ch'ing China – A Bibliographical Study." In *Chinese Women in the Imperial Past: New Perspectives*. ed. Harriet T. Zurndorfer. Leiden: Brill, 1999. 308-353.
- Ho Ping-ti. "Aspects of Social Mobility in China, 1368-1911." In *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 1, no. 4 (1959): 330-359.
- _____. *The Ladder of Success In Imperial China: Aspects of Social Mobility, 1368-1911*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1962.
- Holmgren, Jennifer. "Myth, Fantasy or Scholarship: Images of the Status of Women in Traditional China." In *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no. 6 (1981): 147-170.
- Huang, Martin W. *Desire and Fictional Narrative in Late Imperial China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Irwin, Richard Gregg. *The Evolution of A Chinese Novel: Shui-hu-chuan*. Cambridge: Kai-wing Chow "Ordering Ancestors and the State: Chang Hsüeh-cheng (1738-1801) and Lineage Discourse in Eighteenth-Century China." In *Family Process and Political Process in Modern Chinese History*. Tapei: Tapei Shi, 1992. 297-326.
- _____. *The Rise of Confucian Ritualism in Late Imperial China: Ethics, Classics, and Lineage Discourse*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.
- Ko, Dorothy. "Pursuing Talent and Virtue: Education and Women's Culture in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth Century China." In *Late Imperial China*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1992): 9-39.
- _____. *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.
- Kuhn, Philip A. *Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.
- Kwang-Ching Liu, ed. *Orthodoxy in Late Imperial China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
- Levy, Dore J. *Ideal And Actual In The Story of the Stone*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.
- Levy, Howard, trans. *Sex Jokes in Traditional Times*. Washington D.C.: The Warm-Soft Village Press, 1973.
- Mann, Susan. "'Fuxue' (Women's Learning) by Zhang Xuecheng (1738-1801): China's First History of Women's Culture." In *Late Imperial China*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1992): 40-62.
- _____. "Grooming a Daughter for Marriage: Brides and Wives in the Mid-Ch'ing Period." In *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society*. ed. Rubie S. Watson and Patricia Buckley Ebrey. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991. 204-230.
- _____. "Learned Women in the Eighteenth Century." In *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State*. Christian K. Gilmartin, Gail Hershatter, Lisa Rofel, and Tyrene White, eds. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.
- _____. *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.

- _____. "The Education of Daughters in the Mid-Ch'ing Period." In *Education and Society In Late Imperial China, 1600-1900*. Benjamin A. Elman and Alexander Woodside, eds. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994: 19-49.
- _____. "Widows in the Kinship, Class, and Community Structures of Qing Dynasty China." In *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 46, no. 1 (1987): 37-56.
- McDermott, Joseph Peter. *A Social History of the Chinese Book: Books and Literati Culture in Late Imperial China*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006.
- McLauren, Anne E. "Constructing New Reading Publics in Late Ming China." In *Printing and Book Culture In Late Imperial China*. Cynthia J. Brokaw and Kai-wing Chow, eds. Berkeley: University of California, 2005: 152-183.
- McMahon, Keith. *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists: Sexuality and Male-Female Relations in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Fiction*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995.
- Miller, Lucien. *Masks of Fiction in Dream of the Red Chamber: Myth, Mimesis, and Persona*. Tuscon: The University of Arizona Press, 1975.
- Moss Roberts. "Neo-Confucian Tyranny in the *Dream of the Red Chamber*: A Critical Note." In *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1978): 63-66.
- Mote, F.W. *Imperial China 900-1800*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Naquin, Susan and Evelyn S. Rawski. *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.
- Nivison, David S. *The Life and Thought of Chang Hsiieh-ch'eng (1738-1801)*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966.
- Ocko, Jonathan K. "Hierarchy and Harmony: Family Conflict as Seen in Ch'ing Legal Cases." In *Orthodoxy in Late Imperial China*. ed. Kwang-Ching Liu. Berkeley: University of California, 1990: 212-230.
- Plaks, Andrew H. *Archetype and Allegory in the Dream of the Red Chamber*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976.
- Rolstone, David L., ed. *How to Read the Chinese Novel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- Ropp, Paul S. "The Seeds of Change: Reflections on the Conditions of Women in the Early and Mid Ch'ing." In *Signs*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1979): 5-23.
- Rowe, William T. "Women and the Family in Mid-Ch'ing Social Thought: The Case of Ch'en Hung-mou." In *Late Imperial China*, vol. 13, no. 2 (1992): 1-41.
- Sin Yee Chan. "Gender and Relationship Roles in the *Analects* and the *Mencius*." In *Asian Philosophy*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2000): 115-132.
- Sommer, Matthew H. *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.
- Spence, Jonathan D. *Ts'ao Yin and the K'ang-hsi Emperor, Bondservant and Master*. New Haven: London, 1966.
- T'ien Ju-K'ang. *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity: A Comparative Study of Chinese Ethical Values in Ming-Ch'ing Times*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988.
- Van Gulik, R.H. *Sexual Life In Ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society from ca. 1500 B.C. till 1644 A.D.* with a new introduction and bibliography by Paul R. Goldin. Leiden: Brill, 2003.

- Wai-yee Li. *Enchantment and Disenchantment: Love and Illusion in Chinese Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Waley, Arthur. *Yuan Mei: Eighteenth Century Chinese Poet*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1956.
- Waltner, Anne. *Getting an Heir: Adoption and the Construction of Kinship in Late Imperial China*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990.
- _____. "On Not Becoming A Heroine: Lin Dai-yu and Cui Ying-ying." In *Signs*, vol. 15, no. 1 (1989): 61-78.
- Watson, Rubie S. and Patricia Buckley Ebrey, eds. *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.
- Wolf, Margery and Roxanne Witke, eds. *Women in Chinese Society*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975.
- Wu Shih-Ch'ang. *On The Red Chamber Dream: A Critical Study of Two Annotated Manuscripts of the XVIIIth Century*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961.
- Wu, Yenna. *The Chinese Virago: A Literary Theme*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- _____. "The Inversion of Marital Hierarchy: Shrewish Wives and Henpecked Husbands in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Literature." In *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Study*, vol. 48, no. 2 (Dec., 1988): 363-82.
- Yu, Anthony C. *Rereading the Stone: Desire and the Making of Fiction in Dream of the Red Chamber*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.
- _____. "Self and Family in the *Hung-lou Meng*: A New Look at Lin Tai-yü as Tragic Heroine." In *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, vol. 2, no.2 (1980): 199-223.
- Yu-Shih Chen. "The Historical Template of Pan Chao's *Nü Chieh*." In *T'oung Pao*, vol. 82 (1996): 229-257.
- Zurndorfer, Harriet T. "The 'Constant World of Wang Chao-Yüan: Women, Education, and Orthodoxy in 18th Century China.'" In *Family Process and Political Process in Modern Chinese History*. Tapei: Tapei Shi, 1992. 579-619.
- Zurndorfer, Harriet T., ed. *Chinese Women in the Imperial Past: New Perspectives*. ed. Leiden: Brill, 1999.

Appendix A
Honglou meng Character List¹

- Aroma: principal maid of Jia Baoyu.
Autumn: concubine given to Jia Lian by his father.
Bao Er's wife: wife of a Jia family servant who engages in an affair with Jia Lian.
Caltrop: Xue Pan's chief maid.
Brightie: servant of Jia Lian and Wang Xifeng.
Cousin Zhen: acting head of the Ningguo branch of the Jia family.
Grandmother Jia: widow of Baoyu's paternal grandfather and the head of the Ringguo branch of the Jia family.
Grannie Liu: an old country woman patronized by the Jias.
Jia Baoyu: the eldest surviving son of Jia Zheng and Lady Wang of the Ronguo House
Jia Dairu: instructor of the Jia family school.
Jia Lan: Jia Zhu's son.
Jia Lian: son of Jia She, Grandmother Jia's eldest son, and husband of Wang Xifeng.
Jia Rong: son of Cousin Zhen, heir of the Ningguo household.
Jia Rui: grandson of Jia Dairu.
Jia She: Jia Zheng's older brother; father of Jia Lian.
Jia Tanchun: daughter of Jia Zheng and 'Aunt' Zhao, his concubine.
Jia Zheng: Jia Baoyu's father; the younger of Grandmother Jia's two sons.
Jia Zhu: deceased elder brother of Jia Baoyu and father of Jia Lan.
Lady Wang: wife of Jia Zheng, and mother of Jia Zhu, Yuanchun, and Baoyu.
Leng Zixing: an antique dealer.
Lin Daiyu: orphaned daughter of Lin Ruhai and Jia Zheng's sister; Baoyu's love interest.
Prince of Beijing, The: princely connection of the Jia family.
Qinshi: also called Qin Keqing; first wife of Jia Rong.
'Mattress', The: nickname for the wife of a Jia family servant who became Jia Lian's mistress.
Patience: chief maid of Wang Xifeng.
Shi Xiangyun: orphaned great-niece of Grandmother Jia.
Wang Xifeng: wife of Jia Lian and niece of Lady Wang and Aunt Xue.
Xue Baochai: daughter of Lady Wang's sister, Aunt Xue.
Xue Pan: Baochai's brother.
You Erjie: concubine of Jia Lian.
Zhang Hua: betrothed of You Erjie.
Zhen Baoyu: son of Zhen Yingjia and heir of the Zhen family of Nanjing.

¹ See character lists in each volume of the *HLM*.