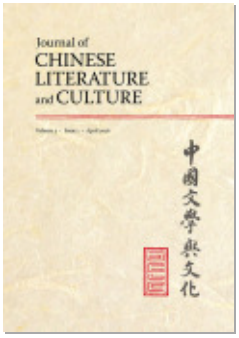
Virtuous Wives and Shrews in *Feng Shuangfei* : Empowering Female Characters through a Revision of Stereotypes



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Virtuous Wives and Shrews in *Feng Shuangfei*: Empowering Female Characters through a Revision of Stereotypes

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Abstract This article looks at two stereotypes of women—the virtuous wife and the shrew—embodied in the mid-Qing *tanci*, *Feng shuangfei*, by Cheng Huiying. Zhang Feixiang is a virtuous and generous wife, the perfect match for her orthodox husband, Lingyun. Yet, in a new twist, *Feng shuangfei* suggests it's the unconventional and unrestrained side of Feixiang that makes her an ideal wife. In contrast to Feixiang, Mu Qionghua fits the stereotype of the shrew in *xiaoshuo* fiction, but this *tanci* suggests it's precisely her so-called shrewish qualities that shape her as an ideal match for a libertine husband like Yishao. Through close reading, the author demonstrates how this female writer assesses and reimagines the standards of ideal women established by the classics and their male authors.

Keywords virtuous wife, shrew, female writer, *tanci*, *Feng shuangfei*

Feng shuangfei 鳳雙飛 (A Pair of Male Phoenixes Flying Together; 1898, 1899) is a fifty-two-chapter Qing *tanci* 彈詞, the imaginative work of female writer Cheng Huiying 程蕙英 (fl. mid-Qing). *Tanci* is a genre of popular fiction that includes vernacular and rhymed prosimetrical narratives and is usually performed orally. During the mid-Ming, the literati began to compose *tanci*, transforming it into a literary genre of a higher register. Thereafter, *tanci* bifurcated along two lines: one remained a performance genre of oral storytelling; the other was adopted by literati to become a written form of scholarly

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tanci novels.[1] Literary women also began to write *tanci* during the Ming, designated by some recent scholars *tanci xiaoshuo* 彈詞小說 (*tanci* fiction/novels).[2] However, to avoid confusion or misunderstanding, and to keep the genre separate from *xiaoshuo* novels, I will use the original term—*tanci*—which is also how these female authors described their writings.

Feng shuangfei is credibly attributed to Cheng Huiying (style name: Chaichou 茝儔, dates unknown), a gentry woman from Changzhou, Jiangsu Province. She is known to have written the *tanci*, as well as the poetry collection *Beichuang yin'gao* 北窗吟稿 (Draft Chantings from the North Window), no longer extant. Little is known about Cheng Huiying's personal life. According to Shen Shanbao 沈善寶 (1808–1862), the earliest biographer, Cheng Huiying supported herself by teaching in a private school for girls.[3] Based on Shen Shanbao's records and the publication date of the *tanci*, we can assume that Cheng probably lived a little earlier or around the same time as Shen, mid-Qing, and that the text was likely published after Cheng's death, although the manuscripts of both her poetry collection and *tanci* had already circulated among literate women. Xu Ke's 徐珂 (1869–1928) *Qingbai leichao* 清稗類鈔 (Classified Collection of Qing Notes) also mentions Cheng Huiying and her *Feng shuangfei* in the late Qing: "She wrote *Feng shuangfei tanci*. Her talent was so overflowing that paper became expensive at the time" 曾作《鳳雙飛》彈詞，才氣橫溢，紙貴一時.[4] Although claims of the scarcity and high price of paper were a standard exaggerated expression, Xu's comment still successfully conveys the idea of the popularity of the *tanci*. It is fascinating to observe that a work of female-authored fiction involving various forms of sexuality (including heterosexual relationships, male same-sex eroticism and desire, and female same-sex desire) was not only allowed but even well received among its wide audience of men and women, common people, and the literati. This is probably related to the popularity of the *tanci* and the fact that the text was likely published posthumously.

Set in the Ming dynasty, the story of *Feng shuangfei* describes the political achievements and romantic lives of talented and loyal Guo Lingyun 郭淩雲 and Zhang Yishao 張逸少, the title's "two male phoenixes flying together" 雙鳳齊飛. As is common in many female-authored *tanci*, the two heroes are the reincarnations of immortals, sent down to earth to reestablish morality. In the public sphere, the sworn brothers serve the court with their extraordinary military skill, pacifying the Tufan rebellion on China's southwestern border and defeating island rebels in the East China Sea. More important, they prove their loyalty to the Ming emperor and, in the end, successfully eliminate the evil usurper—the notorious eunuch Liu Jin 劉瑾 (?–1510) and his partisans in the central government. Meanwhile, in their private lives, Lingyun marries Zhang Feixiang 張飛香, Yishao's elder sister (and takes Zhang Liyu 張麗玉, Zhen Daya 真大雅, and

Murong Zhu 慕容珠 as his concubines), while Yishao marries Mu Qionghua 沐瓊花 (and takes Zhen Xiaoya 真小雅 and Bao Xiang'er 鮑香兒 as his concubines). The two families live side by side, in close relationship, and both families produce many sons and daughters. At the end, the two immortals ascend back to the heavens, a literary trope not uncommon in female-authored *tanci*.

Feng shuangfei, as a woman's work, remains conservative insofar as it doesn't directly depict female sexuality, but it does pay tremendous attention to women's domestic lives even though the title protagonists are men.[5] The two extreme types of women at the heart of this article, virtuous wives and shrews, are common images in the fiction of male writers during the Ming and Qing as well. In the fictional world of male-authored novels, virtuous wives strictly follow Confucian rituals and propriety, or *li* 禮, thereby bringing order and harmony to domestic life, and in turn are rewarded with Confucian prosperity, marked by fertility (including, especially, giving birth to a good son) and longevity. Shrews, by contrast, form a central target for criticism in the works of male writers. Shrews are jealous, fierce, even lascivious, and thus they bring disorder to their families—they are unwanted in a patriarchal Confucian family. They are always punished with infertility or death, or are miraculously "cured" to be reincorporated into the Confucian family.

Cheng Huiying creates a series of attractive women to subvert the rigid stereotypes of virtuous women and shrews. Both the virtuous woman Zhang Feixiang and the shrews Mu Qionghua and Murong Zhu are shown as desirable for their men and families. It is also interesting to see how her subverted images of virtuous and shrewish wives are assigned to the two male protagonists, themselves ideal male types: an unrestrained virtuous first wife and a shrewish concubine to the orthodox man, Guo Lingyun, ideal in terms of ritual propriety; and a shrewish first wife to the libertine, Zhang Yishao, an ideal figure of romantic fantasy. While the virtuous wife can be lovely and interesting, not stringent and boring, the shrews are embraced precisely because of their shrewish features, jealousy and fierceness. These different perspectives from the female writer suggest her tacit challenge to and subversion of patriarchal literary and social norms and stereotypes of women in mainstream male-authored fiction during the Ming and Qing.

Lovely Virtuous Women

Virtuous women are a classic type of women in mainstream male-authored fiction. A virtuous woman is one who behaves in accord with orthodox neo-Confucian rituals and propriety, or *li*, including loyalty, chastity, filial piety, and generosity. She is usually loyal to the country as well as to her husband and his family, able to manage the household, and never jealous of his concubines. She

devotes herself to chastity, but simultaneously encourages her husband to take more concubines to continue the family line. To be a virtuous woman, she has to be not only a good wife but also a good mother who teaches all the orthodox Confucian values to her sons and daughters. In Ming–Qing fiction, these virtuous women are always highly praised and rewarded with a good ending, namely, longevity, fertility, and family prosperity.

Virtuous women are everywhere in Ming–Qing fiction. The best example is Lady Shui 水夫人, the mother of protagonist Wen Suchen 文素臣, in Xia Jingqu's *Yesou puyan* 野叟曝言 (A Country Codger's Words of Exposure). She is a "Confucian matriarch" 聖母, "the symbolic center of the novel's Confucian world" who consistently nurtures the "Confucian superman" Suchen with orthodox Confucian guidance.[6] The most well-known example from fiction for women during the mid-Qing is probably the talented and virtuous Xue Baochai 薛寶釵 in *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢 (Dream of the Red Chamber), who has a good son to reinvigorate the Jia family.[7] An example contemporary to *Feng shuangfei* is the Thirteenth Sister 十三妹 in Wen Kang's *Ernü yingxiong zhuan* 兒女英雄傳 (The Legend of Filial Heroes), who encourages her husband to study for the civil service examination and become an official, while managing the household properties better than they had been managed before she joined the family. She is rewarded with a son, a good family reputation, and a prosperous family. Another good example, as Keith McMahon suggests, is the "overly virtuous wife," Yan Mengqing 燕夢卿, in *Lin Lan Xiang* 林蘭香 (The Six Wives of the Wastrel Geng), endlessly admonishing her wastrel husband and even saving his life when he falls sick with a broth made from part of her finger.[8] She alone of the six wives has a son to continue the Geng family line—though she herself dies at an early age. From a male author's perspective, virtuous women deserve a good (or at least honorable) ending like those experienced by these female characters.[9] Zhang Feixiang fits this general category of virtuous women: married to the ultimate orthodox man, her perfect match, she is considered the *tanci*'s ultimate virtuous wife by the reader. She ably manages the household, shows no jealousy toward Guo's concubines, and gives birth to a son to continue the Guo family line.

However, Feixiang is not just another virtuous wife: she represents an ideal specific to female-authored fiction. Though she assumes the role of a virtuous wife, Feixiang also displays literary talent and *qing* 情, or passion—characteristics markedly absent (neither mentioned nor implied) in the stereotypical virtuous wife of male-authored fiction.[10] Further, as I'll demonstrate, she even embodies an androgynous ideal in both domestic and public scenes, unapologetically conducting herself with "masculinity" in a patriarchal Confucian society in which only men seem entitled to subjectivity and autonomy. Establishing such

an ideal reveals the author's vision and celebration of a virtuous wife's potential agency and power.

Unlike most virtuous women in male-authored fiction, Feixiang is never morally severe, instead displaying characteristics of an elegant woman in a companionate marriage: *qing* and *chi* 癡 (obsession) and literary talent. Although companionship between men and women in marriage was nothing new in late nineteenth-century fiction, there is a subtle difference in Feixiang's case.[11] Companionate marriage in male-authored fiction usually follows one of three patterns: first, the wife is a perfect companion in terms of *qing* and literary talent, but because of her obsession with *qing*, she fails to follow *li* and become a virtuous wife and daughter-in-law, as in the case of Yun in *Fusheng liuji* 浮生六記 (Six Records of a Floating Life). Second, she is merely a concubine who doesn't need to care about household management and thus has plenty of time and freedom to devote to intellectual activities and sharing in her husband's interests, as we see with Wen Suchen's concubines in *Yesou puyan*. The third pattern shows a talented and emotional companion before marriage—where the story ends and she becomes one of the standard virtuous wives mentioned above, as in *Mudan ting* 牡丹亭 (Peony Pavilion) and most scholar-beauty novels.

Feixiang fits none of these patterns. First, she's a consistent adherent of *qing*. She first meets Murong Zhu when traveling, dressed as a man for safety, back to her hometown. They're forced to marry by Zhu's father for their improper private meeting, and she's taken back to Three Immortals Island where the Murong family rules. Cross-dressing is a common theme in many female-authored *tanci*.[12] Such *tanci* can be seen as a form of female fantasy celebrating women's abilities and ambitions, but usually the protagonists accomplish only political and heroic achievements by passing as men in these fantasies.[13] Although cross-dressing is not as central to the plot of *Feng shuangfei* as it is for other *tanci*, it is still a notable feature and sets up the subplot in which the two women consummate their fake marriage and develop their passion and desire for each other. Feixiang's feelings for Murong Zhu are consistently described in terms of *qing* and *chi*, not only by the narrator, but by all the speaking subjects around her.[14]

However, as a typical virtuous wife, her relationship with Lingyun can only be described in terms of *li*, propriety. Before her marriage, unlike a girl longing for a romantic heterosexual relationship (the most extreme and popular example of which is Du Liniang), Feixiang has adapted herself to the Confucian ideal, already seeing through the nature of polygamy, she fully understands her proper position in a polygamous family. When He Danyan 何淡煙, her adopted sister, suggests that the fake marriage between Feixiang and Murong Zhu only

benefits Lingyun, bringing him a beautiful concubine, Feixiang responds,"When one gets rich and noble, it is very common to have several concubines. Even if there weren't such a person [Murong Zhu], I can't guarantee that he [Lingyun] wouldn't take concubines in his lifetime. . . . I am confident that I am not stingy and will definitely not be jealous and fight in the inner chambers" 凡人得了富貴，三妻四妾總是常情；我就沒有這人，也難保他終身不取姬妾.....自信居心非量窄，決不到爭憐妒寵鬧閨房.[15]

Obviously, Feixiang is very clear about what awaits her in marriage and how to be a good first wife—she must be generous. Because of her awareness of marriage as part of proper Confucian rites, she does not shy away from talking about it. While on Three Immortals Island with Murong Zhu, she misses home and is eager to go back to China. Zhu thinks that Feixiang wants to return because she desires marriage with a man, and Feixiang replies with womanly virtue,"My man is arranged by my parents" 我的男子是父母婚配的.[16] Influenced by Confucian ideology, Feixiang seems to consider her marriage an expression of ritual, and, as expected, after marriage she behaves as Confucian teachings require: "Between the couple, they treat each other as guest and friend" 夫婦之間，如賓如友.[17] We see none of the same passionate *qing* between Feixiang and Lingyun that she shared with Zhu.

As a first wife (rather than a concubine), Feixiang is extraordinary in terms of keeping up her household duties and her literary talents, another important feature of *qing*. Whenever anything happens in the inner chambers of the Guo family, people go to Feixiang for resolution, and she usually solves the problem with wisdom and fairness. However, daily chores do not exhaust her literary merits. Lingyun appreciates her literary talent and values it above that of his concubines. Even comparing her literary talent with that of Daya, the most famous female scholar in the *tanci*, Lingyun says,"To talk about your true nature, your poetry is astute and your style is romantic. Your writing style is elegant and naturally beautiful, and is even better than hers" 若論夫人真本色，詩詞警敏調風流。筆鋒秀麗天然俊，尚比他身勝一籌.[18] This immediately follows the narrator's comment that "they treat each other as guest and friend" and a bedroom scene in which the couple discusses literary arts, including poetry, painting, and calligraphy. Grateful that Feixiang possesses such refined taste, Lingyun treats her as a friend and intellectual equal when discussing the arts. The understanding and recognition is mutual: when Feixiang identifies his painting of Daya through his brush style, Lingyun praises her ability to "understand others" 知人 and "have great discernment" 巨識.[19] When Lingyun inscribes poems on the paintings of his four wives, only Feixiang judges them "more delicate and adroit than others" 工敏勝於人.[20]

However, it's worth noting that Feixiang and Lingyun come to appreciate each other's literary talents and share interests in intellectual activities only after

marriage. With the closeness of their families, they probably knew of each other's talents before marriage—after all, even the emperor had heard of Feixiang's talent, and Lingyun was known as a capable prince and official.[21] But, as exemplars of Confucian virtues, they never exchanged literary works before marriage (unlike typical couples in scholar-beauty romances), though Lingyun had read Feixiang's poems to Murong Zhu. Their mutual appreciation and understanding of each other's literary and intellectual gifts really occurs after their official marriage and betrays little hint of romantic attachment.

Although Feixiang is depicted as the perfect intellectual equal and companion to Lingyun, the author seems to feel she's still insufficiently distinguished from the virtuous women in male-authored fiction. Feixiang is more unusual in the way that she gets portrayed as an androgynous and unconventional wife, with all the positive qualities of a male scholar. Recalling Carolyn G. Heilbrun's definition of *androgyny*, "a condition under which the characteristics of the sexes, and the human impulses expressed by men and women, are not rigidly assigned,"[22] we can read Feixiang as androgynous not only in her appearance and style but also in terms of her passions and commitments.

The model of androgynous woman that Cheng Huiying adopts is also different from those found in male-authored literature in which appealing women with positive masculine traits before marriage still end up in a traditional woman's role once married, abandoning unconventional masculine characteristics. We see this in fiction such as Shi Xiangyun 史湘雲 in *Honglou meng* and the Thirteenth Sister in *Ernü yingxiong zhuan*. On the other hand, in late Ming and early Qing, courtesans were often considered androgynous, as they had both masculine literary talents and feminine charms and also occupied a gender-ambivalent physical space, hence culturally outside the Confucian system.[23] Portraying a virtuous first wife with androgynous characteristics as the ideal and adopting the model of courtesans who are usually considered ritually problematic, Cheng Huiying actually manages to create the androgyny that Heilbrun suggests, "a spectrum upon which human beings choose their places without regard to propriety or custom."[24]

Feixiang is able to pass perfectly in both male and female clothing. Since clothing indicated gender in late imperial China, her mobility in both types indicates her gender fluidity. When Zhang Cai 張彩 sees her at twelve or thirteen, he describes her youthful impression as an "appearance like flower and moon" 花容月貌.[25] When she first dresses as a man, her uncle sees how she has "eradicated the gentle and charming appearance of a woman and has the elegant demeanor of a scholar" 絕少閨人容婉媚，儼然文士態清揚.[26] In either type of clothing, Feixiang's appearance seems to embody the ideals of an elite gender, a cultured man or woman.

More interestingly, Feixiang consistently eliminates the potential negative qualities of the assumed gender while retaining some positive qualities of the opposite gender. When Feixiang and He Danyan are planning to dress as men, Feixiang's uncle is against it because he worries that Feixiang may be too feminine and give herself away. However, Danyan comments on the flexible nature of Feixiang's appearance: "Although my elder sister is born with delicate beauty, she is not all that lithe and meek, and her personality is not pliable. Even if she is dressed as a scholar, it is still appropriate to be handsome and elegant" 姊姊雖生秀美姿，並不是一味輕盈柔媚態，性情又不軟皮皮。只消扮作文人樣，俊雅清疏也合宜.[27]

Similarly, when she dresses in men's clothes, the language used to describe her attractiveness is also gender ambiguous. So, when Murong Zhu, a non-Chinese barbarian princess, sees Feixiang dressed as a scholar, Zhu describes her as follows: "His spirit is like autumn water, his bones are like ice and jade, his scent is like that of irises and orchids, and his skin is like snow and frost. His appearance is radiantly beautiful like a pretty woman, and his spirit is pure and integral like immortals. . . . Only he can be considered a beautiful and elegant Chinese man" 秋水精神冰玉骨，芝蘭氣味雪霜膚。貌如好女浮光絕，韻比神仙藻節無.....才算個中華男子美爾都.[28] The descriptors used to portray his or her spirit, bones, scent, and skin can be applied to both men and women. While in this case Zhu is describing Feixiang as a handsome man, Lingyun uses the same words to describe his bride, Feixiang, at their wedding: "Her beauty is so extraordinary that it can be taken as food. Her skin is like ice, her bones are like jade, and her spirit is like water" 秀色可餐真絕世，冰肌玉骨水為神.[29] It seems that one becomes a beauty on possession of these qualities, and such beauty transcends the limits of embodied gender norms. Zhu further compares the cross-dressed Feixiang to a beautiful woman and believes only a man like this can be considered a handsome man. Although it's a cliché that a Han Chinese writer portrays a Chinese "man" as superior to "barbarian" men from a "barbarian" princess's perspective in order to establish China's cultural superiority, it's worth noting that Zhu does not consider all Chinese men handsome, nor is she attracted to them. These men include the cross-dressed He Danyan traveling with Feixiang and the beautiful boy Lingyun sends to seduce Zhu in order to recover Feixiang (sent because Lingyun believes Zhu will be attracted to any handsome man from China). Feixiang's beauty is apparently unique. When talking about it, the narrative blurs the boundary between genders and identifies her with a transcendent androgynous beauty.

Feixiang's dramatic cross-dressing from man to woman suggests that her androgynous beauty stems from personal traits. Witnessed by the women in the Zhang household, Feixiang's cross-dressing evokes praise and wonder about her

gender plasticity: "She is truly a goddess descending to the capital! She was as dashing as Song Yu before, and now she is as gorgeous as Wang Qiang. She doesn't show any fragility or tenderness as a man, nor does she display any stupidity or vulgarity as a woman. She behaves as she wishes with no pretense, so she is naturally suitable as either a man or a woman" 真是神仙降帝鄉！昔也風流如宋玉，而今豔麗比王嬙。為男不見嬌柔態，為女仍無蠢俗腔。任意行為無假借，自然的為男為女總相當.[30] In this passage describing people's appreciation, the author demonstrates that Feixiang's beauty fits both male and female standards. Observers compare her to Song Yu and Wang Qiang, leading examples of male and female beauty in Chinese culture. In either role, she displays no negative qualities of either gender. The narrator concludes that the reason Feixiang has this gender fluidity is her authenticity, or *ziran* 自然 (naturalness). In the literature of the Ming and Qing, *zhen* 真 (authenticity), contrary to *jia* 假 or *jiajie* 假借 (falseness) in the quote above, was considered an ideal quality usually concentrated in women "in contrast to the decadence of the official center."[31] Authenticity as the reason for Feixiang's gender mobility suggests that she naturally carries the qualities of conventionally gendered men and women.

Authenticity is merely one aspect of Feixiang's character. For the most part, she identifies herself as a scholar, a male social identity, and seems to possess all the intellectual talents of a scholar. Although not strictly reserved to males (the presence of talented women during the Ming and Qing was well known), such talents help to blur the boundaries between genders and later build the image of Feixiang as an unconventional scholar, usually a male role. Feixiang is also skilled at painting—even the emperor believes she's inherited her father's talent and bestows honor on her painting, saying, "Excellent! The refined talents really come from Qiantang" 好！果然秀氣出錢塘.[32] Her calligraphy too is praised: Liu Jin, the evil eunuch who is out of the literary circle, says her calligraphy "soars like dragons and snakes" 龍蛇飛舞.[33] And Lingyun comments that her "calligraphy is elegant and naturally beautiful" 筆鋒秀麗天然俊.[34] Above all, of course, Feixiang is good at composing poetry. On her own painting for the emperor, she "wrote three seven-syllable quatrains within the time it takes to drink a cup of tea" 不上一盞茶時間，早寫了三首七言絕句.[35] Such quickness is a clear indication of her poetic talent. She writes four poems in the *ji tangju* 集唐句 (collected verses from Tang poetry) form to express how she misses Zhu when they're separated by war.[36] In addition to her talent in poetry composition, Feixiang's mastery of this special form displays her knowledge and wide reading. Finally, she's adept not only with regulated verse but also with *ci* lyrics—when on the Three Immortals Island, she writes one for Zhu.[37]

Although other talented women during the Ming and Qing (Zhen Daya is a perfect example) may have all these intellectual skills, Feixiang distinguishes

herself by assuming a masculine *wen* persona.[38] In her relationship with Zhu, Feixiang clearly identifies herself as a male scholar. Fitting herself into the scholar-beauty romance, she more than once considers her marriage with Zhu a match of talent with beauty, claiming, "We are worthy of being called the match between talent and appearance" 才貌相當原不愧 and "[We are] perfect in talent and appearance" 才貌兩兼全.[39] As mentioned above, Feixiang composes poetry for Zhu, typical of the scholar-beauty romance genre. Furthermore, the scholar role Feixiang plays in her marriage to Murong Zhu includes not only the romance and talent, but she also inherits "the [unconventional] demeanor of the Jin" 晉人風致.[40] When recalling her life as a man, she concludes, "I am pretty sure that I have been as unconventional as I wished over the past five years" 我自信這五年以來任情放蕩.[41] All the characteristics with which Feixiang identifies when cross-dressing typically belong to the model of the *caizi* 才子 (talented scholar).

Another discovery is made under the guise of the masculine scholar—Feixiang's aptitude for governance. Acting as son-in-law to the king of the Three Immortals Island, Feixiang assumes the ruler's responsibility for the island kingdom, so that Murong Tao, the king, can enjoy retirement:

> (Enjoying the peace, the fake Prince promulgates many ritual and legal policies. In three years, she has transformed the cultures and conventions of the Three Immortals Island to be exactly the same as those in China. (People) not only obey the law, but also are able to open the door at night. Even China cannot achieve this.) When she has leisure time from other books, she scrutinizes the military strategies in *Sunzi* and *Wuzi*. She is so smart that she can naturally understand these books, so she has mastered tactics and battle strategies. Her time on the island has benefited the soldiers and the myriad common people. There is no war, the crops ripen every year, and the good fortune is immense.
>
> 假駙馬坐享平安，就定出許多禮樂刑政。三年以來，竟把一座三仙島上的風俗變做中華一樣，非但奉公守法，兼可夜不閉門，這又是中國所不能及了。]閒時沒有他書看，韜略孫、吳細細查。驚敏自然能會意，也知兵法陣圖排。只因仙子居蓬島，惠及軍民數萬家。烽火無驚年歲熟，三生有幸福無涯。[42]

In the island kingdom, Feixiang assumes the role of an ideal Confucian official governing his prefecture or a sage king ruling his country. According to the Confucian ideal, she first cultivates the people through rituals 禮樂 (literally, rites and music) and then regulates them by laws. Her efforts bring about considerable achievements that surpass China's—people do not need to close their door at night when they are sleeping—the ideal society as depicted in *The Book of Rites*.[43] Being cultivated is not enough for a country, since, of course, it

needs to defend itself. Therefore, Feixiang studies the works of famous military strategists, Sun Wu 孫武 (544–496 BCE) and Wu Qi 吳起 (440–381 BCE), and trains the kingdom's army. Her success as ruler is shown through the prosperity of the island, a state marked by abundant food and peace. Following Confucian teachings, Feixiang accomplishes a male scholar's goal, the canonical injunction laid out in the *Daxue* 大學 (Great Learning) to "cultivate one's self, order one's family, rule the state, and harmonize the country" 修身，齊家，治國，平天下.[44]

With her self-identification as a scholar, even after resuming woman's dress, Feixiang continues to display the characteristics of a *caizi*, unrestrained by rigid conventions and opinions, while simultaneously appearing completely feminine, a classic virtuous wife. As Heilbrun remarks, "Androgyny seeks to liberate the individual from the confines of the appropriate."[45] In this sense, Feixiang remains androgynous within her orthodox marriage, a point underscored by the adjectives the narrative uses to describe her (and more typical for the *caizi* scholar): "talented in letters and unconventional in lifestyle" 風流, "literarily excellent" 風騷, "elegant and refined" 風雅, "bold and unconstrained" 跌宕, "open and upright" 磊落, and "free and easy" 脫灑.[46]

As noted above, *caizi* are famous for their disregard of convention and opinions. Still maintaining an authentic spirit after marriage, Feixiang often follows her heart, not making pretenses of virtues or generosity. Lingyun's marriages with Daya and Zhu take place on the same day, so the question of whom Lingyun will sleep with becomes a problem of protocol. Zhu, who considers Daya a rival, attempts to persuade Lingyun, who has already stayed in her bedroom, to stay in Daya's room in an effort to display her own generosity and detachment from her husband. Daya, as the icon of the talented and virtuous woman awarded by the emperor, tries to show her modesty as well, of course, by not allowing Lingyun to enter her bedroom. The delicate issue between the two wives naturally becomes Feixiang's decision, since she is the head of the inner chambers. Feixiang harshly criticizes both women's hypocrisy and stubbornness. While Zhu has nothing to say in response, Daya challenges Feixiang by asking what she would do if Lingyun were to sleep in her bedroom. Unexpectedly to both Daya and Zhu, Feixiang immediately responds with laughter, "What is the difficulty in this? If Lingyun does not come to me, there is nothing I can do; if he does come, you keep an eye on me, I absolutely won't push him away" 這有何難? 淩雲不到此間便罷，若到這裡，看我決不推他.[47] To Feixiang, there is no need to pretend to be virtuous or generous—she grasps her situation in a polygamous household and rises above pretense. Again, her directness and authentic nature set her apart.

Next to Zhu's peevish temperament and Daya's rigidness, Feixiang's androgyny is appreciated by Lingyun in terms of her flexibility: "[She is] open,

unconventional and poised, unconstrained by trivial matters but clear about great morality. She is really a dignified *man* among women" 磊落風流更大方。小節無拘明大義，女中男子正堂堂.[48] It is interesting that Lingyun comments on Feixiang as a "dignified *man*" because she does not shy away from sex or talking about sex. In late imperial fiction, whether male-authored novels or female-authored *tanci*, no virtuous woman ever talks about anything related to sex. When women do talk about sex, their interest in it is implied, and they're considered lascivious. For virtuous women, sex is only a tool to continue the family line and is taboo in daily conversation. So the moral standards in this *tanci* are very different from those in other fiction, especially male-authored *xiaoshuo* novels of the Ming and Qing. Since sex is part of domestic life, to avoid talking about it would be hypocritical; instead, honestly talking about sex helps to solve problems and is thus considered "dignified." In this way, Feixiang's attitudes are looked upon as not only masculine but also honorable.

Her androgynous subjectivity is more prominent when Murong Zhu is involved. After Feixiang's marriage to Lingyun, Zhu, as Feixiang's "wife" and sworn sister, follows Feixiang into the Guo household, but she does not want to marry Lingyun. Feixiang, after her marriage to Lingyun, doesn't give up the idea of bringing Zhu into the household, so she creates chances for Zhu and Lingyun to be together and "abandons all the standards in women's chambers, learns to be a go-between" 脫盡閨房套，學做牽頭撮合仙.[49] A *qiantou* 牽頭 (go-between) is usually considered a negative figure who connects men and women in illicit relationships, but Feixiang totally disregards the common contempt toward *sangu liupo* 三姑六婆 (women holding nine professions), who are heavily condemned in *Jin Ping Mei* and other late imperial literature, and willingly plays that role.[50] This break from propriety is unthinkable to other gentry women, such as Daya, but Feixiang does not feel embarrassment, for the sake of her beloved Zhu. When her plan seems to fail, owing to misunderstandings between Zhu and Lingyun, Lingyun suggests to Yishao that he marry Zhu. Feixiang argues with him, "If you don't have malevolent intentions, then you don't need to have any contact with her from now on. Let her follow me for her whole life just as we swore to live together on the island" 君若自無留惡意，從今不必再相關。任他一世相隨我，誓若同居在海山.[51] Concerning the relationship between herself and Zhu, Feixiang does not dwell on the ultimate propriety of Zhu as a woman getting married. Still taking a man's part, Feixiang seems to consider Zhu her wife, although she herself has already become Lingyun's wife. When Lingyun, invoking rituals, persists in his suggestion that Zhu should get married, Feixiang reluctantly tells Zhu about it. Interestingly, the reason Lingyun gives Feixiang for why she should talk to Zhu is "she is your wife" 她是你的令正.[52] From this, we see how Lingyun recognizes and accepts Feixiang's masculine role in her relationship to Zhu.

Alhough Feixiang does not have special feelings for other women, she sincerely cares about and fights for their actual benefit. Her androgynous iconoclasm even gives Lingyun, the ultimate orthodox man, a lesson. Guo Lingyun takes Zhang Liyu as his concubine but does not consummate their marriage in order to wait for his formal marriage with the first wife. Three days after their marriage, Feixiang suggests that Lingyun should sleep with Liyu and consummate their marriage, but Lingyun is still hesitant. They have a debate:

> The virtuous Prince, Lingyun, cannot help laughing, "You are generous for sure. However, I am afraid it is unreasonable, since our marriage has only been three days. It is better to hide it from the people. Please let me follow your order after a full month. This girl is sedate and not evil. Moreover, she gets along with you. I expect that she will not complain or sigh." The Lady responded with a severe countenance, "Since she is sedate and without complaints, you shouldn't let her down more. How can you tolerate it that she spends her best days in solitude? Who can intervene in the affairs in our bedroom, and why should you keep in mind the customary taboos?!"
> 哑然一笑賢王子: "海量寬宏信不差。但恐怕才過三朝無此理，還宜略把世人遮。且容月滿方從命。此女端莊性不邪。況與夫人多契合，料無怨恨與嗟呀。"夫人正色回言道: "彼既端莊不怨嗟，君更不宜相負彼，忍叫寂寞度年華？閨房之事誰來管，俗忌何須掛齒牙！[53]

This conversation takes place on the fourth day after Lingyun and Feixiang's wedding. In late imperial China, wedding celebrations lasted three days, so this could be considered the first day after the wedding. Moreover, the bride and groom were still considered newlyweds for the first month. Thinking about taking a concubine during his "honeymoon," Lingyun is worried about his and Liyu's reputations because they could be perceived as lascivious. Feixiang points out Lingyun's hypocrisy and tells him that the real benefit to Liyu is much more important than other people's conventional views. Her opinion on this problem indicates not only her generosity as a virtuous wife but her real and practical concern about other women's lives and happiness.

Desirable Shrews

The shrew is another stereotype that mainstream male authors created during the Ming and Qing. As McMahon argues, shrews are known as *pofu* 潑婦, literally translated as "scattering women," in which *po* carries the symbolic meaning of flooding and pollution. They uncontrollably spill their temper so that their men lose face and sometimes are even frightened. Such women are also called *hanfu* 悍婦 (fierce women) or *yinfu* 淫婦 (lascivious women), in which *yin* 淫 (lust) also has symbolic meanings of flooding and pollution. The spectrum

of shrews also includes *dufu* 妒婦 (jealous women),[54] and jealous wives are usually both irritable and lascivious. They compete with other women for men's sexual attention and favors.[55]

Shrews and jealous wives are abundant in male-authored fiction—these popular images of women fully display the destructive power of the sex and the failure of men's self-cultivation. Pan Jinlian 潘金蓮 in *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 (Plum in the Golden Vase) is a typical shrew and epitomizes the defining characteristics of shrews, *pofu*, *hanfu*, *yinfu*, and *dufu*. She is so jealous that she becomes bad tempered and never fails to scold or curse her peers, Ximen Qing's 西門慶 other wives and sexual partners; at the same time, she is the lewdest woman in the novel, is sexually insatiable, and employs every trick imaginable to obtain sexual gratification. Xue Sujie 薛素姐 in Xizhou Sheng's *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻緣傳 (Marriage Bonds to Awaken the World) is another example of an uncontrollable shrew with destructive energy, judged by neo-Confucian values.[56] The shrew most female writers and readers best recognize is probably Wang Xifeng 王熙鳳 from *Honglou meng*. Capable as she is, Xifeng is also depicted as jealous, ill tempered, and manipulative, and she emerges as a major destructive force on the Jia family.

There are two broad types of solutions for the shrew problem in male-authored fiction. The first one involves containment of the woman through harsh condemnation and punishment, namely infertility or death. Pan Jinlian is infertile in every relationship and ends up being killed by the hero, Wu Song 武松. Xue Sujie never gives birth to a son and dies from disease. Although we are uncertain about the author's real plan for Wang Xifeng's ending, the poem and song about her in chapter 5 suggest her miserable fate and death, and in the popular 120-chapter version she actually does die from illness. Through the desolate deaths of these powerful women and the reconstruction of the orthodox social order, we can see the fear in the male authors.

The second type of solution to the problem of shrewishness is male triumph over the threat of a powerful woman. In this type, according to McMahon, male-authored fictions end with three general solutions: the man realizes a predestined fate between himself and his wife, accepts his fate, and tries to cultivate himself to avoid the same fate in his future lives (as in *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*); the man cures the jealousy of his wife by legendary medicine or food (as in *Liaodu geng* 療妒羹 [The Jealousy-Curing Soup]); and the man transcends the mundane desire for sex, as in "Papo jing" 怕婆經 (Sutra of Wife-Fearing), appended at the end of *Cu hulu* 醋葫蘆 (Gourd of Vinegar).[57] Yenna Wu points out that, in addition to supernatural powers and male transcendence, a shrew or virago may be reformed by human efforts, including those of the husband's friends, relatives, and female companions, and by changes in time and

circumstances—as in *Wanshi zu* 萬事足 (Happiness Complete) and "Mrs. Duan" in *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋志異 (Liaozhai's Tales of the Strange).[58]

However, from the stories involving shrews in *Feng shuangfei*, we see a different standard and value accorded these women. There are two representative shrews in this *tanci*: Mu Qionghua is a shrewish first wife who is married to a *fengliu* 風流 (romantic and libertine) husband, and Murong Zhu is a shrewish concubine married to an orthodox man. Although the personal traits of their husbands are completely different, the two wives exhibit some identical characteristics of shrews. It is worth noting the absence of major *yinfu* characters in female-authored *tanci*, generally more conservative in depicting female sexuality. Only very minor female characters might be described as *yinfu*: for example, Wo Lianggui 沃良規 in *Bi sheng hua* 筆生花 (Flowers Growing from Writing Brushes). Portrayed only negatively, they never occupy a considerable position in *tanci*, suggesting female and male writers agree that lewdness in women is the ultimate negative characteristic. Therefore, *du* (jealousy) and *han* (fierceness) become the major qualities identifying the shrews in this *tanci*. By developing her shrewish characters as positive figures, the author celebrates women's power in their domestic lives and appreciates them as individuals, rather than criticizing them through stereotypes.[59]

The first shrew is Qionghua, Zhang Yishao's first wife. She and Yishao seem to be the stereotypical jealous wife and henpecked husband, although this reputation is intentionally spread by Yishao.[60] He tells Qionghua, "People outside say that you are jealous and I am afraid of my wife" 外邊人說你妒忌，說我怕妻. This is confirmed by Lingyun, the model orthodox male, who considers her "fierce and jealous" 凶妒, and Mu Mengxiong 沐夢熊, Qionghua's elder brother, who calls her "arrogant and jealous" 驕妒.[61] Yishao's mother also believes that Qionghua is a "jealous wife" 妒妻.[62] Finally, her own father also calls her "jealous" 妒忌 when talking to his wife about their daughter.[63]

As a first wife, she is considered jealous because of her opposition to other women having relationships with her husband. She's never generous or virtuous enough to allow him to take any woman he likes as a concubine without her resistance. Qionghua is like any other "shrew" in the works of male writers, constantly watching her husband and preventing him from flirting with other women. It is very difficult to pacify Qionghua when she discovers that Yishao has already had sexual relationships despite her vigilance. When she learns that Yishao has secretly married Xiang'er and that they even have a son, she is so angry that no one, not even her parents-in-law, can persuade her to take them into the household until her father, General Mu, vents her anger for her by scolding and punishing Yishao.

Not only is she jealous, she's also a fierce shrew—fierce to the point of fighting with her social superiors when she believes them to be in the wrong.

Toward the end of the work, when Yishao's secret marriage with Bao Xiang'er is revealed, Qionghua's fury reaches a climax. Before meeting Yishao, she first scolds his teacher, He Shiwei 何世威, who had helped him hide Xiang'er, "Such a great teacher! . . . His fame has already become infamy" 如此名公好教師.....佳名已變臭名遺.[64] Then she immediately learns that it is her brother who had provided the garden for Yishao to hide Xiang'er, so she berates her elder brother, "You are an official and read books, but you don't know ritual and reputation at all. . . . I won't let you off tomorrow, or even the day after tomorrow" 虧你為官也讀書。禮義聲名全不曉.....莫說吵到明朝，後日也不放你.[65] As a shrew, she does not leave room for her social superiors to save face, instead denouncing them directly in front of their families until they cannot argue.

As a typical shrew, Qionghua does not even listen to her parents-in-law when she's furious. Lack of filial piety is routinely one of the harshest charges against shrews, as in the case of Xue Sujie in *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*. Although Qionghua does not go as far as Sujie, who abuses her parents-in-law, her disobedience can also be considered unfilial. Because of Yishao's misdeeds, Qionghua returns to her natal family, trying to renounce the Zhang household. Yishao's parents send a servant to take her back, but she tells the servant, "The old master and mistress are kind people. They must be cheated by his clever words . . . but I won't be taken in" 老爺、太太都是慈善之人，必定被他一番巧話，騙得沒了主意.....我倒不去上他們的圈套.[66] Treating their words as traps, Qionghua shows little respect to her parents-in-law. Furthermore, she has the servant repeat to her parents-in-law that she will not go back home unless Yishao and Xiang'er explain the whole story and apologize. A filial daughter-in-law would never ignore her parents-in-law's wishes or leave them home alone, staying with her natal family because, however much her husband has wronged her, she knows that serving the in-laws is part of her essential role. In response to her strong attitude, her father-in-law can only observe her as a "valiant and masculine woman" 驍雄婦 and also "brutal and unreasonable" 強橫.[67]

Parallel to Qionghua, Murong Zhu is an excellent example of a shrew as concubine. Murong Zhu's jealousy is directed at Zhen Daya, another concubine of Lingyun, as her primary rival. When she discovers that Lingyun keeps a painting of Daya, she takes it away as evidence of their secret relationship.[68] When Lingyun hears about this, he thinks, "[Her] jealousy must be growing wild" 必然妒意又橫生.[69] And as he expects, Zhu then angrily queries him about the painting, leading him to reflect, "It is troubling that the woman's jealousy is so deep" 可怪裙釵妒意深.[70] She herself is very aware of her jealousy but at the same time wants to keep her pride. Therefore, she rejects Feixiang's suggestion to marry Lingyun: "I lack generosity and can't pretend to be mute or deaf" 我身既少寬宏量，作啞裝聾總不能.[71]

Zhu's shrewishness is displayed more in fierceness than jealousy. Readers quickly recognize Qionghua as a jealous wife right after marriage, while Zhu is already recognized by others as a *pofu* even before marrying.[72] Her identity as a *man gongzhu* 蠻公主 (barbarian princess) only reinforces the sense that she neither knows nor cares much about the rituals in the Middle Kingdom. *Man* also correlates to "brutal," which echoes her fierceness.

Her personality is described as arrogant, irritable, and violent. The narrator never begrudges strong words to portray Zhu's peevish responses, such as *qi* 氣 (angry), *nao* 惱 (angry), *he* 喝 (to shout loudly), *ma* 罵 (to scold), and *cui* 啐 (to spit).[73] Moreover, Zhu is one of the two best female warriors in the novel and is cruel to her enemies and inferiors. Throughout the whole *tanci*, she is never reluctant to fight with men, nor is she afraid. When fighting with Liu Xiangui 劉仙桂, Liu Jin's adopted son, and his servants,"the Princess killed insanely" 公主殺出了性 and "crazily" 殺昏了.[74] It indicates that Zhu sometimes cannot even control her own ferocious nature when she fights.

As a barbarian princess without the restraint of Confucian values, Zhu lacks compassion not only toward her enemies and inferiors but also toward those, even ritual superiors, who have done wrong. When talking about Qionghua's beating of her maids after their flirtation with Yishao, Zhu comments to Feixiang and Danyan:

> "This kind of person [the maid] should not only be scolded but also beaten. Xiaoya is too gentle, and Lady Mu only beats the maids when angry. It suggests that she is not very capable."
>
> Danyan said,"True! If it were you, a fierce goddess, you would catch your husband and punish him by having him kneel on the ground and beat him until his tendons broke."
>
> The Princess replied, "Exactly! Otherwise, what is the point of showing your temper?"
>
> "這等人非惟該罵，而且該打。小雅溫柔無足道，還加這位沐夫人，氣來隻把丫鬟打，可見原非太有能。" 淡煙姑娘稱 "是也!若然像你這凶神，必須揪住親夫主，罰跪塵埃打斷筋。" 公主回言 "須如此！不然何用氣空爭。"[75]

With a husband like Yishao, Zhu insists that the wife should punish the husband rather than the maids for his extramarital relationships. She takes it for granted that a wife is entitled to anger at her husband's disloyalty and firmly claims a wife's right to punish a libertine husband. As a barbarian princess, Zhu ignores the rules that a virtuous wife should be demure and always listen to her husband and encourage him to take concubines. What's more, her claim to the right to punish her husband seems unthinkable even to the Chinese He Danyan, the

other great female warrior, with whom she shares other qualities—bravery, cruelty, and willingness to kill.

Qionghua and Zhu fit the image of a shrew in every way, yet they aren't negative characters in *Feng shuangfei*. First, unlike the universal criticism of shrews in the works of male writers, the narrator defends and explains women's shrewishness from the perspective of Yishao's father, Zhang Jing 張景: "It doesn't matter. There is no girl in the world who is jealous if she and her husband are not close. The jealousy only comes from their inseparable love" 張公又道"無妨礙，大抵裙釵在世間，夫婦悄疏原不妒，妒心只為愛纏綿.[76] In this way, jealousy is positively rooted in *qing*, or passions. Since the narrator treats the value of *qing* between men and women in a positive light throughout the *tanci*, jealousy is understandable and forgivable where it arises from *qing*.

Moreover, the narrative indicates that what causes jealousy is not women's lack of generosity or virtue but men's lack of virtue and ability to cultivate themselves 修身 and regulate their family 齊家. When Yishao's mother, Lady Qian 錢夫人, learns of his illicit relationship with Bao Xiang'er and Qionghua's anger, she also (as another shrewish woman) criticizes her son for creating problems in the family:[77] "Now you have a beautiful wife and a pretty concubine, enjoying a golden youth. Why are you so greedy, loving another girl out of the household? Now your secret relationship is revealed, and it becomes a widespread joke. You cannot hold up your principles as a husband. No wonder you have a jealous wife in the bedroom" 現有妻嬌並妾美，風光不負少年時。為何貪欲猶無厭？路柳牆花戀別枝。以至於今私事破，一場笑柄遍傳遺。自家不把夫綱振，難怪閨房有妒妻.[78] This logic is perfectly in line with orthodox Confucian values set out in the *Daxue*: men are to rectify their mind in order to cultivate themselves and properly regulate their families.[79] A very common theme in Chinese fiction maintains that if a man cannot keep his house in order, he will bring about "a corresponding disequilibrium [*luan* 亂] at every other level of the system."[80] Interestingly, in this *tanci*, it's a woman who uses this logic to legitimize another woman's shrewishness. The narrative in effect turns the tables on male-authored fiction, as it moves from the typical condemnation of shrewish women to a reasoned censure of libertine men.

In this sense, jealousy appears to have a certain positive power to regulate the family—especially, of course, when found in a shrewish first wife. Qionghua is established as a positive exemplar of a woman able to discipline her libertine husband: she never rejects the reputation of "jealous wife" and seems even to accept it as a way to keep the family in order. She doesn't allow Yishao to marry Xiang'er, but not merely because she is jealous. In persuading Yishao to give up Xiang'er, every word conforms to ritual: "The physiognomy of this person is low. . . . Her stepfather is a eunuch. Her upbringing cannot be as strict and orthodox as that of one from a grand family" 此人骨相本低微.....太監做幹爺，終

不比大家體統多嚴正.[81] In fact, since Xiang'er is the stepdaughter of Liu Jin, an evil eunuch and Yishao's political enemy, marriage with her would cause trouble for Yishao.[82] But more important are Xiang'er's personal shortcomings; she is neither chaste nor virtuous according to Confucian values. Frequently available at Yishao's place under pretext of visiting her cousin and Lingyun's concubine, Zhang Liyu 張麗玉, Xiang'er arranges to meet Yishao alone, in hopes of marriage or elopement.[83] Qionghua recognizes Xiang'er's character after meeting and talking with her, and she rejects Yishao's wish to bring her into the household. Yishao has to admit that Qionghua is reasonable and right: "After thinking carefully, he recognized that although his wife was jealous, she couldn't be considered unreasonable" 細思妻子雖是妒心，然而卻也未嘗無理.[84]

To regulate a family, the duties of a wife also include training the maids. When Murong Zhu suspects that her maid, Wan Caifang 萬采芳, is having an affair with Yishao, she interrogates and scolds her immediately; and when Caifang pulls out a sword to protest her innocence, Zhu is so angry she whips Caifang and throws her onto the ground.[85] Discovering her husband's flirtation with her maids, Qionghua arranges to keep their contact to a minimum: when home herself, she locks the maids out at night; when she returns to her natal family, she brings her maids with her. In the relationships between Yishao and the maids, she explains to them, she's more concerned with their chastity than with her husband's loyalty: "Although I have a reputation for jealousy, I ask my own conscience, and half of the jealousy is in order to keep you complete. Your social status is low, but you will get married in the end. Is it worth hurting yourself before your marriage? It is for this reason that I am not afraid of people's sneers and am alert day and night as if I were watching you in prison" 我雖妒忌有名傳，然而自把良心問，一半因將爾等全，雖落低微終要嫁，此身何苦預傷殘。故而不怕人譏笑，提防日夜像收監.[86] With so many legitimate concerns to weigh, it's hard to know how much to attribute to a wife's actual jealousy. In Confucian society, although it is perfectly acceptable to take concubines from maids, a man taking too many concubines while already having sons is still considered lascivious.[87] Qionghua's jealousy also serves to protect the reputation of Yishao and the Zhang family, as well as that of the maids.

Fierceness also helps to keep the family in order. The elders all agree that a strict and fierce wife is good for Yishao so that there's someone who can discipline him. He Shiwei, Yishao's master of martial arts, is happy when he learns about Qionghua's personal traits: "This fellow is not afraid of heaven or earth, nor is he afraid of neither the emperor nor his father. Before he was afraid of only Prince Guo; later Prince Guo left the capital, and he now has no scruples. He is exactly in need of a strict wife to restrain him, so that I, his master, don't need to worry about him" 這人上不怕天，下不怕地，在外不怕皇帝，在家不怕父親。當

初只怕個郭殿下，其後郭殿下出了京，真個肆無忌憚，正該要個嚴厲妻子管束管束，也省得我這師傅替他費心.[88] Shiwei is one of the people closest to Yishao and also probably the one who best understands him. He used to be a villain who did not care much about virtue, especially sexual propriety, so he can, to some extent, sympathize with Yishao's libertinism. He will never be as orthodox or strict as Lingyun, so he helps Yishao take Xiang'er as a concubine in secret. But at the same time, he's able to see right from wrong, as well as good from evil, because he himself has experienced both. It's significant that such a person agrees that a wife as strict as Qionghua is perfect for Yishao. Acquainted with Yishao's fearlessness, Shiwei believes that Qionghua's ferocity is a good match for Yishao's sense of invincibility because it brings order and balance to the family.

Last but not least, shrewishness can bring domestic romance to a Confucian household in which marriages are arranged by parents. Murong Zhu, as concubine, does not have much power to control the family or the behavior of the husband, but her shrewishness is also appreciated in the *tanci*. Usually in the works of male writers, a concubine shrew in a wastrel's family, such as Pan Jinlian, will compete with her rivals in appearance and sex; if she's in an orthodox man's family, she'll be disciplined. Neither of these situations arises here. Instead, the orthodox husband, Guo Lingyun, neither disciplines nor cures his shrewish wife, but to some extent, he indulges her shrewishness. When Zhu follows Feixiang into the Guo household as Feixiang marries Lingyun, she starts to have feelings for Lingyun, and the two develop a relationship exactly as in any scholar-beauty (or even modern) romance. They experience the whole course of courtship—from mutual admiration, to misunderstandings and fights while feeling out each other's love, and finally, to certainty of each other's love and devotion to the relationship. All the misunderstandings and fights between the two are caused by Zhu's jealousy and fierceness. However, Lingyun enjoys this courtship so much that he doesn't want Feixiang to help him out of any misunderstanding or fight. Lingyun and Feixiang's conversation about his relationship with Zhu best illustrates the picture:

> [Lingyun:] "Why do the pleasures between men and women have to take place in the bedroom? Drinking and chatting like this gives us the pleasure of keeping a certain distance. . . ." When Lingyun finished, Feixiang laughed, thinking that this man's expressions were so odd. His opinions and plans are mostly different, like a civet cat that makes no noise but steals chickens. What he wants is not a fair and frank marriage but secret meetings in front of flowers under the moon.
>
> [凌雲:] "從來男女行樂，何必定在衽席之間？只像這般飲酒閒談，便有種不即不離之趣....." 重瞳說罷飛香笑，暗想斯人說話奇。主意安排多別調，竟像那狸貓不叫會偷雞。光明嫁娶非其欲，倒想花前月下會佳期。[89]

Apparently, Lingyun considers all the troubles caused by Zhu's jealousy and temper his "pleasures." Feixiang's analysis reveals the unorthodox behaviors of the "orthodox" Lingyun. Her metaphor of a civet cat is especially cynical because Lingyun doesn't talk much, behaving like a true Confucian orthodox man. By projecting these motivations onto the ultimate orthodox man in the *tanci*, the author seems to suggest that all men are hypocritical, no matter how orthodox they seem.

In this *tanci*, Zhu does not bring "disequilibrium" (*luan* 亂) to the household, as might be expected in male-authored fiction (such as Pan Jinlian in *Jin Ping Mei*), but brings instead a kind of piquancy to everyone's domestic life.[90] The ultimate embodiment of ritual, Lingyun shows propriety to his wives, who are otherwise virtuous and generous, and treats them equally. Murong Zhu is the only shrew in the household, and she becomes the source of his happiness. When Zhu displays anger or jealousy toward Bai Ruyu, Lingyun not only doesn't try to correct her misunderstanding of the relationship but enjoys her show of jealousy. The omniscient narrator reads Lingyun's mind: "Because my wife [Feixiang] and my concubine [Liyu] are both virtuous, our household lacks the smell of vinegar among the seven domestic supplies. It is for the best that she adds this flavor to keep the romantic nature of the bedroom" 正因大妻小妾多賢淑，七件關門少醋香，最好由他添一味，維持風月稱閨房.[91] Although he is an orthodox Confucian, Lingyun is not completely satisfied with his married life. His wife and concubine obey Confucian teachings for virtuous women and behave generously and without jealousy. This should be the ideal family for any man, but Lingyun feels that such exemplary virtue can be monotonous. Zhu's jealousy fulfills his desire for domestic passion. Even as Zhu causes trouble in his domestic life, Lingyun delights in her jealousy, need, and love for him. As Danyan comments, "If [his wife and concubines] often fight . . . [he] will voluntarily take the consequences for his libertine behavior" 若然果爾常廝鬧.....風流罪業願承當.[92] By associating a shrewish subplot with the orthodox Lingyun, the author hints at the hypocritical nature of men, who demand generous wives and an orderly family on the one hand and romantic excitement from unconventional women on the other.

Conclusion

Reassessing and reconstructing the shrews and virtuous wives in her *tanci*, Cheng Huiying manages to subvert the stereotypes in male-authored fiction and illustrate the unique value of each of her female characters. The ideals of the traditional stereotypes become lovable and desirable for different reasons: the jealous wives are shown as sometimes necessary, positive figures, instead of disastrous domestic problems, while the ideal virtuous wife is talented and unconventional, rather than rigid. Further, these women have become more

attractive because readers can see and identify with their subjectivity and agency as individuals, instead of viewing them as objects of didactic dogma. Cheng Huiying has also empowered their agency in both their public and domestic lives, suggesting women's power and contribution in both spheres.

The construction of the ideal virtuous wife and lovable shrew is also interesting in terms of the aesthetics of characterization in the *tanci*. The two husbands and their respective wives form two "contrastive pairs" (*fandui* 反對), a term used by Ming–Qing fiction commentators to interpret the aesthetics of characters.[93] As expected from the title, the *tanci* first and foremost creates a pair of male protagonists, the so-called pair of male phoenixes. Guo Lingyun and Zhang Yishao represent two complementary ideals from the perspective of women's fantasies. Guo Lingyun is a typical Confucian orthodox man, described as "solemn and just" 嚴正 and "elegant" 端凝.[94] In contrast, Zhang Yishao represents the *fengliu* man,"sexually and emotionally more 'open' to women and who has a sharp eye for subtleties."[95] Parallel to the complementary pair of men, their wives also complement each other. Lingyun's wife, Zhang Feixiang, is an exemplary, virtuous wife, gentle and generous, while Yishao's wife, Mu Qionghua, is a stereotypical shrew. Their contrast echoes the difference between the husbands. As Yishao comments,"Your wife and concubines are all virtuous, but my wives are all sharp" 你家妻妾人人淑，我的渾家個個尖.[96]

In reevaluating stereotypes of women—the shrews and the virtuous women—Cheng Huiying also reveals the hypocrisy of male authors and readers. She exposes the double standards men impose on women: while they want women to be "virtuous" and generous in the family, men still pursue domestic romances; while they require women to follow strict rules and blame them for any problems at home, they cannot follow Confucian rituals themselves and refuse to admit that their own responsibility is at the root of most domestic problems. Compared to the women who are shown as desirable because they behave authentically, men, through their hypocrisy, are shown to be appalling. In this way, Cheng Huiying penned a subtle protest against the patriarchal Confucian society in late imperial China that should not be overlooked.

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Notes

1. See a detailed history of *tanci* in Bao, *Qingdai nü zuojia*, 66–73.
2. See Hu, *Cainü cheye weimian*; and Widmer, *Beauty and the Book*. Ellen Widmer explains that this term distinguishes these works from *tanci* in general, including oral performance

and the ones written by men, in that "their authorship, narrating voice, and intended readership were all female." See Widmer, *Beauty and the Book*, 14.

3. Shen, *Mingyuan shihua*, 8.15b–16b. It is unclear in what kind of private school she was teaching. There are other records about Cheng Huiying, but they are very similar to Shen Shanbao's. This is almost all the personal information we have about the author.
4. Xu, *Qingbai leichao*, 160–61.
5. Because of the traditional belief in the contradiction between *de* 德, or virtue, and *cai* 才, or talent, of women (for example, the common saying "Women without talent are virtuous"), female *tanci* writers held a much more conservative perspective than most male novelists in order to legitimate their writing, an act which by itself already carried hints of transgression by establishing women's identity in the public male sphere. The best example of this is the fact that Qiu Xinru 邱心如 (fl. mid-late Qing) rewrote and Hou Zhi 侯芝 (1764–1829) edited and wrote a sequel to the story of *Zaisheng yuan* 再生緣 (The Destiny of Rebirth), the most popular *tanci* among women at the time, in order to correct the moral problems in it. Like them, most female *tanci* writers tried to incorporate didactic functions in their *tanci*, specifically, promoting Confucian values for their female protagonists.
6. Maram Epstein discusses Lady Shui as a "Confucian matriarch" in her *Competing Discourses*, 236, 237. Keith McMahon defines Wen Suchen as a "Confucian superman" in his *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists*, 150.
7. In *Honglou meng*, Baochai is identified with *de* (virtue) while Lin Daiyu is identified with *cai* (talents). This is shown in the poem in *Main Register* (ch. 5), part of which reads, "We can sigh for her virtue of 'pausing the weaving machine'; we can sympathize with her talents of 'eulogizing catkin'" 可歎停機德，堪憐詠絮才. Although some commentators and readers find Baochai to be insidious, the "final judgment" by the *Main Register* cannot be ignored—she is established as a virtuous girl at least on the surface. Therefore, the ideal lover in Baoyu's dream is Jianmei 兼美, or Two-in-One. In his *Archetype and Allegory in the Dream of the Red Chamber*, 43–53, Andrew H. Plaks also suggests that Daiyu and Baochai function as bipolar characters that complement each other, although he does not specifically discuss the topic in terms of *de* and *cai*.
8. McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists*, 205–20.
9. Although Baochai's marriage is unhappy, she has a healthy and successful son in the popular 120-chapter edition, which can be considered the best reward for a virtuous woman.
10. The cult of *qing* is a notion that includes, but is not limited to, passions, emotions, sentiments, and feelings, as well as notions of authenticity and aesthetics; an interest in thinking about new roles for women in marriage, society, and the world of letters; and connoisseurship (as opposed to academic success in the examination system) as a basis for social prestige.

    Analyzing *Mudan ting*, *Honglou meng* and Xiaoqing, Judith Zeitlin, Li Wai-yee, Maram Epstein, and Ellen Widmer all argue that *qing* (emotions), rather than *li* (rituals), was appreciated and pursued by literati and that the cult of *qing* appeared during the Ming and the Qing. See Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment*; Epstein, *Competing Discourses*; Zeitlin, "Shared Dreams"; and Widmer, "Xiaoqing's Literary Legacy."
11. Keith McMahon also mentions this in his book *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists* when talking about *Yesou puyan* and *Lin Lan Xiang*.
12. The plot of various female-authored *tanci* revolves around cross-dressing, such as *Yuchuan Yuan* 玉釧緣 (The Destiny Connected by Jade Hairpin), *Zaisheng yuan* 再生緣

(The Destiny of Rebirth), *Jinyu yuan* 金魚緣 (The Destiny Connected by Golden Fish), and *Bi sheng hua* 筆生花 (Flowers Growing from Writing Brushes).

13. For detailed discussions on cross-dressing women, see Hu, *Cainü cheye weimian*; Bao, *Qingdai nü zuojia*; Bao, "Qingdai 'nüzhong zhuangfu'"; and Bao, "Zhenshi yu xiangxiang." There is also a brief discussion on this topic in McMahon, *Polygamy and Sublime Passion*, 139–41.
14. For examples of Feixiang's *qing*, see Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1543, 1547, 1782, 2034, 2233, and so forth; for examples of people commenting on Feixiang's *chi*, see comments by He Danyan and Lingyun in ibid., 1774; comments by Murong Zhu in ibid., 1990; and comments by Yishao in ibid., 2033.
15. Ibid., 834.
16. Ibid., 849.
17. Ibid., 1999.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., 2193.
20. Ibid., 2473.
21. Ibid., 759.
22. Heilbrun, *Toward a Recognition*, x.
23. Li, "Late Ming Courtesan"; Ko, "Written Word."
24. Heilbrun, *Toward a Recognition*, xi.
25. Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 763.
26. Ibid., 809.
27. Ibid., 807.
28. Ibid., 823.
29. Ibid., 1995.
30. Ibid., 1966.
31. Epstein, *Competing Discourses*, 90. Epstein examines authenticity and *qing*, and authenticity and women in different texts.
32. Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 759.
33. Ibid., 760, 761.
34. Ibid., 1999.
35. Ibid., 760.
36. Ibid., 1774. *Ji tangju* is a form of poetic composition in which the author combines different lines or verses from various Tang poems into a coherent poem of his or her own.
37. Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 849.
38. Kam Louie divides premodern Chinese masculinity into two large categories: *wen* (literary) and *wu* (martial or military) in his book *Theorising Chinese Masculinity.*
39. Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 840, 843.
40. Ibid., 1999. Intellectuals during the Wei and Jin are famous for their wild and unrestrained behavior as well as their extraordinary literary talents. Gu Yanwu comments on their "abandoning the classics and upholding [the philosophy of] Laozi and Zhuangzi, despising rituals and advocating unconventionality" 棄經典而尚老莊，蔑禮法而崇放達. See Gu, *Rizhi lu*, 13:306.
41. Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1966.
42. Ibid., 1543.
43. Legge, *Li Chi Book of Rites*, in *Four Books*, 365–66. "In this way [selfish] scheming was repressed and found no development. Robbers, filchers, and rebellious traitors did not

show themselves, and hence the outer doors remain open, and were not shut. This was [the period of] what we call the Great Union" 謀閉而不興，盜竊亂賊而不作，故外戶而不閉，是謂大同.

44. This goal is articulated in *Great Learning*. For a translation of this passage, see Plaks, *Four Masterworks*, 158; Epstein, *Competing Discourses*, 27–28; Chan, "Great Learning"; Legge, *Four Books*, 317–46; Hughes, *Great Learning*, 145–66.
45. Heilbrun, *Toward a Recognition*, x.
46. Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*. For *Fengliu*, see 834, 1965, 2005, 2006, 2018, 2178, 2262; *fengsao*, see 845; *fengya*, see 2232; *diedang*, see 2473; *leiluo*, see 2018, 2262; *tuosa*, see 2262.
47. Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2261.
48. Ibid., 2262. My italics.
49. Ibid., 2005.
50. The word *qiantou* is used for Hongniang, who helps Cui Yingying and Mr. Zhang in *Xixiang ji* (Wang, *Xixiang ji*); and Dame Wang, who connects Ximen Qing and Pan Jinlian in *Shuihu zhuan*; and so forth. *Sangu liupo* usually has a negative connotation, referring to women whose professions are either illegitimate or disreputable. *Sangu* refers to Buddhist nuns 尼姑, Daoist nuns 道姑, female fortune tellers through *gua* 卦姑; *Liupo* refers to women trading girls as slaves, concubines, and so forth 牙婆; matchmakers 媒婆; witches 師婆; bawds 虔婆; female healers 藥婆; and midwives 穩婆.
51. Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2035.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid., 1998.
54. See McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists*, 55–57. Also see Wu, *Chinese Virago*, 4–5. She does not include *yinfu* in the definition, but she does suggest that sexual rivalry is part of the definition.
55. Ibid., 58–65. Also see Epstein, *Competing Discourses*, 120–49.
56. See Epstein, *Competing Discourses*, 125–26.
57. See McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists*, 59–60.
58. See Wu, *Chinese Virago*, 144–58.
59. Although Yenna Wu, in her *Chinese Virago*, suggests that there are "benefits of female jealousy and domination" in male-authored fiction, it is noteworthy that she places them in the "Comedy" chapter. In this sense, the positive features noticed by the male writers merely offer comic relief from the grave problems of shrews. However, Cheng Huiying treats these benefits seriously in this *tanci*.
60. Yishao spreads this reputation so that he can use his "jealous" wife as an excuse, for example, the first time he rejects Bao Xiang'er's request to elope.
61. Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1480.
62. Ibid., 2384.
63. Ibid., 2438.
64. Ibid., 2378.
65. Ibid., 2380–81.
66. Ibid., 2398.
67. Ibid.
68. Lingyun painted Daya's likeness himself. But since Daya doesn't know about it, it can't be taken as evidence of their relationship.
69. Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2090.
70. Ibid., 2090.

71. Ibid., 2189–90.
72. Ibid., 1761.
73. In ibid., see examples of *qi*, 1548, 1652, 1712, 1728, 1777, 1784, 2195; *nao*, 1548, 1652; *he*, 1758, 1772, 2043, 2250; *ma*, 1757, 1784; and *cui*, 1548, 1588, 1713, 1759, 2042.
74. Ibid., 1560.
75. Ibid., 2195.
76. Ibid., 2416.
77. She scolds Zhang Jing for having sex with the beautiful boy, Bai Wushuang, when Jing goes back home in chapter 21 (Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 964), and Jing does not even fight back.
78. Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2384.
79. In *Daxue*, it reads, "Once one's mind has been rectified, one's self can be cultivated; once one's self has been cultivated, one's family can be ordered" 心正而後身修，身修而後家齊，家齊而後國治. See Zhu, *Sishu jizhu*, 2. The translation is from Plaks, *Four Masterworks*, 158.
80. Plaks, *Four Masterworks*, 158. See pp. 156–80 for a lengthy analysis on how Ximen Qing's family is *luan* on the very level of the above saying in the *Daxue*.
81. Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1451.
82. This actually is the case when Yishao tries to ask for Xiang'er as a concubine. Liu Jin demands that Yishao abandon Lingyun in exchange for Xiang'er, but Yishao is unwilling to betray his sworn brother.
83. Although these behaviors do not conform to Confucian values, I read them as belonging to Xiang'er's subjectivity and agency.
84. Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1452.
85. Ibid., 2337–38.
86. Ibid., 2412.
87. A positive example can be seen in *Ernü yingxing zhuan*, while a negative example can be seen in *Jin Ping Mei*.
88. Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 1361.
89. Ibid., 2009.
90. Plaks, *Four Masterworks*, 156–80.
91. Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2076. Lingyun at this time has not married Daya and Zhu. He has just consummated his marriages with Feixiang and Liyu. "The seven domestic supplies" is from a Chinese idiom since the Song Dynasty, "There are seven things when you open a door: firewood, rice, oil, salt, soy sauce, vinegar, and tea" 開門七件事，柴米油鹽醬醋茶. "Open a door" here means to keep a household running.
92. Ibid., 2259.
93. The parallelism had been considered an essential part of the aesthetics of Chinese literature. As early as in *Wenxin diaolong*, the importance of parallelism and the terms of *zhengdui* and *fandui* had already been theorized. For a detailed discussion, see Plaks, "Bones of Parallel Rhetoric," 163–74. In terms of the aesthetics of parallelism in Ming–Qing fiction, the terms appear frequently in commentators' writings. For a theorized study, see Rolston, *Traditional Chinese Fiction*, 211–12.
94. Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 46.
95. McMahon, *Causality and Containment*, 51.
96. Cheng, *Feng shuangfei*, 2033.

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