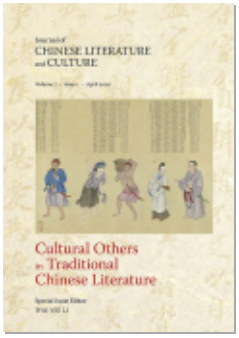
Closer to Home: A Hanlin Academician Writes about Persons outside the Educated Class



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Abstract *Yijian zhi*, the massive collection of supernatural tales compiled by Hong Mai (1123–1202) in the twelfth century, gives considerable attention to merchant figures and even members of more lowly walks of life (e.g., soldiers, butchers, waiters, and singing girls). This is unexpected since Hong Mai himself was not just an imperial official but a particularly eminent one, whose appointments included Hanlin academician and court historian. Appearing in the tales, sometimes even as protagonists, are members of society whom the superelite like Hong Mai seldom even mention in their conventional literary and scholarly writings. These *Yijian zhi* stories thus provide a glimpse of the ways that members of the socially and politically elite perceived persons of lowly social backgrounds. The fact that Hong Mai did not compose his stories from his own imagination but, rather, recorded tales told to him by informants, most of whom were also members of the elite, as well as his conviction that the tales narrate events that actually happened, however uncanny or "marvelous" they were, makes the collection even more valuable as a source for general upper-class perceptions. Once identified and examined, those perceptions by socially elite persons of contemporaries who did not have a classical education contain elements we might expect as well as those that may surprise us.

Keywords Hong Mai, *Yijian zhi*, merchants, scam artists, singing girls, other women

Before the advent of vernacular literature, that is, before the Yuan-Ming period, when writings in the vernacular language became widespread (at least as that kind of literature has come down to us today), writing in China was mostly done by persons who had a classical education. It is hardly surprising, then, that this writing, whether historiographical or literary, features persons of the same

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privileged classes as its authors, whether high-ranking or low-ranking officials, Buddhist or Daoist clergy, proudly aloof recluses or doctors and diviners. The number of written works that give sustained attention to less well-to-do and less educated persons, who after all constituted the bulk Chinese society at any particular time, is not large. When we come across such a work, written by a member of the educated elite, it has special interest, as much for what it tells us about elite perceptions of ordinary people as about those people themselves. Indeed, it is probably best to understand the content of such writings as reflecting precisely those perceptions more than anything else.

The high standards of what kind of person warrants attention in writing were nevertheless relaxed in certain genres or subgenres. One thinks immediately of *yuefu* 樂府 or ballad-like poetry that had a long tradition of featuring conscript laborers, soldiers, and peasants in narrative verse. Another form in which the less-than-elite often appear is the prodigious one of the anomaly or supernatural tale, since ghosts, demons, werefoxes, and so on, were not snobbish about whom they chose to torment. Tang dynasty collections of supernatural tales would provide a wealth of material for anyone interested in reconstructing literati representations of persons socially below them.

The largest and most important collection of such stories from the Song period, far larger than any other and more voluminous as well than any that survives from earlier times, is Hong Mai's 洪邁 (1123–1202) *Yijian zhi* 夷堅志 (Records of Yijian).[1] Aside from its sheer size—what survives of it today contains over two thousand tales, only half the original size—several other features give it particular interest as a source for elite representations of socially lower classes. One is the special position of its compiler. Unlike the compilers of many collections of supernatural tales during the Tang and Song, Hong Mai did not live on the periphery of the elite class—he was a Hanlin academician and a court historian. Indeed, together with his father, Hong Hao 洪皓 (1088–1155), and two of his brothers, Hong Kuo 洪适 (1117–84) and Hong Zun 洪遵 (1120–74), Hong Mai's immediate family managed to produce three grand councilors and four imperial academicians, a feat celebrated at the time as unprecedented in the dynasty. Despite his eminence, Hong Mai persisted in collecting and recording (and publishing) volumes in his *Yijian zhi* series. He did this over a fifty-year period and in thirty-two different collections or installments, continuing right up until his death. He also persisted in this effort despite considerable criticism from his elite peers, many of whom viewed his *Yijian zhi* project as a waste of his time and something unworthy of his station as a high official and learned scholar.[2] Hong's other major work, *Rongzhai suibi* 容齋隨筆 (Reading Notes from Accommodations Studio), is a highly regarded collection of reading notes on the classics and histories. We have, then, in Hong Mai an extreme of

opposites: an eminent official who was endlessly fascinated, even obsessed, as he himself tells us, with stories about bizarre happenings in everyday life, many of them set in the countryside and involving persons of absolutely no notoriety; and a classical scholar of great erudition who spent untold hours of his life recasting into polished literary Chinese stories of questionable veracity and dubious didactic purpose or effect. The sharp contrast between Hong Mai's place in elite culture and his activities as a chronicler of the stories that occupied, at best, a marginal place in that culture is a remarkable one that bodes well for reading his collection as a record of his perception of persons outside his social class and circle.

Another point to bear in mind is that Hong Mai did not create these stories. He collected them, mostly from oral informants, although he had written sources as well. We know this because he makes it his convention to note the name of his informant at the end of each story. (Not all of his stories have such a notation, but a great many of them do, and often Hong Mai strings several stories together that he heard from the same informant.) These are not fictional informants, by the way. We can identify not all of them but enough to establish that they were contemporaneous with Hong Mai and to be confident that he is not fabricating the persons he names as his sources for particular stories.[3]

There are, in all, hundreds of informants. Some of them are family members, but most of them are men Hong Mai must have met during his travels as a provincial official. Hong Mai's official career consisted of appointments at the court, as well as postings as provincial governor (and periods when he had no appointment and returned home). So he was well traveled within the empire, as was typical of officials of his status, and was even once sent on a mission to the Jin Empire in the north. He thus had ample opportunity to visit new places and to seek out their local lore of "strange tales." It is likely that the great majority of Hong Mai's informants were members of the imperial bureaucracy themselves, whether high or low ranking. The thousands of stories that Hong Mai put into *Yijian zhi* may thus be thought of as representative of an even larger trove of oral tales, most of them rooted in a particular locale and anchored there by dates, local personal names, and place names that existed in his day. How widely these tales circulated before Hong Mai wrote them down we do not know. Probably many of them had not circulated beyond their immediate locale until they were published in *Yijian zhi*. (Each of the installments of *Yijian zhi* appears to have been published, in one place or another, immediately upon its completion.)[4] Another thing we do not know is how much rewriting, editing, or shaping Hong Mai did as he converted the oral story he heard from an informant to its written version that we have today in *Yijian zhi*, or how much his selection of stories for inclusion in his collection reflects his own tastes and conscious or unconscious

purposes. That Hong Mai collected and recorded, mostly for the first time, such an array of stories gives him a place of distinction in literary history. For my purposes here, it is particularly significant that Hong Mai did not create these stories himself from whole cloth. He gave the stories he came across their final form in which we have them today, but collectively the stories are more than one writer's creation. They represent a huge corpus of narratives, otherwise largely invisible to us today, that were being told and retold but seldom, before Hong Mai came along, recorded for posterity. The collective nature of this material also means that whatever recurrent themes and biases we find in it probably do not simply reflect its compiler's idiosyncrasies.

It would be inaccurate to say that *Yijian zhi* mostly contains stories about nonelite persons. A sizable number of stories concern members of the lower echelons of the educated class, men who held posts in provincial administrations or their supporting staff members. Such persons do not belong to the superelite class as does Hong Mai, yet they are clearly above persons of the merchant class, laborers, and menials. Hong Mai's informants were mostly also educated persons, as best as we can tell, precisely the sort of person that Hong Mai would naturally come into contact with as he moved about the empire as a career official. But the number of stories is so large, and our compiler's interest in strange events is so wide-ranging and universal, that he managed to include here and there stories about persons who belong to a dramatically lower social world than his own. In that respect, *Yijian zhi* is markedly different from the sorts of writings that men of Hong Mai's official eminence customarily produced, in whatever form we choose to examine.

What is to be gained by examining such stories in this collection? *Yijian zhi* can be read in many different ways, its contents being so rich and varied. To date, in English-language scholarship its stories have mostly been used as a window on Song-period popular religion and beliefs about gods, ghosts, and relations between the seen and unseen worlds. The focus in this article is different: by concentrating on stories about the merchant class and those below the merchant class, my aim here is to shed light on perceptions of the elite storytellers and narrators toward the nonelite. Whose perceptions are these? Some combination of Hong Mai's own—ultimately Hong Mai made the final decision about what stories to include in his collection and also put the stories into the form we have them in today—and those of his hundreds of informants. While the exact balance between these two is impossible to measure, certainly both have their influence on these stories. Here I examine how attitudes of the narrators in these stories toward the nonelite persons featured in them are varied and quite unpredictable. Their lives are often presented in ways that are less stylized and stereotyped than when such persons are treated in elite poetry

(actually, typical merchants are hardly ever treated in elite poetry of the time, unlike peasants, soldiers, laborers, etc.). This is an aspect and value of *Yijian zhi* that has generally been overlooked. But it is one that sets it apart from almost all other writing of the period, especially that which passed through the hands of such an eminent official.

I have grouped into categories the types of nonelite persons who appear most frequently in these stories, and discuss each category below: merchants; scam artists; singing girls; butchers, soldiers, and waiters; and other women. The last category, women in general (apart from singing girls, who constitute their own category) may seem at first overly amorphous and diffuse. But it may be less so if we adopt the perspective of the men who told and recorded these stories, in whose lives and patrilineal culture women held a distinctly marginal place.

Merchants

Merchants are not generally treated favorably in *Yijian zhi*. In the stories about them, or in which they figure, merchants tend to be men who exemplify greed. Some of them are so obsessed with making money that they will put profit ahead of any humane consideration or moral principle. That seems to be the main point of several merchant stories. There is likewise a dearth of stories about more estimable merchants. We do not find stories about merchants leading morally exemplary lives or making principled choices that lead to virtuous rather than venal conduct. There might have been such stories—we find some later, in Ming dynasty story collections—but the depictions we find in *Yijian zhi* instead show the influence of traditional perceptions of the merchant class that were widespread among the educated elite, who sought a livelihood in officialdom rather than in buying and selling. There was a long tradition among the elite of looking down on merchants, owing to the latter's lack of classical learning and their preoccupation with monetary gain. We see clear evidence of that attitude in these stories.

Merchants in *Yijian zhi* may amass considerable fortune, but it is precisely that fortune, or their obsession with increasing it, that is so often their downfall. These merchants often lose sight of the fact that the world operates according to a moral order. A person fixated on the accumulation of wealth becomes in these stories the embodiment of the folly and the ultimate self-destructiveness of such covetousness.

As one example, a Quanzhou merchant named Yang had been engaged in coastal trade for more than ten years.[5] Navigating the rivers and offshore waters of the southeast, he was often caught in storms at sea. Whenever this happened, he would pray to the gods for safe passage through the storm, swearing that he would repay the gods by making donations to shrines and sponsoring offerings

to the hungry ghosts of water and land (*shuilu zhai* 水陸齋). But as soon as he arrived safely on shore, he had no thought for the oaths he had sworn. One night he dreamed that various gods confronted him in a dream, chastising him for his behavior. He promised that this time when he returned to Lin'an he would make good on all his previous declarations. "Do you think all this comes from *your* good fortune?" a god demanded of him. "What you have is nothing but what we have given you. You need not make good on your former promises. We will simply see that all your possessions are returned to us." Yang was deeply troubled by this threat, and when he returned to the capital he gathered together all his possessions. His most valuable things, such as gems and precious incense, he put inside an earthen storehouse, owned by a Mr. Tang, for safekeeping. His less precious things like bolts of cloth and wood used for medicines and dyes were deposited just outside the storehouse. He told Tang that he planned to use one-tenth of his wealth in service of the gods and then give up his career as merchant and return home to Quanzhou. That night Tang hosted a banquet for Yang, and Yang got drunk. News soon came that a fire had broken out in a section of the city not far from the storehouse. Yang climbed up a hill for a look. At first he was relieved to see that the fire was not on the street of the storage hut. But then as he watched, the fire quickly spread to that street. Well, Yang told his servant, even if it burns right up to the storehouse, I will have only lost my less valuable things. The fire seemed to burn itself out. After some time, a thick new plume of smoke suddenly appeared. The storehouse itself was on fire, and by the time Yang went to inspect he found that all his possessions had been completely incinerated. That night Yang hung himself from a rafter of the charred building. His corpse was left there for a time, exposed. Eventually, his remains were wrapped in straw and buried that way.

We know, of course, that fires broke out regularly in the city of Lin'an, where wooden structures were easy prey for flames—whole neighborhoods burned down again and again. But the way this story is told, with the fire approaching an *earthen* structure (meaning, perhaps, an underground storehouse; in any case, one expected to be safe from fire), then seeming to die down, only then to ignite the storehouse and all its contents, leaves the reader with no doubt that this is the gods' way of making good on their threat to take back all the wealth they had given to merchant Yang (especially since they would have known that he greedily planned to give them only one-tenth of his wealth). This is not just a financial catastrophe for him; it is a mortal punishment. The details at the end about the exposure of his corpse and eventual burial without even a cheap coffin complete the divine punishment of reducing him to utter penury. The wealthy merchant who had spent years thinking he could con the gods ends up being buried as a pauper.

In other stories, it is not the gods whom merchants abuse but other people in their lives. We learn that traveling merchants in the southeast, as they plied the rivers there for months at a time, often picked up a local female entertainer to travel with them as "auntie" (*shenzi* 嬸子). These women were recruited to help the merchant with daily chores and slept with him at night. One merchant, Wang Sanke, persuaded one such woman, Di Bajie, to be his "auntie" during his travels one year.[6] She was large framed and not pretty but was a hard worker and parsimonious, so during the weeks and months she accompanied him Wang found his savings increasing steadily and his business more profitable than ever before. Eventually, Wang told her he would make her his wife, even though she was already forty years old and he, in fact, already had a wife and children at home. One night, as the season approached when Wang returned home each autumn, the two of them stayed together in an inn. The next morning Wang rose early, went down to his boat, and cast off. By the time Di Bajie appeared at the pier, Wang's boat was already midstream. Beside herself for having been tricked and abandoned this way, Di Bajie threw herself in the river and drowned. Wang, watching from his boat, congratulated himself for having done so well in this relationship and extricating himself so effectively. But soon after Wang returned home to his real wife and children, inside the house at night there were sightings of ghosts, led by a large female, who terrorized the family. Soon Wang's two youngest sons were stabbed to death by a neighbor's servant who bore a grudge against their father. Next, Wang's oldest son killed someone in a drunken argument. He had to purchase reprieve from capital punishment and was sentenced to distant southern exile. Then, Wang's only remaining son was killed in a drunken brawl. Alone and embittered, Wang himself soon died. His widow soon starved to death. There were no heirs, and Wang's dwelling was returned to the local clan head.

Given the lowly status of the "auntie" in this story, we may be surprised that this account of ghostly revenge for Wang's treatment of her exists at all. This is certainly a more unexpected story than the one about the gods' punishment of merchant Yang. We note that it is not just the shocking behavior of Wang in his abandonment of Di Bajie that is highlighted here. The narrative goes out of its way to tell us how smugly pleased Wang felt as he watched Bajie drown herself. Such is the selfishness and inhumanity of merchants in these stories, which cannot go unpunished.

Wealth itself, however it is acquired, may be inherently corrupting. The combination of wealth and youth, in a man, is perceived as particularly untoward. The story "The Nun of a West Lake Convent" is a well-known *Yijian zhi* story that was retold many times in later literature.[7] It is a shocking tale of a young man's seduction of a pretty wife. The young man, who is never named in

the story, spends his days in a teashop just across the street from the wife's residence, where he waits to catch a glimpse of her. He eventually notices a nun coming to visit the young woman, probably to instruct her or help perform religious devotions, and then follows the nun back to her West Lake convent. The young man then offers to donate a large amount of cash to the convent. When the nun agrees, the young man gets her to further agree to conspire together with him to lure the wife to the convent, on the pretext of celebrating the reconstruction of the building's roof, whereupon the nun will see that the young woman gets drunk at the feast and lead her into a separate room to "rest and recover," where the man will be waiting to rape her.

The story is memorable for the particularly vile character of the nun, who enthusiastically agrees to go along with the young man's scheme to assault the woman in the convent (of all places). That must be why the nun becomes the story's title character. But we should not overlook the wickedness of the young man. Two of his traits stand out: he is rich, and he seems to have no demands on his time—once he first catches sight of the young wife, he spends his days in the teashop across the street from her house, just waiting to see her again. We do not know how he came to have such wealth. Perhaps he belongs to a rich merchant family; it is unlikely that he belongs to a family with a history of official service, because if he did this would normally be noted in the narrative. In any case, his wealth has clearly corrupted him or at least has given him the means to act on his reprehensible fantasies.

His denouement in the story is this: While in the midst of sexual intercourse with the inebriated and unconscious young wife, he suddenly dies. The woman wakes up to find a dead stranger next to her in bed and hurries home. Eventually the young man's family, missing him, makes inquiries based on where he was last seen, and his body is discovered in the convent. This leads to a criminal investigation, and the nun eventually confesses and is sentenced to death. Justice is served to the nun, who allowed the crime of sexual assault to occur within her own convent. Justice of a different kind, divine justice, has likewise been meted out to the young man. In modern times, we might understand his death purely in physiological terms. The young man's sexual activities proved too much for him physically, and he died of overexertion (i.e., a heart attack). (Such a fatal consequence of sexual indulgence would later become commonplace in Ming and Qing erotic fiction.) But a Song-period reader might view the young man's death another way: as divine retribution for not just the crime but, on top of that, the sacrilege of this sexual attack in a sacred place. Karmic retribution for crimes against Buddhist precepts is found in many *Yijian zhi* stories and is likely operative here.

It would not be hard to find collaboration in other Song-period sources for the impression of a cultural divide or even alienation between men of Hong Mai's class and merchants, especially wealthy ones, that we sense in these stories. For example, an entry in Shen Gua's 沈括 (1031–95) *Mengxi bitan* 夢溪筆談 (Talking with the Writing Brush at Stream of Dreams) tells of an encounter between Shi Manqing 石曼卿 (i.e., Shi Yannian 石延年, 994–1041), a well-known literatus and friend of Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–72), famous for his drinking prowess, and a wealthy young man who happened to be Manqing's neighbor in the Northern Song capital.[8] Although merely twenty years old, this neighbor was fabulously wealthy (he must have been the scion of a rich merchant clan) but was known never to have any interaction with *shidafu* 士大夫, that is, educated gentlemen like Shi Manqing. Still, the wealthy man, surnamed Li, enjoyed fine drink, and he had heard of Manqing's reputation as a drinker, so he invited him to his house one evening. The passage describes the fine foods, expensive alcohol, and elaborate music performed by beautiful concubines that were presented that evening. But what is emphasized throughout the account is the boorishness of the host: he did not know how to dress properly to receive his guest, he could not bow correctly in greeting him, and he was unable to take leave of him politely (the host excuses himself from the feast early). Indeed, it seems that host and guest hardly exchanged a word all evening. The rude dress and conduct of his host leave Manqing marveling over the fact that a man could be so wealthy yet not have the faintest idea of how a gentleman should behave; Manqing thinks to himself that the man is an idiot in terms of cultural refinements (*haozhe zhi zhuang, mengran yuai* 豪者之狀，懵然愚騃). That is the whole point of this revealing entry.

Yet the negative attitude toward the pursuit of riches in these stories is not only a matter of cultural alienation or of looking down on the extremely wealthy. There is something in the quest for monetary profit itself, even if relatively small, that is viewed as inherently distasteful or even immoral if it entails blindness to humane values. We saw this already above in the story about Di Bajie, the "auntie" who served Wang Sanke so diligently and then was so cruelly abandoned by him. A more extreme example is the story of Zhang Liu and his killing of the family silkworms.[9] One year the price of mulberry leaves (silkworm food) had risen dramatically in Xinzhou. Zhang Liu, who lived in nearby Shaoxi, hears about this. Having a large amount of mulberry leaves himself, growing in a mulberry grove beside his home, he decides that he will pick and then transport his leaves to sell in Xinzhou at a large profit. This means that he will have no leaves to feed his own family's silkworms, but he calculates that he will make far more money (and do so far more easily) by selling all his leaves rather than using them the normal way. He takes his household's trays of silkworms and throws

them in the river, drowning the insects. His wife, however, is worried that if they dispose of all of their silkworms this way, it will be difficult to start from scratch the following year, so she secretly sets two trays aside and hides them under the second wife's bed. Late that night, Zhang is told that a thief has been spotted in his mulberry tree grove, stealing leaves. (Zhang had no idea his wife has sent their own son out under cover of night to pick leaves to feed the silkworms she had hidden away, without telling him.) Zhang rushes out into the grove and kills the man up in the trees with a spear. In the darkness he does not realize he just killed his own son. Zhang comes back home and proudly tells his wife what he has done. His wife, suspecting the worst, rushes out into the mulberry grove and, finding her dead son, proceeds to hang herself from a mulberry tree. When his wife does not soon return home, Zhang himself returns to the mulberry grove, and seeing his dead son and wife and realizing what he had done, he commits suicide as well. Finally, the second wife, finding herself alone in the house, goes out looking for her family. Coming upon three corpses, she cries out and rouses the neighborhood warden. He promptly arrests the woman, intending to charge her with a triple murder. But the second wife somehow manages to struggle free and rushes back to the mulberry grove, where she too hangs herself. The entire family is, in this way, wiped out, without, as the narrator wryly observes, "ever getting a single coin of profit. Heaven's retribution is swift indeed."

This story is steeped in the Buddhist prohibition against the killing of any living thing (including silkworms). There are many stories in *Yijian zhi* about divine retribution for such killing, but this story stands out for linking the scheming for petty profit with disregard for living things and consequent divine punishment. For readers who are not Buddhists, much less those living in a society untouched by Buddhist values, the relentless extermination of a family as divine retribution for one member's killing of silkworms may seem extreme, especially when another member of the family went out of her way to save a portion of the worms. But in the world of *Yijian zhi*, such punishment is not considered extreme, particularly when the motive behind the killing is the vile one of monetary gain.

Scam Artists

There are a relatively small but significant number of *Yijian zhi* stories about scam artists. These might at first sight be thought of as a subset of merchant stories or at least related to them. But as it turns out, they are very different from the merchant stories discussed above.

These are all distinct stories, and the informants Hong Mai names for them (those that have named informants) are all different. Yet several of the

stories have certain elements in common, so many in fact that they almost appear as variations on a prototype. They all tell of the defrauding of a man in the relatively early stage of his official career (usually after he has already passed the examinations and entered into officialdom). The events take place in the capital Lin'an (Hangzhou) to which the protagonist has returned to obtain a new official assignment. The men who are targeted in the scams are ones who are known to have brought considerable wealth with them to the capital. This is not surprising, since men between official assignments sometimes had to wait months or even years before being given their next official post, during which time they needed to support themselves in the city. Another common element is that attractive young women play a crucial role in the scam, in one of various ways. Sometimes these women identify themselves, falsely, as young wives whose husbands are away on a long journey.[10] The woman is typically living near the inn or apartment where the young man is living; perhaps she allows herself to be briefly glimpsed by him, to arouse his interest. Servants go back and forth between the two, affectionate letters are exchanged, and eventually (this may take months) the two are brought together. The young man may visit the young lady in her home. Or, after the affair has begun and seems safe, he may be foolish enough to allow himself to be persuaded to move into her home.[11] In either case, soon the absent "husband," usually a burly fellow, returns home unannounced to find the two lovers together in his house. At that point, the young man either tries to mollify the enraged husband and minimize the scandal by allowing himself to be extorted, or he bolts from the scene, leaving all his wealth and belongings behind. If the young man passes by the "wife's" residence the next day, he discovers that it has been vacated overnight, because of course the couple who lived there were not a married couple at all but, rather, partners in deception.

Such scams involve only a few persons who carry out the plan: a man, a woman, and a few servants. There are also far more elaborate schemes. A woman is still involved, but a man who "befriends" the targeted fellow is also used. In one on these tales, the target, Zheng, is befriended by Sun, who happens to be staying in the same inn.[12] Zheng watches as several people come calling on Sun, including eventually a messenger carrying the formal appointment letter of Sun's new official post. Sun invites Zheng to accompany him the next day to a broker who deals in concubines; Sun purchases two for himself, and Zheng, hearing about a woman who attracts him (who happens to be available for a discounted price!), decides to indulge himself too. He purchases her and promptly takes her back to his apartment. Two days later, Zheng goes off on an errand, and when he returns he finds the woman has absconded, with all of his wealth that she emptied from his luggage. Zheng goes to Sun's room, but there is

no sign of Sun either. Zheng hurries back to the broker's shop, only to see that it is now nothing but a wine shop. He realizes that Sun and everyone he saw or met through him were frauds.

Another story features a gambling scam. Shen Jiangshi is awaiting reassignment in the capital and is befriended by two others in the same situation, Zheng and Li.[13] They spend time together for a few months. One day Zheng and Li take Shen to see an old friend of theirs, Wang, a man who held the prestigious title of Grand Master for Court Discussion. Wang is elderly and ill. He hosts a banquet for the visitors but must soon excuse himself, after a fit of coughing, to go rest. Zheng and Li take advantage of their host's absence to begin drinking and playing gambling games with his several concubines. Shen joins in the gambling and goes on a terrific winning streak. The girls are losing everything, all their money and jewelry. Shen takes pity on a particularly pretty one among them and offers to gamble on her behalf, to try to win back what she has lost. Immediately, Shen's luck turns. He quickly loses everything he has won and then starts losing the considerable sum of money he happened to have brought with him that day. When he has lost everything he has, the old man suddenly starts coming back into the room. The concubines shoo the other men away, and they all return home. The next day Shen goes to find Zheng and Li, but they have vanished. He then goes to Wang's estate but finds that it, too, is deserted. The neighbors tell him that there was no official named Wang living there, but that in recent days a few ne'er-do-wells had occupied the house, bringing a group of prostitutes from Pingkang Ward to pass a few days drinking and gambling.

Two points about these stories are particularly noteworthy. The first is the sheer scope and ambitiousness of the schemes. The last two summarized above involved a whole cast of characters (somewhat like a troupe of actors), all cast in roles very unlike the persons they are in real life, and the scams required weeks or even months to play out. The inclusion of men playing the role of officials, and even in the story about Zheng and Sun, soldiers in full regalia, a court messenger (*dacheng guan* 大程官), and a forged appointment document ostensibly from the court—these are particularly interesting. We must bear in mind that the men being deceived were themselves members of the official class; in other words, they were hardly country bumpkins, so the sophistication of the deceptions must have been high. Three of the four stories recounted here have named informants who are said to have witnessed the entire scam; the informant for the story about Zheng being defrauded by Sun is Hong Mai's own nephew.

The second point, more important for my purposes here, concerns the narrator's attitude toward the con games being described. There is no authorial disapproval in the presentation of the stories, and no punishment, human or divine, is visited upon the perpetrators of the frauds. The lack of such

punishment in a *Yijian zhi* story already suggests a sense by the author that none is called for. Why? Perhaps because these scams might be described as "victimless crimes" (although the target of the scam would surely disagree). No violence occurs, and no bodily harm is done to the victim. He loses a large or small fortune, that is true, but beyond that there is no irreparable harm done to him. Not only is no authorial disapproval or punishment inflicted on the scam artists, but these stories also exude the narrator's fascination with the ingenuity of the ruses, their daring ambitiousness, and their complete attainment of the fraudulent goals. In that regard, these stories are the opposite of the stories about unscrupulous merchants discussed earlier. The judgmental and ethically engaged narrator of those stories has been replaced by one who relishes recounting an elaborate shakedown. This is a kind of narrator we are familiar with in later *xiaoshuo* 小說 (fiction). But we find it already here, in the compilation produced by a high official. The victims in these stories, moreover, are members of the compiler's own social class, and those who deceive the victims are socially low. Yet the victims are foolhardy—some more than others, it must be said—and the fraudsters are clever. This reversal of what might be the expected objects of admiration and distain on the part of the narrator are interesting especially in light of the heavy-handed authorial treatment of greedy merchants in other stories. What we see in these scam stories may be little more than the storyteller in Hong Mai trumping his other identity as a guardian of Confucian morality. But we also see his willingness to step out of his own social niche and to treat with interest and narratorial sympathy persons who belong to lower social classes even as they make members of his own class look like fools.

Singing Girls

Many *Yijian zhi* stories feature singing girls or courtesans of the empire's urban centers (usually one of its capitals, Kaifeng and Lin'an). These are not stories in which singing girls simply appear as minor figures; they are stories in which the singing girl is the protagonist and often the title character as well. These stories stand out for the depiction given of these professional entertainers. The stories contrast sharply with the portraits of singing girls we find in song lyrics (*ci* 詞) written for them by eleventh- and twelfth-century literati, many of which also feature this woman as a stereotype. They differ as well from the famous Tang-dynasty tales that feature singing girls.

These stories seldom romanticize the girls, making them into alluring objects of literati desire (whether accessible or not). To the contrary, the stories regularly depict these women as persons taken advantage of by the men who patronize them in the demimonde and then cast them aside. The stories present unflattering portraits of the men, most of whom are members of the official

class. These men tend to be provincial officials who have returned to the capital for a new assignment after an official appointment has ended. They have time on their hands and money to spend, and they frequent the wine shops, cabarets, and pleasure houses of the entertainment districts and become romantically involved with the entertainers there.

Consider the short story titled "Darling Hong."[14] Hu Shijiang, between official assignments, is walking through the entertainment district in Lin'an when a woman starts yelling at him. At first he does not recognize her, but after a few steps (as he subsequently tells his male friend) he sees that she is Darling Hong, a singing girl with whom he had had an affair a few years before. She rebukes him for having deceived her, promising to marry her and then abruptly breaking off the relationship. When she fell ill, she further reminds him, he was still in the capital but never came to see her. She predicts that he will soon succumb to the same illness she had and ends with an ominous prediction about the outcome. By now, both Hu Shijiang and the reader can infer that this woman is actually the ghost of Darling Hong, and she probably has been waiting in the pleasure quarters, where she had died from that illness, until Hu Shijiang eventually returned. Sure enough, soon after this confrontation in the street Hu Shijiang becomes sick, and he dies soon thereafter.

The most remarkable aspect of this story is the speech the ghost delivers, denouncing Hu Shijiang. It is vitriolic and is also the centerpiece of the whole story: "You made a promise. Why did you deceive me, telling me you were not married, and then ignore your promise? When I became sick and you never came to see me. Where in heaven and earth is there such a heartless man as you?" 君向與我約，如何始以不娶欺我，既而背之？我病，君略不相視，天地間豈有忍人如君比者? Deceit by the man is a common motif in these stories. Promises are made and then broken. Sometimes, the man actually borrows money from his new girlfriend and then absconds with it. The consequences for the girls may be tragic. They are so ashamed by what has happened, their unrealistic high hopes suddenly dashed, that they fall seriously ill. Sometimes they die, as Darling Hong did. Just as often they commit suicide. Then their ghosts come back to take revenge on the unsuspecting man.

These singing girl stories could hardly be more different from the ways of writing about the same female entertainers that are so widespread in *ci* of the time. In those songs, the same women, who frequently performed the very songs that describe them or give voice to "their" inner lives and longings, are coy and flirtatious, or cool and aloof, or, most common of all, prey to affection and resultant heartbreak and loneliness. It is true that many of the songs are about love affairs turned sour, with the woman left alone again. But the portrait of a singing girl pining away for the dashing young man who has left her is a far cry

from one who is driven to suicide by distress and humiliation. And even the most spirited and self-sufficient of these girls, the likes of which we encounter occasionally in Liu Yong's 柳永 (ca. 987–1053) songs, may fantasize about "punishing" her roving lover the next time he comes to find her, denying him sex for one night, but she is not going to come back as a ghost with murderous intent, and with good reason for having it.

It is surprising that these stories exist at all, considering the thousands of song lyrics that collectively convey such a different image of these same women. How can their existence be explained? One might suppose that they reflect a special sympathy and understanding that the *Yijian zhi* compiler, Hong Mai, had toward these women. This is not impossible, as unlikely as it may seem. There is some support for this possibility: in one singing girl story in *Yijian zhi* Hong Mai himself appears (it is very unusual for him to figure in a story).[15] As governor, he is presiding over a banquet, and a singing girl interrupts her own standard song, announcing she wants to perform a song she herself has composed. She proceeds to sing a song that presents a personal complaint, couched in allusive language, about an unnamed young man (or men) who has been harassing her. This is a singular story, and it likely appears in the collection only because, at some level, Hong Mai sympathized with this woman (and admired her ability to compose her own song).

On the other hand, the many other stories about singing girls and, often, their vengeful ghosts are said to originate in various times and are told to Hong Mai by many different informants (named at the end of each story). So it is unlikely that he or any other single individual can be credited with the creation of these stories, although it is indisputable that Hong Mai saw fit to select them for his collection. It may be best to think of these stories as expressions of some vague general awareness in society of the time of how often these young entertainers were taken advantage of by the men on whom their livelihood depended. Many of the stories show these girls to be young, naive, and easily duped. There may have been a prevalent sense in urban society at the time of the human cost of the "pleasure quarters" where these women lived and worked, a cost ironically paid not by the men who were spending sums of money to indulge themselves but by the girls who were employed to provide such diversion. It may not be so surprising, after all, that such stories would turn up in a collection devoted to "strange events," featuring ghosts and supernatural retribution, since in real life these women had little or no recourse to worldly justice. In any case, the stories about these entertainers provide a sobering alternative to all the love songs that male literati wrote for the girls to sing, performing in front of male clientele, about how emotionally needy they are for male attention.

This is not to say there are no stories that show these girls in a harsher light. There are depictions of singing girls who are anything but naive and vulnerable. A case in point is the story of three Imperial Academy students who go out looking for fun one night in Kaifeng, intending to go to the Cai River neighborhood, south of the city wall, where there were many brothels.[16] Along the way, two of the young men become separated from the third, and after spending some time looking for him, the two decide to give up the plan and go back to the school for the night. The third fellow, Sun Xingzhong, not knowing his friends have gone back, proceeds on his own to the entertainment district. He happens to be dressed in fine clothes that night, and he has a rather haughty manner. When he arrives at a brothel, announcing that he wants to buy drinks and songs, the girls who greet him are immediately put off by his supercilious ways. Noticing that Sun, as they later observe, has come alone, is well dressed, and is somewhat overbearing, they immediately "decide to kill him and throw his body in the river." But after they kill him (how we are not told) they first strip off his clothes, which they plan to sell. The murder eventually comes to light, because one of the girls makes the mistake of keeping Sun's hat in her room, not realizing that it has Sun Xingzhong's name sewn into it on the inside. In the investigation into Sun's disappearance that follows, the hat found in the girl's room is all the authorities need to force a confession of the killing from the girls. The crime is all the more shocking for how quickly the girls settle on their plan and how brazen and unprovoked they are. We see that these women are not always the ones taken advantage of in their dealings with men. Needless to say, this aspect of their behavior also goes unrecorded in the love songs the literati wrote for them to sing.

Butchers, Soldiers, and Waiters

Yijian zhi stories include persons from all social classes and walks of life. Few stories feature as protagonists persons whose social standing is below the merchant class (common soldiers, laborers, servants, peddlers, etc.), just as we would expect. Yet such stories are to be found occasionally in the collection.

We sometimes find some upper-class snobbishness or even traces of contempt in the way these lowly persons are depicted. These persons often engage in behavior sure to be viewed as immoral and shocking to upper-class eyes (e.g., adultery among them is common). But just as often we find the opposite: menial workers are idealized and shown to be as virtuous as the most upright and cultivated persons of the upper class. Although the two ways of characterizing socially lowly persons may be considered contradictory, probably they both spring from the unfamiliarity that the mostly upper-class storytellers (i.e., Hong Mai's informants) had with the underlings of their day. The large

social and cultural gap between the educated class and laborers made it as plausible for storytellers to idealize persons who existed beyond the boundaries of respectable society as it did to assume they deserved only to be viewed with contempt.

A story about butchers happens to capture both of these modes of representation.[17] A government clerk in Ezhou, Ding, died young, leaving his wife a widow at the age of thirty. Soon she began to have illicit sex with a butcher named Zhu Si. The two carried on shamelessly, with Zhu coming to the Ding residence in broad daylight, which scandalized the son, Ding Erlang. Erlang contrived to befriend another butcher, a man known as Wheezer Zhang Er (perhaps because he was asthmatic), who is the story's title character and its hero. Erlang ingratiated himself to Zhang Er, first by paying generously for meat he was selling and then by loaning him money to open a butcher shop, so that he would no longer need to walk the streets peddling his product. Once Erlang believed that he had won Zhang Er's loyalty, he secretly asked him to murder his mother's illicit lover. Zhang Er, however, acted like the proposal offended him, saying that he could not be "bought" that way. Zhang Er broke off his friendship with Erlang. Erlang's friends, when they learned about his failed plot, said that Erlang had made the mistake of looking for loyalty and good faith among the lower classes, where those virtues are unknown. Before long, Zhang Er and fellow butcher Zhu Si agreed to go together to Hanyang to buy pigs. On the way they had to cross a river, and the two men had some disagreement over the boat that would take them across. The argument became heated, and blows were exchanged. After Zhang Er returned home, one night he armed himself, snuck into Zhu Si's home, and murdered him along with two of his children. The next day Zhang Er turned himself in to the authorities, confessing his guilt for the murder. He never said a word about Erlang and Erlang's grievance. But a military general who happened to be camped with his troops in Ezhou heard the whole story about what had happened from those who knew. Impressed by Zhang Er's "commitment and loyalty" (*zhiyi* 志義; i.e., to Erlang), he recruited Zhang Er onto his staff and saw to it that his crime was forgiven. Zhang Er later earned himself an appointment as officer because of meritorious service.

It would have been clear to readers that Zhang Er's altercation with Zhu Si at the riverside was contrived and something he intended to use as an excuse for his violent reprisal. Despite his rejection of Erlang's secret request, Zhang Er felt obligated to his benefactor, not because Erlang had favored him with money but, quite to the contrary, because he had befriended him. We come to understand that the conclusion Erlang's friends draw, when Zhang Er first rebuffed Erlang's plan, that Erlang had overestimated the lowly Zhang Er is a note of subtle irony struck by the narrator.

The idealization of menial men also happens in stories about romance. Wang Fu, a common provincial soldier on patrol alone at night, encounters a pretty girl on his rounds who tells him that she has "long admired him" (a claim the reader will immediately find suspicious).[18] They begin sleeping together, outside it seems, every night, and Wang Fu even begins to volunteer for night patrol duty when it is not his turn. All this affects Wang Fu's health, and his family becomes suspicious. Eventually, Wang's father spies on his son and surprises the couple when they are together. The girl runs into the nearby Shrine of the Heavenly King and disappears. Upon inspection, it turns out that she is a maidservant statue in the shrine. (Female attendant statues in shrines, which were often delicately and exquisitely crafted in Song times, come to life as pretty ladies in many of these stories.) The father has the statue destroyed while Wang Fu looks on, weeping. Within a week Wang Fu dies, apparently done in as much by grief as by any adverse physical effects of his liaison with the bewitched statue.

In another story, Cui San, a waiter in a teashop in Huangzhou, has closed the shop for the night and is preparing to sleep inside when he hears a knock on the shop door.[19] Cui San opens the door to find a pretty young woman who tells him that she is a new daughter-in-law of the Sun family next door, but her mother-in-law treats her badly and has driven her out this night. She needs a place to sleep. Cui San is reluctant to allow her in, explaining that he is merely a servant, not the proprietor of the teashop. But eventually he relents, and predictably, the two end up sleeping together, after she approaches his bed in the middle of the night, explaining that she "is not accustomed to sleeping alone." The woman's nocturnal visits become habitual, and she even starts giving Cui San money, noting that his monthly salary in the teashop is hardly enough to support him. Cui San can hardly believe his good fortune, having acquired both a pretty "wife" and unexpected income. Soon, however, Cui San's older brother, who is a hunter, comes for a visit. When Cui San tells his brother about his good luck, the brother is immediately suspicious, reminding Cui San that the area is full of ghosts and other evil creatures. Late one night the brother sets traps outside the shop, and sure enough, in the middle of the night he catches a spotted linsang.[20] It has already died. The brother skins and roasts it and then eats its meat while Cui San looks on weeping, "unable to control his heartbreak." But a few days later (after the brother has departed), Cui San is surprised at night to be visited by his lover again, who appears to be unharmed. At first she rebukes him, asking how he could be so cruel to her when she had been so good to him. Then she explains that the animal caught previously in the net was one of her maids, and she herself escaped harm that night. When Cui San apologies and begs forgiveness, the woman's demeanor changes. She knows, she admits, that it was not Cui San's idea to set out traps, and she does not resent him. The reader sees at this point that Cui San knows this woman is not who she claimed to be

and is in fact a werecat of some kind. But he still loves her. The story has a happy ending, the narrator telling us that they resumed their affair as before and that, as the story ends, the love affair "continues to this day."

The men in both stories appear to be completely devoted to the women they have taken up with. In stories about educated men who encounter such women, the man typically repudiates the woman once he understands the truth about what she is. But Wang Fu and Cui San are a different sort of man, whose endearment and dedication even after their lovers are revealed to be demonic are evidently part of the strangeness and appeal of their stories.

Other Women

Earlier I discussed the distinctive treatment of singing girls in *Yijian zhi* stories. Here I expand that topic to other types of women. It may seem odd to speak of women of the time generally as "others." How can half of contemporary society be construed that way? Yet when we remind ourselves how little the educated men of the day wrote about women, it may not be so far-fetched to group women among the others, at least from the point of view of the writings men produced. One of the interests of the treatment of women in *Yijian zhi* and other tale collections of the time stems from the candor of the material. Outside of tales and *biji* 筆記 (miscellanies), most of the writing about women from the Song period that we have today is eulogistic and formalistic (e.g., in commemorative and funerary writings: poetic laments, tomb inscriptions, eulogies, etc.).[21] Such material fulfills ceremonial and ritualistic purposes and is expected to be laudatory—rarely is anything included that is highly individualistic or perhaps even problematic. The representations of women in *Yijian zhi* stories are not nearly so constrained by stereotypes. Consequently, the range of their behavior is wider, and their virtues and vices more fully displayed, as are the everyday problems they faced. In what follows I discuss some of the common ways women are written about in these stories, grouped according to their social role and function in the stories: women of heroic resolve, women who suffer in silence, women with unspecified or suppressed grievances, and madwomen and women bewitched. Given the purposes of this chapter, my interest is not in giving a comprehensive sketch of women in Song period social history (others have already done that) but, rather, in identifying the attitudes toward women that the stories, and particularly the narrators, display.

Women of Heroic Resolve

Some stories feature women who, faced with a personal crisis, react with what the narrator clearly thinks of as admirable decisiveness and bravery. This bravery often shows itself in violent physical acts. There are, for example, mothers who kill their own children and then kill themselves.[22] They are driven to these

desperate acts by unfaithful husbands or husbands who harbor suspicions of the woman's infidelity when is fact there is none. In one story the wife of an official, who with her two children is accompanying her husband on his way to a new provincial appointment, discovers that he secretly has a lover following them up the river in her own boat.[23] One morning, when the husband is off visiting the other woman, having left his family on a pretext, she sends a box of "delicacies" to the other boat, with polite greetings. When the husband opens the box he discovers the heads of his children. By the time he returns to his wife, she has killed herself. We might expect authorial condemnation of such violence, but the narrator of this story explicitly praises the wife for being willing to commit such acts, likening her choice to "heroic" women commemorated in the histories. Yet most of such women eulogized in more canonical writings have a cause other than an extramarital affair behind their violent acts.

Another morally vexed story is that of a wife of a wine shop owner, Zhang, who is abducted by an officer of the Jurchen army when the invaders reach Yangzhou during one of their incursions in the early Southern Song period.[24] The woman subsequently informs her abductor about a stash of cash that her husband has hidden away, and the two of them return to rob the husband. Convinced now that the woman is devoted to him, the Jurchen officer keeps her with him, trusting her. One night he gets drunk, and the woman kills him with a knife and then takes all his valuables (including her husband's wealth, as well as all of the officer's other plunder) and returns to her husband. The husband curses her when she arrives, but she cleverly points to all that she has brought back to him and asks if she had not won the officer's trust that way, would they now have such riches to enjoy? In an appended comment, Hong Mai goes out of his way to praise the woman, linking her "heroism" to her native place of Huaiyin, which we are told has since the time of Han Xin of the Han dynasty produced persons, including even "women and children," known for their "resolve, incorruptibility, and principle." One wonders whether the husband in the story would agree with this assessment.

One might see a connection between such stories and less violent tales that still shine a light on women's self-reliance, albeit of a different kind. Wang Balang, a traveling merchant, takes up with a singing girl on his travels, and when he returns home he announces to his wife of twenty years that he is going to divorce her.[25] She is furious and drags Wang to court, where she insists on a divorce that gives her one-half of the family wealth. The focal point of the story is the outraged denunciation of her husband the wife delivers before the judge. The judge agrees with her demand, and also agrees to let her keep custody of their daughter, whom Wang had wanted to take with him. She opens a shop selling wares, and Wang angers her again one day when he passes by and predicts that

she will never make any money from that shop. What transpires is the opposite: the woman becomes quite wealthy from her successful business and Wang, living with his newfound love, sees money slip away from him, until he dies impoverished.

Women Who Suffer in Silence

For every story of bold and assertive women, there are many more about women who endure abuse not daring to protest. Unlike the stories of heroic women, those that present examples of women who suffer silently do not go out of their way to call attention to that experience. It is more likely that, if we notice the suffering at all, we do so in spite of the way the stories are presented.

A provincial official, Wang, holder of the prestigious title of gentleman for attendance, comes back to Lin'an to wait for a new assignment, bringing his wife with him.[26] Dissatisfied with the neighborhood they first lodge in, Wang tells his wife that on the next morning he will go look for better lodgings and then send a carriage to fetch her once he finds a place. Unfortunately for them, Wang's plan is overheard by someone. The next day, Wang sets out early in the morning. Around noon, a carriage arrives to fetch Wang's wife. Not suspecting anything, the wife goes off in the carriage, only to be delivered to a man whose livelihood is selling women. Wang looks everywhere but cannot find his wife. Five years later, when sent to a new post in Quzhou (west of Jinhua, Zhejiang), Wang happens to be invited to a banquet by the assistant magistrate there. When a dish of turtle is served, Wang begins to weep. Asked why, Wang explains that his wife used to make just such a dish, and tasting it brought back his sad longing for her. The host asks the cook to come out: she is none other than Wang's wife, who had been purchased as a concubine by the assistant magistrate and just by coincidence had been asked to help in the kitchen that evening. Hearing the story of the wife's disappearance in Lin'an, the assistant magistrate is deeply chagrined and immediately offers to return the woman to Wang, without even asking him to return her purchase price to him. Thus, husband and wife are reunited.

The narrator names his informant for the story, apologizing that he had forgotten Wang's full name as well as that of the assistant magistrate ("forgotten" deliberately, one suspects, to protect the persons involved from the humiliation of having these events brought to light). The narrator adds, however, that as soon as he heard the story he decided he must include it in his collection, since it would be so regrettable if the assistant magistrate's virtue and generosity were not recorded and passed on to posterity. Nothing is said about what had happened to the woman from her point of view. The interesting question of why she had never explained to her new master the calamity that had befallen her also goes unexamined. We are naturally curious about this, once the question occurs to us, but the narrator of the story has no interest in it.

Women with Unspecified or Suppressed Grievances

There are stories of women who evidently suffered injustice or abuse at the hands of men but whose grievances go unidentified. These women typically return as ghosts, but whether the man they confront is the one who abused them or one who just happens to turn up in the place where they died is sometimes left unclear. *Yijian zhi* is frequently cagey about giving specifics (personal names, details of crimes) when the men involved are officials, so it is often impossible for the reader to be sure what the story behind the story is. These muted narratives may therefore take on a haunting quality owing to their suppression of detail, for the reader as well as for the male protagonist.

In one story, an unnamed official is on his way back to Lin'an for a new appointment when he stops at an inn in Jinling.[27] When left alone by his servants, he is confronted by two female ghosts, one after another, who address him accusingly. But what are they accusing them of? The first ghost glares at the man, points to her chest, and says, "In my chest there is a jade bracelet. Do you know that?" It is completely unclear what this means. Abruptly the ghost leaves the room. The second ghost then appears (from a different door). This one is holding an infant in her arms. She also glares at the man and says, "The official brutally killed us." The reader does not know if "the official" (*guanren* 官人) here is a term of address ("you") or a reference to some other official. The protagonist is overcome with fear, so much so that he wants to run away, but his legs will not move, and he wants to cry out for help but cannot make a sound. Soon his servants return and he immediately decamps to another inn for the night. That is the whole story, which is less than two hundred characters long.

In extreme cases, the fact that a woman even has a grievance may be suppressed to the point it is nearly invisible. The story behind the story is almost completely elided. The maidservant of a certain military officer, who is married to a woman surnamed Lin, is told to go out into the family garden one evening to cut vegetables to cook for the couple's dinner.[28] While she is outside, the husband suddenly cries out and falls to the floor, losing consciousness. He does not come to until the next morning. It is also the next morning before the maid returns from the garden. She explains that just as she was harvesting vegetables, a little boy only a foot tall sprung up from under the ground and began pulling himself up on her clothes. When she struck him with her knife, the little boy divided into several little boys, and eventually they succeeded in overpowering the maid and forcing her to the ground. When the family calculated the timing of the two strange occurrences, one indoors and one outdoors, it was determined that they happened at exactly the same time. The husband never fully recovers from his sudden illness, and soon he dies. His wife, Lin, remarries, to another official.

The one thing that is clear from the story is that there is link between the two strange events and that it is deeply significant. But what is that connection? Presumably, it is something untoward and disturbing, which is why it is only hinted at in such an odd but unmistakable way. We might suppose that the unconscious husband's spirit or soul sexually assaults the maid in the garden. But the details about the garden attacker being so small, pulling himself up on the maid's clothes (as a child does on its mother), and her use of the knife against him argue for this being something other than a sexual assault. The child may be the ghost of a murdered infant or an aborted fetus that was buried in the garden, the product of a rape or illicit affair between the husband and the maid, the issue of which had to be hidden from public knowledge (and perhaps from the wife as well). The husband's guilt in some unspeakable prior act that is now threatening to come to light is further implicitly supported by his death soon after, which presumably is karmic punishment for his involvement in killing the baby. His culpability is even hinted at by the strange way he is designated in the story (literally, "the son-in-law married to a woman surnamed Lin").

Madwomen and Women Bewitched

This is a large topic in terms of the number of stories that center on such women and the range of their behaviors, circumstances, and spirit possessions. It is surprising that women's madness in these stories has not attracted more scholarly attention. It is a topic that deserves more scrutiny, and more than can be given in this brief account. The phenomenon of normal women who suddenly go mad or are possessed by a demon or spirit (who may then speak through them) is frequently encountered. Abrupt and often inexplicable madness strikes women more frequently in these stories than it strikes men. Men's madness tends to be associated with character types: Buddhist or Daoist "mad monks." By contrast, women of all social classes and walks of life seem vulnerable to sudden fits of madness, which may be temporary or long lasting, sometimes even permanent.

A woman's madness or bewitchment often, but not always, has a sexual dimension: a woman is perceived as "mad" or bewitched because she becomes wanton in flaunting her sexuality and sexual desires. The story attributes her shocking behavior to an untoward encounter she had that left her bewitched. Girls who gaze into tree trunks, for example, are liable to become bewitched by the tree spirit or sprite (*mei* 魅, *xiao* 魈) inside. Thereafter, they dress up and apply makeup every day, seclude themselves in a room, and spend hours in a kind of revelry (overheard outside the room) that has strong sexual overtones. One such girl, bewitched by the spirit of a *wutong* tree growing outside her window, calls out to her "wutong lover" (*wutong lang* 梧桐郎) as her distressed father chops the bewitched tree down.[29] When another girl, who suffers possession by a sprite of unspecified origin, emerges from her seclusion, her family

notices that her face is red, as if she had been drinking (she had not). When her brother questions her about what had been going on, she replies, "I cannot talk about it. There is no such pleasure in this world!"[30]

Encounters with the demon known as Wutong 五通 or Muke 木客 were particularly common in the south, according to Hong Mai, who writes a lengthy entry on this noxious sprite, summarizing numerous encounters.[31] (This *wutong* 五通 or *wutong shen* 五通神 is roughly homophonous with the name of the tree *wutong* 梧桐 that figures in the story above.) Hong Mai observes that the prevalence of this demon in southern lands is analogous to that of the werefox in the north. Later in the Southern Song the Wutong cult would receive imperial recognition (its name changed to Wuxian 五顯 [Five Eminences]), and temples and shrines devoted to Wutong flourished. The effort to tame this troublesome demon, and widespread popular belief in it, was likewise reflected in Wutong's elevation as a god in both Buddhist and Daoist pantheons. In Ming times Wutong was transformed into a god of wealth.[32] But the later respectable Wutong is a far cry from the baleful scourge we find in *Yijian zhi*.

In the stories Wutong is a demon who seduces woman and induces madness, comas, sickness, and even death. He is also responsible for unwanted pregnancies, unnatural pregnancies of impossibly long duration, and the eventual birth of deformed or bestial babies. Again, the motif of illicit sex in these stories is linked to female sexual desire. It is not the case that Wutong simply assaults and rapes. It is, rather, that appearing to women as a handsome, well-bred gentleman or, more deviously still, "taking on the appearance of whatever kind of man a woman may find attractive," he seduces women so that they willingly have intercourse with him, taking leave of their senses. Wutong may even appear in his "original form" (whatever that is) or as an ape, a shaggy dog, a toad, and so on. Such reports make the intercourse seem all the more horrible, incomprehensible, and intriguing to the reader.

There are obvious parallels between the accounts of women's sexual encounters with Wutong and all the stories we find elsewhere in *Yijian zhi* about men seduced by female ghosts and werefoxes. But there are also differences. One of the clearest is that madness is not a prominent feature of the stories about men. Another is that there are no happy endings in Wutong stories, as there are sometimes in stories about beautiful female ghosts, or at least stories in which the outcome is not a disaster for the man. That does not seem to happen to the women who meet up with Wutong. Another difference is that men are not seduced by bestial women; ghost women or werefoxes who appear as women to seduce men are all beautiful (at least they are at the time of seduction). Wutong manifestations may as well be horrific as handsome.

Madness or spirit possession may as often be in the eye of the beholder as in the woman deemed to be bewitched, demonic, or mad. The social stricture

against any mention of female sexual desire must be at work in the ease with which these stories convert a woman's sexual fantasy or real pleasure into an instance of female madness.

A different but parallel case may be seen in certain stories about female werefoxes or weretigers. The Yangtai countryside south of Xiangzhou (modern Xiangyang, Hubei), which had been wracked by warfare during the early decades of the Southern Song, was said to be plagued by animal spirits and demons. During the Qiandao period (1165–73) there were frequent sightings of a weretiger (*hujing* 虎精) that was said to live off of pigs, dogs, and children that it captured and consumed.[33] Jiang Tongzu, a circuit inspector touring the region, encountered a woman said to be a transformation of this demon a few times on his travels through the countryside. Her dress and appearance are described ominously: she looked forty or fifty years old, had dark skin, wore her hair tied up in a single bun, used no makeup, and had red eyes. She carried a small leopard cat, which darted about her, in front and behind, when she put it down. Later, when Jiang arrives in the provincial capital of Xiangzhou, he sees this woman again: she has been arrested and put on trial, believed to be responsible for the disappearance of several children. In her defense, the woman writes out a statement (she is literate), explaining that she is from a good family and her father was a local official. She was unhappy in marriage, however, and her husband already died. She has no offspring and chooses to live alone, eking out a living as best she can as she moves from place to place. She says she has been slandered and demonized by young men in the marketplace who do not know what to make of her. Her explanation may sound perfectly plausible to us. It evidently sounded at least potentially plausible to the local magistrate, who decided not to punish her but instead had her tied up and escorted across the border of his county jurisdiction. The woman is said to have gone into the hills to live but was eventually driven off by the people there as well, and her whereabouts was unknown. The magistrate hesitates to take any action against her, and there is presumably no evidence that she had committed any crime, beyond her strange appearance and way of life. But a woman like this was a magnet for suspicion and untoward rumors, just like women who were perceived as flaunting their sexuality. Despite the magistrate's decision to release her, her story in the collection is still titled "The Weretiger of Yangtai" 陽臺虎精 (Yangtai hujing).

. . . . .

Aside from types of persons found in the stories discussed above, *Yijian zhi* also contains stories that feature more obvious "others." These are stories about the

Jurchen invaders, who overran northern China in 1125, captured Song emperors (reigning and abdicated), and drove the Song court, or what was left of it, south across the Yangzi River, where it would remain for the next century and a half (before the next invasion, by the Mongols). The Jurchen invasion, which happened when Hong Mai was three years old, was a dynastic calamity and a national trauma. The Song's inability to ever recapture its northern heartland, not to mention frequent incursions by their northern enemy in the following decades, cast a pall over the remainder of the Southern Song, and especially over the decades that Hong Mai was active as an official and collector of tales. The *Yijian zhi* stories about rapacious northern invaders are pretty much what we would expect from a proud but conquered people whose humiliation continued many decades after the initial invasion. I have not written about them here because they have been treated elsewhere, and because they are, after all, quite predictable.[34]

The stories I have discussed contain, to my mind, more interest and more surprises. Perhaps some of the types I have identified project attitudes and assumptions by the narrators that we would expect in stories circulating orally among the educated class (e.g., those about rich merchants). But other types are likely to stand outside our expectations, for their open-mindedness (the scam artist stories), candor and sympathy (singing girls), or ambivalence (menial workers). The attention in these stories to women of all social classes and walks of life, whether in character wicked, heroic, aggrieved, mad, or malevolent, is a particularly interesting feature of *Yijian zhi*. It may not be easy to account for the prominence of women in these stories, and it is a feature of the collection not often commented upon, but it is one that certainly deserves more critical attention.

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Notes

1. Yijian is the name given in *Liezi* to a legendary recorder of strange tales and miracles; see *Liezi jishi* 5 ("Tang wen" 湯問 [The Questions of Tang)], 98. An excellent general introduction to the work and its compiler, Hong Mai, is found in Zhang, *Record of the Listener*. See also Inglis, *Hong Mai's "Record of the Listener."* A recent general Japanese study is Ihara and Shizunaga, *Nansō no kakureta besuto serā*.
2. An example of contemporary criticism of *Yijian zhi* as a misguided project for someone of Hong Mai's stature is the reference to the disapproving remarks by "pedantic scholars" (*louru* 陋儒) in a poem on reading *Yijian zhi* by the Southern Song poet Lu You 陸游

(1125–1220), who was Hong Mai's contemporary; Lu You refers to this criticism to voice his disagreement with it: "Ti *Yijian zhi* hou" 題夷堅志後 (Colophon on *Yijian zhi*), in Lu, *Jiannan shigao jiaozhu* 37.2371. Other sources for this early disapproval of *Yijian zhi* may be found in Hong Mai's own numerous prefaces to the thirty-two installments of his work, which refer abundantly and defensively to such criticism, discussed in Inglis, *Hong Mai's "Record of the Listener,"* 24–55.

3. See Inglis, "Hong Mai's Informants."
4. See Inglis, "Textual History"; and Zhang, "*Yijian zhi* de banben yanjiu."
5. "Quanzhou Yang ke" 泉州楊客 (A Quanzhou Merchant Named Yang), in Hong, *Yijian zhi*: "Dingzhi" 丁志, 6.588. All further references to Hong, *Yijian zhi* (the four-volume, Beijing, Zhonghua shuju edition, first published in 1981 and reprinted several times), are cited simply as *Yijian zhi*. Page references are given in this form: *juan* number in the section named (e.g., "Dingzhi"), followed by the page number.
6. "Di Bajie" 翟八姐, *Yijian zhi*: "Zhiyi" 支乙, 1.802.
7. "Xihu anni" 西湖庵尼 (The Nun of a West Lake Convent), *Yijian zhi*: "Zhijing" 支景, 3.902–3.
8. Shen, *Mengxi bitan*, 9.74–75.
9. "Zhang weng sha can" 張翁殺蠶 (Old Man Zhang Kills Silkworms), *Yijian zhi*: "Dingzhi," 6.590.
10. See, e.g., "Li Jiangshi" 李將仕 (Jiang of the Ceremonial Service), *Yijian zhi*: "Bu" 補 (Supplement), 8.1618.
11. "Lin'an wujiang" 臨安武將 (A Military Officer of Lin'an), ibid., 8.1619–20.
12. "Zheng zhubo" 鄭主簿 (Assistant Magistrate Zheng), ibid., 8.1620–21.
13. "Wang chaoyi" 王朝議 (Court Discussant Wang), ibid., 8.1621–23.
14. "Hong nu'er" 紅奴兒 (Darling Hong), *Yijian zhi*: "Bingzhi" 丙志, 6.412.
15. "Hesheng shici" 合生詩詞 (Miss Hesheng's Poetry and Songs), *Yijian zhi*: "Zhiyi," 6.841, the second story in the entry.
16. "Caihe xiucai" 蔡河秀才 (The Academy Student at the Cai River), *Yijian zhi*: "Dingzhi," 11.630.
17. "Xiao Zhang Er" 哮張二 (Wheezer Zhang Er), *Yijian zhi*: "Zhijia" 支甲, 8.772–73. The story is translated in Zhang, *Record of the Listener*, 74–76.
18. "Jianchang Wang Fu" 建昌王福 (Wang Fu of Jianchang), *Yijian zhi*: "Zhiyi," 2.766.
19. "Chapu Cui San" 茶僕崔三 (Teashop Waiter Cui San), ibid., 2.805.
20. A linsang is a slender tree-dwelling mammal, related to other families in the Feliformia ("cat-like") suborder.
21. For an excellent recent analysis of these and other Song period materials, see Xu, *Crossing the Gate*.
22. Two stories are presented in one entry, titled "Cai Hao qijie" 蔡郝妻妾 (The Wife and Concubine of Cai and Hao), the first about a secret affair and the second about a husband's unfounded jealousy; *Yijian zhi*: "Dingzhi," 14.659.
23. This is the first story in the entry referenced in note 22.
24. "Huaiyin Zhangsheng qi" 淮陰張生妻 (The Wife of Zhang of Huaiyin), *Yijian zhi:* "Zhiding" 支丁, 9.1038–39.
25. "Wang Balang" 王八郎 (Wang Balang), *Yijian zhi*: "Bingzhi," 14.484.
26. "Wang Congshi qi" 王從事妻 (The Wife of Wang, Gentleman for Attendance), *Yijian zhi*: "Dingzhi," 11.631–32.

27. "Jinling di" 金陵邸 (The Hostel at Jinling), ibid., 1.544.
28. "Linshi xubi" 林氏壻婢 (The Lin Family Son-in-Law), ibid., 7.591.
29. "Xincheng tonglang" 新城桐郎 (The Paulownia Tree Spirit at Xincheng), *Yijian zhi*: "Bingzhi," 7.421.
30. "Fangshi nü" 方氏女 (The Fang Family Daughter), ibid., 10.446.
31. "Jiangnan muke" 江南木客 (The Wood Spirit of Jiangnan), *Yijian zhi*: "Dingzhi," 19.695–97.
32. See Von Glahn, "Enchantment of Wealth."
33. "Yangtai hujing" 陽臺虎精 (The Weretiger of Yangtai), *Yijian zhi*: "Zhijing," 1.880–81.
34. See the discussion of such stories by Inglis, *Hong Mai's "Record of the Listener,"* 94–103.

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