SEQUELS TO *HONGLOU MENG*: HOW GU TAIQING CONTINUES THE STORY IN *HONGLOU MENG YING*

by

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ABSTRACT

After *Honglou meng* (1791) was published, a number of sequels appeared that redefined its major characters, rewrote its ending, and continued the story of life within the two Jia households. One of these was *Honglou meng ying* (1877), by female poet, Gu Taiqing. Despite its status as the earliest extant novel written by a woman, few studies have been devoted to examining it. Building on research that Ellen Widmer has provided on Gu Taiqing and her work, including *Honglou meng ying*, I will explore the novel further in terms of its relationship to the parent work and to other sequels written by men, and also examine it on its own terms as a literary work. Some of the main questions that I will address include: how does it compare to other sequels to *Honglou meng*? How does Gu Taiqing’s continuation of *Honglou meng* depart from the parent novel?

I have organized my discussion by providing an introduction to Gu Taiqing, whilst providing contextual information about women’s education, their relationship to fiction, and the impact of *Honglou meng*. Chapter One will deal with the broad issue of sequels in the Chinese context, the popularity of writing sequels during the Ming and Qing dynasties, and conclude with some observations about *Honglou meng* sequels in particular. The second chapter will deal exclusively with Gu Taiqing’s *Honglou meng ying*, evaluating it in terms of how the author continues the parent work, how she refashions its characters and themes, and how her sequel reflects her own unique concerns (which may not have been part of the original parent work). Finally, I will conclude with some remarks about *Honglou meng ying* in terms of its relation to sequel writing in late imperial China and its contribution to our understanding of women’s reading and writing in the final years of the Qing dynasty.
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INTRODUCTION

The past two decades have witnessed the publication of numerous works concerning women’s reading and writing in the pre-modern period. Stemming from a conference held at Yale University in 1993 entitled, “Women and Literature in Ming-Qing China,” a series of papers formed an important volume, Writing Women in Late Imperial China (1997). The scholars who attended this conference have subsequently published more detailed works that explore the various aspects of women’s writing: what forms their writing took, and what women’s writing reveals about the place of women in society. A common theme of the scholarship of the last two decades is the need to dispel the long held image that prior to 1911, Chinese women were oppressed and voiceless victims of a traditional society in which they were held prisoner. As a result of this work what is increasingly evident is that women in the late imperial period, through their writings, transformed the traditional gender role that they occupied and were able to create a space in which they could express themselves and at the same time form social networks that took them from their prescribed “inner chambers” to spaces beyond their cloistered existence.

In 1985, Hu Wenkai’s Lidai funü zhuzuo kao (An examination of women’s writing through the dynasties) was reprinted. This invaluable catalogue lists the name, works and dates of women writers from as early as the Han dynasty to the end of the Qing dynasty. Susan Mann describes the impact of this source when she states, “In 1985, when Hu Wenkai’s sourcebook on women’s writing was reprinted, it seemed that scholars recognized for the first time the magnitude of the corpus available to us…But now at last historians and literary critics are
studying the thousands of volumes of published books and unpublished manuscripts by women that Hu identified in his anthology, and countless others are still being discovered.”

Until as recently as 1989, the author of *Honglou meng ying* 红楼梦影 (Shadows of *Dream of the Red Chamber*) (1877), a sequel to the much-beloved classic, was unknown. *Honglou meng ying* was part of a series of sequels that Beijing University Press reprinted in 1988. The cover lists an author using the pseudonym Yuncha Waishi 云差外史 (Cloud Raft Unofficial Historian). Based on the title page, the work was printed by a publishing house located in Beijing during the third year of the Guangxu emperor’s reign (1877). The work also includes a preface by one Xihu Sanren 西湖散人 (Idler of West Lake), written in 1861. The identities behind the two pseudonyms were unknown. In fact, when Beijing University reprinted *Honglou meng ying*, there was speculation that Yuncha Waishi and Xihu Sanren were in fact, the same person. This was owing to the fact that each chapter begins with the phrase, “Written by Xihu Sanren” (西湖散人撰).” A year after Beijing University published its reprint, Zhao Botao 赵伯陶 found conclusive evidence in a poetry collection by Gu Taiqing 顾太清 (1799-1877), which identified her as the author of *Honglou meng ying* and Gu, in turn, identified the writer of the preface as Shen Shanbao 沈善宝 (1808-1862). Included in this newly discovered material is a poem by Gu Taiqing titled, “Crying for Third Sister Xiangpei” 哭湘佩三妹 (*Ku Xiangpei sanmei*)², which provided the conclusive evidence that she is the author of the work and Shen Shanbao wrote the preface:

*Honglou*’s illusory landscape has no basis in reality.
Occasionally I take up my writing brush and add a few chapters.
In her long preface, I (undeservedly) received excessive praise.

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² 湘佩 is Shen Shanbao’s courtesy name.
Frequent missives on beautiful paper demanded [that I complete the project].

红楼幻梦原无据，偶耳拈毫续几回。
长序一篇承过誉，花笺频寄索书来。

Zhao’s discovery uncovered the earliest surviving novel written by a Chinese woman whose identity can be verified. Many questions arise from such a discovery: Who is Gu Taiqing? And what compelled her to write a sequel to *Honglou meng*?

**An Introduction to Gu Taiqing**

Gu Taiqing, who is alternatively known as Xilin Chun 西林春, or Gu Chun 顾春, was descended from one of the major Manchu clans of the Qing dynasty, the Xilin Jueluos 西林觉罗, and was born in or around Beijing. Her dates (1799-1877) are generally agreed upon, as they are found in clan genealogies. Details about Gu’s origins are murky and still a point of contention amongst scholars. Her use of a Han surname, in particular, has been the focus of a number of studies, with some arguing that she is in fact not a Manchu but was really of Han Chinese descent. There are also those who believe that Gu took on a Han Chinese surname in an attempt to distance herself from a scandal that her grandfather was embroiled in when she got married.

According to Chen Shuiyun, there is now a general consensus that she is a descendant of E Ertai 鄂尔泰 (1677-1745), a high official during the reigns of Yongzheng (r. 1722-1735) and Qianlong (r.1735-1796). Her grandfather, E Chang 鄂昌 (1700-1755), wrote a poem that was...
deemed seditious and was ordered to commit suicide.⁶ Little is known about Gu’s childhood, save what can be inferred from reflections found in her poetry.

While the details of her childhood are largely shrouded in mystery, her life after she was taken as a concubine by a Manchu prince, Yihui 奕会 (1799-1838), becomes clearer. As alluded to earlier, some of the mystery surrounding Gu Taiqing’s identity involves her adoption of a Han surname. One of the more popular theories regarding it is that she adopted the surname Gu from one of Yihui’s Han bondservants in order to avoid detection by the Office of Royal Family Affairs (宗人府, Zongren fu).⁷ Fearing repercussions from her grandfather’s disgrace, she is believed to have taken the Han surname in order to become Yihui’s concubine at the age of twenty-six.⁸ Yihui was a grandson of the fifth son of Qianlong. He was a talented young man known for his love of poetry and extensive scholarship in a wide range of subjects including music, philosophy, Buddhism, mathematics, and architecture.⁹ These talents complemented Gu’s own. By all accounts their marriage was a happy one. Further evidence of this is the fact that after the death of his first wife, “Yihui lived with Gu exclusively, taking no concubine.”¹⁰ Yihui is largely credited for helping Gu refine her poetry. Their shared interest in poetry is evidenced by the poems they exchanged, many of which were published posthumously.

Gu’s life took a dramatic turn for the worse when Yihui died at only forty years of age in 1838. She was cast out of her home only three months after Yihui’s death. As for the reason of her expulsion, scholars generally attribute it to the strained relations that Gu had with her eldest

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⁶ Chen 117.
⁸ Zhang 3.
⁹ Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, eds., The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004) 630.
¹⁰ Widmer, Beauty, 187.
stepson, Yihui’s son by his first wife. Others cite an alleged affair with the author Gong Zizhen 龚自珍 (1792-1841)—an event that caused quite a stir at the time—as the cause of her expulsion.

In dire straits, Gu was able to raise her family in a new home, made possible by selling her jewellery. She documents this traumatic event in a headnote to a poem she wrote mourning Yihui's death:

On the seventh day of the seventh month, my late husband passed away. On the twenty-eighth day of the tenth month, in accordance with the orders passed down by my sister-in-law, I had to take my two sons, Jian and Chu, and two daughters, Shuwen and Yiwen to move outside the official residence. Without a place to live, I have had to resort to selling my gold phoenix hairpins in order to purchase a place to live and have composed a poem to commemorate this.

In the years following her expulsion from her husband’s household, Gu found comfort in her network of friends, many of whom were well-known female writers of the day. Included amongst them were daughters of famous writer of prosimetric verse 弹词 (tanci) Liang Desheng 梁德绳 (1771-1847), who wrote the latter part of Zaisheng yuan 再生缘 (Eternal destinies), Xu Yunjiang 许云姜, and Xu Yunlin 许云林. It is also likely that her closest friend was a noted poet, the aforementioned Shen Shanbao. Gu’s poetry is filled with references to these friends throughout her years of widowhood. A year after her husband’s death, she and her friends started their own poetry club. It is also likely that her closest friend was a noted

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12 Zhang 90.
13 Zhang 17.
14 Zhang 90.
poet, the aforementioned Shen Shanbao. Gu’s poetry is filled with references to these friends throughout her years of widowhood.

As a widow, Gu continued to write. By 1876, her poems numbered around 623 shi and over 354 ci (song lyrics). Wang Pengyun (1848-1904), a ci poet, in an assessment of Manchu poets placed her with the likes of Nalan Xingde (1655-1685), who is considered the best Manchu poet in the Qing dynasty. Based on the date of the preface (1861), Gu must have begun writing Honglou meng ying during or before 1861, but it wasn’t published until 1877, less than a year after she died. According to Ellen Widmer, the lengthy gap between the preface date and the actual publication date may indicate that Gu wanted her novel to be published after her death. Whether it was Gu or another family member, someone wanted her work to be preserved.

Gu Taiqing is most famous for her ci poetry. Her most famous works include her collection of shi, Tianyouge ji (“Collection from the Tower of Celestial Wanderings”), published in 1910, and a collection of ci, Donghaiyu ge (“Fisherman’s songs from the Eastern Sea”), published in 1913. In addition to writing poetry, Gu is also known to have been a skilled painter and frequently wrote couplets for paintings made by her friends. More recently, it is also believed that she may have even authored two operas.

Studies about Gu Taiqing

In addition to brief entries found in The Red Brush (2004), Writing Women in Late Imperial China (1997) and The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature, the only

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16 Widmer, Beauty, 183-84. This summary of details of Gu’s life is indebted to Widmer’s account.
17 Zhang 145.
18 Huang Shizhong, “Gu Taiqing de xiqu chuangzuo yu qi zaonian jingli” (Gu Taiqing’s operas and her early experiences), Wenxue yichan 6 (2006): 88-95.
extended examinations of Gu Taiqing available in the English language include Ellen Widmer’s chapter in The Beauty and the Book: Women and Fiction in Nineteenth-Century China (2006), an article titled “Continuities: Honglou meng ying in its Nineteenth-Century Setting” (2004)\(^\text{19}\), Beata Grant’s article, “The Poetess and the Precept Master: a Selection of Daoist Poems by Gu Taiqing” (2009), and a Master’s thesis by Huang Qiaole, which examines Gu’s poetry and how her role in a women’s community directly impacted it.\(^\text{20}\) To date, Widmer’s book and article are the only English publications devoted to the sequel. Keith McMahon mentions Honglou meng ying briefly in an article, “Eliminating Traumatic Antinomies: Sequels to Honglou meng”.\(^\text{21}\)

Studies about Gu Taiqing in China began as early as the first decade of the twentieth century.\(^\text{22}\) Many deal with the same topics: her alleged affair with Gong Zichen, her poetry, and matters concerning her identity. Unfortunately, following Zhao Botao’s discovery that Gu Taiqing authored Honglou meng ying, little interest has been generated amongst scholars. The majority of recent studies have focused on her poetry. Thus far, I have only located two articles (besides Zhao’s) that are devoted to Honglou meng ying: Li Zhemei’s “Honglou meng ying zhong Xue Baochai de qinggan shijie” (“Xue Baochai’s emotional world in Shadows of the Dream of the Red Chamber”) (2006) and Ma Jingni’s “Qian xi Honglou meng ying de jiazhi” (“A elementary analysis of the value of Shadows of the Dream of the Red Chamber”) (2007). A chapter in Zhang Juling’s Kuangdai cainü Gu Taiqing (An unrivalled female talent: Gu Taiqing) (2002) provides a brief overview of Honglou meng ying and highlights the potentially autobiographical details that are included in the novel, usually drawing connections between

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\(^{19}\) This chapter is an expansion of an article she contributed to Martin Huang, ed., Snakes’ Legs: Sequels, Continuations, Rewritings, and Chinese Fiction (Honolulu: U of Hawai’i P, 2004).


\(^{22}\) For a list of articles and books published in China about Gu Taiqing, refer to Appendix 3 in Xu Hongquan, ed., Gu Taiqing ci xiao zhan (“Song lyrics by Gu Taiqing with annotations”), (Chengdu: Sichuan chubanshe, 2010) 495-500.
Gu’s background as a Manchu noblewoman and how it impacts the overall work in terms of depicting women’s daily activities. Other topics she briefly discusses include the overall theme of the work and Gu’s portrayal of Jia Baoyu, as compared to the way he is portrayed in Cao Xueqin’s original work.

**Setting the Context: Women’s Education in Late Imperial China**

I will begin by outlining the changing conditions in late imperial China that made it increasingly conducive for women like Gu Taiqing to get educated and, in turn, look to writing to express their ideas and feelings in numbers previously unheard of. Secondly, I will provide a brief overview of women and their reactions to *Honglou meng*—the novel that brought women closer to the genre of *xiaoshuo* than any other work of fiction had done before.

Only a small percentage of the population were literate in imperial China, no more than 10%. Education was a pursuit that men traditionally engaged in because of the wealth and prestige that came with passing the examinations for which advanced literacy and a command of the Confucian classics was mandatory. Few women received an education that was equal to that which men received. The primary reason for educating women was to groom them for their future roles as wives, mothers and daughter-in-laws. As such, emphasis was given to domestic arts such as sewing, embroidering and management of the household and much less so to acquiring literacy. The attitude toward educated women is expressed by a popular saying at the time: In a woman lack of talent is a virtue (女人无才便是德).

Beginning in the sixteenth century, debates about the status of women and subsequently, the status of women’s education were a concern amongst many scholars. Some radical views

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24 Hou 175.
25 Hou 179.
can be gleaned from Li Zhi 李贽 (1527-1602), “[who] had argued that women are the intellectual equals of men.”

In the seventeenth century, when the printing industry took an interest in the publication of women’s works, the increase in the visibility of women’s talent, "more important than in their absolute numbers, provoked debates on women’s education, and by extension, the true nature of a women’s calling.”

Coming to the eighteenth century, two high profile figures, Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716-1798) and Zhang Xuecheng 章学诚 (1738-1801), engaged in debates over the validity of women’s participation in literary activity. The former encouraged female participation in writing and the latter opposed the publication of women’s writings. Apart from being one of the most famous poets of his time, Yuan Mei was also highly vocal about his support for women’s literary activities. He published the works of his female family members and started accepting female disciples in 1783. Zhang condemned Yuan’s activities as "contrary to the Confucian dictum that 'words should not pass outside the gates of the women’s quarter' and was greatly troubled by the new women of the eighteenth century.” He was more representative of mainstream attitudes of the upper class of eighteenth century China, having authored “Fuxue” (Women’s learning), an essay that championed the Han dynasty female historian, Ban Zhao’s Nüjie (Women’s prohibitions). Zhang held that the ideal woman was one who was isolated from the outside world. He did not believe that women should not engage in literary activity at all, but that they should do so privately.

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28 Schmidt 5.
29 Schmidt 6.
31 Schmidt, “Reception,” 12.
The tension between remaining in the “woman’s quarters” and participating in reading
and writing was also a concern for women at the time. For example, the female poet, Gu Ruopu
顾若璞 (1592-1691) had written:

When I read the Odes, I learned that the tasks of women are limited to the care of wine
and food, so how could I dare toy with brush and ink in order to compete with literary
gentleman? Still, from ancient times it has been true that “creatures cry out when they
suffer injustice.” In the past, such pure exemplars of womanhood as Ban [Zhao] and Zuo
[Fen] composed many texts to amuse themselves, thus demonstrating that “red reeds”
[used in making women’s writing brushes] and “needle reeds” can be displayed side by
side. So perhaps [writing] is not completely foreign to our lot [as women].

In Gan Lirou’s 甘立媃 (1743-1819) poetry, she laments the opportunities that are not afforded to
women of literary talent:

I want to inherit the osmanthus of Mount Yan,
My three elder brothers and one younger brother all came first in the examinations.
But wearing skirt and hairpin, my aspirations are in vain.

Both examples illustrate some of the frustrations talented women faced in their social
environments. In Gu Ruopu’s case, she is dealing with justifying the act of writing by aligning it
with the virtuous model of Ban Zhao, and in Gan’s case, she is voicing the frustrations of
ambitions to write the civil service examinations, which were blunted because of her sex.

By the nineteenth century, female literacy rates were somewhere between 2-10% of the
population. In some areas, rates were even as high as 25%. While the hub of female reading
and writing activities was largely centered in Jiangnan during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), the
Qing dynasty also witnessed the spread of women’s writing in other parts of China. Beijing for

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32 Idema and Grant 415.
33 Grace S. Fong, Herself an Author: Gender, Agency, and Writing in Late Imperial China (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 2008) 48.
34 Xiaoping Cong, “From “Cainü” to Nü Jiaoxi: Female Normal Schools and the Transformation of Women’s Education in the Late Qing Period, 1895-1911”, Different Worlds of Discourse: Transformations of Gender and Genre in Late Qing and Early Republican China, eds. Nanxiu Qian, Grace S. Fong, and Richard J. Smith (Leiden: Brill, 2008) 117.
35 Cong 117.
example, is where Gu created her poetry club along with her female friends. A recent study also shows that women writers were active in Guangxi. Prior to the Qing dynasty, only a handful of noted female writers were well-known in Guangxi; according to the study, more than thirty female poets in that province left poetry anthologies from the Qing dynasty alone.

The increasingly urbanized and commercialized culture taking hold in South China (Jiangnan) in the mid-Ming made books increasingly accessible to various groups that did not have access to them before; this included women. Prior to the mid-Ming, printing blocks were cut and proofread with care and printings were only made on high quality paper. Book buying had previously been exclusively reserved to the wealthy upper class, as they were the only ones who could afford to buy them. During the late Ming, the emphasis on quality printing shifted to quantity printing. With the increasing availability of books as a result of the expansion of trade routes and regional markets and coupled with the lower prices being charged for them, the composition of consumers was greatly expanded. In sixteenth-century Jiangnan, merchants identified new markets. These consumers included “aspiring students, holders of lower degrees, petty rural landlords, owners of small businesses and women from gentry’s families.” These economic trends continued through the Manchu conquest with “more urbanization, more print culture, and more books for women, and more published work by women.”

How did these economic shifts and new publishing technologies affect attitudes toward women and their relationship to education and literacy? Prior to the economic boom of the

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36 Zeng Ruanbo and Li Zhonglu,. “Qingdai Guangxi guixiu shiren qunti jiqi zhizuo” (Groupings of female poets and their works from Guangxi during the Qing dynasty), Guilin shifan gaodeng zhuanke xuexiao bao 19.1 (2005): 46–49.
38 Ko Teachers 35.
39 Ko Teachers 35.
40 Ko Teachers 35.
41 Mann 22.
sixteenth century, the ideal woman was largely confined to the inner sphere (nei). It was largely inappropriate for women to go beyond the private domain of their homes, let alone publicly offer their own views through writing. With the booming economy, the traditional elite witnessed the rise of wealthy merchants, who usurped the prestige they had enjoyed for centuries. Prosperous merchants and farmers garnered wealth and status that was previously unheard of. As a result, a number of people from these new classes of wealthy merchants and farmers could afford educations for their sons, enabling them to compete in the civil service examinations. This led to an increase in competition for the already limited number of positions available through the civil service examinations and threatened the position of the traditional elites, who had monopolized positions in the government. Such fluidity among the classes blurred traditional hierarchal boundaries. Dorothy Ko has dubbed this transformation, “the floating world”, “in which definitions of identity, social relations, and community were no longer predetermined but were defined by situational context and could change over an individual’s lifetime.”

With such anxiety, there was a call for women to get educated in order to reinforce the traditional order and uphold moral virtues. Yin Huiyi 尹会一 (1691-1748), a Han Chinese official serving the Qing, suggested that women’s literacy was connected with good rule. In his work, Sijing lu (Record of four mirrors), he includes biographies of virtuous women who save their men through proper counsel.

By the Qing dynasty, attitudes toward the education of women were largely carried over from the mid-Ming. Similar to the motivations underlying women’s education and writing in the Ming, some women wrote to uphold Confucian values. According to Susan Mann, “Elite
fathers held strong views on the proper rearing of their daughters. In High Qing Jiangnan, most elite fathers appear to have wanted their daughters educated. Many officials also agreed that it would be practical for women to be educated so that they could prepare their sons for the examinations. To further prepare women for motherhood and household management, they read Liu Xiang’s 刘向 (c.77 BCE-6 CE) Lienü zhuan (Biographies of exemplary women) (c.18 BCE). Reading Liu’s text educated women on proper conduct by emphasizing virtues such as filial piety and chastity.

In addition to advocating for the education of women as a means to promote Confucian values, the notion of “the ideal woman” was changing. She not only had to be virtuous, but also talented. Being talented was equated with the ability to recite and compose poetry. Amongst the most talented women at the end of the Ming dynasty were courtesans. Numerous accounts by intellectuals such as Qian Qianyi 钱谦益 (1582-1644) and Chen Zilong 陈子龙（1608-1647）attest to the idealized image of the courtesan at the end of the Ming dynasty. She was not only beautiful, but had considerable literary talent. According to Paul Ropp, “Poetry was a primary means of written communication between courtesans and their clients, and they frequently wrote letters to each other in the form of poems. Poetic talent was an important part of a courtesan’s allure.”

The Manchu conquest dramatically altered the status of courtesans, with decrees banning prostitution. The idealized talent-beauty image of women then transferred from the pleasure quarters into the homes of elite families. By the seventeenth

46 Mann 77.
47 Mann 78.
48 Ko, Teachers, 53.
49 Ko, Teachers, 181.
51 Wai-Yee Lee, “The Late Ming Courtesan: Invention of a Cultural Ideal,” in Widmer and Chang, 47.
century, the ideal “new woman” was both talented and virtuous.\textsuperscript{52} Like the courtesans of the Ming dynasty who found it necessary to be skilled in literary arts, daughters from elite families needed to get educated in order to increase their chances of a favorable marriage. Men now sought women who were highly literate—a quality previously idealized by the figure of the courtesan. Shi Chengjin selected his bride based on her literary talents and wrote, “Besides womanly work, she was also proficient in the Classics, literature, calligraphy, and arithmetic; choice verses poured from her mouth. Everybody praised her as a talented girl [\textit{cainü}]. I heard about her and asked for her hand.”\textsuperscript{53}

**Setting the Context: Female Responses to *Honglou meng***

Prior to the publication of *Honglou meng* (1792)\textsuperscript{54}, “the very name of \textit{xiaoshuo} (novels) had been associated with rambunctiousness and vulgarity.”\textsuperscript{55} Fiction, the parent genre of \textit{xiaoshuo} as a whole, was regarded as inappropriate for women. Ann Waltner writes, “China sought to protect their gentlewoman from pollution by confining them to the home, we should not be surprised that fiction reading—not to mention writing—remained off limits.”\textsuperscript{56} Fiction reading, in a sense, allowed women to imagine a realm and domain beyond their prescribed “inner chamber”. And this threatened these traditional tenets that confined women to their “inner chambers”.

Even in *Honglou meng*, fiction, primarily in the form of fictionalized drama, is considered inappropriate for young women. In chapter 42, Baochai reprimands Daiyu for reading *The Western Chamber*, “As for girls like you and me: spinning and sewing are our

\textsuperscript{52} Ko, Teachers, 181.
\textsuperscript{53} Ko, Teachers, 183.
\textsuperscript{54} There is some disagreement about the year that *Honglou meng* was initially published; some say 1791, while others believe it was in 1792.
proper business. What do we need to be able to read for? But since we can read, let us avoid
like the plague those pernicious works of fiction, which so undermine the character that in the
end it is past reclaiming.”

The same sentiment is expressed by Grandmother Jia in chapter 54. While criticizing the clichés found in scholar-beauty fiction, she expresses her opinions on the corrupting influence such novels have, “That is the general rule in all the best people’s houses. Even in our household the children aren’t allowed to listen to such stories.” While fiction is considered inappropriate to read in *Honglou meng*, other more “feminine pursuits” such as poetry and painting are commonplace activities taken up by the young educated women in the novel.

The relationship between women and fiction changed when *Honglou meng* began to circulate widely. For the first time, women, in significant numbers, read *xiaoshuo*. Since the time of its publication in 1791, *Honglou meng* was extremely popular amongst literate women. Many women picked up their brushes to express their feelings, reactions, and responses in the form of poetry, paintings, commentaries, and dramas. Poetry was the dominant medium that their responses took. While most of this came from Jiangnan, women in other parts of China also expressed admiration for the work. Women from diverse regions such as Guangdong and Hunan also participated in this trend. Emulating the young female characters in the story, women formed their own poetry clubs and engaged in similar activities such as painting and listening to music.

There is a general consensus amongst scholars that the reason *Honglou meng* became so popular amongst women was the degree to which women could relate to the characters in the novel. Widmer comments, “Its [*Honglou meng*] unprecedentedly complex female characters

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58 Widmer, *Beauty*, 140.
evoked powerful reactions among women readers,” and Wu Yanling notes that the popularity of *Honglou meng* has to do with the realism and extremely detailed accounts of the lives of young women.

The earliest written response to *Honglou meng* by a woman was in the form of a *shi* poem, dated to 1791; Given that *Honglou meng* is believed to have been initially published in 1791 or 1792, this written response may have been either to the newly published version, or even to a manuscript copy. Written responses by women to the novel took on a variety of forms: *shi* poems, *ci* poems, prose, drama, and novels—with a majority being poetry. Responses by women to *Honglou meng* extended from its publication nearly to the present. By Gu Taiqing’s time, these women writers came from a variety of regions throughout China. Their responses were not usually solo efforts, but were done as a social activity, usually in response not only to the work, but as a social exchange between mothers and daughters, husbands and wives, between relatives, and between friends.

For most Qing female writers, when writing about *Honglou meng*, they focused on the triangular relationship of Jia Baoyu, Lin Daiyu and Xue Baochai. Since the circulation of the story, male critics have either aligned themselves with “team Daiyu” (Yong Daiyu pai) or with “team Baochai” (Yong Baochai pai); however, no such divide existed amongst women—they almost always sided with the tragic heroine, Daiyu. The reason for this may lie in how these

60 Wu Yanling, “Qingdai houqi nüxing wenxue chuangzuo ticai yu Honglou meng de yingxiang” (The impact of *Honglou meng* on female literary pursuits during the latter part of the Qing dynasty), *Honglou meng xuekan* 5 (2006): 298.
61 Widmer, *Beauty*, 140.
63 Shuman Liu, “Ying shi Honglou meng liren: Qingdai guige dui Honglou meng de yue du” (They should be characters in *Dream of the Red Chamber*: responses to *Honglou meng* from within the female quarters of the Qing dynasty) *Honglou meng xuekan* 1 (2007): 207.
64 Liu 207.
women identified themselves with Daiyu, whose literary talents they associated with themselves. This alludes to the realism noted by Widmer, which many felt about the female characters that Cao Xueqin had created. For example, Qian Shoupu wrote a *shi*, which “frequently laments the plight of the intelligent woman, for whom talent is a source of trouble, not satisfaction.”  

Qian wrote of Daiyu:

> A fairy form, an immortal banished to an earthly home of wealth.  
> With poor fate, and great talent, it is difficult to protect oneself.  
> A flower endowed with feeling would only arouse regret.  
> Women find that literacy is the root of their undoing.  
> In vain did the Lady of the Xiáng’s tears speckle the bamboo.  
> Who will cherish her delicate soul?  
> When she returns to the Land of Illusion, she will surely understand.  
> That karma of passion and intelligence leave no traces.  

By the late Qing, female novelists appear on the literary scene. Wu Yanling tallies the number of novels authored by women to only five. The small number of female novelists may have to do with the stigma that fiction was a corrupting influence on women. Of the five that are suspected to have been produced, four are sequels to *Honglou meng*. They include Gu’s *Honglou meng ying*, Tiefeng Furen’s *Honglou jue meng* (*Dreaming of the Red Chamber*), Peng Baogu’s *Xu Honglou meng* (*Continuation of Dream of the Red Chamber*), Qiyun Nūshi’s *Sanfu yan* (*Three Beauties*).  

Unfortunately, with the exception of Gu’s sequel, the other sequels have not been preserved.

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65 Widmer, *Beauty*, 142.  
67 Wu 295.
CHAPTER 1: SEQUELS AND XUSHU IN LATE IMPERIAL CHINA

There is no term in Chinese that equates with “sequel”. Gérard Genette defines “sequel” as, “[a work] that continues a work not in order to bring it to a close but, on the contrary, in order to take it beyond what was initially considered to be its ending.” The term closest to this rendering of “sequel” in the Chinese tradition is xushu 续书 (“books of continuation”); however, even a literal translation of xushu fails to underscore the incredible variety displayed by works of this kind. Whereas, “sequel” as defined above, is primarily concerned with a continuation beyond an ending, xushu can start at various points in its parent work—not necessarily at the end. Honglou huanmeng (Illusions of Dream of the Red Chamber) 红楼幻梦 (1843) for example, begins after chapter 97 of Honglou meng and Dangkuo zhi 荡寇志 (The Records of Suppressing the Rebels), a xushu to Shuihu zhuan, begins after chapter 71. A definitive view of xushu has yet to emerge, in part owing to a lack of studies of them. For example, Lin Chen provides two definitions for xushu—one “broad” and one “narrow” definition. Martin Huang renders Chen’s definitions as follows: “When broadly defined, the term xushu…refer to works that can be characterized as an expansion, abridgment, and rewriting of a previous work for the purpose of improvement…however, xushu, when narrowly defined, refer to only what is usually understood as an extension (yinshen) or further elaborations (yanyi) of a previous work in terms of characters and plot development.”

Kang i-Sun Chang comments on the usage of this term when she writes, “[xushu] is a loose term, embracing a broad range of

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68 Huang, 4.
70 Huang 4.
writing practice from continuations to parodic rewritings.\textsuperscript{71} The definitions for “sequel” as defined by Genette imply a certain amount of closure or finality of a parent work, this situation is often not found in the works that inspired sequels in traditional China.

The complicated textual histories of \textit{Shuihu zhuan} and \textit{Honglou meng} and questions related to their authorship make it difficult to determine when the “original” narrative ends. In the case of \textit{Honglou meng} for example, scores of works have been published debating the authorship of the work. Before \textit{Honglou meng} was published in 1792, it had been circulating in what is generally believed to be an incomplete version in 80 chapters. When \textit{Honglou meng} was finally published in 1792, it was published as a complete work in 120-chapters. This version is commonly referred to as the Gao-Cheng edition, after the editors, Gao E and Cheng Weiyuan. It is generally agreed that the first 80 chapters were written by Cao Xueqin; the author(s) of the last 40 chapters remains a contentious issue. Martin Huang succinctly sums up the different theories regarding them: “1) Gao and Cheng told the truth, and these chapters were essentially the work of Cao Xueqin, and their role was only that of editor; 2) Gao and Cheng merely played the role of editor, but what they edited was work by someone other than Cao, and they might have unknowingly accepted it as part of the original novel; and 3) Gao and Cheng were being deceptive and actually were themselves the authors of the last forty chapters.”\textsuperscript{72} The textual history of \textit{Shuihu zhuan} also complicates what is deemed the “ending” in the narrative. Jin Shengtan 金圣叹 (1608-1661), for instance, in his highly influential commentary-edition of \textit{Shuihu zhuan}, credits Shi Nai’an 施耐庵 (c.1296-1372) as the author of the work; while

\textsuperscript{72} Huang 20.
attributing elements of the work he did not like, to Luo Guanzhong 罗贯中 (c.1330-1400).\textsuperscript{73} Jin Shengtan’s edition of \textit{Shuihu zhuan} discarded the last 49 chapters of the Yuan Wuya edition of 120 chapters.\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Shuihu zhuan} has variously been found in editions ranging from 100, 109, 110, 115, 120, and 124 chapters. Which of these versions then, constitutes the \textit{definitive} ending? The narrow definition of “sequel”, as reliant on the concept of a definitive ending of a parent novel is difficult to apply to pre-modern Chinese novels, as attested by the complex textual histories of the various versions of \textit{Honglou meng} and \textit{Shuihu zhuan}.

My usage of “sequel” will align more or less with the concept of \textit{xushu} as discussed by Chen and Chang. By adopting their flexible definitions, I can orient my discussion in terms of how sequel authors initiated responses to other novels and also earlier sequels, for which they often used the broad term \textit{xuzuo 续作} (works of continuation) without providing any indication as to what is being continued. If we are to apply the definition of “sequel” as provided by Genette, many works that are considered \textit{xushu} would not qualify. In order to facilitate a more focused discussion, I will be limiting analysis of \textit{xushu} (hereafter referred to as “sequel”) to those produced during the Ming and Qing dynasties, when the practice of writing sequels became popular.

\textbf{The Rise of Fiction Criticism and \textit{Xushu}}

“\textit{Xiaoshuo}”, literally meaning “small talk” is the common translation for fiction. The term is believed to have originated in the \textit{Zhuangzi}, but has little to do with the form that \textit{xiaoshuo} took in the Ming and Qing dynasties. Vernacular fiction \textit{白话小说} (\textit{baihua xiaoshuo})

\textsuperscript{73} David Rolston, \textit{Traditional Chinese Fiction and Commentary: Reading and Writing between the Lines} (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997) 117.
\textsuperscript{74} Shuhui Yang, “Growing from the Waist: The Problem of Sequeling in Yu Wanchun’s \textit{Dangkou zhi},” in Huang, 145.
constitutes one of two genres found mostly in the pre-modern period; the other being classical fiction in literary-language 文言小说 (wenyan xiaoshuo).\(^{75}\) The present discussion will primarily deal with vernacular fiction, as all works discussed here belong to this tradition. Of the various forms of discourses found in traditional Chinese society, fiction held a low position. Discourses that were esteemed by Confucian standards included the Confucian Classics, dynastic histories, and poetry.\(^{76}\) Even Ban Gu (32-92), in his estimation of fiction (albeit xiaoshuo in his time was much different than the form it took in subsequent centuries) held fiction writers in low esteem, as he listed them as the last of ten categories of writers adding, “only the former nine are worth reading.”\(^{77}\) Even by the early Ming dynasty, “The cultural position of vernacular fiction was not far from such cultural ‘discourses’ as prostitution. There were many government decrees after the founding of the Ming Dynasty in the fourteenth century, imposing a ban with severe punishment on the practice of all kinds of sub-cultural ‘discourses’—fiction, drama, balladry, together with popular cults, paranormal communication, prostitution.”\(^{78}\)

Efforts to elevate the status of fiction begin to appear in the form of commentaries toward the end of the sixteenth century. Members of the literati class including Jin Shengtan and Li Zhi 李贽(1527-1602) wrote commentaries to fiction and drama in pingdian form. Pingdian commentaries are highlights and evaluative comments made by a commentator which usually appeared interlineally in the text that is being commented upon.\(^{79}\) The close readings made by these commentators reflect a desire to promote fiction as a genre worthy of critical attention. Other, more highly regarded genres such as poetry and classical prose had previously been

\(^{76}\) Zhao 177-78.
\(^{77}\) Zhao 180.
\(^{78}\) Zhao 182.
\(^{79}\) Rolston 1-2.
published in pingdian commentary editions. The practice of fiction published with pingdian commentary became so widespread that, as David Rolston points out, “Commentary editions of famous novels became so popular that earlier editions without commentary or only rudimentary commentary went out of circulation and became rare books.”

Jin Shengtan’s edition of Shuihu zhuan was so popular that it became the most widely read version. Similarly, Zhang Zhupo’s Jin Ping Mei commentary edition is the most widely read version of the work.

Jin Shengtan’s commentary edition of Shuihu zhuan attests to the popularity and impact that fiction with commentary had on readers and readers-turned-commentators. “Later commentators implicitly or explicitly compared their work to that of earlier commentators.”

Choosing the medium of sequel-writing, Yu Wanchun 俞万春 (1794-1849) the author of Dangkou zhi (1853), wrote a sequel responding not only to its parent novel, Shuihu zhuan, but to the truncated version as presented by Jin Shengtan. Dangkou zhi’s author expresses his approval of Jin Shengtan’s version of Shuihu zhuan in the foreword to the work:

This book is called Dangkou zhi (The records of suppressing the rebels). My readers, why do you think I wrote this book? It is because Shi Nai’an’s Shuihu zhuan is not about Song Jiang being loyal and righteous. Everyone need only examine his Shi Nai’an’s flow of thought in his writing. There is not one written character that does not describe Song Jiang’s treachery...[Jin] Shengtan commented clearly: How is he loyal? How is he righteous?

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80 Rolston 2.
81 Rolston 4.
83 Rolston 5.
This example is evidence that sequels writers read commentary editions of fiction and that Yu Wanchun’s response in the form of a sequel may be an offshoot of pingdian commentary editions of fiction.

**Sequels during the Ming and Qing Dynasties**

In addition to pingdian commentary, another type of commentary on fiction emerged in the latter stages of the Ming dynasty—the proliferation of sequel writing. Sequel writing proliferated as fiction commentary editions of fiction became standard.85 Much like the functions of pingdian commentary editions of fiction where commentators’ remarks reflect their reaction to a work, sequels are also a reflection of the sequel author’s reaction to a parent work. Similarly, emendations made by a commentator, such as the editing to make it suit what they deem to be “correct,” is akin to what the sequel writer often is doing—correcting a version of a work they deem to be either incomplete or in need of revision. In the case of Jin Shengtan’s truncated version of Shuihu zhuan, his dissatisfaction with the previous 120-chapter version prompted him to revise it by claiming the last chapters were written by Shi Nai’an. Likewise, many sequel writers of Honglou meng in the nineteenth century were dissatisfied with the tragic ending of the parent novel, prompting them to write sequels in which characters, by and large, are met with better fates.

84 Gao Yuhai, **Gudai xiaoshuo xushu xuba shi lun** (A discussion of prefaces and postscripts to sequels of ancient Chinese fiction) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chu ban she, 2007) 71.
85 According to David Rolston, the most important stage of commentary edition fiction emerged with the publication of Jin Shengtan’s version of Shuihu zhuan, Mao Lun’s of Sanguo yanyi, amongst others—all published between the waning years of the Ming dynasty and the early years of the Qing dynasty (Rolston 3). According to Rolston, commentary editions of fiction became so widespread that it was uncommon to see a work without them. Martin Huang has identified the same time period as the first wave of production of sequels (Huang 1).
During the Ming and Qing dynasties, a plethora of sequels were published. Sequel production was particularly concentrated during two major historical transitions: the end of the Ming dynasty and at the turn of the twentieth century. An example of this is *Xu Jin Ping Mei* (Continuation of *The plum in the golden vase*) (1660) by Ding Yaokang 丁耀亢 (1599-1669), written after the Manchu conquest (1644). Some scholars have concluded that *Xu Jin Ping Mei* was written as a direct response to the effects and trauma felt during the collapse of the Ming dynasty. Ding’s sequel takes place when the Jurchen army invades China. Siao-Chen Hu points out, “Considering the great length (at least one-sixth of the book) and intense emotion that are dedicated to the description of the dynastic fall, we must acknowledge that the author must have meant *Xu Jin Ping Mei* to be a reflection of the last decade of the Ming dynasty.” Ding’s sequel is concerned with morality and karmic retribution. He was concerned with the way that *Jin Ping Mei* was being understood—namely, solely as an erotic novel. Ding writes, “I have witnessed how this novel was turned into a guidebook for debauchery…These people have turned the author’s good intention into hell. What a great crime!” The author’s intention, according to Ding, is to warn against the consequences of greed and excess. He explains, “The novel *Jin Ping Mei* intends to preach. It depicts how those who are debauched and greedy get proper retribution in this life.” In *Xu Jin Ping Mei*, principle characters that had died in the original, namely Ximen Qing, Li Ping’er, and Pan Jinlian are reincarnated as new characters and meet horrible fates as retribution for the crimes they committed in the original work and in the sequel. By working through the medium of a sequel, Ding was able to convey

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86 Huang 32.
87 For this view, see Siao-Chen Hu (2004) and Li Zhongchang,(1993).
88 Siao-Chen Hu, “In the Name of Correctness: Ding Yaokang’s *Xu Jin Ping Mei* as a Reading of *Jin Ping Mei,*” in Huang, 77.
89 Hu 79.
90 Hu 78.
his understanding as to why the Ming collapsed. *Jin Ping Mei*, a novel that is characterized by excesses of all types—material goods, money, and sex—lends itself to Ding’s belief that the collapse of the Ming was caused by such immorality and was retribution heaven exacted on the empire because of such greed. Siao-chen Hu concludes, “Reading, and writing a sequel to, the representative novel of the late Ming was his [Ding Yaokang’s] way of explaining the past era and justifying the current situation.”91

Another sequel that was also produced during the Ming-Qing transition was Chen Chen’s 陈忱 (c.1613-?) *Shuihu houzhuan* 水浒后传 (Chronicles after *Tales of the water wargin*) (1664). It too deals with the collapse of the Ming dynasty—albeit in a completely different manner. Rather than searching for the causes of the collapse of the dynasty, Chen Chen’s work is characterized as a work of Ming loyalism in which he imagines a new reality in which the old dynasty continues.92 Like Ding Yaokang, Chen Chen’s attitude toward the Ming dynasty is thinly veiled and can hardly be missed. Huang’s assessment is this: “With the help of the medium of a sequel, Chen Chen was able to symbolically extend the rule of the Ming monarchy by presenting a ‘continuation’ that differed from the ‘conclusion' in reality.”93

Another possible reason for the proliferation of sequel publishing was to meet the market demands of the reading public, which was fostered by advanced printing technologies that enabled publishers to mass produce fiction at lower costs. There are many reasons for such a productive phase of sequel writing. Huang suggests one of the main reasons so many sequels were produced, “is obviously the enormous popularity of the original work and the readers’

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91 Hu 93.  
92 Huang 33.  
93 Huang 33.
yearning to know ‘what happens next’. Capitalizing on the popularity of a parent work, sequels could appeal to those readers who wanted to revisit familiar characters and storylines. There was clearly a market for sequels, as several of them were reprinted numerous times. Also, in a number of prefaces to sequels, authors often justify their work as an attempt to satisfy readers. Certainly there were other reasons for writing sequels, sometimes as an outward dismissal of the way the parent novel ended, to reward or restore characters or dole out punishments to characters that were not adequately punished in the original works.

Reasons for sequel writings vary considerably, but are there any general trends amongst sequels to specific works that may reveal why certain works spawned more sequels than others and are there trends to be discerned based on commonalities between sequels? *Sanguo yanyi* for example, spawned far fewer sequels than *Honglou meng*, *Shuihu zhuan* or *Jin Ping Mei*. Perhaps the finality of the story of *Sanguo* rendered itself less conducive to a satisfying continuation; whereas *Honglou meng*, with its tragic ending and the uncertain fates of its cast of characters, lent itself to more continuations and rewritings.

**Honglou meng Sequels**

After *Honglou meng* was published in 1791, both male and female readers picked up their brushes to express their reactions; whether it was to praise the masterful storytelling of its author, Cao Xueqin or lament the sad fates of many of its characters, readers felt the need to express their reactions through the medium of writing. Yisu catalogues no fewer than 300 works that responded to *Honglou meng*—a testament to how the novel resonated with readers following

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94 Huang 2.
95 120 Chapter version. It had previously circulated with 80 chapters, and was considered incomplete.
its publication. 96 These reactions manifested themselves in all sorts of forms: notes, poetry, essays, drama, and novels.

The difficulty in defining “sequel” is all too apparent in the complicated textual history of Honglou meng, as alluded to in the introduction. By the time Honglou meng was in print, owing to the efforts of its commentators, most notably Red Inkstone and Odd Tablet, the authorship of Honglou meng had been attributed to Cao Xueqin. There is a general consensus that the first eighty chapters of the work were written by Cao; however, the authorship for the last forty chapters is still a point of contention. They are often attributed to Gao E and Cheng Weiyuan, and scholars cite numerous inconsistencies between these last forty chapters and the first eighty in support of this position. 97 Thus, the last forty chapters may even be considered the first sequel inspired by Honglou meng, and all subsequent sequels that continued after the 120-chapter version are actually sequels of a sequel. 98

Sequels in both English literature and in Chinese literature are often viewed negatively, derided for their lack of originality and their inevitable failure to live up to their parent work. Martin Huang cites Terry Castle’s assessment of literary sequels, “A sequel can never fully satisfy its readers’ desire for repetition, however; its tragedy is that it cannot literally reconstitute its charismatic original. Readers know this; yet they are disappointed.” 99 A similar reaction to Hou Honglou meng 后红楼梦 (Aftermath to Dream of the red chamber) (1796), an early sequel, is expressed by Yu Rui 裕瑞 (1771-1838), who writes:

96 Yisu, ed. Honglou meng juan (Documents on Honglou meng) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1963).
98 In her discussion of Honglou meng, for example, Li Wai-yee refers to the last forty chapters as a sequel to the first eighty. See Enchantment and Disenchantment: Love and Illusion in Chinese Literature (1993), chs. 4-6 inter alia.
Tasteless as chewing wax, they [sequel writers] have taken [Cao] Xueqin’s meaning of restrained but suggestive writing with layered meanings, and have to the utmost caused great suffering.

嚼蜡无味, 将雪芹含蓄双关极妙之意茶毒尽矣

Despite the generally unfavourable critique that sequels often received, *Honglou meng* sequels were published in close succession beginning in 1796 with *Hou Honglou meng* (1796), *Xu Honglou meng* (Continuation of *Dream of the red chamber*) (1798), and *Qilou Chongmeng* (Dreaming again in the elegant chamber) (1799). Subsequent sequels were published more sporadically: *Honglou fumeng* (1805), *Honglou yuanmeng* (Fulfilling the dream in the red chamber) (1814), *Honglou meng bu* (1819), *Bu Honglou meng* (1820), *Zengbu Honglou meng* (1824). Following *Zengbu*, the gaps between sequels widen significantly, with *Honglou Huanmeng* (1843) and *Honglou meng ying* (1877). To date, it is estimated that *Honglou meng xushu* number close to 100.

In general, *Honglou meng* sequels published during the Qing dynasty sought to “re-write” the ending of the parent novel. Most begin after the end of the 120-version, the “Cheng-Gao edition” (程高本); while a few others begin at chapter 97, when Lin Daiyu dies. Lu Xun summed up the purpose of *Honglou meng xushu* in his assessment that their authors wrote to

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100 See Zhao Jianzhong, “Honglou meng xushu de yuanlian shanbian jiqi yanjiu” (The origins, development, and evolution of sequels to *Honglou meng* and studies about them), *Hongloumeng xuekan* 4 (1992): 301-355. Martin Huang (16) notes that Zhao’s definition of *xushu* may be too broad.
ensure that endings to *Honglou meng* would be characterized by a reunion(s) (*tuanyuan* 团圆)\(^{102}\) and indeed, all but one do conclude with a series of such reunions.

In many of these sequels, Daiyu is either brought back to life or reincarnated. In addition to Daiyu, sequel authors also restored Skybright to life. Moreover, reunions were not restricted to bringing back the dead. They could also take place in the immortal realm (仙界), as is found in *Xu Honglou meng*. The story begins immediately after Lin Daiyu dies in chapter 97. Her soul makes its way to the Land of Illusion, where she is reunited with many of the female characters who had died in the parent work including Golden, You Erjie, You Sanjie, and Qin Keqing. Shortly after Daiyu’s arrival, other new arrivals, characters who had died after Daiyu in the Cheng-Gao version, also make their way to the Land of the Illusion. These include Faithful and Wang Xifeng. Qin Zizhen (秦子忱), the author of *Xu Honglou meng*, takes the theme of “reunion” to the extreme by reuniting those who live in the immortal realm, mortal realm and the underworld. Characters have full access to these three realms. For example, if a character wished to communicate with someone in the immortal realm, he or she would use incense as a means to summon the character that they wish to see. And if they wished to see someone who lived in the underworld, they would make use of a magic charm (符). In *Xu honglou meng*, the living and the dead are even able to feast together. In chapter 19 for example, Lin Ruhai, Lin Daiyu’s father, who had died in the early part of the original, along with Jia Zhu, Baoyu’s deceased elder brother, and Grandmother Jia feast with the living members of the Jia clan. Qin’s message of reunification is summed up in a couplet Baoyu reads upon a visit to the Land of Illusion:

Hope that the entire world’s gifted scholars and fair maidens, through generation after generation, will always be things that possess passion, to take the world’s infatuated men and women, husbands and wives to all appear on the stage of never separating.

願天下才子佳人，生生世世，永作有情之物，度世間痴男怨女，夫夫婦婦，同登不散之場。

Lu Xun’s assessment of these *xushu* authors and their attempts at creating a “happy ending” is echoed for the most part by *xushu* authors of *Honglou meng* during the Qing dynasty. All the sequels, to varying degrees, end with the restoration of the Jia clan’s fortunes. For example, in *Hou Honglou meng*, Jia Baoyu is awarded the *jinshi* degree and is selected by the emperor to take up post as an Academician Reader-in-waiting (侍讀學士) and Xichun also becomes an imperial concubine. A similar ending is found in Qin Zichen’s *Xu Honglou meng*. As in *Hou Honglou meng*, Baoyu also passes the *jinshi* examination and is made a Hanlin Acamedician (拔作翰林士). The conferring of titles in this *xushu* is not limited to Baoyu; other men of the Jia family receive favour from the emperor in the form of various other titles.

As Martin Huang notes, sequels began to proliferate during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, just as writing fiction commentary became an increasingly serious pursuit. With the canonization of masterworks such as *Sanguozhi*, *Shuihu Zhuan*, and *Honglou meng*, there was a sense of urgency to “control” readings of texts. One of the means of doing this was by writing *xushu*, which can be viewed as commentary on parent works. How the *xushu* author “picks” and “chooses” which elements he or she wants to include or exclude, adapt or refashion, in part reveals how he or she reacted to the parent novel. The very act of writing a *xushu* was in itself an elevation of the parent novel that acts as a self-justifying means of such a pursuit. The very acts of writing a *xushu* is somewhat paradoxical; on the one hand, it reflects the popularity of the
parent novel and praises it by implying that it is a significant work worthy of further examination.  

On the other hand, a *xushu* is also essentially a critique of the way the parent novel's author “handled” their characters and stories. These paradoxical forces, namely that of “praise” with simultaneous “criticism”, are best evidenced in prefaces found in *xushu*. *Honglou yuanmeng*’s preface includes the following passage:

> I have Bailin Heshan’s book, *Yuanmeng*, which has caused Daiyu to be reborn, Baoyu to return to his family, and the two to become man and wife. It has enabled the entire world’s lovers finally to be happily married. Is this not also a happy thing! Moreover, those who were treated unjustly in the earlier work, without exception are satisfied. As for the dazzling beauty of the prose, and the sentimentality of poetry, they especially can, like the earlier work, be praised as unlike any other.

The author of *Honglou yuanmeng*, on the pretext of satisfying readers, reunites Baoyu and Daiyu—a drastic change to the original tragic ending. This change is coupled with praise of the literary skill of both the original and his own work. Similar sentiments are found in *Honglou mengbu*’s prefaces:

> Recently, among literary works that appeal to every palate, there is none that compares with *Honglou meng*. Its diction is very lucid, but its purport very subtle. It has truly become the most extraordinary and most marvellous of texts…From the point at which the new continues the old, [the writing of] Master Gui Chuzi flows freely from the point where the narrative broke off, excelling all others in originality and craft. He has composed this book in order to gratify the minds of readers and please their eyes.

In addition to this paradoxical relationship with the parent novels, these *xushu* also display a high degree of awareness of each other. Each *xushu* was competing with others to

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103 Mengmeng xiansheng. *Honglou yuan meng* (1814). I have used the text found in Gao Yuhai 178.  
104 Gui juzi. *Honglou meng bu* (1819), using the text in Gao Yuhai 181.
establish itself as the continuation, and each writer employed different strategies to achieve this. For instance, *Hou Honglou meng*, considered the earliest sequel, inserts Cao Xueqin into the narrative—probably imitating chapter 120 of the Gao-Cheng edition, in which Vanitas entrusts to Cao the manuscript of the story. In *Hou Honglou meng*, Cao is a significant character who appears at the beginning and end of the work. In this *xushu*, he is intimately acquainted with the Jia family. At the urging of Baochai, Baoyu asks him to rewrite the original ending of *Honglou meng*. She reproaches Baoyu and Daiyu about the outpouring of grief that readers have felt upon reading their story, while they in fact they have lived “happily ever after”:

The two of you are enjoying honours and splendour to the utmost, but have caused thousands of generations of people to grieve and shed tears for you. How can your minds be at ease?

你兩人享盡榮華，反使千秋萬古之人為你兩人傷心墜淚，於心何安！

Baoyu then approaches Cao Xueqin to re-write the ending by creating *Hou Honglou meng*. The author further uses Cao Xueqin to justify his work by claiming to have retrieved *Hou Honglou meng* from Cao Xueqin himself. In the “general remarks”, he notes, “[This] book is from Cao Xueqin’s manuscript. Each *juan* is of [Cao] Xueqin’s own creation and bears the seal of Naiad’s House.”

In a secondary preface, the publisher of *Hou Honglou meng* even resorts to creating a letter that purports to be written by Cao’s own mother in order to further prove the authenticity of *Hou Honglou meng* as being written by her son. The preface begins with an explanation of where the letter originated from:

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106 书系曹雪芹原稿．每卷有雪芹手定及潇湘馆图章．
Old Mrs. Cao sent Mr. Cao Xueqin a family letter, which is also present before the beginning of *Hou Honglou meng*. traces [left by Mrs. Cao] are present on the original manuscript and are stored at Naiad’s House, Mrs. Jia Baoyu’s [Lin Daiyu’s] residence. Mr. Cao Xueqin has placed this before his story as the preface.

曹太夫人寄曹雪芹先生家书即书于后红楼梦之首篇，墨迹在原稿，藏于林黛玉夫人潇湘馆，雪芹先生即以冠于卷首为序文。107

Old Mrs. Cao praises *Hou Honglou meng* when she writes:

*Hou Honglou meng* is well organized and written clearly and [I] believe that it concludes the earlier work. With these thirty chapters, it is ready to be sent back for printing. Only this time [I] quietly delay, so as not to add legs to snakes.

后红楼梦简文温理,信可归结前书.再有第三十回，脱稿即寄回.只此悄宕，勿为蛇足。108

With the exception of *Hou Honglou meng*, the earliest *xushu*, it is abundantly clear that sequel writers read each other’s works—often either by explicitly addressing another sequel in their preface or by directly copying elements from earlier *xushu*. These competing *xushu* were highly critical of one another while claiming superiority for their own work. In one of the prefaces for *Xu Honglou meng*, the author, Qin Zichen remarks about the publication of other *Honglou meng xushu* and their lack of congruence with the original work:

*Honglou meng* already has *xushu* that have been published, have you seen them? As for the language and tone [in those works], they are not compatible with the earlier work…it’s like patching a sable coat with a dog’s tail.

红楼梦已有续刻矣，子其见之乎?...而语言声口，亦与前书不相吻合，...未免续貂。109

The author of *Honglou fumeng* was equally critical of other *xushu* when he wrote:

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107 Xiaoyaozi 2.
108 Xiaoyaozi 2.
109 From Qin Zichen’s *Xu Honglou meng* (1799) I have used the text found in Gao Yuhai’s *Gudai xiaoshuo xushu xuba shi lun* (A discussion of Prefaces and postscripts to sequels of ancient Chinese fiction). (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chu ban she, 2007) 155.
If you dream by means of other people's dreams, what follows from it must be lacking. The drawing of the snake is complete and yet feet are added. It's difficult to assess it as a snake.\(^{110}\)

若以他人之梦，即而梦之，次为梦之所必无者。蛇画成而添以足，难平其为蛇矣。

Despite criticisms that \(xushu\) directed at each other, they often copied elements from one another. For instance, there’s a minor detail in \(Hou Honglou meng\) concerning the naming of Baoyu’s son as Jia Zhi. The same name is also given to Baoyu’s son in \(Honglou meng ying\). Also, both \(Hou Honglou meng\) and \(Xu Honglou meng\), contain a storyline that involves Xichun becoming an imperial concubine. A majority of \(xushu\) also include the element of bringing the dead back to life or the appearance of reincarnations of characters who had died in the parent novel. In his study of Jiaqing-era (1796-1820) \(xushu\), Li Yixuan notices several commonalities between them—all address the reconciliation between the three leads (Jia Baoyu, Lin Daiyu, Xue Baochai). Li subsequently categorizes the \(xushu\) into four different groups: those that promote Baochai as the main character, those that promote Daiyu as the main character, those that promote Daiyu and Baochai equally as main characters, and those where the main characters are reincarnated.\(^{111}\) Suffice to say that \(xushu\) authors were pre-occupied with resolving the relationships between these three characters. The elevation or promotion of Daiyu and Baochai revealed the author’s preference for one over the other—very much reflective of writers who debated the virtues of these two female characters.

In Keith McMahon’s study of \(Honglou meng xushu\), he also identifies common trends found in these them: the improvement of Baoyu, the vindication of Daiyu, and the resolution of

\(^{110}\) See Gao Yuhai 181.
\(^{111}\) Refer to Lin Yixuan’s \textit{Wucai kebutian: Honglou meng xushu yanjiu} (No talent to repair the sky: studies about \(Honglou meng\) sequels) (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe youxian gongsi, 1999).
the love affair between Baoyu and Daiyu. In many of these xushu, Baoyu first renounces monkhood and takes on the new role of being a father and competent scholar-official. Many of the eccentricities that characterize Baoyu in the parent work are stripped away in the sequels. Gone is Baoyu’s disdain for conventional values, such as his opinion that girls are superior to boys, his unusually close and inappropriate conduct with women, and his disregard for studying. In many sequels, what one finds is a proper Baoyu, and in some cases there’s an overall sense of promoting Confucian conventional values. This is simultaneously reflected in some xushu works that bring Jia Zheng, Baoyu’s father to the forefront of the story. As presented in the original novel, Jia Zheng is representative of Confucian orthodoxy. He is a strict observer of Confucian rites who repeatedly exhorts Baoyu to study. This underlying concern with assigning proper Confucian values to Baoyu, and by extension Honglou meng is especially apparent in Xu Honglou meng. It centers around Jia Mao 贾茂, Baoyu’s son. Like his father, Mao was also born with a jade in his mouth. Unlike his father, however, Mao strictly adheres to Confucian values. In chapter 7, he is described as, “Cultured and elegant, [he] is never naughty; reading and writing are the activities that he enjoys most.” Unlike the Baoyu of the parent novel, Jia Mao not only enjoys studying, he also heeds to the advice doled out by his elders. This model Confucian is not only acknowledged by Jia Zheng, but also by the emperor, who eventually rewards Jia Mao with the post of Prime Minister.

Daiyu, more than any other character, undergoes a complete transformation in many of the xushu. Some sequels still maintain distinctive Daiyu-like characteristics such as her propensity to cry and her quick temper, but what one finds in many of the sequels are new

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characteristics not found in the original. One of these is that Daiyu becomes a capable manager. In fact, in *Hou Honglou meng*, Jia Zheng attributes Wang Xifeng’s disdain for Daiyu to the fact that Daiyu is a superior manageress of household finances! In the first chapter, Jia Zheng reflects:

[Xifeng] was jealous of Daiyu after all, fearful that if she became Baoyu’s wife, she would take away her position [as manager] of Rong Mansion’s accounts. As a result, she secretly set a deadly trap that caused Daiyu, while she was alive, to fret herself to death.

竟是他妒忌黛玉，隻恐做了寶玉媳婦，便奪他這個榮國府的帳房一席，故此暗施毒計，活活將黛玉氣死.114

Ellen Widmer has dubbed Daiyu’s transformation as an “extreme makeover.” In addition to being an able household manager, she assumes the role of encouraging Baoyu in his studies—the role that is normally associated with Baochai and Aroma. Widmer observes, “Under her firm hand, Baoyu shapes up, takes and passes the examinations, and assumes mature responsibilities.”115 Daiyu’s managerial acumen is also recognized in *Honglou meng bu*.116

In comparison to the many sequels to *Honglou meng* that were largely published just after the publication of the Gao-Cheng version in 1792, *Honglou meng ying* was published much later, past the height of sequel production at the turn of the nineteenth century. What then, prompted Gu to write a sequel to *Honglou meng* at that particular time? On the one hand, the very act of writing the sequel is a testament to the long-lasting popularity of *Honglou meng*, which by the time Gu’s was published, had already been available en masse for more than 80 years. And unlike the other extant sequels up until Gu’s time, this is the first to be written by a woman. The preface to Gu’s sequel, as written by Shen Shanbao provides clues as to why Gu wrote *Honglou*

114 Xiaoyaozi 7.
116 McMahon 104.
meng ying. Clearly dissatisfied with other sequels, Shen expresses her disapproval for them, a possible motivation behind Gu’s writing of Honglou mengying. She touches on this when she writes:

All know that Crimson Pearl had the wish of repaying her debt by tears and did not have a marriage contract. Tears spent, she returns to the immortal realm and is not able to linger in thoughts of the mortal realm. There is not a predestined relationship for Luminescent Stone between Wood and Stone, but there is an arrangement between Gold and Stone. Therefore, it is only right that this be experienced in life to reflect this [predestined relationship]. From beginning to end, this is the main point of Dream of the Red Chamber.

Throughout the country, because Crimson Pearl, who bears peerless talent and beauty and harbours eternal sorrow unto her early death, readers of the novel gave rise to continuations of it, each to provide a means for different interpretations and understandings. On behalf of Crimson Pearl, [the authors] expel the resentment from when she was alive, turn over the old case of her unlucky life by using the riches of the red dust and adding the fairy maidens of the skies. [The authors] revive those who are dead, and make those who are innocent impure. Even though much effort is made at writing such a story, they make little sense. This is contradictory to the earlier book’s original meaning.

咸知絳珠有償淚之願，無終身之約，涙盡歸仙，再難留戀人間；神瑛無木石之緣，有金石之，理當涉世，以了應為之事。此《红楼梦》始终之大旨也。海內讀此書者，因絳珠吐生前之夙怨，翻薄命之舊案，將紅塵之富貴加碧落之仙姝。死者令其復生，清者揚之使濁，縱然極力舖張，益覺擬不於倫。此無他故，與前書本意相悖耳。117

The sequels that Shen Shanbao criticizes are the ones where Lin Daiyu is brought back to life—a typical feature of earlier sequels. From Shen Shanbao’s point of view, restoring Lin Daiyu to life is akin to deviating from the parent novel’s intention. Shen and Gu shared this point of view, as evident in Honglou meng ying, where she is not brought back to life, nor does she feature quite so prominently as she does in earlier sequels. Like other sequel writers, Gu is very aware of the reader’s relationship with Honglou meng, which suggests that during her writing process, she was very much conscious of the reader-cum-sequel-writer. This is apparent when she notes,

117 Gu Taiqing. Honglou meng ying (Shadows of Dream of the red chamber) (Beijing: Beijing chuban she, 1988 (1877)) 1.
“Throughout the country, because Crimson Pearl, who bears peerless talent and beauty and harbours eternal sorrow unto her early death, readers of the novel gave rise to continuations of the previous work, each providing a means for different interpretations and understandings.”

In addition to Lin Daiyu’s less than prominent presence in the book, other notable departures made by Gu Taiqing include the ending of her novel. In almost every other sequel, there is a “happy ending”; *Honglou meng ying* ends with Baoyu making another visit to the Land of Illusion, where he undertakes to search for Daiyu. During his search, many of the significant female characters from the original novel (whether dead or alive in the sequel at this point) appear. Every time Baoyu attempts to approach them, he is unable to reach them. Baoyu’s frustration reaches its zenith when he spots Daiyu, along with Baochai, Shi Xiangyun and others on an upper floor of a tower. In vain, Baoyu searches for stairs that will bring him to these women. After realizing his inability to reach Daiyu and the others, Baoyu is abruptly transported to a horrific scene consisting of dancing skeletons set in the wild countryside, thus bringing the work to an abrupt end.

Of the sequels produced during the nineteenth century, Gu Taiqing’s *Honglou meng ying* certainly stands out for many of departures it takes from what typically makes a *Honglou meng* sequel; further to the aforementioned deviations that Gu makes when compared to many of the earlier sequels, there is a marked effort to continue many of the themes present in the parent work, a tendency largely absent in many of the more extreme alterations typical of some of the earlier sequels. Gone are the heavily supernatural elements that are present in the earlier sequels, which often involve fanciful plotlines where characters are resurrected, or, in more than one sequel, the transformation of Baoyu and his harem of women into martial warriors! In comparison to other sequels, *Honglou meng ying* remains more faithful to the tragic vision of
Cao’s work, but it also departs significantly from it. In the following chapter, I will discuss some of these departures.
CHAPTER 2: GU TAIQING’S HONGLOU MENG YING

Honglou meng ying consists of 24 chapters with roughly 130,000 characters. A woodblock edition was printed in Beijing in 1877, the same year Gu died; it remains unknown whether it was published while she was alive or published posthumously. As Ellen Widmer has pointed out, given the large gap between Gu’s writing of the book (before 1861, the date of the preface) and the date of publication, it is possible that she did not want it published during her lifetime—perhaps owing to the poor reputation of sequels or to the uneasy relationship women had with fiction writing. No subsequent editions of the work were printed until the twentieth century when Beijing University published a scanned copy of the 1877 version. As a late entry into the world of nineteenth-century sequels, Honglou meng ying seems to have generated little reaction in literary circles, as no commentaries about it have come to light. As a result, it is difficult to assess how Gu’s contemporaries felt about Honglou meng ying. Even though it is evident that Gu read other sequels, as suggested in her preface and in details that she borrowed from them, authors of sequels that were published after Honglou meng ying have failed to mention it in their works—a practice that was common in earlier sequels.

Despite being largely ignored by contemporaries, Honglou meng ying is significant, as it is the earliest surviving novel known to be written by a woman. There are an abundance of stories from the late imperial period depicting women as readers of fiction, but seldom as writers of it. As mentioned in the introduction, reading fiction was considered inappropriate for women. An examination of Honglou meng ying thus offers us a rare opportunity to explore the beginnings of novel writing by women in China. An examination of the text can shed some light on Gu’s understanding of the parent novel. Her creative choices, whether by imitating, copying, or drastically altering what was presented in the original work, can increase our understanding of
women’s culture, in particular, and offer evidence as to how deeply women engaged fiction and the medium of the novel.

I will arrange my discussion as follows: First, I will illustrate how Gu tries to maintain continuity with Honglou meng. Next, I will focus on her manipulation of character development in order to facilitate two narrative threads she intends to pursue—one from the original, and one of her own; I will then conclude with some observations about the autobiographical nature of Gu’s work and what sets Honglou meng ying apart from Honglou meng.

**Constant Reminders: Continuation, Referencing and Imitation of Honglou meng**

One of the challenges that Gu may have faced in writing her own sequel was how to connect it with the narrative of the parent novel. This connectedness to the parent novel is alluded to in Shen Shanbao’s preface of the work when she writes:

As for figuring out how to make all the characters’ speech and expressions closely resemble [the original] and whether or not the Rong Mansion will gradually be prosperous again, the author has a grasp on what logically comes next and continues the earlier novel without leaving any scars.

至於諸人口脗神情，揣摹酷肖，即榮府由否漸亨，一秉循環之理，接續前書，毫无痕跡。

One of the methods that Gu uses in order to make these connections is constantly to refer to events that took place in Honglou meng. This serves both to remind readers of what happened in the parent novel and also demonstrates Gu’s familiarity with it. This is achieved in one of three ways—through plot elements from the parent novel that are either copied or imitated, through dialogue between characters, or via reminders made by the narrator.
Gu starts *Honglou meng ying* on the assumption that the reader is familiar with the parent work, as it begins in the middle of events that unfold in the 120th chapter of the Gao-Cheng version of *Honglou meng*. She copies verbatim from this chapter, altering what happens after Jia Zheng reencounters Baoyu, who has gone missing after taking part in the civil service examinations. In the original chapter, after Jia Zheng sees his son, Baoyu is taken away by a Buddhist monk and Daoist who tell him, “Come, your earthly karma is complete. Tarry no longer.”

In *Honglou meng ying*, after Jia Zheng greets Baoyu, his servants immediately snatch him from his captors and the Daoist and Buddhist monk are eventually caught. The resulting action is a major alteration from the 120-chapter Gao-Cheng version, which depicts the Monk and Daoist as semi-omniscient characters. Here, they are reduced to criminals who scheme with Mother Ma (who collaborated with Aunt Zhao in chapter 25 of the parent novel in order to cause harm to Baoyu and Wang Xifeng through the usage of witchcraft) to profit from holding Baoyu captive. Without these changes, Gu’s sequel would not be possible. Rather than having Baoyu abandon his family by becoming a monk, Baoyu, as in most of the other sequels, returns home to continue his life at the Jia family mansions.

References to the parent novel continue in the second chapter, which features Jiang Yuhan and Aroma, Baoyu’s chief maid in the original. Here, Aroma’s possession of the red cummerbund that Jiang Yuhan gave Baoyu in the parent novel (in chapter 28) is used as a device to underscore Aroma’s close relationship with Baoyu, but also serves as a reminder to readers about Jiang Yuhan and his involvement in an episode involving Baoyu’s beating by Jia Zheng in chapter 33 of the original book. The red cummerbund is a gift given to Baoyu by Jiang Yuhan. Here, brief references are made to the incident in the parent novel when Gu writes, “The next

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day, he [Jiang Yuhan] opened the luggage and found that red cummerbund and suddenly thought of how he had heard that Aroma’s surname was “Hua” [meaning Flower] that year when he played drinking games and thus knew that she must be Baoyu’s maid in name, but really his concubine.”\(^\text{119}\) Aroma also makes specific reference in chapter 33 of the original work in her conversation with Jiang Yuhan. Without going into any detail, Gu explains, “[Aroma] then explained how people from Zhongshun mansions were demanding his [Jiang Yuhan’s] whereabouts and how Baoyu had taken a beating [for remaining silent on the matter].\(^\text{120}\) This reference to events that occurred in the parent work is referred to once again by Li Wan and Patience in a conversation in the very same chapter:

Patience said, “That year that Baoyu took a beating, was it because of him [Jiang Yuhan]?” Li Wan explains, “Did you forget? That time, people from Zhongshun mansions sent some plays over to us and he [Jiang Yuhan] sang “Reading the Play.” Grandmother Jia liked it very much and rewarded him with a bolt of silks for making clothes.”

平儿道: “那年宝二爷挨打,就是为他吗?” 李纨道: “你忘了?那回忠顺府送戏,他不是还唱了一出《题曲》,老太太很喜欢,还赏了一匹尺头.\(^\text{121}\)

The episode is referred to, but not explained in detail by both Jiang Yuhan and Aroma—another indication that knowledge of events in the parent novel is assumed; otherwise, those who just read the sequel on its own would not be able to make sense of what these characters are referring to. Gu does seem to make a point of constantly reminding readers of events that took place in the parent novel in order to enable the reader to understand events that she is writing about.

\(^\text{119}\) 到了第二天,开箱看见那条猩红汗巾,忽然想起那年行酒令儿,听见袭人姓花,便知是宝玉的通房了 Gu 8.

\(^\text{120}\) 便将那年中顺府要人,宝玉挨打的事说了一遍 Gu 11.

\(^\text{121}\) Gu 12-13. The reference is to Scene 9 of Liaodu geng (Jealously-Curing Soup) by Wu Bing (d.1646). In the scene, Feng Xiaoping, a concubine who is the victim of a jealous wife, finds solace in reading Mudan ting (Peony Pavilion), commenting on each scene of the play as she reads it through the night deep in late autumn.
The narrator of the work, as noted by Ellen Widmer, remains rather mute throughout the story, but is sometimes used to recap events that happened in the original book, while offering commentary that may be reflective of Gu’s own opinion of the parent work. For example, chapter 5 opens with a lengthy prologue about the events that happened in the parent novel, recounting the reasons for the downfall of the Jia family:

The story goes that after items in the Rong mansions were confiscated, it was followed by a series of events: Grandmother Jia passed away. Faithful followed her mistress by committing suicide, things were stolen, and the pure-minded Adamantina joined those in the immortal realm. It’s a pity that the manageress, Wang Xifeng, was forced to an early death. How fortunate it is that both [Baoyu and Jia Lan] passed the civil service examinations, but how unfortunate it was that Baoyu went missing shortly after! With the fortunes of the family declining, all sorts of ill fortunes found its way to them. In addition, there were those depraved men of the younger generation who took advantage of the misfortunes the family was experiencing by stealing and then selling the goods of the household. This caused the once great and mighty Rong mansion to dissolve.

The garden was filled with cries and howls of spirits with each room filled with the sounds of moaning and weeping…It really was as the ancients say: Yesterday the house possessed such intense political power that it was burning to the touch. Today, they must seek outside help. It’s all because they rely on the achievements of their ancestors, and the family’s money, that they did not restrain themselves in their extravagant spending and sensual pleasures and thus caused the absolute destruction of the family’s fortunes.

In addition to relying on the narrator and the story’s characters to recount plot details from the parent novel, Gu also designs plot details in Honglou meng ying to imitate episodes that occurred in Honglou meng, and this undoubtedly would cause readers to recall the events that

122 From “Fang yan” by Tang poet, Bai Juyi (772-846).
123 Gu 30.
occurred in the parent work. For instance, in chapter 5 of *Honglou meng ying*, Bayu recalls his first visit to the Land of Illusion in the original. In the original, Baoyu’s first visit to the Land of Illusion is made in a dream, and this dream also takes place in the fifth chapter (probably on purpose and by design by Gu). In the original, Baoyu’s entrance into the dream is facilitated by the room that he sleeps in. Cao Xueqin describes in detail Baoyu’s surroundings as a precursor to his visit to the Land of Illusion. A comparison between the description of the room, as written by Cao Xueqin in *Honglou meng* and that of by Gu in *Honglou meng ying* shows a strong resemblance between the two. One can imagine Gu writing this portion of the text with the original work clearly in mind. In *Honglou meng*, Qin Keqing’s room is described in great detail with elaborate decorations connected to famous *femme fatales* in Chinese history like Yang Guifei and Wu Zetian. A focal point is a painting on the wall of her room. Cao describes it as follows:

Inside the room there was a painting by Tang Yin entitled ‘Spring Slumber’ depicting a beautiful woman asleep under a crab-apple tree, whose buds had not yet opened. The painting was flanked on either side by a pair of calligraphic scrolls inscribed with a couplet from the brush of a Song poet Qin Guan:

(on one side)
The coldness of spring has imprisoned the soft buds in a wintry dream;
(on the other side)
The fragrance of wine has intoxicated the beholder with imagined flower-scents.

In *Honglou meng ying*, the setting of chapter 5 is Baoyu’s room, not the room of his sensual niece. Gu takes great pains to describe his room—more so than any other description of a room in the entire work. As was true with Qin Keqing’s décor, Baoyu’s decorations also make references to *femme fatales* in Chinese history. There is a wall hanging with text from “Rhapsody to the Goddess of the Luo River” (洛神賦), a sensual description between the poet

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Further to the feminization of Baoyu’s surroundings is the detail including Chou Shizhou’s (仇十洲) painting, “Spring Morning in the Han Palace” (汉宫春晓). Chou’s painting depicts women who lived in royal quarters engaged in a variety of activities, including watering plants, dancing, eating, applying make-up, playing instruments, sewing, playing chess, and taking care of children. Like the painting found in the original, “Spring Morning in the Han Palace” is also flanked by a couplet. It reads:

The shadows of flowers do not leave one’s side;
The sounds of the oriole are only heard in the courtyard’s west and east.

Both poems make references to spring and flowers, representing youth and women. In Cao’s poem, the flowers refer to the young and unmarried female characters. In Gu’s context, the flowers no longer exist, they only linger as shadows, referring perhaps either to the fact that the female characters in the parent novel are all married or to the reality that many of the female characters that had died in the parent work, most notably Lin Daiyu and Skybright, who are always associated with flowers. The connection of Gu’s chapter to the chapter in the original work is unmistakable when Baoyu makes reference to the ‘Spring Slumber’ painting. After hearing Tanchun make offhanded remarks about spring slumbers under a crab-apple tree, “Baoyu, upon hearing ‘spring slumber’ and ‘crab-apple trees’ all of a sudden recalled that time when he was in Qin Keqing’s room and that painting on the wall was in fact ‘Spring Slumber’.”

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125 For a discussion on “Rhapsody to the Goddess of the River Luo”, refer to Li’s Enchantment and Disenchantment, 33-36. It is fitting that Gu uses this fu, since (as Li points out), it deeply influences the portrayal of love and desire (qing) in all subsequent literature, including Honglou meng.
126 Gu 34.
127 宝玉听见海棠春睡四个字，忽然想起那年秦氏房中挂的正是“海棠春睡图 Gu 35.
More obvious references to the parent work occur in chapter 12 when many of the female characters take a tour of Jia She’s new residence. Gu Taiqing, replicating the tour of the garden that is made with Baoyu and Jia Zheng in chapter 17, changes it here by having the women tour the new residence. In chapter 17 of the book, the tour of Grand Prospect Garden is one of the more elaborately detailed elements of the entire novel, with each residence designed to represent its inhabitant.\(^{128}\) In Gu’s work, the tour of Jia She’s new residence, called “Ten-Thousand Willow Manor” is certainly smaller in scale and not nearly as elaborate as Cao’s garden world in terms of hidden meanings, but it nonetheless recalls both Baoyu and Jia Zheng’s tour of Grand Prospect Garden. Baoyu’s residence in the original is referenced when Lady She comments that one of the apartments looks like Baoyu’s, “This really does resemble your residence!”\(^{129}\) In Honglou meng ying, as in Honglou meng, the various buildings are associated with poetry. In the parent work, it is Baoyu’s task to name the various spots in the garden; in this sequel, the poems have already been provided by Gu, and are works that are praised by the female characters who read them. Comparisons between the two spaces are even pointed out by one of Jia She’s concubines, who remarks, “Let’s head upstairs to have a look, the flower garden is even better than that of Grand Prospect Garden.”\(^{130}\)

Chapter 19 features a more blatant copy of events that take place in Honglou meng. The core plotline of this chapter involves the viewing of snow and subsequent poetry writing that is inspired by it. The events here clearly hark back to the snow viewing party that occurred in the parent novel in chapters 49 and 50. The imagery found in Honglou meng ying is taken directly from Honglou meng. Examples of some of the more striking images created in the original include the highly contrasted image of Baoyu and Shi Xiangyun roasting venison in the snow-

\(^{129}\) 这倒像你那院子的样儿 Gu 92.
\(^{130}\) 上楼上去瞧瞧去，花园子比大观园还好呢 Gu 93.
covered garden. The scene consists of contrasts between the heat (cooking venison over an iron stove) and cold (the snow-covered backdrop), and between refinement (the finery that the women wear, including their elaborate capes and jewellery) and the common (eating wild game without restraint). In *Honglou meng ying*, when Lady Wang and Patience prepare for a snow viewing party, they discuss what food should be prepared:

Lady Wang says, “Everyone who is coming are close relations, other than wonton, we can just order a few other things to be prepared as well. We can even serve some wild game as accompaniment—that would be interesting!”

Patience laughingly replied, “Madam, speaking of game, I have already prepared a deer’s leg for Shi Xiangyun.”

王夫人道，“都不是外人, 除了馄饨, 再传几样可吃的就是了。就是那些野味, 我也可以陪着上, 倒有意思。”平儿笑道: “太太提野味, 我已经给史大姑奶奶留着一条鹿腿呢。”131

In addition to referencing Shi Xiangyun’s eating of game in the original, Shi Xiangyun also mentions the fact that Patience lost a bracelet (another detail from the original work) when she retorts to Patience’s teasing about eating game, “It’s not a big deal whether or not I get to eat roasted venison, but you’ll have to spend some effort looking for your bracelet.”132

This chapter, much like the chapter set-up in chapters 49 and 50 of the parent novel, is one characterized by the gathering of the story’s many characters. In the parent novel, these chapters introduce many new characters including Xue Baoqin, Xing Xiuyan and Li Qi. By the time these new characters arrive, the poetry club has already been formed and the club members, residents of the garden, intend to invite the newcomers to join them in writing poetry about snow. Here, Gu Taiqing takes the opportunity to reunite many of the characters who were present at the original snow viewing party, bringing them together again (those who are living of course).

131 Gu 151.
132 王夫人说: “我烤鹿肉吃倒不要紧, 你又得费工夫寻找镯子。” Gu 151.
Another obvious reference to the parent novel is when Xue Baoqin, a cousin of Baochai, enters wearing the same elaborate cape that Grandmother Jia had given to her in the original—a focal point in chapter 50 of *Honglou meng*. Also gathered at the party in Grand Prospect Garden (also the setting in the original), is Caltrop, who here makes her first significant appearance in the sequel. In the parent novel, she has just joined the poetry club.

The winter backdrop, paired with red plum blossom, serves as the backdrop and inspiration for the poetry writing gatherings that take place in these chapters. The poetry composed in this chapter, by far the longest section of poetry found throughout the work does not seem to do what Cao Xueqin was able to do with his poetry, that is, “[provide] a riddling evocation of an object and the secondary evocation, through that object, of another object. All these poems are allegories—that is, when you get past the first layer of allegory, you still have a second layer to deal with.”\(^{133}\) Saussy explains Cao’s use of poetry further when he says, “[there exists] a bridge between the poetry and prose, between the limited knowledge expressed by the character and the more extensive knowledge of the narrator.”\(^{134}\) In *Honglou meng ying*, poetry composed by the women seems to function less as “double meanings” and more as descriptive of natural landscapes or objects. In *Honglou meng*, the “double meanings” poetry worked because they were tied to the “register of fates” of the characters according to the register that Baoyu discovers in chapter 5; however, in *Honglou meng ying*, the fates of the 12 female characters have more or less already been enacted in the 120-chapter version, with Gu just continuing those narrative threads.

Towards the end of *Honglou meng ying* in chapter 20, Gu stages a robbery that resembles the robbery that occurs toward the end of the 120-chapter version of *Honglou meng*. In both

\(^{133}\) Haun Saussy, “Women’s Writing Before and Withing the Hong lou meng,” in Widmer and Chang, 291.

\(^{134}\) Saussy 296.
novels, some of the servants of the household hatch schemes to rob their masters. In chapter 111 of *Honglou meng*, He San is a disgruntled servant who was dismissed by Jia Zhen; embittered with his recent losses at gambling, he conspires with some local thieves to rob his former masters. A contrast to this disloyal servant is Bao Yong, who we learn has been demoted to caretaking duties in the garden in chapter 111 of *Honglou meng*. Despite this demotion, he remains loyal to the Jia family and it is because of him that not all was lost during the robbery. In the sequel, the setting is no longer the Rong mansion, but Jia She’s residence, Ten-Thousand Willow Manor. Here, the premise is similar and even features characters related to the events of the robbery in *Honglou meng*. At this point in the story, Jia She’s health is diminishing and household management has fallen into the hands of two managers of the household. These managers are described as, “Spending their days drinking, gambling, and smoking opium. And the rest of the servants went beyond their bad example. At first, they gambled in secret, but afterwards started having gambling parties…always saying that gambling is close to theft…when they suffered losses, they discussed the possibility of thieving.”

As in the parent novel, there is a hero who emerges amongst the servants of the household and saves the day. The lead perpetrator, ironically, is actually the brother of Bao Yong, Bao Qiang. It is unclear why Gu chooses to include this plot detail. Perhaps in this case too, it only serves to remind readers once again of the events that happened in the original work.

**Rewriting Baoyu**

Baoyu’s visit to the Land of Illusion at the end of *Honglou meng ying* is a departure from his previous visits to the Land of Illusion in the parent novel. In chapter 5 of *Honglou meng*, Baoyu is given access to the fates of the young women in his life, but quickly forgets what he

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135 中日里两个人吃酒，看牌，吸食鸦片。所有那些三众也就效尤，先还是偷着耍钱，后来就开聚赌…常言赌近盗…输急了商量偷窃 Gu 158.
sees. In chapter 116, Baoyu is given access to the fates of the women once more; this time, he is able to remember what he learns and experiences “a flash of illumination”—a precursor to his journey of detachment from the world of red dust by becoming a monk. In *Honglou meng ying*, Gu Taiqing fashions it so that Baoyu is unable to fulfill his journey toward enlightenment; rather, he is trapped in the Land of Illusion unable to tell the difference between real (*zhen*) and unreal (*jia*)—effectively derailing Baoyu’s journey toward enlightenment.

On his first visit to the Land of illusion, Baoyu reaches a signpost that is inscribed with the following couplet:

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Truth becomes fiction when the fiction’s true;
Real becomes not-real where the unreal’s real.
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Dore J. Levy explains the significance of the couplet:

> This is the signpost to transcendence and affects all levels of the book. The gateway presents the ultimate conundrum of the writing and experience of the novel. The paradox of the first line of the couplet pivots on the word for “time” (*shi*), the second on the word for “place” (*chu*). Truth and fiction interpenetrate in time, real and not-real in space...the epiphany of the couplet is that the separation of these categories is illusory. Whatever the vehicle to enlightenment, when liberation is achieved the truth or fictionality, realness of not-realness of the vehicle—and the goal—evaporates.

In *Honglou meng ying*, Gu Taiqing ends her work with a statement about Baoyu being unable to distinguish between what is real and what is not real, a reference to the couplet found at the entrance of the Land of Illusion all the way back in the fifth chapter of Cao’s original. In the last chapter of *Honglou meng ying*, Baoyu goes to visit Xichun for a chat because he has been feeling somewhat depressed (郁郁闷闷). Xichun then presents a bronze mirror for him to examine. After staring into it, he finds himself transported to the Land of Illusion. While there, he longs to see Daiyu and frantically searches for her. While he explores the Land of Illusion, Baoyu sees

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famous episodes from *Honglou meng*, including Skybright tearing apart a fan and Caltrop changing her pomegranate skirt. He sees these ladies from his life, but is frustrated when they don’t react or respond to his questions. Baoyu finally sees Daiyu, who is also accompanied by Baochai, Baoqin, and Shi Xiangyun in an upper floor of a tower. They beckon him to come over, but he is unable to find stairs to reach them. He then reflects that not too long ago (in chapter 23), some singers had performed for their family and some of the song lyrics particularly resonated with him. The lyrics foretold that there would be no stairs:

Without stairs it is difficult to ascend and descend the tower…As for those who appear in dreams, no matter how much you want them to stay, you cannot detain them.

无梯楼儿难上下…梦中的人儿，千留万留也留不下。¹³⁹

Frustrated at his inability to reach the women, Baoyu is suddenly swept away by a violent storm and transported to the wild countryside, which is populated with dancing skeletons. The entire novel comes to an end with the following sentence: “Baoyu was stunned [at the sight of the skeletons] and could not tell the difference between what is real and what is unreal.”¹⁴⁰

In the 120-chapter version, Baoyu’s journey to the Land of Illusion in chapter 116 is very similar to his journey to the Land of Illusion in chapter 24 of *Honglou meng ying*. In both sequences, Baoyu reencounters many of the young ladies who had died in the parent work (although in *Honglou meng ying*, he meets both those who have died and those who are still living). In both instances, Baoyu is frustrated by the lack of recognition from them. In both instances, he is unable to reach Daiyu, the person he longs to see. And in both novels, the sequence ends with a horrifying image: dancing skeletons in *Honglou meng ying* and ghoulish monsters in *Honglou meng*. The main difference, however, is that in *Honglou meng*, Baoyu’s dramatic entrance and expulsion from the Land of Illusion are shortly followed by his decision to

¹³⁹ Gu 186.
¹⁴⁰ 宝玉大吃一惊，却也不知是真是假 Gu 196.
become a monk and ultimately remove himself from the world of red dust. In *Honglou meng ying*, by contrast Baoyu’s journey has left him in a state of shock rather than the enlightenment. Nevertheless, his fate in both works maintains his marginalization outside the norms of society.

Ellen Widmer suggests that the ending may reveal Gu’s inclination to represent, “a women’s culture from which Baoyu is excluded.” The abrupt ending may be an attempt to explore a theme found in Cao Xueqin’s original: Baoyu’s inferiority complex vis-à-vis the women in his life. In keeping with the parent novel, Gu Taiqing figuratively portrays a Baoyu who is situated outside of the ‘centre stage’ of the novel’s events—going even further than Cao Xueqin’s portrayal of Baoyu as feeling inferior to the female sex, but still keeping him as the main character of the work. What one finds in *Honglou meng ying* is a Baoyu who is at the margins of the story, with a majority of the chapter episodes centered on the everyday activities of the Jia women. Arguably, even Jia Zheng gets more attention than Baoyu! Many of the more exclusively “female” activities that are featured in the parent work, and that feminize Baoyu and situate him in an exclusively female world—such as the application of rouge and washing the hair of female characters—are largely written out of Gu’s sequel. There are more occasions in *Honglou meng ying* where Baoyu makes brief appearances amongst the women, only to be called away by official duties. On more than one occasion, the women are portrayed as being more perceptive, easily seeing through Baoyu’s attempts at secrecy, while he is unable to be “in” on their conversations and secrets. For example, in the latter half of chapter 8, Baoyu wishes to visit Naiad’s Place on Daiyu’s birthday. He formulates an excuse for visiting Daiyu’s old residence by announcing that he will be making offerings to the Flower Spirit. Baochai immediately sees through his lie, but lets him get away with it:

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141 Widmer, *Beauty*, 205.
Because he remembered that tomorrow was going to be the Flower Festival, he [also recalled] that it would have been Daiyu’s birthday and wanted to make some offerings but didn’t know how to go about explaining it [to Baochai]. He thought it best to tell them that he was planning on making offerings to the Flower Goddess as a means of hiding his true intentions from them.

正想到明日花朝，正黛玉二十冥寿，要祭奠一番，又不好说明只说祭花神便可瞒过他们。^{142}

Later in the chapter, Baoyu asks Baochai for suggestions on where he should make offerings to the Flower Goddess. Baochai sees through his inquiry, and her response indicates that she is aware of the true intentions behind Baoyu’s visit to Naiad’s Place:

The most quiet and peaceful of places can only be Naiad’s Place. If you plan on giving sacrifices to the Flower Goddess, you must write an elegy, but don’t write one like you did for Hibiscus Goddess… the Hibiscus Goddess was not particularly literate, but this Flower Goddess is good both in character and learning. If you offend [her], you’ll have to write another elegy to apologize [for it].

清净中之最清净者,莫过潇湘馆。然而祭花神须得一篇祭文,可别像祭芙蓉神的…
芙蓉神原不大识字,这花神可是品学兼优的,倘或冒犯了,又得一篇后祭文赔不是。^{143}

Even when it comes to writing poetry, the women are clearly superior to Baoyu, and in this case the parent novel and the sequel agree. On two separate occasions in *Honglou meng ying*, members of the newly formed poetry society gather to write poetry. Both times, Baoyu’s contribution is ridiculed by the women. The first occurrence is in chapter 14, when the group gathers to write about lotuses. All the other women praise one another for their linking verses, but Baoyu’s contribution is criticized for being farfetched.^{144} In chapter 19, nine poems are composed, the most for any chapter. All are praised by Jia Zheng, but none of them are composed by Baoyu. Gu is clearly bent on preventing Baoyu from matching the women when it comes to writing poetry.

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^{142} Gu 57.
^{143} Gu 59. Baoyu is referencing Skybright (The Hibiscus Goddess), a foil for Daiyu, who had died in *Honglou meng*.
^{144} 众人笑道:“这可牵强。”Gu 115.
More often than not, Baoyu is found in the company of men, a significant departure. In the parent work, remarks are often made by other characters that Baoyu should not be in the company of so many young women. Lady Wang implies the impropriety of Baoyu’s inclination to be in the company of women when she says, “You little know how things are here! Bao-yu is a law unto himself. Because your grandmother is so fond of him she has thoroughly spoiled him. When he was little he lived with the girls, so with the girls he remains now.”

When Baoyu is permitted to live in Grand Prospect Garden (in inappropriately close proximity to his female cousins), he is the only male allowed to do so. Mary Scott comments that, “[this is] scarcely a proper arrangement by mid-Qing standards.”

In Honglou meng ying, however, Gu takes pains to marginalize Baoyu not only from the female members of the family, but from the family and the story as well. For example, with the exception of much of the first and third chapters—which are concerned with his return to the Rong mansion, his encounter with Daiyu’s spirit in chapter 8, and presence at the poetry gathering in chapter 19—and his journey into the Land of Illusion in the final chapter, Baoyu is otherwise largely absent. In fact, on two occasions of large family gatherings (in chapters 12 and 13), he isn’t even mentioned. When he does make an appearance, particularly in the middle chapters, those appearances are brief. Gu paints a tableau of harmony among Jia family members, the women in particular, and appears bent on preparing the family’s next generation, supplying daily details about child rearing and matchmaking for the remaining unmarried members of the Jia family. It is Baoyu who reflects on the past, and is particularly prone to melancholy (a condition afflicting Daiyu in the parent novel). There are references to other

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145 Cao Xueqin, A Dream of Golden Days, 98.
characters who reflect on deceased family members, but Baoyu’s depressive episodes are the only ones done in solitude, further heightening his isolation from the rest of the family. Two separate episodes that highlight his increased marginalization can be mentioned here. The first of them comes in chapter 17 when Baoyu accompanies many of the story’s male characters on an excursion to a residence outside of the city. Once they make their way to the residence, Baoyu and the others are taken aback by the flowers that adorn the place. Baoyu is particularly affected by the sight of the thirty-four potted white crab-blossoms (a reference to chapter 37 of the parent novel):

Seeing the white crab-blossoms, Baoyu thought of the time when everyone had gathered to write poems about them. He stared at them dumbfounded, while the others did not know what had overcome him.

宝玉见了白海棠，便想起那年大家作海棠诗来，呆呆的看，众人不知其故.\footnote{Gu 134}

Baoyu experiences another wave of depression when, in chapter 23, he recalls events from the past after hearing a song. Baoyu attends a party that is organized by Jia Zhen. Two singers are hired for the occasion, including one who closely resembles Parfumée, an actress who is hired by the Jia family in \textit{Honglou meng} in preparations for the arrival of the imperial concubine. After the family’s private troupe is disbanded, she takes up the position of maid in Baoyu’s apartment. By the end of the 120-chapter version, Parfumée’s story comes to an end when she decides to become a nun, after Lady Wang decides to rid Baoyu’s apartment of bad influences by returning her and other former actresses to their foster mothers (chapter 77). The singer hired for this occasion bears a similar resemblance to Parfumée and even share a character in their names (Parfumée is 芳官 and Guifang is 桂芳). In \textit{Honglou meng ying}, as in the parent work, the mention of Parfumée is closely linked with Skybright because Parfumée’s expulsion from
Baoyu’s household is a direct result of Lady Wang’s dismissal of Skybright. The song that Guifang sings is “Tower without Stairs” (无梯楼儿), which causes Baoyu to think about these female characters who are no longer present:

After listening to the song the others didn’t give it much thought, it was only Baoyu who when he saw that Guifang resembled Parfumée, was unable to think straight and became lost in thought. Hearing the phrase, “As for those who appear in dreams, no matter how much you want them to stay, you cannot detain them” stirred up memories of the year that he made offerings to the Flower Goddess. He was in a daze as he stared out the window.

别人听了都不理会, 惟有宝玉看见桂芳仿佛芳官, 已是颠倒, 寻思. 又听了这句“梦中的人儿, 千留万留也留不下”, 触动那年祭花神的事来, 眼望着窗户发怔.148

Refashioning Familiar Characters: The Transformation of the Jia Patriarchs

Two characters get drastic makeovers in Gu’s sequel: Jia Zheng and Jia She. In Louise Edwards’ analysis of the male members of the Jia clan, she notes, “While the Jia men, with the exception of Jia Baoyu, are not the novel’s central characters their behaviour is pivotal in determining the ultimate fate of the Jia clan.”149 She sums up the portrayals of the brothers in the parent work when she observes:

In the Rong mansions of the Jia clan the dichotomy between these social and moral positions is exemplified by the split between the two brothers Jia Zheng and Jia She. One is lacking in virtue and devoid of a sense of responsibility, while the other aspires to virtue and regards family responsibility with the utmost gravity. Jia Zheng, although the younger of the two, has assumed responsibility in both the governmental and family spheres. However, Jia She pays little attention to anything except the potential expansion of the number of his concubines in his household and rare curios in his collections.150

If, according to Edwards’ assessment, the fate of the Jia clan’s fortunes is so closely tied to the behaviour of the characters, and it was the intent of Gu (and all other sequel writers up until her time) to restore the family’s fortunes, then these two characters had to be altered.

148 Gu 186
150 Edwards 131.
Jia She, arguably the parent novel’s most immoral character, undergoes a complete rehabilitation under Gu’s pen. In *Honglou meng*, he often neglects his duties as senior male in the Rong household, opting to remain preoccupied with material and sensual pleasures. In three episodes where he is featured prominently, he is portrayed in scathingly negative terms. The first episode involves his desire to take Faithful, Grandmother Jia’s principal maid, as a concubine (in chapter 46). At this point, Jia She already has several concubines. Faithful ultimately commits suicide— an act that has been interpreted as an act of loyalty to her mistress, or alternatively as a means to escape from Jia She’s advances. The second involves his desire to acquire a fan collection that he covets (chapter 48). After being tried on trumped up charges, the owner of the fans is driven to suicide. After being presented with the fan collection, Jia She shows little remorse for the actions that led to his acquisition of it; indeed, he beats his son, Jia Lian, savagely for presuming to challenge him about what he has done. Even his daughter’s death is tied to his actions. Unable to pay back a large debt, Jia She forces his daughter, Yingchun, into a disastrous marriage to a brutal man as repayment of his obligation to the man’s family (chapter 79). Shortly after her marriage to Sun Shaozu, Yingchun dies (chapter 109). The narrator remarks on her sad fate, “Alas! What a cruel end for such a gentle creature, her flowerlike beauty crushed within a year of marriage!” Thus, Jia She’s most memorable episodes in *Honglou meng* tie him to three deaths.

Gu Taiqing makes efforts to remind readers of earlier events in *Honglou meng*, and purges her novel of any hint of Jia She’s despicable conduct in the three cases mentioned above. She recasts him as a “family man” who is much more concerned with the well-being of those around him, and as one who does not indulge in material or sensual pleasures. For example, when Jia She is first introduced in *Honglou meng ying*, he shares a tearful reunion with his

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brother, (in chapter 2), and shows genuine concerns for his just returned nephew—even tearfully embracing him! Contrary to his callous handling of his daughter’s marriage, as depicted in

*Honglou meng*, he is incensed to hear from Jia Lian that his granddaughter, Qiaojie, has almost been forced into an unfavourable marriage:

Upon hearing [Jia Lian relate what happened to Qiaojie], both men [Jia Zheng and Jia She] were so outraged that they were stunned speechless. Jia She said, “That both seniors and juniors always see profit and forget righteousness! Could those three fools actually proceed with exchanging their niece or sister for money and think they can get away with it?! How are they supposed to face our ancestors?”

He proceeds to take care of this family matter (something completely uncharacteristic of him) by calling a meeting amongst those culprits involved in the failed exchange and handing out punishments to them. In the Gao-Cheng version, Jia Huan conspires with Jia Yun and Wang Ren to sell Qiaojie to a Mongol prince in hopes of making a profit (in chapter 118). In order to escape this match, Grannie Liu arranges for Qiaojie and Patience to go to her village (in chapter 119).

Jia She is depicted as a hedonist in *Honglou meng*; in Gu’s re-imagining, he finds pleasure in decidedly more wholesome activities with the younger generation of Jias. For example, during a conversation between Jia Zheng and the emperor, Jia Zheng remarks on what a changed man Jia She is when he reports, “My brother is 70 years old this year. Ever since his amnesty, he has completely changed for the better. When household affairs are in order, he teaches the young men of the family horseback riding and archery.” Furthermore, he is portrayed as a doting grandfather who relishes time spent with his grandchildren. In chapter 12,

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152 Gu 20. The “three fools” referred to here are Jia Huan (Baoyu’s brother by a concubine, Aunt Zhao), Jia Yun, a poor relation of the Rongguo Jia’s who is in the good graces of Qiaojie’s (deceased) mother, Xifeng, and Wang Ren (Qiaojie’s uncle and Xifeng’s brother).

153 臣胞兄贾赦现年七十岁, 自蒙恩赦回, 颇知悛改。家居无事, 教教子侄们骑射 Gu 89.
the nannies arrive with Zhige (Baoyu’s son) and Lingge (Jia Lian’s son) and he gives them each a toy, right after Jia Zheng remarks about spending time with grandchildren: “There is nothing truly more happy in life [than doing this]!”\textsuperscript{154}

Jia Zheng is also represented more positively in \textit{Honglou meng ying}. In \textit{Honglou meng}, Jia Zheng is representative of the Confucian moral order who is often seen in the company of scholars and is a keen believer in the importance of learning and scholarship. He often reprimands Baoyu for neglecting his studies. In Edwards’ estimation, “Ultimately, Jia Zheng emerges as a character who is a stickler for form lacking in the substance which propriety requires for the successful protection of the clan’s long-term interests.”\textsuperscript{155} Even strict adherence to Confucian rites and rituals does not necessarily mean success for Jia Zheng in his official post. Edwards further remarks, “His tenure as Education Commissioner reveals Jia Zheng to be a man of mediocre talent with little vision or skill in leadership.”\textsuperscript{156} Under Gu’s brush, Jia Zheng is transformed into the epitome of the capable official. In chapter 6, he is promoted to the position equivalent to Minister of Personnel (\textit{shibu shangshu}, 史部尚书), and by chapter 11 is personally entrusted by the emperor with the task of suppressing a rebellion in the northwest (a mission he accomplishes with dispatch) and promoted to the position of Grand Secretary (\textit{da xueshi}, 大学士).\textsuperscript{157} By the end of the work, Jia Zheng submits a petition to the emperor, asking that he be permitted to retire from official service. It is only after three rejections that the emperor agrees, reluctantly, to grant his wishes—all of which underscore Jia Zheng’s outstanding abilities as an official.

\textsuperscript{154}这才是人生第一快事呢 Gu 90.  
\textsuperscript{155}Edwards 138.  
\textsuperscript{156}Edwards 139.  
\textsuperscript{157}Gu 45 and 86-88, respectively.
Towards a Happy Ending: A Brighter Future for a New Generation of Jias

By the end of Gu’s sequel, Jia She is suffering from a sickness brought on by old age and Jia Zheng has retired from an illustrious career as an official. In order to ensure that the Jia family remains successful for generations to come, Gu passes duties on from the older generation of Jias to the newly married Jias, and by the end of her novel, has created a whole new generation that show promise and talent. For example, Lady Wang hands over management duties to the next generation of Jia women; this includes Baochai, her daughter-in-law, and Patience, who has become Jia Lian’s principle wife (in chapter 9). Together, they arrange matters such as Jia Huan’s living arrangements after he takes a wife. Every previously unmarried member of the Jia famiy who is of marriageable age (with the exception of Xichun, whose storyline continues from the original, as she furthers her studies into Daoism) marries well in Gu’s sequel. For example, Jia Lan’s wife is described as being, “Sixteen years of age, very pretty, well-mannered and educated, and also good at needlework.”

The youngest generation of characters introduced in Gu’s sequel includes Jia Zhi (Baoyu and Baochai’s son), Jia Ling (Jia Lian and Patience’s son, born in chapter 9), Zhangzhu (Shi Xiangyun’s daughter), and Xianbao (Xue Pan and Caltrop’s daughter). In each case, their futures are secured as the arrangements for their betrothals are settled between their parents by the novel’s end. Jia Zhi is to marry Zhangzhu, and Jia Ling is betrothed to Xianbao!

Additions and Innovations in Hong lou meng ying

One of the more striking features of Hong lou meng ying is the attention given to music and musical instruments. According to Widmer, “Gu’s deep interest in music is reflected in Hong lou meng ying.” Instances where characters are singing and playing musical instruments

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158姑娘十六岁，长得很好，知书识字，活计也好 Gu 117.
159 Widmer, Beauty, 203.
are featured in many chapters. In fact, it would seem that Gu Taiqing introduces new characters and recasts old ones for the purpose of featuring music. One of these characters is Mei Seqing, whose name is fittingly, includes the character 瑟 (se, a stringed instrument). Xue Baoqin’s husband, who is only mentioned very briefly in the parent work, is a fully fleshed out character in Gu’s sequel. Liu Xianglian, who was last seen following Zhen Shiyin on the path toward enlightenment in chapter 66 of Honglou meng is reintroduced into the narrative. A likely reason for this is that Xianglian was an accomplished amateur performer of opera in Honglou meng.

Chapter 7 is entirely devoted to a meeting between Mei Seqing and Liu Xianglian in Suzhou, aboard a boat Mei has hired to take in the sights, especially Tiger Hill, a place renowned for its publicly staged singing contests. On a moonlit night, with the light of lanterns reflected in the water of Suzhou’s canals, the two men make music, together with a courtesan who is keeping Mei company. Liu Xianglian sings, while Mei Seqing plays the vertical bamboo flute (xiao, 萧). More music is featured in chapter 17, when Liu Xianglian and Mei Seqing are at a gathering with Baoyu, Xue Pan and Jiang Yuhan. Singing and playing of instruments is also featured in chapter 13, where Jia She’s concubines, including the daughter of a famous performer from Tianjin whom Jia She has purchased for 2900 taels, gather to play instruments and sing. Widmer suggests that Gu’s highlighting of music in her sequel probably reflects her own experiences with her circle of friends—many of whom, were talented musicians, as chronicled in her poetry.

Another possibly autobiographical element of Gu’s work is her depiction of everyday life of women in Honglou meng ying. Certainly the depiction of women living in upper classes of

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160 Gu 49-50.
161 Gu 100-102.
162 Widmer, Beauty, 203.
society is a mainstay of Cao’s original, but Gu’s description of child birth and child rearing is absent from the parent work. Gu’s particular attention to such details, especially in the segments that depict women giving birth, is probably drawn from her own considerable experience, both as a mother and a grandmother by the time she is believed to have written her sequel. The vivid details that she provides in these sequences include mention of bodily fluids, the cutting of the umbilical cord, the treatment of the mother after giving birth, and even pains experienced by women after giving birth. An notable example is found in chapter 9:

In the meantime, Patience woke up, got down off the [kang] and, opening up the lamp, turned it up. After going to the bathroom, she washed her hands in cold water, and climbed back up on the kang. She lay down and as soon as she closed her eyes, saw Elder Sister Feng come in with Second Elder Sister You, who was holding a child next to her breast. Patience greeted them saying: “Mistress, you’ve returned! What a happy coincidence that you should come together!”

Second Elder Sister You said: “Because you are so worried about the child to come, I have come to thank you.”

Patience said: “What do you mean by that, Mistresss?”

Elder Sister Feng replied: “All right, I’ll tell you—we have come to deliver your son to you. It’s all because of the good deeds that you have done that Jia Lian is able to have an heir. In the future you will receive the honours brought on by your son and there will be those who will address you as the Grand Matriarch!”

Elder Sister Feng then turned to Second Elder Sister You and said, “There’s no need for you to miss [the child], you will also benefit from the association [with the child]!” Second Elder Sister You then placed the child in Patience’s quilt.

Patience remarked, “What are you trying to say?”

She then felt her heart beating wildly and waking up, felt a huge heavy sodden weight in her lower body. Frightened, she cried out: “Grannie Zhao! Hurry! Get up! Things aren’t good!”

Mama Zhao, startled awake from her dream, heard a child’s cry, but her lamp had gone out, and she couldn’t find her shoes. So she got down off her kang in her bare feet and went looking for some touch-paper to light the lamp, muttering: “My young Miss, why didn’t you say something earlier!”

Patience said: “I didn’t know myself!”

Jia Lian had not yet gone to sleep, so when he heard a child bawling and crying, and the two of them talking, he went and got Feng-er up. Then, holding up his lamp, he looked at the clock: it was exactly midnight. He threw on some clothes and came over, and seeing Grannie Zhao there still looking for some touch paper, he grabbed the lamp as he said, “Miss Feng, you take her and pull her up so that I can get a hold of the child.”

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163 Widmer, Beauty, 204.
When Feng-er leaped on the kang and pulled at Patience, Patience said, “Just take it easy! I can’t sit up yet!” Not until Mama Zhao had pulled the covers to one side to have a look did she hurriedly pull Patience’s undergarments down: seeing the infant lying there next to her belly, she reached out and took it up in her arms.

When Jia Lian saw the baby’s red feet, all covered with blood, he was anxious, but funnily enough said: “Mama, put some socks on him so he doesn’t catch cold!” Then he ordered Feng’er to help Patience sit up. He went to the window of the room and called for Elder Sister Qiao’s Mama Li to come. Mama Li got up on the kang, and washed off both Patience and her baby. Just at this moment, the old ladies all got up as well, and they boiled up a hot calming broth. Mama Li cut the umbilical cord, and taking up the child, gave it to Patience to hold. She then cleaned up all traces of blood from the kang.

When Jia Lian saw that it was a boy, he suddenly remembered the dream he had just a short while earlier. He wanted to tell Patience about it, but was afraid that it might make her feel hurt and afraid. But after Patience had drunk her calming broth, she slowly began to describe her own dream to Jia Lian.

Jia Lian then said: “Was your mistress wearing that snow-white dress that she used to wear all the time?”

“How did you know that?” Patience asked.

Jia Lian then described the dream he had had that night, and everyone marveled at the coincidence.  

且说平儿睡醒一觉下了地，打开灯罩拨了拨灯。小解了，用凉水洗了手。重新上炕。躺下才一合眼，见凤姐带着尤二姐进来，尤二姐怀里抱着个孩子。平儿就请安问好，说: “奶奶回来了？怎么这么巧，都一同来了?”凤姐说: “因你在孩子跟前用心，我来谢谢你。”平儿说: “奶奶这是怎么说呢！”


164 Idema and Grant 650-651. I have supplemented the translation provided there.
孩子交给平儿抱着，又把炕上的血迹收拾干净。贾琏见是个男子，想起将才的梦来，要告诉平儿，又怕他伤心害怕。这平儿喝了定心汤，慢慢的把梦中之事告诉贾琏。贾琏说：“你奶奶可是穿着那在日常穿的那件月白棉袄吗？”平儿问：“爷怎么知道？”

贾琏就把夜间的梦说了一遍，大家都觉诧异。

Language in Honglou meng ying

One of the more striking features of Honglou meng ying is the amount of dialogue presented throughout the work. According to Widmer, “a good deal of the action is conveyed through dialogue rather than the intervention of the narrator…The effective and lively way direct speech enters the picture increases the interest of the novel as a whole and again signals Gu’s awareness of this particular potential of the novel form.”

Gu is particularly effective in portraying women’s speech and women’s conversation. In chapter 21, for instance, Gu depicts a gathering of many female characters who gamble in a game of yaotan which involves a banker who is in charge of shaking a container with four dice in it, while the players guess the value of the dice. The dialogue featured in this episode is particularly lively and is characteristic of much of the dialogue featured throughout the work:

Lady Xue, along with Li Shenniang entered together with some maids who followed behind them. When they entered the courtyard, they exchanged greetings [with the others]. Lady Xue then said, “My in-laws [referring to Li Shenniang] came over to my place and then said that they wanted to pay a visit here, so we decided to come here together.”

After the ladies were served tea, Silver [a maid of Lady Wang’s], laughingly said, “Here come another two people who want to give their money away to our missus!”

Lady Xue then noticed that there were some gambling chips and boxes on the table and knew that they were about to play yaotan. She then asked Silver, “How do you know that we’ll be the ones giving away our money?”

Silver laughingly responded, “Is there actually a time you played where you didn’t lose?”

Youshi then asked, “Who wants to shake [the dice]?”

Li Wan responds, “How about you shake them!”

165 Gu 66-67.
166 Widmer Beauty 213-214.

Another instance where women are engaged in conversation also shows Gu’s skill at generating a sense of familiarity and intimacy between her female characters in chapter 9 shortly after Patience has given birth to her son:

Li Wan asked Patience, “Did you deliver past your due date?”
Patience responded, “I’m not really sure. Eldest sister-in-law, have a look at my stomach, it’s quite hard and [I] feel pain there—I don’t have another one in there, do I?” Everyone burst into laughter. Li Wan explained, “ Those are postpartum abdominal pains. They’re not a big deal. Just rub your abdominal area and it will get better.”


Conclusion

While Gu’s work in many respects is highly imitative of its parent work and is certainly not as complex or fully developed as the original, Widmer has given an apt appraisal of it, “Whether one looks at its expressiveness or its structure, one discovers evidence of Gu’s sustained attention to the traditions and potential of the novel, even as she applied it to her own ends.”169 Considerable thought was put in to the organization of the work. Although imitative of the original, it was intended to remind readers of Honglou meng, as is clear in the number of times she refers to events in that occurred in the earlier work. She is clear as to what she wants to accomplish with her sequel. Unlike many of the sequels that came before hers, Honglou meng

167 Gu 166.
168 Gu 67.
169 Widmer, Beauty, 215.
ying reflects Gu’s efforts to retain some of the narrative threads found in its parent work—most notably, Baoyu’s isolation from the family; like other sequels, she does create a “happy ending” of sorts for the rest of the Jia family. Considerable thought is evident in the unfolding of these two narrative threads especially in her characterizations of Baoyu, Jia Zheng, and Jia She. In the lead-up to Baoyu’s tragic ending, he is often seen depressed, melancholic, and more nostalgic than any of the other characters. In her decision to create a more proper and prosperous Jia clan, Gu concluded that it was necessary to rehabilitate Jia She and Jia Zheng. Both of these narrative threads develop progressively and logically. Despite the fact that Gu thought it necessary to copy or imitate many plot elements found in the original—which required the utmost familiarity with the parent work (one can imagine her writing sections of the work with Honglou meng by her side as reference), her work is distinctive in the many autobiographical elements that she infuses into it, such as her appreciation of music, the insertion of her own poetry, and interest in such matters as childbirth and child rearing.
CONCLUSION

The publishing of *Honglou meng ying* was part of a literary movement that saw an increase in the publishing of women’s writings. Susan Mann points out, “During the High Qing Era [c.1683-1839], published work by women came into its own. The first anthologies of women’s writing, edited by women, appeared in print.” For *guixiu* (gentlewoman), writing often had to compete with the many roles that she was expected throughout her life cycle—namely, that of daughter, wife, and mother. Mann further points out:

In Jiangnan’s elite families during the High Qing period, young girls were educated and encouraged to write poetry (and to paint and practice calligraphy as well, if they showed the talent) until they married. At marriage these young women were expected to set aside brush and inkstone to manage the “rice and salt.” Finally, as mothers-in-law or widows, many women were able to resume their writing, turning over family responsibilities to the next generation of women.171

Certainly, many writings by women that survive from the Qing dynasty detail the often conflicting images of a proper gentlewoman confined to her inner chambers and writer and public figure. In order to deal with these conflicting images, some women justified their writings as necessary for the general morality of society; thus, many writings that emerge from the late imperial by women are didactic and advocated Confucian norms. For instance, Yun Zhu 欽珠 (1771-1833), editor of *Correct Beginnings* 国朝闺秀正始记, a poetry collection consisting more than 3000 poems written by women, selected poetry that conformed to her moral standards, having written in her preface:

This final edited version I have titled *Correct Beginnings*. The genres and their contents vary, but the sentiment and tone of each is correct. Pure beauty, chaste emotion, conjugal

170 Mann 3.
171 Mann 78.
harmony, limpid verse—none would shame Ban Zhao’s admonitions, and all conform to the standards required of a poet.\textsuperscript{172}

As Ellen Widmer has pointed out in her study of prosimetric verse (\textit{tanci}) authored by women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such works reveal that women participated in other literary activities beside writing poetry; in fact, \textit{tanci} as a category constitutes a genre of fiction that women participated in before taking up the writing of novels. The most famous \textit{tanci}, \textit{Zai Shengyuan} and its sequel, \textit{Zao Zaotian}, deal with the tensions between women as public figures and the image of the ideal Confucian woman found in conduct manuals.

Compared to these earlier works, \textit{Honglou meng ying} is less didactic. Like these works, there are elements of Gu’s \textit{Honglou meng ying} that overtly praise the talents of many of the female characters, but it is less didactic in the sense that it does not outline the consequences of not adhering to Confucian tenets. In Yun Zhu’s anthology of poetry for example, she chooses only those poems that she deems appropriate and excludes poetry by famous courtesans.\textsuperscript{173}

\textit{Zaisheng yuan} and in \textit{Zai Zaotian}, describe the rise of two women (the mother in the first, and her daughter in the second work) who participate in officialdom. In \textit{Zai Shengyuan}, the female protagonist’s career comes to an end when she marries.\textsuperscript{174} \textit{Zao Zaotian}, written by another female author in reaction to \textit{Zai Shengyuan}, is a sequel to that work. Its main character is the daughter of Meng Lijun (protagonist of \textit{Zai Shengyuan}) who like her mother, seeks a career in officialdom. The sequel, decidedly more didactic, cautions that, “the good though talented woman should temper her ambition, not that she should have no ambition at all.”\textsuperscript{175}

\textsuperscript{172} Mann 96.
\textsuperscript{173} Mann 121.
\textsuperscript{174} Widmer, \textit{Beauty}, 73.
\textsuperscript{175} Widmer, \textit{Beauty}, 75.
What also sets *Honglou meng ying* apart from other Qing female writings is that it is not quite as discernible as being told from a strictly “feminine” point of view. Probably owing largely to its form, Gu attempts to enliven her sequel by re-creating the unique characteristics of characters that she was both familiar with in the parent work as well as fashioning new characters in her sequel; this requires that she create dialogue and fashion mannerisms for both female and male characters. *Honglou meng ying* thus offers us a rare opportunity to examine both genders from a woman’s point of view in a genre that few women took up.

*Honglou meng* was a pivotal moment in women’s reading and writing—having not only drawn large numbers of women to the form of a novel, it also served as a catalyst for women to venture into wholly uncharted territory when it came to women’s writing. The sequel form seems to have been a medium of sorts for a woman to experiment in this form of writing. Gu’s sequel stands somewhere in the middle—on the one hand, she writes in a genre that was considered inappropriate for women; on the other hand, she stays in familiar territory by writing a sequel as opposed to creating an entirely new work. Sequels, which can be interpreted as commentaries on parent works, became popular at a time when fiction commentary in the form of *pingdian* editions of works were both popular and influential in raising the reputation of fiction. Regardless of the bad reputation that sequels had, sequel writers, one after another still sought to establish their own as the “rightful” ending to Cao’s masterpiece. Gu Taiqing, who obviously read other sequels, participated in this commentarial culture.

Although largely imitative of its parent work, *Honglou meng ying*, is a culmination of Gu Taiqing’s skill in many aspects of literature including poetry, song, and drama. Most
importantly, it reveals Gu’s familiarity with the novel form. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Gu shows much skill and thought in her adherence to many narrative elements of the parent work including some themes and in her handling of familiar and unfamiliar characters. An increased understanding of Gu’s *Honglou meng ying* can hopefully yield more understanding of the diversity of women’s reading and writing practices in late imperial China.
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