

QU BINGYUN (1767-1810): ONE MEMBER OF YUAN MEI'S FEMALE
DISCIPLE GROUP

by

LIUXI MENG

B. A. People's University of China, Beijing, 1982
M. A. State University of New York at Oswego, 1996

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Department of Asian Studies

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

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ABSTRACT

Qu Bingyun 屈秉筠 (1767-1810) took the leading role in a famous group of female poet in eighteenth-century China known as "The Female Disciples of Yuan Mei." This study explores the development and accomplishments of Qu as a poet and examines her unique poetry with special attention to her dynamic interrelation and interaction with her contemporaries.

This dissertation begins with an introduction to the primary source for this research, the socio-cultural background of eighteenth-century China in which women's literature developed. Chapter II describes the connection between Qu's poetic engagement and her family's background, and Chapter III gives an account of her family's poetry circles and her relationships with them. The interaction between Qu and other members of Yuan Mei's female disciple group in her region re/shaped her poetic concepts, allowed her to advance to the level of an expert poet, and gained her recognition. Chapter IV deals with the interaction between Qu and other members of her group, and Chapter V examines the reading of and comments on Qu's poetry by her group. Qu's poetry is primarily family-oriented, revealing her domestic life and her social networks. Chapter VI views her poetic worlds in the framework of interrelations and interactions within the family and society, and the last chapter sums up the implications of her accomplishments as a poet and evaluates her creations in the contexts of Chinese literature and women's literature.

Qu honoured women's experience as the source of autonomous art and her poetry opens up the world of a gentry woman's private life and feelings to an extent had not seen much before in classical Chinese poetry. Qu, together with her female contemporaries, broadened the scope of Chinese literature by bringing new themes to it and introducing a genial style of poetry. Qu also constantly sought connections with other people, and it was during the course of interaction with them that her poetic career developed. This experience of hers sheds light on the large increase in the number of women writers in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century China: women joining together with women to write poetry.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract		ii
Table of Contents		iii
List of Figures		iv
Abbreviations		v
Portrait of Qu Bingyun		vi
Chronology		vii
Acknowledgments		viii
Chapter I	Introduction	1
	1.1 Qu Bingyun's Works and Their Commentaries	2
	1.2 Socio-Cultural Background	6
	1.3 Yuan Mei's Promotion of Literary Education for Women	19
	1.4 Assumptions, Approaches and Objectives	28
Chapter II	Family and Poetic Background	34
	2.1 Brilliant Lineage and Childhood Education	36
	2.2 A Virtuous Housewife	43
	2.3 A Well-known Poet from the Mount Yu Region	55
Chapter III	Domestic Poetry Circles	59
	3.1 The Zhao Family Poetry Circle	59
	3.2 The Qu Family Poetry Circle	74
Chapter IV	Becoming a Member of Yuan Mei's Female Disciple Group	84
	4.1 Yuan Mei's Teaching of Poetry to Gentry Women	84
	4.2 Qu Bingyun's Association with Yuan Mei and His Followers	98
Chapter V	Within a Feminist Discourse Community: Interactions Through Critical Comments	120
	5.1 Yuan Mei's Comments	122
	5.2 The Comments of Xi Peilan, Gui Maoyi and Bao Yin	138
	5.3 Qu Bingyun's Critical Opinions	153
Chapter VI	Poetry	161
	6.1 A Gentry Woman's Domestic Life: Poems on Family Life and 'Home-Based Nature'	161
	6.2 A Gentry Woman's Social Network: Poems on Her Relations with Others	183
Chapter VII	Conclusion	203
	7.1 Qu Bingyun's Becoming a Poet and Its Implications	203
	7.2 Qu Bingyun and Chinese Women's Literature	206
	7.3 Qu Bingyun and Chinese Literature	217
Appendix	A Table of Yuan Mei's Female Disciples	221
Works Cited		228

LIST OF FIGURES

1. The lower Yangzi River region in the Ming-Qing period.	35
2. Qu Bingyun's genealogy	37
3. Members of Qu Bingyun's Domestic Poetry Circles	60
4. "Painting Thirteen Female Disciples Asking Yuan Mei for Advice at Lake Tower," its continuation and their colophons.	101-4
5. Comments of Yuan Mei, Xi Peilan, Gui Maoyi and Bao Yin on Qu Bingyun's poems	121

ABBREVIATIONS

BY	Yuan Mei, <i>Suiyuan shihua buyi</i>
CD	Yuan Mei, <i>Xiaocang shanfang Chidu</i>
NS	Yuan Mei comp., <i>Suiyuan nüdizi shixuan</i>
RGCZ	Zheng Zhongxiang, Pang Hongwen et al comp., <i>Chongxiu Chang Zhao hezhi</i>
SG	Yuan Mei, <i>Yuan Taishi gao</i> .
SH	Yuan Mei, <i>Suiyuan shihua</i>
SJ	Yuan Mei, <i>Xiaocangshanfang shiji</i>
SY	Yuan Mei comp., <i>Suiyuan bashi shouyan</i>
TZJ	Sun Yuanxiang, <i>Tianzhen'ge ji</i>
WAIJ	Yuan Mei, <i>Xiaocangshanfang waiji</i>
WJ	Yuan Mei, <i>Xiaocangshanfang wenji</i>
XT	Yuan Mei comp., <i>Xu tongrenji</i>
YMQJ	Wang Yingzhi et al, comp., <i>Yuan Mei quanji</i>
YS	Jiang Dunfu, <i>Suiyuan yishi</i>
YY	Yuan Mei, <i>Duwai yuyan</i>
YYJ	Qu Bingyun, <i>Yunyulou ji</i>



Qu Bingyun (1767-1810)

CHRONOLOGY

1767—born in Changshu, Jiangsu province.

1769—2 years old; mother died.

1770—3 years old; father died.

1773—6 years old; education begun by grandfather.

1785—18 years old; married.

1794—27 years old; became Yuan Mei's disciple.

1796—29 years old; poems were included in Yuan Mei's *Selected Poems by My Female Disciples*.

1798—31 years old; had become famous for her poetry in the Mount Yu region.

1810—43 years old; died of liver disease; one year after death, *Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower* 蘊玉樓集 (*Yunyulou ji*) printed.

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Finally, I greatly appreciated *A Reader's Report* on this dissertation by my External Examiner for the final oral examination, Professor Kang-i Sun Chang. This report is comprehensive and insightful. The highly pertinent questions asked in it are stimulating and will broaden the scope of my research in the field of Chinese women's literature.

Chapter I Introduction

Qu Bingyun 屈秉筠 (1767-1810, courtesy name Wanxian 宛仙, sobriquet Xielan 協蘭 and nickname [*Xiaoming* 小名] Zhanqing 霑慶) took the leading role in a famous group of female poets in eighteenth-century China known as “The Female Disciples of Yuan Mei (1716-1798)” 袁枚女弟子 (“Yuan Mei Nüdzizi”). This study of Qu Bingyun explores the development and accomplishments of Qu as a poet and examines her unique poetry with special attention to her dynamic interrelation and interaction with her contemporaries.

The interrelations between Qu Bingyun and others played an important role in her engagement in the study of poetry and in her development as a poet. Qu Bingyun, her fellow disciples in the Mount Yu 虞山 region, and their mentor, Yuan Mei, formed a feminist discourse community which explored women-related poetic issues, a significant activity of which was reading and commenting on Qu’s poetry. During the interactions with these able poets, Qu advanced to the level of an expert poet and gained recognition in the Mount Yu region and beyond.

Qu Bingyun’s poetry is primarily family-oriented, revealing her domestic life and her social networks. It opens up the world of a gentry woman’s private life and feelings to an extent had not seen much earlier in classical Chinese poetry, and it is natural and genial; the poet mostly writes with the persona of a real woman speaking to other real individuals. Also, Qu’s poetry was derived from the environment of eighteenth-century women’s literature, in which women started to become self-aware. Qu, however, was different from her female contemporaries in many ways. Compared with the “man-like” women writers who tried to participate in public affairs and wrote about men’s concerns, she valued the female experience. Qu largely freed herself from Confucian orthodoxy while the majority of her female contemporaries conformed to it. Different from the radicals of Yuan Mei’s female group, who were eager to challenge men’s authority and sometimes wrote poems in a voice unidentified by gender, Qu honoured women’s experience as the source of an autonomous art and concentrated on developing feminine features in literature.

Contrary to traditional views, Qu Bingyun and her female contemporaries played a substantial role in the later development of Chinese literature, broadening its scope by introducing new themes, new language and new styles. They also made a special contribution to classical Chinese poetry by introducing a genial and practical style of poetry. Qu also constantly sought connections with other people, and during the course of her interactions with them she established herself as an expert poet.

1.1 Qu Bingyun's Works and Their Commentaries

The primary source for this research is Qu Bingyun's *Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower*,¹ published in 1811, which contains a collection of five hundred twenty-eight (528) *shi* poems and *ci* poems composed by Qu Bingyun during her adulthood. It also includes three hundred forty-nine (349) passages of commentary on its contents by the author's contemporaries.

This collection was not widely known following its publication, which has resulted in a paucity of research on Qu. In 1795/6, Yuan Mei first selected Qu Bingyun's poems for a poetry collection by his thirteen female disciples.² Several months later, he included her works in another poetry collection containing poems by twenty-eight of his female disciples. Unfortunately, no copies of the first selection have been found so far, while the existant version of the second selection, known as the *Selected Poems by Yuan Mei's Female Disciples* 隨園女弟子詩選 (*Suiyuan nüdizi shixuan*),³ is missing Qu Bingyun's works along with those of eight other poets listed in the table of contents. In 1831, when the woman poet-scholar Wanyan Yunzhu 完顏雲珠 compiled the *Correct Beginnings: Women's Poetry of Our August Dynasty* 國朝閨秀正始集

¹ Qu Bingyun, *Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower* 蘊玉樓集 (*Yunyulou ji*, hereafter *YYJ*): *Shi Poems from the Jade-Collecting Tower* 蘊玉樓詩 (*Yunyulou shi*) and *Ci Poems from the Jade-Collecting Tower* 蘊玉樓詞鈔 (*Yunyulou cichao*), printed by the Gathering Lotus Studio 集芙蓉室 (Jifurongshi) in 1811.

² See the discussion about this selection in Chapter III.

³ Yuan Mei comp., *Selected Poems by Yuan Mei's Female Disciples* 隨園女弟子詩選 (*Suiyuan nüdizi shixuan*, hereafter *NS*), printed in 1796. Modern punctuated edition in *Collected Works of Yuan Mei* 袁枚全集 (*Yuan Mei quanji*, (VII); hereafter *YMQJ*), compiled by Wang Yingzhi 王英志 et al, Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993.

(*Guochao guixiu zhengshi ji*),⁴ she mentioned a poem entitled "Withered Chrysanthemums" 殘菊 ("Canju") attributed to Qu Bingyun, which, however, is not found in the *Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower*. In 1896, when Xu Naichang 徐乃昌 compiled the *Small Sandal Arched Study's Anthologies of Ci Poems by A Hundred Women Poets* 小檀欒室百家閩秀詞 (*Xiaotanluanshi baijia guixiu ci*), a series of collected works by women poets, he edited an anthology containing fifteen *ci* poems by Qu Bingyun entitled *Ci Poems from the Jade-Collecting Tower* 韞玉樓詞 (*Yunyulou ci*). Since all the *ci* poems can be found in the *Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower* and since the title for the anthology seems to be borrowed from this collection, it is very likely that Xu used it as his source. Lei Jin's 雷瑋 1915 *Talks about Women's Ci Poetry* 閩秀詞話 (*Guixiu cihua*) also mentions a *ci* poem by Qu, "To the Tune of Golden Threads" 金縷曲 ("Jinlüqu"),⁵ which can be found in both Xu Naichang's anthology and the *Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower*. It is more likely, however, that Lei Jin used the former as his source. In 1977, in her *An Anthology of Female Poets of the Qing Dynasty* 清代女詩人選集 (*Qingdai nüshiren xuanji*),⁶ Chen Xiang 陳香 credits a set of two poems "Expressing My Aspirations" 述志篇 ("Xuzhipian"), not included in the *Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower*, to Qu Bingyun. In 1999, in their *Women Writers of Traditional China: An Anthology of Poetry and Criticism*,⁷ the American scholars Kang-i Sun Chang and Haun Saussy discussed Qu Bingyun. A contributor to this book, Anthony C. Yu, selected and translated five *ci* poems believed to be from Xu Naichang's anthology and wrote a short biographical note about her. It begins with the statement: "Available information about Qu Bingyun, a student of Yuan Mei, is not abundant" (p. 490).

The *Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower* is referred to in a few sources such as *The Revised Local Gazetteer of Changshu and Zhaowen* 重修常昭合志

⁴ Wanyan Yunzhu 完顏惲珠 comp., *Correct Beginnings: Women's Poetry of Our August Dynasty* 國朝閩秀正始集 (*Guochao guixiu zhengshiji*), printed by the Red and Fragrant House 紅香館 (Hongxiang guan), 1831, (12:4a-5b).

⁵ Lei Jin 雷瑋, *Talks about Women's Ci Poetry* 閩秀詞話 (*Guixiu cihua*), Shanghai: Saoye shanfang, 1915, 2:12b.

⁶ Chen Xiang 陳香 comp., *An Anthology of Female Poets of the Qing Dynasty* 清代女詩人選集 (*Qingdai nüshiren xuanji*), Taipei: Commercial Press, 1977, pp. 122-3.

⁷ Kang-i Sun Chang and Haun Saussy comp., *Women Writers of Traditional China: An Anthology of Poetry and Criticism*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

(*Chongxiu Chang Zhao hezhi*),⁸ *A Study of Women's Writings Through the Ages* 歷代婦女著作攷 (*Lidai funü zhuzuo kao*)⁹ and the recently published *A Comprehensive Catalogue of Individual Collections of Qing Writers* 清人別集總目 (*Qingren bieji zongmu*).¹⁰ Although there are several copies of Qu's collection in different locations, Xu Naichang is probably the only one among the above scholars to know about it. I came across a copy of this collection in the summer of 1999 in Beijing University Library, when I undertook an investigation of Yuan Mei's female disciples in China.¹¹

The *Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower* survived accidentally. When Qu Bingyun was dying after prolonged liver disease, she first distributed her paintings—mainly of fragrant flowers and dragonflies—to her family members, including her brothers, sisters, cousins, nephews and nieces. Then, one day prior to her death, she ordered a maid to collect all her poetry in a basket and incinerate it. The maid was in the process of doing so when Qu's husband, Zhao Tongyu 趙同鈺 (courtesy name 良伯 and sobriquets Ziliang 子梁 and Maocai 茂才), happened to return home. He grabbed the poetry and hid it, telling Qu, "It's been burned." One year later, Zhao edited the poetry and had it published. In his account of the compilation, he says:

While I suffered pain [from the loss of my wife], I collected her poems and put them in order, dividing them into four chapters [of *shi* poems] and one chapter of *ci* poems, and then brought the compiled poems to a publisher. I knew it was not what she wanted me to do, but I was doing this only for relieving my own grief 忍痛綴輯, 離爲四卷, 詞一卷, 付諸梓人. 知非君之意也, 亦聊以釋余之悲爾 (Zhao Tongyu, Preface).¹²

⁸ Zheng Zhongxiang 鄭鐘祥, Pang Hongwen 龐鴻文 et al, *The Revised Local Gazetteer of Changshu and Zhaowen* 重修常昭合志 (*Chongxiu Chang Zhao hezhi*, hereafter *RGCZ*), Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe youxian gongsi, reprinted, 1974, p. 3039.

⁹ Hu Wenkai 胡文楷, *A Study of Women's Writings Through the Ages* 歷代婦女著作攷 (*Lidai funü zhuzuo kao*), Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1985.

¹⁰ Li Lingnian 李靈年, Yang Zhong 楊忠 et al comp., *A Comprehensive Catalogue of Individual Collections of Qing Writers* 清人別集總目 (*Qingren bieji zongmu*), Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002. According to this book, copies of Qu Bingyun's *Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower* can be found in the libraries of Nanjing, Shanghai and Beijing. It does not, however, mention Beijing University Library, where I located a copy of it.

¹¹ The *Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower* is in the rare section of Beijing University Library and cannot be photocopied under the protection regulations. I took photos of the entire book after paying a fee.

¹² In this dissertation, all the poems and commentaries cited from the *Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower* are given parenthetical references in the text.

The poems in this collection are arranged primarily in chronological order. They were mainly written during Qu's adulthood—from the time when she got married at eighteen until her death at forty-three.¹³ The book is a nearly complete collection of poems composed during the twenty-five years of the mature period of Qu Bingyun's life. However, this collection fails to include Qu's childhood poetic creations, which were quite possibly large in quantity and some of which were of high quality. Also, since she was famed in the region, Qu had to write many poems on request. Some of these poems might have not been available to Zhao Tongyu when he compiled this collection. Therefore, a certain number of poems by Qu was inevitably lost, while some were scattered throughout various sources. This explains the fact that Wanyan Yunzhu and Chen Xiang found poems excluded from the *Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower* when they compiled their anthologies.

The *Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower* includes a large quantity of commentaries on both the poems and the author, as follows:

(1) Prefaces by Wu Weiguang 吳蔚光 (1744-1803), Chen Wenshu 陳文述 (1775-1845), and Bao Wei 鮑偉 (courtesy name Lingke 凌客);

(2) Inscriptions for this poetry collection by Yuan Mei, Tao Tingxi 陶廷樾 (courtesy name Yuezhai 約齋), Xi Shichang 席世昌 (died 1808, courtesy name Zikan 子侃 and sobriquet Zhiquan 稚泉, Provincial Graduate, 1795), Shao Yuanyao 邵淵耀 (courtesy name Huanlin 環林), Xi Peilan (1762-1826, courtesy names Daohua 道華, Yunfen 韻芬 and Wanyun 浣雲), Zhao Gui'e 趙貴娥 (courtesy names Mingxiang 茗香 and Mengyue 夢月), Xu Gong 徐恭 (courtesy name Shunxian 舜仙), Zhao Bingqing 趙秉清 (courtesy name Ruoyun 若韞), Gui Maoyi 歸懋儀 (c. 1762-c. 1832, courtesy name Peishan 佩珊, sobriquet Langao 蘭皋), Ji Ruizhen 季瑞貞 (courtesy name Jingyu 靜玉) and Bao Yin 鮑印 (courtesy name Zungu 尊古);

¹³ The time for the composing of a set of eight poems, "Songs of Willow Branches" ("Liuzhici"), is unidentified. They, among the first group of poems in *YYJ*, are possibly part of poems Qu Bingyun wrote in her childhood, as indicated in Sun Yuanxiang's 孫原湘 preface to *YYJ*: "The fifteen circulated poems of the 'Songs of Willow Branches' were written in [Qu Bingyun's] childhood" 所傳柳枝辭十五章蓋髫髻時作也。

(3) Biographies by Sun Yuanxiang 孫原湘 (1760-1829, courtesy name Zixiao 子瀟, Metropolitan Graduate, 1805), and Bao Fen 鮑份 (courtesy name Shuye 叔野);

(4) Eulogies by Bao Yin, Qu Jingkun 屈靜壘 (courtesy name Wanqing 婉清), and Zhao Tongyu.

(5) Postscripts by Qu Jingkun and Bao Yin;

(6) The editor's foreword by Zhao Tongyu;

(7) Reflections about a poem in the collection by Zhao Tongyu and a commentary about these reflections by Sun Yuanxiang; and

(8) Three hundred twenty-five pieces of commentary about individual poems in the Collection by thirteen poets who are as follows:

Wu Weiguang (ninety-two), Sun Yuanxiang (seventy-three), Xi Peilan (forty-three), Bao Wei (twenty-eight), Xi Shichang (seventeen), Gui Maoyi (thirteen), Bao Yin (twelve), Weiye 未冶¹⁴ (twelve), Yuan Mei (eleven), Zhao Gui'e (eight), Yunqiao 筠樵¹⁵ (six), Zhang Xie 張燮 (died 1808, courtesy name Zihe 子和, five), Lanfeng 嵐風¹⁶ (three), and Chen Wenshu (two).

A portrait sketch of Qu Bingyun by Xi Peilan is also included.

The above commentators consist of some well-known poets and critics, as well as Qu Bingyun's fellow disciples, other poetic friends and relatives. Their commentaries provide abundant information about the poet and her creations. Specifically, they present the primary modes of the poet's interaction with other members of her discourse communities, in addition to providing a model for the contemporary reading of this poet.

1.2 Socio-Cultural Background

Qu Bingyun lived at the end of the "prosperous age of the Kangxi, Yongzheng and Qianlong reigns" 康雍乾盛世 ("Kang Yong Qian Shengshi," 1683-1775),¹⁷ when China's economy recovered and then developed vigorously. At the same time, since Qing rulers strictly controlled the country's ideology, intellectuals occupied themselves

¹⁴ Unidentified.

¹⁵ Unidentified.

¹⁶ Unidentified.

¹⁷ See Wei Qingyuan 韋慶遠 and Ye Xian'en 葉顯恩, *A Comprehensive History of Qing China*, 清代全史 (*Qingdai quanshi*), Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1991, v. 5, p. 1.

with “evidential studies” of the classics as well as other non-political and non-ideological subjects. Among these were issues concerning women, such as chastity and education for women. The economic and political situations combined by chance to allow women to be seen and heard.

Economic Recovery Facilitated the Flourishing of Urban Culture and Women's Literature

The establishment of the Qing triggered the development of handicraft industries. During the mid-Qing, especially the Qianlong period (1736-95), the national commercial economy developed greatly and a countrywide trade market took shape. Cotton spinning and weaving, silk reeling, pottery production, the working of bamboo, wood, tea, paper, sugar, the smelting of iron, copper and lead, and salt production grew rapidly.¹⁸ At the same time, the state network of transportation, of which river transportation was the major part, expanded. It included over fifty thousand kilometres of river routes in the interior and approximately a thousand kilometres in the coastal regions. The trade market expanded from the five regional market centres to include the entire country: from Beijing to the northern region, Hankou to the central region, Hangzhou to Jiangnan, Guangzhou to the southern provinces and Fuzhou to the coastal areas.

Urbanization increased along with the development of handicraft industries and the commercial economy. This was particularly true after 1737, when the Qing court began supporting the mining industry and when the exploitation of mineral resources swiftly spread throughout the nation. Numerous peasants left their homes to seek work in the mining industry. For example, in southwestern China, where the mining industry was the most advanced, millions of peasants came to seek employment in the silver, copper and lead mining factories. A single factory accommodated thousands of peasants and the numbers of workers in some factories reached seventy or eighty thousand.¹⁹ Migration brought the growth of urbanization and consumerism.

¹⁸ Wei and Ye, p. 40.

¹⁹ Wei and Ye, pp. 12-5.

The Lower Yangzi, where Qu Bingyun's hometown Changshu 常熟 is located, was already a highly commercialized and urbanised region during the late Ming. In the eighteenth century, the region saw a rapid growth of cotton cultivation and sericulture, as well a swift development of the textile industry. Spinning and weaving became the major occupation of each family, involving both females and males. For example, in Wuxi "both female and male spun and weaved, occupying themselves with nothing else" 不分男女全織布紡花, 別無他務.²⁰ Women took the chief role in the textile industry and their position became important, as Susan Mann indicates: "Women were central to household production and consumption patterns in the Jiangnan's High Qing economic upswing, and rapid economic change called immediate attention to women's roles in production and consumption."²¹

Urbanization gave rise to urban culture, producing and requiring urban literature and arts. Due to popular demand, unorthodox literature such as regional operas and art-song thrived in urban areas. The scholar Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸 emphasizes this outpouring by pointing out that his collection of twelve thousand (12, 000) songs of the Qianlong period is "actually no more than one-tenth among thousands of hundreds of them" 其實還不過存十一於千百而已.²² Women's literature was one of the types of unorthodox literature flourishing at the time. A widely-quoted work, Hu Wenkai's *A Study of Women's Writings Through the Ages*, gives evidence of this trend. This book records a total of four thousand and ninety seven (4097) women writers, of whom three thousand six hundred and forty-three (3643) are credited to the Qing period and only three hundred forty one (341) to pre-Qing times. Of those women poets who emerged during the Qing, more than half are said to have been Qu Bingyun's contemporaries. Chen Bohai 陳伯海 states: "to my surprise, more than a half of the Qing women writers mentioned [in Hu's book] appeared between the ends of the Kangxi (1722) and Qianlong periods (1736-1795)" 康熙末年乾隆年間的婦女作品竟居大半.²³

²⁰ Wei and Ye, p. 41.

²¹ Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997, p. 32.

²² Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸, *A History of Chinese Folk Literature 中國俗文學史 (Zhongguo suwenxue shi)*, Beijing: Commercial Press, 1939, p. 408.

²³ Chen Bohai 陳伯海, *An Outline of Last Four Hundred Years of China's Literary Trends 近四百年中國文學思潮史 (Jinsibainian zhongguo wenxue sichao shi)*, Shanghai: Dongfang chubun zhongxin, 1997, p. 285.

Hu's book is a valuable source illustrating women's literature throughout China's history and in particular showing the sudden increase of women writers during the mid-Qing. However, readers should realize that it is an incomplete record, possibly as incomplete as Zheng Zhenduo's collection of song scripts. It fails to include many women who authored works, as well as numerous other women writers who did not leave their works behind for various reasons (such as, for example, deciding to burn their poetry before death). For example, Changshu women writers alone who are not referred to in Hu's book include Shao Wanzhang 邵琬章, the author of the *Draft Left Behind from the Talking to the Moon Tower* 話月樓遺稿 (*Huayuelou yigao*), Gao Suo 高索, who wrote the *Heavenly Fragrance Chanting Draft* (one chapter) 天香吟稿一卷 (*Tianxiang yin'gao yijuan*), and Wang Sun 王蓀, who authored the *Collected Poems of Singing and Responding at the Green River* 綠水唱酬集 (*Lüshui changchouji*).²⁴ Another example is that Hu uses Yuan Mei's *Selected Poems by Yuan Mei's Female Disciples* as a source, but his book leaves out five of the twenty-eight women writers mentioned in Yuan's selection. These examples of the incompleteness of Hu's records suggest a much greater outpouring of female writing during the Qing than his book shows us.

Together with the dramatic increase in the number of women writers came changes in their self-consciousness. Having tested their ability in writing, women became aware of their role in the development of literature. They started to get rid of the male guise and wrote as women, introducing their own themes, styles and language to classical literature. For example, one of Qu Bingyun's fellow disciples, Xi Peilan, argued against those who regarded women as simple and incapable of writing literary works, saying:

The commonly-held view is stale and thickheaded,	世俗見迂拒,
Saying, a woman is best advised to stick to simplicity.	謂婦宜守拙.
This idea, I would say, is unreasonable.	余曰理不明,

²⁴ These works are mentioned in *RG CZ*, but do not seem to have survived. They, however, are eligible to be included in Hu's book, since it includes non-extant works.

I study and see it does not adhere to logic.
Look at the *Zhounan* poems,
Which one was not written by a woman?

究於理多缺。
請觀周南詩，
誰非淑女筆？²⁵

Xi Peilan thinks that women possess the qualities needed for writing poetry, usually attributed solely to men. She suggests that since women had achieved excellence in poetry from the early stages of Chinese history as illustrated by the *Zhounan* poems in the *Classic of Poetry*, they could also attain greatness during the present time. She became aggressive in her competition with men, as suggested by the fact that she misunderstood Yuan Mei's praise of her as the "number one poet of the time" and assumed she could be superior to all contemporary poets, both men and women.²⁶

Strict Ideological Control Turns Intellectuals' Interests to Women's Issues

²⁵ Xi Peilan 席佩蘭, *Collected Poems from the Eternal Truth Tower* 長真閣詩集 (*Changzhen'ge shiji*), Shanghai: Saoye shanfang, 1920, 4:5b.

²⁶ Yuan Mei wrote,

Although I have over twenty female disciples, Ruizhu, learned and refined, Jin Xianxian, intelligent, and Xi Peilan, esteem(ed/ing) number one of our times, are the three bosom friends of mine among ladies. 余女弟子雖二十餘人，而如蕊珠之博雅，金纖纖之領解，席佩蘭之推尊本朝第一，皆閨中之三大知己也。 *YMQJ* (VIII): *Continuation of the Poetry Talks at Sui Garden* 隨園詩話補遺 (*Suiyuan shihua buyi*, hereafter *BY*), 41 of v 10, p. 808.

In this passage, "Xi Peilan as esteem(ed/ing) number one of our times" is a vague phrase, since it can be interpreted as "Xi Peilan as being esteemed" or "Xi Peilan esteems (someone else)" as "number one of our times." Xi Peilan understood that Yuan Mei praised her as "number one" and she wrote: "I composed some poems in celebration of Master Yuan Mei's birthday and was rewarded by the Master with a bundle of fine silk and encouraged by being praised as the champion of our times in poetry." 以詩壽隨園先生，蒙束縑之報；且以詩冠本朝一語相勗。 See Xi Peilan, 3:3a. However, it was Xi herself who had praised Yuan as "the champion of our times in her poems mentioned above:

You, my senior, were an official
held in esteem both inside and outside the government. 官無內外推前輩，
In poetry and prose,
you are the champion of our times. 集有詩文冠本朝。
(Xi, 3:2b)

Because Xi Peilan had admired him as "number one of our times," Yuan Mei regarded Xi Peilan as one of his three lady bosom friends. Nevertheless, many scholars in later times followed Xi's interpretation. For example, in his *The Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*, Arthur W. Hummel, gives the following account of Xi Peilan: "She is known as a painter of orchids and as a pupil of Yuan Mei who declared her to be, up to his day, the best poetess of the Ch'ing period." See Hummel, Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1944, p. 686.

Qing rulers strictly controlled the country's ideology and cultural activities and harshly suppressed any opposition to the Qing court, real or imaginary. During the sixty years of the Qianlong reign there were over thirty cases of "literary inquisition and persecutions" 文字獄 ("wenziyu"), as the result of which accused officials and scholars, as well as their families, were executed. The Qianlong Emperor also ordered the examination of books in order to pick out and destroy anything potentially harmful to his rule. As a result, 2, 453 sets of books were destroyed, 402 sets were partly obliterated, and numerous books were revised; only 3, 470 books survived this examination and were compiled into the *Imperial Library* 四庫全書 (*Siku quanshu*).²⁷ At the time, under the threat of death, intellectuals dared not touch on political and ideological issues. Instead, they submerged themselves in "evidential studies" of classics and histories, which were encouraged by the Qing court. In the Qianlong period, philosophy waned while evidential studies thrived.²⁸

Through evidential studies, intellectuals got a chance to re-examine the classics and histories and to judge contemporary social and cultural phenomena in their light. This enabled them to criticize society. The discussions on women's chastity and the debate on women's education were thus brought about by studies of the *Book of Rites*, the *Book of Changes*, the *Classic of Poetry* and some historical works.

The discussions and the debates on women's issues in which the scholars promoted the equality and visibility of women were also related to the trends of self-consciousness and individualism of intellectuals in the fields of learning as well as to literary and artistic creations. These trends, which started during the late Ming, did not seem to be hindered by the harsh political repression, which was aimed mainly against anti-Manchu ideas. For example, as one of the "Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou" 揚州八怪 ("Yangzhou baguai"), a group of artists and poets who behaved unconventionally and whose works were eccentric, Zheng Xie 鄭燮 (1693-1765) overtly defied tradition and supported independent thinking but never got into trouble. In his autobiography, Zheng was proud of having been famous during three reigns, saying, "I, Banqiao (the

²⁷ Xiao Shafu 蕭蕙父 and Xu Sumin 許蘇民, *Developments and Changes of the Enlightenment of Learning in the Ming and Qing Dynasties* 明清啓蒙學術流變 (*Mingqing xueshu liubian*), Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 1995, p. 635.

²⁸ See a detailed discussion of this issue in Chen Bohai, pp. 261-77.

courtesy name of Zheng Xie), am a Cultivated Talent²⁹ of the Kangxi reign, a Provincial Graduate of the Renzi year (1732) of the Yongzheng reign, and a Metropolitan Graduate of the Bingchen year (1736) of the Qianlong reign” 板橋康熙秀才, 雍正壬子舉人, 乾隆丙辰進士.³⁰ He even used “Cultivated Talent of Kangxi, Provincial Graduate of Yongzheng, and Metropolitan Graduate of Qianlong” as a pen name in his works of painting and calligraphy. Also, in his poem “Written by Chance” 偶然作 (“Ouran zuo”), Zheng discards all authority:

Why does a hero have to read classics and histories?	英雄何必讀書史?
What he should do is to directly expose	
his blood and nature in his writings.	直據血性爲文章。
Say no to the immortal, to Buddha,	
and to the sage,	不仙不佛不賢聖,
Beyond his brush and ink	
the hero has his own positions.	筆墨之外有主張. ³¹

Discouraging independent thinking was a long tradition. Chinese intellectuals abided by Confucius' saying, "I transmit but do not invent; I believe in and am devoted to antiquity" 述而不作, 信而好古.³² Instead of creating their own discourses, intellectuals tended to find what they wanted to say in the classics and then quoted the classics to express themselves. Zheng Xie, however, wanted intellectuals to discard all these authorities—Confucianism (the sage's), Daoism (the immortal's) and Buddhism (Buddha's)—and to think for themselves and express ideas of their own.

Another notable individual who upheld individualism and upheld the independent value of learning was Qu Bingyun's mentor, Yuan Mei. Yuan endorsed emotions and

²⁹ This dissertation uses Charles Hucker's *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985) to term official titles.

³⁰ Zheng Banqiao 鄭板橋, "Banqiao's Self-Accounting" 板橋自敘 ("Banqiao zixu") in *Collected Works of Zheng Banqiao 鄭板橋全集 (Zheng Banqiao quanji)*, compiled by Bian Xiaoxuan 卞孝萱, Ji'nan: Qilu shushe, 1985, p. 241.

³¹ Bian Xiaoxuan comp., p. 35.

³² Zhao Cong 趙聰 annotated, *A Full Explanation on The Analects of Confucius: I transmit but 論語詳釋: 述而 (Lunyu xiangshi: shu'er)*, Taipei: Hualian chubanshe, 1960, p. 129.

desires, which were conventionally required to be controlled, as the most important aspect of social life:

For what reason did the people of the world collectively hope to be ruled by the sages and the sages diligently rule the people? Nothing more than emotions and desires. 天下之所以叢叢然望治於聖人, 聖人之所以殷殷然治天下者, 何哉? 無他, 情慾而已矣.³³

As a scholar, Yuan claimed to "discard Confucianism orthodoxy" 廢道統之說 in the field of learning,³⁴ while as a poet, he wanted poetry to be free from any concerns other than emotions and desires. He argued against the saying, "Writing is also good for serving the state" 文章亦報國,³⁵ and criticized the Confucians of the Song Dynasty, for wanting literature to be didactic in order to serve the state: "the Song Confucians bound political affairs, literature and language all together with one rope, and drove all subjects into the one single category of morality 宋儒硜硜然將政事文學言語一繩捆束, 驅而盡納諸德行一門."³⁶ Yuan also disagreed with the idea that "[poetry] must be related to human relations and everyday life" 必關係人倫日用,³⁷ maintaining that literature should have its own value, independent from any other subjects.

Self-consciousness and individualism helped promote equality between men and women, as can be seen from the discussions and debates on women's issues. Qing rulers set forth Confucianism as the state ideology and upheld Confucian family values by highlighting the chastity of women. Each year the court reviewed numerous petitions and granted chaste widows honours by the thousands. However, through their studies

³³ Yuan Mei, "Idle Talks" 清說 ("Qingshuo") in *YMQJ* (II): *Prose Collection from the House on the Small Barn Hill* 小倉山房文集 (*Xiaocangshanfang wenji*, j. 22, hereafter *WJ*), p. 374.

³⁴ Yuan Mei, "Five Answers to Cultivated Talents" 策秀才文五道 ("Ce xiucaiwen wudao") in *YMQJ* (II): *WJ* (j. 24), p. 417.

³⁵ Yuan, Mei, "Another Letter to Answer General Administration Circuit Tao" 再答陶觀察書 ("Zaida Tao Guanca shu") in *YMQJ* (II): *WJ* (j. 16), p. 269.

³⁶ Yuan Mei, "A Letter to Answer Minister Zhu Shi" 答朱石君尚書書 ("Da Zhu Shi jun Shangshu shu") in *YMQJ* (V): *Correspondence from the House on the Small Barn Hill* 小倉山房尺牘 (*Xiaocang shanfang Chidu*, j. 9, hereafter *CD*), p. 181.

³⁷ Yuan Mei, "A Letter to Discuss Poetry and Answer Shen Deqian" 答沈大宗伯論詩書 ("Da Shen Dazongbo lunshi shu") in *YMQJ* (II): *WJ* (j. 17), p. 284.

of the classics, some scholars argued for remarriage of widows and against foot binding, stating that women were not merely dependents of men.

The scholar Wang Zhong 汪中 (1744-94) wrote several essays on women's remarriage and chastity, one of which is entitled "On the Suicide of Engaged Women after Their Fiancés' Death and the Remarriage of Widows" 女子許嫁而婿死從死及守志議 ("Nüzi xujia er xusi congsi ji shouzhi yi"). In it, Wang quotes the *Book of Rites* to dispute the practice of women committing suicide after their fiancé's death and maintains that it is against ancient etiquette that such a woman does not remarry. He points out that the *Book of Rites* states that children should have enough time to express their grief, but at the same time, they should limit the duration of their grief. The ancient kings thought the corpse of a parent should lie unburied in a coffin for only three days after death and limited the mourning period to three years;³⁸ also, the *Book of Rites* makes it clear that people's bodies are received from their parents and should not be mutilated.³⁹ He writes,

Since the ancient kings hated to cause harm to the living by mourning for the dead, they created a funeral ceremony for moderate grieving. It was not permitted by etiquette for

³⁸ The *Book of Rites* prescribes sons to lay out the corpse of their parent three days after death, in order to give enough time for the dead to revive, and in the meantime, limit the exposure of the corpse so as to prevent sons from being downcast in their heart: "laying out the corpse three days after death... to wait for the parent coming back to life...and afterwards, the heart of the filial sons will be more downcast, so that the sages had decided three day period as the rule" 死三日後殮...以俟其生...孝子之心亦益衰矣,是故聖人爲之斷決以三日之爲禮制也. Sun Xidan 孫希旦 comp., *A Collection of Commentaries on the Book of Rites 禮記集解 (Liji jijie)*, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989, p1352.

Also, in response to the question, "What purposes do the mourning rites for three years serve?" The *Book of Rites* indicates that the different rules for mourning rites were established in harmony with people's feelings: "The greater a wound is, the longer it remains; and the more pain it gives, the more slowly it is healed. The mourning of three years, being appointed with its various forms in harmony with the feelings (produced by the occasion of it), was intended to mark the greatest degree of grief. . . If people continue to indulge the feeling, their grief will prove to be inexhaustible. Therefore, the ancient kings determined the proper medium for mourning, and appointed its definite terms." 創鉅者其日久,痛甚者其日遲.三年者稱情而立文.所以爲至痛極也,...然而遂之,則是無窮也.故先王焉爲之立中制節. *Book of Rites: questions about the mourning for three years* 禮記: 三年間 (Liji: sannianwen, j. 55). The translation is taken from James Legge, *Li Chi: Book of Rites*, New Hyde Park & New York: University Books, 1967, pp. 392.

³⁹ The *Book of Rites* quotes Zengzi 曾子 as saying, "The body is that which has been transmitted to us by our parents; dare anyone allow himself to be irreverent in the employment of their legacy" 身也者父母之遺體也? And, "His parents give birth to his person all complete, and to return it to them all complete may be called filial duty. When no member has been mutilated and no disgrace done to any part of the person, it may be called complete" 父母全而生之,子全而歸之,可謂孝矣.不虧其體不辱其身可

someone to die himself because he could not bear his grief 先王之惡人以死傷生也,故爲之喪禮以節之.其有不勝喪而死者,禮之所不許也.⁴⁰

Wang applied these rules to women whose fiancés had died; to ask such a woman to commit suicide is against the etiquette prescribed by the *Book of Rites*.

Yu Zhengxie 俞正燮 (1775-1840), one of the most prominent scholars of the Ming and Qing period, condemned unfairness to women, advocating women's equality to men. Having seen that women were treated as sexual toys or slaves for housework, and that men could buy as many concubines as they wanted and could afford, Yu reminded men that women are human beings. He voices his disapproval of men fomenting jealousy, stating that men should not buy concubines and if they do a wife who loves her husband would surely be jealous:

The principle of being husband and wife is said to be oneness. If the husband buys a concubine and the wife does not become jealous, she must be indifferent. If the wife is indifferent the Way of the family is damaged. 夫妻之道,言致一也.夫買妾而妻不妒,則是愬也.愬則家道壞矣.⁴¹论

Yu's "oneness" of the husband and wife contains the ideas of equality of women to men. He explained it further by referring to ancient etiquette: "According to ancient etiquette, a husband and wife should be combined into one body, and be of equal rank" 古禮夫婦合體,同尊卑.⁴² And, since husbands and a wives are equal parts of the 'oneness,'

謂全矣. *The Book of Rites: the meaning of sacrifices* 禮記祭義 (*Liji: jiyi*, j. 46). The translation is taken from Legge, p. 226 and 229.

⁴⁰ Wang Zhong 汪中, "On the Chastity and Suicide of Engaged Woman After Their Fiancés' Death" 女子許嫁而婿死從死及守志議 ("Nüzi xujia ertusi congshi ji shouzhi yi") in Wang Zhong's *A Commentary on Learning: Inner Pieces* 述學: 內篇 (*Shuxue: Neipian*), Publisher (unknown), 1815, 1:15a.

⁴¹ Yu Zhengxie, "Jealousy Is not a Wicked Behavior of a Woman" 妒非女子惡德論 ("Du feinüzi edelun") in *Classified Drafts in the Guisi Year* (1833) 癸巳類稿 (*Guisi leigao*), j 13. Shanghai: Shangwu, reprint, 1957, p. 497.

⁴² Yu Zhengxie, "On Chaste Widows" 節婦說 ("Jiefu shuo") in *Classified Drafts in the Guisi Year* (1833). Yu, j 13, reprint, p. 493. Yu refers to the *Book of Rites* which states: "When the bride arrived, the groom bowed to her as she entered. They ate together of the same animal and joined in the sipping from the cups made of the same melon; thus showing that they now form one body, were of equal rank, and pledged to mutual affection" 婦至,婿揖婦以入,共牢而食,合卺而酌.所以合體,同尊卑.以親之

Yu concludes that "therefore, a woman who remarries [after her husband dies] should be regarded the same as a man who remarries [after his wife dies] " 是女再嫁與男再娶者等。⁴³

The scholar and writer Liu Dakui 劉大櫨 (1698-1780) and the novelist Li Ruzhen 李汝珍 (1763-1830) also participated in the discussion. Liu challenged the comparison of the relationships between a husband and wife to that between the emperor and ministers, claiming that unlike the emperor-minister relationship held together by loyalty, the husband-wife relationship is bound by love. An engaged woman should not commit suicide after her fiancé dies, since a minister does this out of loyalty.⁴⁴ Li wrote a novel, *The Romance of the Flowers in the Mirror* 鏡花緣 (*Jing hua yuan*) that creates a marvellous world in which women have the same intellectual capabilities as men. Women read, write, and, take civil service examinations and are appointed as officials if they succeed. Also, men cannot buy concubines and sometimes have to do housework.

Along with the flourishing of women's writing, women's education was raised as another important issue. This was hotly debated because of Yuan Mei's and his followers' enthusiastic promotion of women's writing. Yuan Mei actively supported women's literary education and openly took on a large group of women as his disciples to study poetry (See the next section and Chapter III). Following his example, the male poets Wang Chang 王昶 (1724-1806), Wang Wenzhi 王文治 (1730-1802), Guo Lin 郭麐, Chen Wenshu 陳文述 (1775-1845) and Ren Zhaolin 任兆麟 (ca. 1776-1823) among others taught poetry to groups of women. Chen Wenshu, just like Yuan, compiled *Poems by the Female Disciples from the Jade City Immortal House* 碧城仙館女弟子詩 (*Bicheng xian'guan nüdizi shi*), a selection of poems written by his thirteen female disciples.⁴⁵ Yuan and other male literary educators thus caused the debate in which many renowned scholars and writers participated. Yao Nai 姚鼐 (1732-

也, *Book of Rites: the meaning of marriage ceremony* 禮記: 昏義 (*Liji: hunyi*, j. 58). The translation is taken from Legge, pp. 429-30.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 494.

⁴⁴ Liu Dakui 劉大櫨, "A Biography of the Chaste Woman Wang" 汪烈女傳 ("Wang Lienü zhuan") in *Collected Works of Liu Dakui* 劉大櫨集 (*Liu Dakui ji*), Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1990, j. 6, p. 202-3.

⁴⁵ See Lu Cao 陸草, "On the Characteristics of Women Poets Groups of the Qing Dynasty" 論清代女詩人的群體性特征 ("Lun qingdai nüshiren de quntixing tezheng"), *Journal of Zhongzhou*, 中州學刊 (*Zhongzhou xuekan*), 1993: 3, p. 79.

1815) was one of those who agreed with women writing poetry on the condition that it benefited society:

Some Confucians said that writing and chanting poems is not suitable for women. I do not think so. If writing is to make this world better, it is suitable for both males and females 儒者或言文章吟詠非女子所宜,余以爲不然.言而爲天下善,於男子宜也,於女子亦宜也.⁴⁶

The scholar Yu Yue 俞樾 (1821-1907) opposed Yuan Mei's educating women in literature, but expressed his opposition with some restraint: "I never thought it right that Yuan Mei widely recruited women disciples" 余素不以袁枚廣收女弟子爲然.⁴⁷ However, some Confucian scholars criticized Yuan Mei harshly by accusing him of being "loose in morals" 佚蕩 (yidang).⁴⁸ Among these scholars was the well-known historian Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 (1737-1801). Zhang was one of the scholars who endorsed independent thinking, stating that although the Way does exist in the Six Classics, in everyday life the Classics should only be treated as records of history and source materials for seeking the Way.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, he was the most severe among those Confucians who condemned Yuan Mei. He wrote a long essay, "Women's Learning" 婦學 ("Fuxue"), to attack Yuan, ignoring the fact that Yuan associated with women at an old age and still accused him of seducing women:

⁴⁶ Yao Nai 姚鼐, *Collected Poems and Prose from the Small Room of Cherishing Ambitions* 惜抱軒詩文集 (*Xibaoxuan shiwenji*), Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1992, j. 8, p. 121.

⁴⁷ Yu Yue 俞樾, *Complete Collection from the Spring Hall* 春在堂全書 (*Chunzaitang quanshu*), Taipei: Zhongguo wenxian chubanshe, 1968, p. 3045.

⁴⁸ See *Accounts of Anecdotes from the Mystery Talking Study* 說元室述聞 (*Shuoyuanshi shuwen*) YMQJ (VIII): Appendix 3: "Criticisms on Yuan Mei." p. 26.

⁴⁹ Zhang Xuecheng, "Confucians regard the six classics as conveying the Way and adhere them. Does the world have a Way separate from its use like a shadow existing without an object? The Confucians, ignoring human relations and livelihood, adhere to the six classics to talk about the Way, so it is impossible for them to discover the Way. 儒家者流,守其六經以爲是特載道之書耳.夫天下豈有離器言道離形存影者哉?彼舍天下事物人倫日用而守六經以言道則固不可言夫道也." "Examination of the Way (II)" 原道 (中), in Ye Ying 葉瑛 comp., *A Checked and Annotated Edition of A Survey of Literature and History* 文史通義校注 (*Wenshi tongyi jiaozhu*), Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983, p. 132.

Recently, there has appeared a shameless and arrogant man who considers himself to be a talent, and who has seduced gentry women, much like an actor in a drama of "a talent and a beauty". He seduces many young women from prestigious and noble families south of the Yangzi River. He solicits those women's poems and prints them to advertise their names. Having ignored the discretion that should exist between men and women and having forgotten that they themselves are female, such young girls do not study women's learning. How could they have had any real talent? 近有無恥妄人,以風流自命,蠱惑士女,大抵以優伶雜劇所演之才子佳人惑人.大江以南,名門大家閨閣多爲所誘.徵詩刻稿,標榜聲名.無復男女之嫌,殆忘其身之雌矣.此等閨娃,婦學不修,豈有真才可取⁵⁰

Zhang's charge of "seduction of gentry women" is much the same as the one levelled against Li Zhi 李贄 (1527-1602) who accepted two female disciples two centuries earlier.⁵¹

Zhang does not consider literature to be an appropriate subject for women's learning. In his essay, he outlines a history of Chinese women's learning and maintains that women should adhere to the traditional women's learning that included four categories: womanly virtue, womanly speech, womanly manners and womanly work. As for "womanly speech," he says that women should study the *Classic of Poetry* and the *Book of Rites*, but not poetry writing. He writes, "Writing is not a woman's calling" 婦人文字,非其職業; "although there are some good writings originating naturally from women's inborn talent, they should not go beyond the inner quarters" 雖文藻出於天爛,而範思不逾閨外.⁵² Even though Zhang Xuecheng re-states traditional beliefs, he tends to recognize that women have the same intellectual gifts as men.⁵³

Because of Zhang's attack on Yuan Mei, the debate surrounding women's literary educations was extremely heated, making women's issues more prominent.

⁵⁰Ye Ying comp., p. 538.

⁵¹ See a discussion of Li Zhi in Section 3 of this chapter.

⁵² Ye Ying comp., pp. 532-3.

⁵³ Regarding the debate between Zheng Xuecheng and Yuan Mei, see Susan Mann, "Fuxue" (Women's Learning) by Zhang Xuecheng (1738-1801): China's First History of Women's Culture." *Late Imperial China*, 3.1 (June), pp. 40-62.

1.3 Yuan Mei's Promotion of Literary Education for Women

Yuan Mei devoted himself more than others to the literary education of women during the Qing, directly causing the aforementioned debate. Yuan defended his teaching women literature by answering the following two questions: (1) "Should literature be a subject of women's education?" and (2) "Should men teach women?" Since Susan Mann has studied the debate from Zhang Xuecheng's side, as part of the introduction to the social and cultural background for Qu Bingyun's life and creations, the following section will be devoted to the debate from Yuan Mei's side.

Women's Education in Literature

Throughout the history of pre-modern China, women were prohibited from any official form of education. They could only receive informal training at home in the subjects of Confucian morality and basic literacy. Before the late Han Dynasty, only the "Domestic Regulations" 內則 (*Neize*) of *the Book of Rites* mentioned the training of women. The "Domestic Regulations" chapter emphasizes the physical separation of the sexes: The men were in charge of all affairs outside the home, and the women managed the internal affairs. From the time they were born, boys and girls dressed and acted differently. Girls should only be taught the knowledge and skills necessary to manage a household. Before the age of nine, they learned the same survival knowledge, such as "to use the right hand to eat," "the numerals and the names of the four directions," and "how to use the ten Heavenly Stems [天干 *Tiangan*] and the twelve Earthly Branches [地支 *Dizhi*] to memorize dates,"⁵⁴ but after that boys and girls studied different subjects. When they were nine years old, boys began to go outside the room to pursue a broad range of knowledge, such as the classics, history, philosophy, literature, musical instruments, mathematics, and martial arts, while girls were confined in the inner quarters to study how to make clothes and to conduct religious rituals. These prescriptions established the basis for women's learning in later ages. Ban Zhao (ca. 49-c. 120) started the systematic education of women, not in literacy but in Confucian morality. In accordance with *the Book of Rites*, she wrote *Instructions for Women* 女誡

(*Nüjie*), in which she announced women's inferior position and put forward the correct behaviour of a woman in four categories: womanly virtue, womanly speech, womanly manners, and womanly work. She also suggested that a woman should study the classics before she is fourteen years old in order to serve her husband better.⁵⁵ After Ban's book came quite a few works on women's moral education, including Madame Zheng's 鄭氏 (c. 700 c. e.) *Classic of Filial Piety for Women* 女孝經 (*Nü xiao jing*), Song Ruoshen's 宋若莘 (ca. 800 c. e.) *Analects for Women* 女論語 (*Nü lunyu*), and Lü Kun's 呂坤 (c. 1600 c. e.) *Rules for Women* 閩範 (*Gui fan*). These books elaborate the principles set forth in Ban's book, and, together with Ban's, were used as texts for the education of women.

Literature and the classics were designated as the father's and brother's domain and were not available to women.⁵⁶ Even in the Qing dynasty when women got more freedom to extend the scope of their learning at home, literature was still a prohibited subject for them to study in public.⁵⁷ On the other hand, during the early period of Chinese history, there were a few women who excelled at the learning of the classics or literary writing; society did not accuse them of the "crime" of studying the subjects they were not supposed to, but admired and openly praised them. Some famous women writers, such as Zhuo Wenjun 卓文君 (118 B. C.), Wang Zhaojun 王昭君 (33 B. C.),

⁵⁴ Sun Xidan comp., pp. 754-73.

⁵⁵ Zhang Fuqing 張福清 comp., *The Book of Instructions for Women: A Yoke for Females* 女誡: 女性的枷鎖 (*Nüjie: nüxing de jiasuo*), Beijing: Zhongyang minzu daxue chubanshe (the Central Nationality University Press), 1996, p. 2.

⁵⁶ There are exceptions in the area of religion, where women were not excluded from education and could excel at some domains.

According to Daniel Overmyer, early Taoist texts are addressed to the whole household including women, and sometimes women are specially mentioned as participants. One fifth century text, *San-t'ien nei-chieh ching*, praises both the Celestial Masters and their wives as founders of the tradition. Another one, *Cheng-i fa-wen T'ai-shang wai-lu I*, devotes several pages to instructing women in various stage of life. Also, there was a Taoist tradition of sexual rituals that supposedly could bring immortality to men as well as women (See Daniel L. Overmyer, "Women in Chinese Religions: Submission, Struggle, Transcendence," in Koichi Shinohara and Gregory Schopen ed., *From Benares to Beijing: Essays on Buddhism and Chinese Religion in Honour of Prof. Jan Yun-hua*, Oakville: Mosaic Press, 1991). However, in late imperial China women were prevented from learning Daoism.

Also, as stated by Diana Y. Paul, the notion that the feminine is wise, maternal, creative, gentle, and compassionate is a theme of Buddhist texts. A female could be the teacher of Dharma, a good daughter, and a good friend, even an advanced Bodhisattva or imminent Buddha. Women's position in Mahayana Buddhism is higher than in any Chinese philosophies and political thought (See Diana Y. Paul, *Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in the Mahayana Tradition*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

⁵⁷ See Chen Dongyuan 陳東原, *A History of Chinese Women's Life* 中國婦女生活史 (*Zhongguo funü shenghuo shi*), Beijing: Commercial Press, reprint 1998, p. 282.

Cai Wenji 蔡文姬 (160), Zuo Fen 左芬 (300), Xie Daoyun 謝道韞 (344), Xue Tao 薛濤 (died ca. 832), Guan Panpan 關盼盼 (785), Yu Xuanji 魚玄機 (ca. 844-ca.871), Li Qingzhao 李清照 (1084-ca.1151), and Zhu Shuzhen 朱淑真 (died 1107), were greatly admired throughout Chinese history. However, from the late Ming onward, the number of women writers dramatically increased, although traditional society opposed this trend. The saying on everyone's lips at the time was "a woman having no talent is virtuous."⁵⁸ A debate on the issue of whether women should be educated in literature or not erupted.

Yuan Mei advocated equality among people in the area of education. He maintained that everyone should have the right to receive education, upholding the Confucian idea, "There is no distinction in education" 有教無類 (*you jiao wu lei*).⁵⁹ Yuan wrote,

The creator did not choose a certain category when creating human beings. Also, the gentlemen did not choose a certain category of people to teach. Formerly the ancient kings were worried about choices arising [in the field of education] and therefore they established education 天不擇人而生, 則君子亦不擇人而教. 昔先王憂天下之有類也, 而教立焉.⁶⁰

Yuan denied that education for a certain class should be restricted. This was why he accepted women and some Daoist and Buddhist monks, runners and actors as his disciples.⁶¹

Yuan Mei told his contemporaries that women were more suited for learning literature, because it was originally a woman's domain, and study was originally a woman's activity. Yuan Mei thought that people who opposed women studying poetry were ignorant. He declared his research on the history of women's education showed that (1) Poetry had been contributing to the education of women for a long time; (2) the sages associated the trigrams, *dui* and *li*, in the *Classic of Changes* with educational

⁵⁸ See Chen Dongyuan, p. 2.

⁵⁹ Zhao Cong comp., p. 354.

⁶⁰ *YMQJ* (V): *Drafts by the Grand Historian Yuan*, 袁太史稿 (*Yuan Taishi gao*, hereafter *SG*), p. 35.

⁶¹ *YMQJ* (VIII): *BY*, 35 of v 9, p. 780.

activities and literature, and (3) they selected women's works to make up a major part of the *Classic of Poetry*:

Today's scholars easily say that poetry and prose are not the callings of women. They do not know that the poems "Shade of the Vine" ("Getan") and "Curl-Grass" ("Juaner"), which were all written by women, crown the *Classic of Poetry*. Also, the sages defined the trigram, *dui*, as a young girl, and the sage associated it with "lecture and study amongst friends." He defined the trigram, *li*, which stands for middle-aged women, as "literature, bright and pretty, shining in the sky." So, poetry has been contributing to female education for a long, long time 目論者動謂詩文非閨閣所宜. 不知葛覃卷耳首冠三百篇, 誰非女子所作? 兌爲少女而聖人繫之以朋友講習; 離爲中女而聖人繫之以文明麗乎天. 詩之有功於陰教也久矣.⁶²

The trigrams, *dui* and *li*, are two of the eight primary divinatory symbols, each made up of a set of three broken and unbroken lines. These eight trigrams constitute sixty-four hexagrams, which are the core content of the *Classic of Changes*. *Dui* is associated with marshes in the category of natural objects, young girls among human beings, happiness (qualities), sheep (animals), mouth (the body), west (direction) and autumn (season) and *li* with fire and the sun (natural objects), middle-aged women (human beings), dependence (qualities), pheasant (animals) eye (the body), south (direction) and the summer (season). The commentaries for the trigrams 篆辭 (*Zhuan ci*) define *dui* as an educational activity, and *li* as literature. It was believed that one of the earliest legendary rulers, the Emperor Fu Xi 伏羲 (2852-2538 B. C.) drew the divinatory symbols and that the Duke of Zhou (ca. 256 B. C.) and Confucius wrote the commentaries on them. It was also believed that Confucius was the compiler of the *Classic of Poetry*. No matter whether Yuan's interpretations were true or not, the

⁶² Preface to Luo Qilan, *Collected Poems from the Listening-to-Autumn House*, 聽秋軒詩集 (*Tingqiuxuan shiji*), Jinling: Gongshi 龔氏, 1796. Also see the similar statements in *YMQJ* (III): *Poetry Talks at Sui Garden* 隨園詩話 (*Suiyuan shihua*, hereafter SH), p. 570-1, *YMQJ* (II): *WJ*, p. 588, *YMQJ* (V): *CD*, p. 108, and *YMQJ* (II): *Outer Collection from the House on the Small Barn Hill* 小倉山房外集 (*Xiaocangshanfang waiji*, hereafter *WAIJ*), p. 125. The translations of the poems' titles are taken from Ezra Pound in John Minford and Joseph S. M. Lau ed., *An Anthology of Translations: Classical Chinese Literature* (Volume I: From Antiquity to the Tang Dynasty), New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, pp. 97 and 98.

references that he found in the classics made his arguments more persuasive to his contemporaries. This was why Yuan Mei repeated them in various texts.

Yuan Mei's poetics had a great impact on his promotion of women's poetry. The core of Yuan's poetics is his theory of "nature and inspiration," which emphasizes individual spontaneous feelings and ingenuity as the key points for composing a good poem. According to Yuan Mei's viewpoint, poetry is an art of self-expression and should be composed ingeniously. This theory not only tries to free poetry from Confucian didacticism, but it also tries to free it from excessive scholarship.

First, Yuan's statement that "poetry allows for self-expression" means that poetry serves as a medium for individuals to express their inner feelings and personal life. Traditional poetics placed an emphasis on social affairs for educational and political purposes; numerous Chinese officials devoted their lives to the writing of poetry. However, Yuan Mei broke with this tradition. He concentrated on the private and de-emphasized didacticism in poetry. Yuan declared that, everybody, regardless of class or gender, could compose poetry. Sometimes even an illiterate village woman could utter one or two superb poetic lines, to which even Li Bai and Du Fu, if they were alive, would have to bow down.⁶³

Second, "poetry is for natural self-expression," means that the true feelings and the nature of personality in poetic expressions are valued. In a poem Yuan wrote, "Only the self must exist in poetry; / don't pirate others." 但須有我在, 不可事剽竊.⁶⁴ Yuan emphasized the importance of the sincerity and naturalness of an individual's feelings. He believed that the best poetry came from a poet's intuition and spontaneous emotions, particularly from his/her romantic emotions. By emphasizing romantic emotions Yuan Mei promotes women's feelings as at least equal to men's (See more discussion of this issue in Chapter VI).

Men Teach Women

It had also been a long tradition that women's education was restricted to the women's quarters and taught only by women. The royal family selected erudite women

⁶³ *YMQJ* (III): *SH*, 50 of v 3, p. 84-5.

from the families of the Grand Masters 大夫 (*Daifu*) and prestigious scholars to teach their unwed females. The daughters of officials, scholars, and commoners usually received their education in literacy and morality from their mothers or wet nurses.⁶⁵ In Ming and Qing times, some gentry families who wanted a better education for their daughters started to hire women teachers from outside the family.⁶⁶ Li Zhi was the first man who tried to cross the boundary between male scholars and female students, by teaching Daoism at a nunnery. He also accepted two female students, Mei Danran 梅澹然 and Mei Shanyin 梅善因, the daughters of his friend Mei Guozhen 梅國禎, the Right Vice Minister of the Ministry of War 兵部右侍郎 (*Bingbu you shilang*). Since at the time it was socially unacceptable for men to teach women, Li's relationship with his two female students was kept unofficial, yet even then he was accused "of seducing the wives and daughters of gentry families" and "daring to teach Daoism at a nunnery."⁶⁷ The above was used as one of a series of criminal charges against him, and he was imprisoned.

Following Li Zhi, Mao Qiling 毛奇齡 (1623-1716), a poet of the early Qing, had a female disciple by the name of Xu Zhaohua 徐昭華.⁶⁸ Shen Dacheng 沈大成 (1700-71), a scholar and a poet of the Qianlong period before Yuan Mei, also took on a female disciple, Xu Yingyu 徐映玉.⁶⁹ No historical sources indicate that the two men were prosecuted for taking a female as a student; nevertheless, Qing society still opposed the idea that men teach women. During the Qing a school issued "Regulations for Good

⁶⁴ *YMQJ* (I): *Collected Poems from the House on the Small Barn Hill* 小倉山房詩集 (*Xiaocangshanfang shiji*, hereafter *SJ*), v 14, p. 259.

⁶⁵ See Chen Dongyuan, p. 53.

⁶⁶ See Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994, pp. 123-129.

⁶⁷ Zhang Wenda 張問達, "A Memorial for Impeaching Li Zhi" 劾李贊書 ("He Li Zhi shu"), in Zhu Weizhi 朱維之 ed., *On Li Zhi* 李卓吾論 (*Li Zhuowu lun*), publisher (unknown), 1935, p. 121.

⁶⁸ Mao Qiling was very erudite. His contemporaries called him "Master Xihe." His female disciple, Xu, was a native of Shangyu in Zhejiang. She was the author of the *Poetry Collection of Instructor Xu* 徐都講詩集 (*Xu Dujiang shiji*). Xu's mother and older sister were also skilled poets. Xu Zhaohua was well known in the local community and her father was a friend of Mao Qiling. We are told that one day Mao, together with some other friends, visited the Xu family. When Xu Zhaohua came out to greet the guests, Mao asked her to compose a poem on a painting of butterflies. Xu completed the poem immediately. This surprised the guests. See Shi Shuyi 施淑儀, *Biographies of Gentry Women Poets of the Qing Dynasty* 清代閨閣詩人征略 (*Qingdai guige shiren zhenglue*), Taipei: Mingwen shuju, 1985, 1:4a-b.

⁶⁹ Xu Yingyu, a native of Kunshan, authored the *Drafts for Chanting from the Southern Tower* 南樓吟稿 (*Nanlou yin'gao*). It is said that when Shen Dacheng visited Wuling, he happened to see a poem that Xu

Behaviour" which specify: "If a female student reaches the age of nine, it is not appropriate for her to learn from a male teacher who is from outside the family and not more than forty-nine years old" 如女已十歲, 外師未過五十者, 不宜教之.⁷⁰

Yuan Mei defied this tradition. He openly recruited a group of female disciples and actively associated with them. Yuan spent a lot of time and energy in order to convince people that taking teaching female disciples was the right thing to do. By quoting Confucius' "there is no distinction in education," Yuan made it clear that he would not refuse women who wanted to learn from him.⁷¹ Also, through his own interpretation of certain references, Yuan Mei tried to make people aware of the fact that his form of education "existed from ancient times," which means that it had been approved by the tradition a long time ago. In a poem written to celebrate acquiring another five female disciples Yuan wrote:

Mr. Xiahou was getting feeble and his temples becoming grey.	夏侯衰矣鬢雙皤,
When finished planting "Peaches and Pears," ⁷² he moved on to the "Female Vines." ⁷³	桃李栽完到女蘿.
From ancient times, only a few poets have achieved longevity.	從古詩流高壽少,
Nowadays, however, so many women read books.	於今閨閣讀書多.
Women with painted eyebrows have time to compose poems,	畫眉有暇耽吟詠,
But there is nobody for them to discuss them with and to ask about the wording.	問字無人共切磋.
No wonder that the daughter from the family of Director-in-Chief Wen,	莫怪溫家都監女,

wrote about blossoming plum. He could not help appreciating this poem and changing some words in it; Xu was happy with the changes and asked Shen to be her mentor. See Shi, 4:8a.

⁷⁰ Chen Dongyuan, p. 282.

⁷¹ *YMQJ* (III): *BY*, 35 of v 9, p. 780.

⁷² "Peaches and Pears" conventionally alludes to students.

⁷³ "Female Vines" refers to trailing plants and alludes to female students.

Stole a glance over the window at the aged Dongpo.

隔窗偷覷老東坡。⁷⁴

In this poem, Xiahou Sheng 夏侯勝 (73 B. C.), an allusion to Yuan himself, was the Grand Master for Splendid Happiness 光祿大夫 (*Guanglu daifu*) in the royal court. He was also an erudite scholar specializing in teaching the *Book of Documents* 尚書 (*Shang shu*). The Empress Dowager had been overseeing the state administration when the Emperor Xuan 宣帝 ascended the throne. She invited Xiahou to help her study the *Book of History* because she wanted to know about the classical ways of supervising the newly formed administration.⁷⁵ In this case, gender was not an issue because the Empress Dowager could not be treated merely as a woman. As the Grand Master for Splendid Happiness, Xiahou was an intimate imperial aid and an advisor resident the palace.

The other allusion in the poem is to an anecdote about "the aged Dongpo" (Su Shi 蘇軾, 1037-1101, courtesy name Dongpo) through which Yuan suggested an increase in demand for male supervision from a growing number of literary women. Yuan detailed this anecdote in the epitaph for his female disciple Jin Yi 金逸 (1770-94): When Su Shi was demoted to Huizhou 惠州 he was already growing old. One day, when he was reading, he discovered that the Director-in-Chief Wen's daughter was secretly watching him through the window. At first, Su Shi felt strange about this, but he assumed that this girl admired him for his ability to read books and that she wanted to learn from him. He was impressed by her ambition and praised her. Later, however, Su Shi was further degraded to Hainan 海南. After he returned from Hainan he found that the girl had died, he was so struck by grief that he wrote a short *ci* poem in her honour."⁷⁶

Yuan's account of this anecdote, however, differs from other sources. For example, the *Ci Poetry Talks from Meidun* 梅墩詞話 (*Meidun cihua*) states that there was a girl in the Wen family named Chaochao who did not want to marry anyone, even though she was already sixteen years old. When Su Shi became her neighbour, she was so pleased that she told everybody he was the right man for her. She spent a lot of

⁷⁴ *YMQJ* (I): *SJ*, p. 961.

⁷⁵ Ban Gu, *The Books of the Han* 漢書 (*Hanshu*), reprinted: Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962, p. 3155.

time lurking around Su's house and listening to him chant poems. Yet when she saw that Su was aware of her presence, she quickly withdrew. Shortly afterwards, Su was further exiled to Hainan Island. When he returned from Hainan and found out that Chaochao had died and was buried in the sand near-by, he was struck by grief and wrote a *ci* poem entitled "To the Tune of Divination Song: A Waning Moon Hangs in Sparse Tong Trees" 卜算子: 缺月掛疏桐.⁷⁷ Scholars doubt the authenticity of this anecdote and do not tend to consider this a valid interpretation of the aforementioned *ci* poem.⁷⁸ Yuan Mei treasured it, however, and changed it from a romantic anecdote into a girl-learner's story in order to stress the fact that women need experienced male poets to teach them poetry.

The reason why Yuan Mei had to use far-fetched historical stories and even make some changes to them was because he, as well as others, could not find many precedents for his teaching of women in ancient records. This proves that Yuan's opening up the possibility of male-taught literary education to women was a pioneer undertaking. It should also be noted that Yuan Mei stressed his old age in talking about the teaching of women. In the above poem, both Xiahou and Su are old men. Also, in a letter to one of his female disciples, Sun Yunfeng 孫雲風, Yuan suggested that he accepted Sun and other women as disciples because he was old (72) and wanted to pass down his knowledge as well as wanting company for conversation.⁷⁹ During the course of his teaching, Yuan also tried to make people aware of his old age and states that it was proper for him to teach women at his age. He obviously wanted to downplay suspicion of sexual relationships with his female disciples.

⁷⁶ *YMQJ* (II): *WJ*, p. 588.

⁷⁷ Yan Zhongqi 顏中其 comp., *Collected Anecdotes about Su Shi* 蘇東坡軼事匯編 (*Su Dongpo yishi huibian*), Shandong: Yuelu shushe, 1984, pp. 209-10.

⁷⁸ Cao Shuming 曹樹銘 comp., *Ci Poems by Su Dongpo* 蘇東坡詞 (*Su Dongpo ci*), Taiwan: Commercial Press, 1983, pp. 261-4.

⁷⁹ See *YMQJ* (V): *CD*, p.108. Yuan Mei wrote, "When scholar Fu got old, he simply wanted to pass on someone his knowledge of the Classics, and, when Liu Yin became aged and feeble, whom could he get to talk with? 伏生老去, 正想傳經; 劉尹衰頹, 與誰共話? "The scholar Fu" refers to Fu Sheng 伏勝 (221 B. C., courtesy name Zijian 子賤), a native of Ji'nan 濟南, who was an erudite. When the First Emperor Yingzheng ordered the burning of all Confucian books, he hid the *Book of Documents* (Shang shu) in the walls of his house. During the Han Dynasty (206-25 B. C.), he took initiative to spread the knowledge of the *Book of Documents* by teaching it to the people in the Qi and Lu areas. Emperor Wen heard about this and sent a scholar to learn about the *Book of Documents* from him when he was already in his nineties and could not speak clearly, but he taught the scholar with the help of his daughter as an interpreter (See Sima Qian 司馬遷 *The Historical Records* 史記 (*Shiji*), reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959, v 121, 3124-5).

1.4 Assumptions, Approaches and Objectives

The approaches and objectives set forth for this research of Qu Bingyun and her poetic creations were formulated on the basis of two assumptions: (1) according to Nancy Chodorow's theory regarding the relational gender identity of women, the interrelations between Qu Bingyun and other people played an important role in her engagement in poetry study and in her accomplishment as a poet; and (2) consistent with Marilyn M. Cooper's theory that writing is both a system of social action and an individual process, the interaction between Qu Bingyun and other members of her discourse communities formed her poetic concepts and writing techniques.

Nancy Chodorow's Theory: Women's Relational Gender Identity

The psychoanalyst and feminist Nancy Chodorow wrote a book, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*,⁸⁰ in which she states that a sense of group identity is one of the more prominent characteristics of women: the very sense of identity, interdependence and community are key elements in the development of a woman's identity. Instead of seeing themselves as unique, women often explore their sense of shared identity with other women.

Chodorow analyzes the reproduction of mothering as the central and continuing element in the social organization and reproduction of gender. She says that mothering, including childbearing and childcare, is one of the few universal and enduring elements of the sexual division of labour. However, the actual physical and biological requirements of mothering have historically decreased and its role has gained psychological and ideological significance. Chodorow draws on psychoanalytic accounts of female and male personality development to demonstrate that women's mothering reproduces itself cyclically: women as mothers produce daughters with mothering capacities and the desire to mother. These capacities and needs are built into and grow out of the mother-daughter relationship itself. By contrast, women as

Liu Yin is unidentified.

⁸⁰ Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, California: Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1978.

mothers produce sons whose nurturant capabilities and needs have been systematically curtailed and repressed, which prepares men for their less affective later familial role and for primary participation in the impersonal extra-familial world of work and public life. The sexual and familial division of labour in which women mother and are more involved in the interpersonal affective relationships than men produces in daughters and sons a division of psychological capabilities, which leads them to reproduce this sexual and familial division of labour (p. 7).

Chodorow indicates that women's mothering produces asymmetries in the relational experience of girls and boys as they grow up, which cause crucial differences in feminine and masculine personalities, capacities and modes. The feminine personality comes to be based less on the repression of inner objects and more on the retention and continuity of external relationships. From the retention of pre-oedipal attachments to their mother, growing girls come to define and experience themselves as continuous with others; their experience of self contains more flexible or permeable ego boundaries. Boys come to define themselves as more separate and distinct, with a greater sense of rigid ego boundaries and differentiation. The basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world, while the basic masculine sense of ego is separate from it (p. 149). In the Oedipus complex, which is, according to the psychoanalytic paradigm, a time of major developmental differentiation in personality and of a relative fixing of personality structure for girls and boys, a girl does not turn absolutely from her mother to her father, but adds her father to her world of primary objects. She defines herself in a relational triangle—she, her mother and father—which means that there is a greater complexity in the feminine endopsychic object-world than in the masculine one and that although most women emerge from their Oedipus complex erotically heterosexual, heterosexual love and emotional commitment are less exclusively established. Men tend to remain emotionally secondary, which contrasts to the greater primacy and exclusivity of the Oedipal boy's emotional tie to his mother and other women (pp. 167-8).

From their Oedipal complex and its resolution, women's endopsychic object-world becomes a more complex relational constellation than men's, and women remain preoccupied with ongoing relational issues in a way that men do not. A masculine personality comes to be defined in terms of more denial of relation and connection,

whereas a feminine personality comes to include a fundamental definition of self in a relationship. Thus, relational abilities and preoccupations have been extended in women's development and curtailed in men's, pointing to boys' preparation for participation in non-relational spheres and girls' greater potential for participation in relational spheres (p. 170).

From reading Chodorow, I conclude that the sense of Qu Bingyun's relational identity intersects with that of her individual identity in the development of her personality, and that the relational gender identity plays the key role in her writing.⁸¹ Consequently, I decided to view Qu Bingyun from a relational perspective. Also, while looking into such relations, I keep my main focus on the interaction between Qu Bingyun and the members of her discourse communities. This focus is derived from a study of Marilyn M. Cooper's theory.

Marilyn M. Cooper's Theory: Writing as a Social Interactive Process

Marilyn M. Cooper maintains that writing is not merely a process of networking ideas or bringing an isolated writer together with isolated readers, but a way of living in a social group, of interacting with others.⁸²

Cooper and her colleague Michael Holzman compiled a collection of essays⁸³ promoting the idea of writing as social action. In her article, "The Ecology of Writing," included in this collection, Cooper states that the concept of writing not as a product but a process, a recursive cognitive activity, seemed quite revolutionary. It started in 1982 and soon was codified. However, according to this concept, the ideal writer projected by the cognitive model is isolated from the social world and becomes what she calls the "solitary author." The solitary author works alone within the privacy of his/her own mind, expressing his/her feelings, passing on information, persuading others to see things as s/he does. S/he sees

⁸¹ I follow the common practice of making use of Western feminist theories in understanding Chinese women. At the same time, I am aware that these theories are based on modern western culture, so that they are not always compatible with Chinese traditional society. Chinese society is a traditional group-oriented society, in which both women and men seek relations with others. Chodorow's theory provides an enlightening approach to Qu Bingyun from the relational perspective: Chinese women may like to connect themselves with other people more than men.

⁸² Marilyn M. Cooper and Michael Holzman, *Writing as Social Action*, Boynton: Cook, 1989, pp. viii-iv.

⁸³ See Note 82 in this chapter.

her/his writing as a goal-directed piece of work, the process of producing a text. Cooper indicates that post-structural literary theory reflects this concept. For example, Stanley Fish believes that readers are guided by interpretative strategies that are constitutive of interpretive communities originating with writers. Fish's strategies are not present in the text. Rather, they are part of the mental equipment of writers and readers, and only by explaining this mental equipment can we explain how writers and readers communicate (pp. 2-3).

Cooper argues that language and texts are not simply the means by which individuals discover and communicate information, but are essentially social activities dependent on social structures and processes not only in their interpretive but also in their constructive phases. Based on this argument, she proposes an ecological model of writing, the fundamental tenet of which is that writing is an activity through which a person is continually engaged with a variety of socially constructed systems. Writers within the system are connected by writing through systems of ideas, purpose, interpersonal interactions, cultural norms, textual forms:

(1) The system of ideas is the means by which writers comprehend this world and turn individual experience and observations into knowledge. From this perspective, ideas result from contact, whether face-to-face or mediated through texts.

(2) The system of purpose is the means by which writers coordinate their actions. Purposes arise out of interaction, and individual purposes are modified by the larger purposes of groups; in fact, an individual's impulse or need only becomes a purpose when it is recognized as such by others.

(3) The system of interpersonal interactions is the means by which writers regulate the access to one another. Two determinants of the nature of a writer's interactions with others are intimacy and power.

(4) The system of cultural norms is the mean by which writers structure the larger group of which they are members. One always writes out of a group; the notion of what role a writer takes on in a particular piece of writing derives from this fact; and,

(5) The system of textual form is the means by which writers communicate. A textual form is at the same time a conservative repository of tradition and a revolutionary instrument of new forms of action.

Cooper continues to say that a writer and the above systems are inter-determined: all the characteristics of any individual writer or piece of writing both determine and are determined by the characteristics of all the other writers and writings in the systems. The systems are concrete and in them interactions take place as part of writing. The systems are structures that can be investigated. Every individual writer is necessarily involved in these systems—for each writer and each instance of writing one can specify the domain of ideas activated and supplemented, the purposes that stimulated the writing and that resulted from it. Within these systems a writer does not internalize the audience and makes it a mental construct, but faces real readers. The writers learn to employ the devices of audience-adapted writing by handing their texts to colleagues to read and respond to. The audience not only judges the writing, it also motivates it (pp. 2-13).

Cooper, in fact, categorizes two models of writing—one is the individual cognitive process and the other is the social interactive process. Although she denies it, her description of the second category of writing model is actually a picture of a writing model within a discourse community. As Freed and Broadhead point out, Cooper attempts “to describe a discourse community and the dialectic involved as discourses and community each act upon the other and change each other” (p. 155). In association with Chodorow’s theory of the relational identity of women, I assume that Qu Bingyun’s writing falls into Cooper’s second category of writing models; that is, it is a social interactive process, a part of which is Qu’s interaction with the members of her discourse communities.

Research Approaches and Objectives

In light of the above assumptions, I approach Qu Bingyun from the perspective of interrelation and interaction to fulfill the objectives of exploring the questions: (1) How did Qu Bingyun become an accomplished poet? (2) What are her poetic worlds and their characteristics? First, I will investigate various relationships concerning Qu and her

poetic activities so as to reveal the process of her engagement with poetry. I will then look into her literary interactions with the members of different discourse communities in order to comprehend her poetic concepts and creations. So, this research will:

(1) Trace Qu Bingyun's family historical background and map out her domestic cultural environment. Chapter II, "Family and Poetry Engagement," describes thirteen generations of Qu Bingyun's ancestors and her childhood education to show a connection between her poetic engagement and her family's historical background. Chapter III, "Domestic Poetry Circles," gives an account of twenty-one poetic members in Qu Bingyun's birth and marital families and her relationships with them to illustrate her usual poetic activities and motivations for those activities.

(2) Explore the interrelation and interaction between Qu Bingyun and other members of Yuan Mei's female disciple circle in her region. Chapter IV, "Becoming a Member of Yuan Mei's Female Disciple Group," recounts Qu Bingyun's active association with Yuan Mei and his other followers. Chapter V, "Within a Feminist Discourse Community: Interactions Through Critical Comments," examines the interaction through writing among Qu and other members in Yuan Mei's female group to give reasons for the formation of Qu's poetic concepts and techniques as well as characteristics of her poetry.

(3) View Qu Bingyun's poetic worlds in the framework of interrelations and interactions within the family and society. Chapter VI, "Poetry," looks at Qu's poetic themes and imagery in connection with her social environment. Chapter VII, "Conclusion," wraps up the accomplishments of Qu Bingyun as a poet and their implications and evaluates her creations in the fields of Chinese literature and women's literature in general.

Chapter II Family and Poetic Background

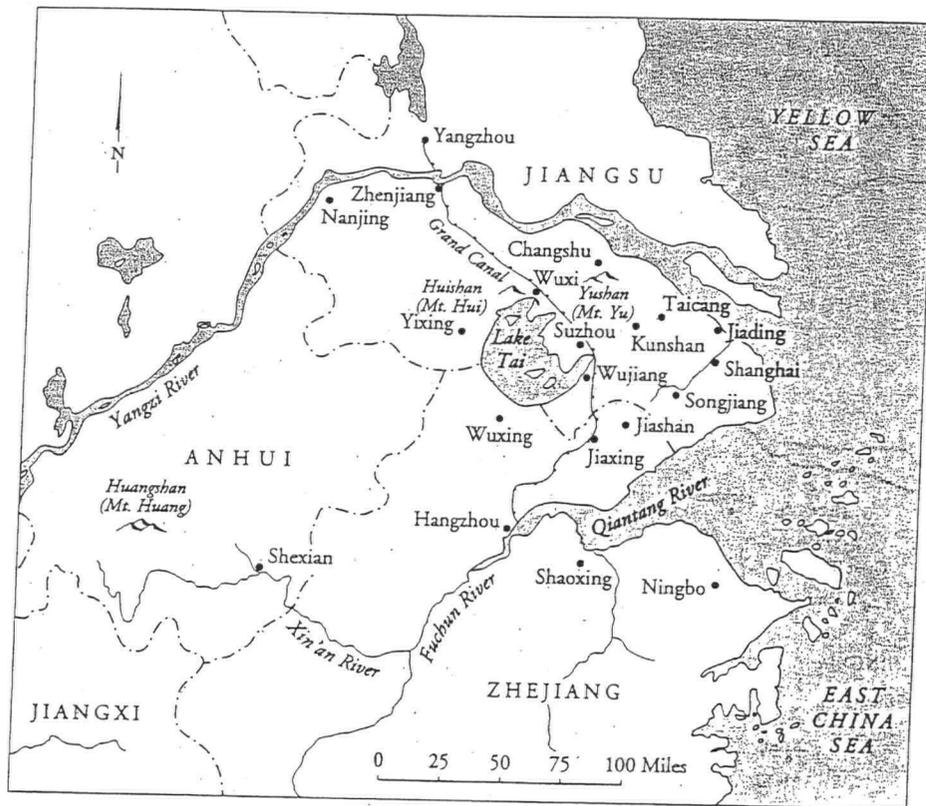
Qu Bingyun was born into an elite household during the "prosperous age of the Kangxi, Yongzheng and Qianlong reigns," which provided favorable social, economic and cultural environment for the development of literature. Her hometown, Changshu 常熟, Jiangsu, in a district in the lower Yangzi River, produced nearly 40 percent of all the women writers during the Qing Dynasty.⁸⁴ The young girls of elite families from the region were educated and encouraged to write poetry, paint and practice calligraphy until they married, and after marriage, most of them were able to continue writing poetry when their housework was finished.

Back in the Zhou dynasty (ca. 11th century B. C.-256 B. C.), this place was not yet called Changshu; rather, it belonged to the state Wu 吳. It became the township of Yu 虞 in the Wu district at the time of the Han dynasty (206 B. C.-220 A. D.), and in the Jin Dynasty (265-420) Yu Township was separated from the Wu district and became another district called "Haiyu" 海虞. It was in 541 that this place came to be called "Changshu." In 1726, Changshu was divided into two parts. The eastern part became a new district and was given the name "Zhaowen" 昭文 based on two words from the *Literary Selections of Zhaoming* 昭明文選 (*Zhaoming wenxuan*). According to tradition, it was here that Xiao Tong (501-531) compiled this literary anthology, one of the most influential in Chinese history. Changshu and Zhaowen were governed separately as two districts until 1912 when the latter rejoined Changshu.

Changshu was situated on the south shore of the lower Yangzi River (See Figure 1), and had a warm climate and picturesque scenery: The hills were covered with green plants throughout the year and the water routes extended in all directions. Mount Yu, also called Mount Wumu 烏目山, was located in northwest Changshu. The name of this mountain was derived from Yu Zhong 虞仲, the second son of King Tai of Zhou 周太王, who ruled over the surrounding areas and was buried on the mountain after his

⁸⁴ See Susan Mann's calculations in "the Spatial Distribution of Women Writers in Qing Times" in *Precious Records*, pp. 229-232.

Figure 1. The lower Yangzi River region in the Ming-Qing period:⁸⁵



⁸⁵ From Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in China, 1573-1722*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994, p. xvi.

death. Mount Yu is not large, only 262 meters in height, 9 km in length and 20 km in circumference. However, literati regarded it as an emblem of Changshu and proudly referred to themselves as “natives of Mount Yu.” This mountain features several scenic spots, such as the tomb of Yu Zhong, the tomb of Yanzi 言子, one of Confucius' favorite disciples, and the Peach Springs 桃源 (*Taoyuan*).

2.1 Brilliant Lineage and Childhood Education

A noble descendent of the family from Gui⁸⁶ and a girl of a prominent family of Mount Yu 歸鄉高裔, 虞麓名閨. (Bao Fen, Biography of Qu Bingyun)

"A Prominent Family of Mount Yu"

The Qus were a lineage with a long and brilliant tradition of both "morality and writing" 道德文章 (*daode wenzhang*). One of the Qu family's putative ancestors, Qu Yuan (ca. 340 - 277 B. C.), whom Qu Bingyun proudly called "my ancestor," is one of the most illustrious poets in Chinese history, and his *Encountering Sorrow* 離騷 (*Lisao*) established the lamentation genre 騷體 (*saoti*) in Chinese poetry. Qu Yuan's uprightness and loyalty to his country have moved the Chinese people generation after generation.

Also, according to the local gazetteer of Changshu and Zhaowen, the Qus “had been engaged in Confucian learning for nine generations and not declined” 九世儒業不墜 prior to Qu Bingyun’s great-great grandfather’s time.⁸⁷ From this we know that there were at least thirteen consecutive generations in the Qu lineage involved in scholarship up to Qu Bingyun’s time. The generations from the great-great grandfather to Qu Bingyun are known to us, as shown in a table below:

⁸⁶ Bao Fen, “Biography of Qu Bingyun,” in *YYJ*. The prefecture of Gui 歸 (modern Zhigui in Hubei) was the homeland of Qu Yuan.

Figure 2. Qu Bingyun's genealogy:

Qu Yongqing 屈永清, <i>zi</i> Guoshi 國士 (Qu Bingyun's great-great grandfather)	Tribute Student 貢生 (<i>Gongsheng</i>), specialized in the "Great Preface," ⁸⁸ "upright and frank" and "never crooked and dishonest." ⁸⁹
Qu Chenglin 屈承霖, <i>zi</i> Qishang 啓商	Metropolitan Graduate 進士 (<i>Jinshi</i> , 1736), Prefect of Lulong 盧龍 and Jingzhou 景州 in Hebei province, authored three books. ⁹⁰
Qu Zengfa 屈曾發, <i>zi</i> Lu-chuan 魯傳, Xingyuan 省園	Provincial Graduate 舉人 (<i>Juren</i> , 1738), left behind three works. ⁹¹
Qu Hongji 屈洪基, <i>zi</i> Zhongqian 仲潛 (Qu Bingyun's father)	Known as erudite, kind and filial by nature.

The Qus were well known for both their scholarship and tradition of moral integrity. There are quite a few anecdotes regarding their good deeds in academic affairs, social charity, governmental administrative work and family affairs. Here are some examples:

Qu Yongqing's great-great father Qu Tanzhi frequently used his money to host large banquets for the people in his district. On these occasions, he fed the hungry, met with the folk of his district and sometimes publicly sermonized indecent people. One day, Tanzhi and some other scholars had an opportunity to sit with some celebrities. Qu Tanzhi did not think that scholars like them were inferior to these famous people, and when he saw a scholar showing humility and submission to the celebrities, he got angry

⁸⁷ RGCZ, pp. 1658-9.

⁸⁸ The "Great Preface" to *The Classic of Poetry*.

⁸⁹ RGCZ, pp. 1658-9.

⁹⁰ Qu Chenglin's works, *Referential Correspondences Between the Classics and Histories* 經史參同 (*Jingshi cantong*), *A Book on Learning Correctness* 習是編 (*Xishibian*), and *A Local Gazetteer of Jingzhou* 景州志 (*Jingzhouzhi*) are mentioned in RGCZ, p. 3034, but not found.

⁹¹ "A Comprehensive Examination of the Number 9" 九數通考十三卷 (*Jiushu tongkao shisan juan*), *A Study of Ten Thousand of Words* 萬言肆雅 (*Wanyan yiya*), and *Teaching Materials in Biyang* 畢陽講義 (*Biyang jiangyi*) are mentioned in RGCZ, p. 3034, but not found.

and immediately shouted at him, "Should a scholar from a prestigious family be like this?" In 1644, when he was seventy-five years old, Tanzhi experienced the collapse of the Ming dynasty. The news was announced when he was eating, and he threw his chopsticks away and wailed loudly, fasting for seven days until he died of starvation.⁹²

When Qu Zengfa, Qu Bingyun's grandfather, took office in Kaizhou he enthusiastically promoted academic endeavors, patronizing the Academy of Donggao by supervising its curriculum and giving lectures, buying books from Suzhou to enlarge its library and selecting scholars to study there. He did the same later in Bijie 畢節, where he was also renowned as benevolent to ordinary people and severe to evil individuals. Bijie was the central post station for three adjacent provinces—Guizhou, Yunnan, and Sichuan—and required a large number of post horses. The local horses were commandeered at a very low compensation rate, which heavily burdened the people, so Qu Zengfa changed the rate from one *qian* per horse to four *qian*, making the local people happy with this reasonable rate and more willing to provide horses for the post.⁹³ Also, it was said that a tribal chief in Dading 大定 by the name of An Zhao wanted to possess his own sister-in-law and her property after his brother died. The woman disobeyed him and swore to kill herself if An Zhao forced her. When Qu Zengfa heard about this he punished An Zhao and honored the woman. Afterwards, An Zhao committed more adultery with women outside his tribe and was beaten by local villagers. When he led his people against the villagers, Qu Zengfa stopped him.⁹⁴

Qu Bingyun's father Qu Hongji was a filial son. When he was very young his mother suffered from illness, and he prayed for her every day, telling Heaven that he was willing to shorten his own life if his mother's life could be prolonged. He was also kind to other people, selling rice at a low price to relieve people. Sometimes he even put money inside bags of rice and sold them cheaply to poor people, or he would place baskets of rice at the door of hungry families.⁹⁵

According to the local gazetteer, the Qu family was also praised by the public for a large philanthropic project, the establishment of a manor for poor people, which was completed by four consecutive generations of the Qu lineage. Qu Bingyun's great-

⁹² Ibid, pp. 1775-6.

⁹³ Ibid, pp. 1660-1.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid, pp. 2133-4.

grandfather Qu Chenglin initiated the project by contributing a hundred *mu*⁹⁶ of land for public use. In the following two generations, Qu Xiaofa 屈曉發 (Provincial Graduate, 1798) and Qu Wenji, continued contributing their land to poor people, and Qu Bingyun's cousin Qu Tingzhen 屈廷鎮 (courtesy name Shangheng 上衡, Provincial Graduate) completed the project by donating six hundred *mu*. People glorified the Qu family in the following words: "The whole family loved to do public good. The four generations of the Qu are of the same heart" 一門好義, 四代同心.⁹⁷

Qu Bingyun's mother, surnamed Bao 鮑, also came from a scholar-official family of Changshu. By the time of Qu Bingyun's mother, the Baos had engaged in study for three generations. Qu Bingyun's maternal grandfather and his two brothers were all scholars who produced works that survived them. The maternal grandfather Bao Jiexun 鮑捷勳 (courtesy name Yuanlü 元侶 and sobriquet Mingshan 銘山) was a Stipend Student 廩生 (*Linsheng*). Known as an accomplished poet, painter, and calligrapher, he left behind a work of poetry entitled *Collected Poems from the Residence of Growing Trees* 養木居詩集 (*Yangmuju shiji*).⁹⁸ Jiexun's elder brother Bao Jin'gao 鮑晉高 (courtesy name Yitao 亦陶 and sobriquet Liucun 柳村) was a Tribute Student by Purchase, First Class 廩貢生 (*Lin'gongsheng*). Bao Jin'gao was a contributing author to the provincial gazetteer. Meanwhile, Jiexun's younger brother Bao Kui 鮑涑 (courtesy name Shenzhi 深之) wrote two books, *What I Learned from My Travel in Qian* 黔游一得 (*Qianyou yide*) and *Collected Poems and Ancient-Style Prose* 詩古文集 (*Shiguwen ji*).⁹⁹

Madame Bao's generation was engaged in learning to an even greater extent. Her brothers, Bao Wei, Bao Fen and Bao Tan 鮑倓 (courtesy name Xintian 心恬, Student 諸生 [*Zhusheng*]), and her sister Bao Yin were all accomplished scholar-writers. Bao Wei, a Tribute Student by Purchase, First Class, was a very honest and forthright man and fond of ancient books. He authored a work entitled *Collected Poems from the Banana Rain Tower* 蕉雨樓詩集 (*Jiaoyulou shiji*).¹⁰⁰ Bao Fen, a Tribute

⁹⁶ A unit of area, one *mu* equals to 0.165 acre.

⁹⁷ *RGCZ*, pp. 2134-5.

⁹⁸ This collection is mentioned in *RGCZ*, p. 2040, but not found.

⁹⁹ These books are mentioned in *RGCZ*, p. 2041, but not found.

¹⁰⁰ This work is mentioned in *RGCZ*, p. 2041, but not found.

Student, was very knowledgeable about the *Illustrious Articles from the Literary World* 文苑英華 (*Wenyuan yinghua*) and *The Great-Peace Imperial Encyclopedia* 太平御覽 (*Taiping yulan*), and also a skilful calligrapher. He indulged in poetry and wine, so he did not attain any degrees or official titles. His disciples published his writings entitled *Collected Works from the Have-not-been Learned Studio* 未學堂集 (*Weixuetang ji*),¹⁰¹ after his death. Bao Yan, who had profound knowledge of ancient prose, was very adept at prose writing and his prose even surprised Yuan Mei, who praised Bao Yan by comparing his work to that of Xunzi 荀子 (ca. 313-238 B. C.). Yan was also good at poetry and calligraphy in the Han Dynasty Script 漢隸 (*Hanli*). It is said that he authored a work called *Collected Poems and Ancient Style Prose from the Non-Innovation Hall* 不作堂詩古文集 (*Buzuotang shiguwen ji*).¹⁰²

The Qus befriended the Baos. Qu Chenglin wrote Bao Jiexun's tomb epitaph and Madam Bao married Qu Hongji. These two families' historical background surely gave Qu Bingyun a sense of becoming a knowledgeable and upright person and motivated her to be engaged in literary education. This profile of the thirteen consecutive generations of Qu's lineage reveals the strong desire of Qu's family to transmit its tradition of erudition and integrity from one generation to the next.

Childhood Education

Qu Bingyun lived in a "grand family" which consisted of her great-grandparents, grandparents, parents, and siblings. Her uncle and aunt and their children also lived under this roof. When Qu Bingyun was a toddler, her mother, Madame Bao, began teaching her womanly manners. As she grew a little older her parents started teaching her literature and began instructing her more seriously in the moral conduct prescribed for women in the classics. It is said that Qu Bingyun was very bright and able to learn more than what was taught to her directly. More specifically, if her instructions dealt only with the superficial aspects of a particular matter, she would invariably be able to figure out the meaning underlying it on her own (See Bao Fen, Preface). Unfortunately, her

¹⁰¹ The *Collected Works from the Have-not-been Learned Studio* (eight chapters) 未學堂集 (*Weixuetang ji*) was printed in 1839, found in Shanghai Library.

¹⁰² This work is mentioned in *RGCZ*, p. 2041, but not found.

mother died in 1769 when she was merely two years old and in the following year her father also died. Afterwards her grandparents, Qu Zengfa and Madame Jiang 蔣, became the guardians of little Qu Bingyun and her younger brother Qu Baojun. According to the later accounts of relatives, as well as her own testimony, Qu Bingyun felt very sad about losing her parents at such a tender age (See Bao Yin, Preface) and was very grateful for her grandparents' care. Later on, when recalling those days with her grandmother, she wrote:

Your great kindness, every time, reminds me of
those lonely days when I was like a drop of dew; 恩重每思孤露日,
But, is my deep gratitude to you only for that frosty time? 感深豈爲肅霜天?
(4:5a)

Her grandmother, Madame Jiang, and aunt, Lady Cao 曹, took care of Qu Bingyun's everyday life and trained her in womanly virtue and work. The grandfather, Qu Zengfa, an encyclopedic scholar, took charge of her literary studies. There is little doubt that the grandfather had a direct and profound influence on Qu Bingyun.

As the above table indicates, Qu Zengfa was outstanding both in terms of erudition and morality. He was a prodigy, "being gifted and knowing a great deal about strategies when he was just a child."¹⁰³ He passed the provincial examination in 1738 in Nanjing with Yuan Mei. To fulfill his duties as a son, instead of continuing to pursue a Metropolitan Graduate degree, Qu Zengfa followed his father to Jingzhou in order to help him with office work. After his father retired, Qu Zengfa accompanied him at home, assisting him with construction work in the house. Qu Zengfa's nearly lifelong companionship with his father, one of the most learned scholars in the Qu lineage, turned Qu Zengfa into an erudite scholar too. Qu Zengfa was well known as a mathematician, and Dai Zhen 戴震 (1724-1777), one of the greatest thinkers of the eighteenth century and possessed of a broad knowledge of astronomy, geography, mathematics, history, the classics and linguistics, wrote a preface to Qu Zengfa's thirteen chapters on mathematics entitled *A Comprehensive Examination of the Number*

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 1160.

9九數通考十三卷 (*Jiushu tongkao shisan juan*).¹⁰⁴ Qu Zengfa also had a profound knowledge of the Six Classics. His work on this subject, *A Study of Ten Thousand Words* 萬言肄雅 (*Wanyan yiya*),¹⁰⁵ was published in 1779. Qu Zengfa occupied the position of Prefect of Bijie at the age of sixty after he had finished his duties as a filial son.

We are told, at the age of six, the grandfather began teaching Qu Bingyun the Confucian classics, the works of the pre-Qin philosophers, history, and literature. It was said that Qu Bingyun understood the "general meaning" of those works, and that she could recite a piece fluently after only a few readings (See Qu Jingkun, Postscript). Calligraphy was also included in her education; however, under her grandfather's instruction she did not spend much time working on the standard script (*Kaishu*). The grandmother, Madame Jiang, instructed her on Ban Zhao's *Womanly Instructions*, and together with Lady Cao, training her in womanly work and skills, such as cooking, embroidering, and playing Chinese musical instruments.

Qu Bingyun grew up with her cousin Qu Jingkun who also became an accomplished poet later on, and the two cousins shared their affinity for poetry the rest of their lives. The two girls were born in the same year, although Qu Jingkun was a little older, and they were educated together in the family. A poem by Qu Bingyun entitled "Missing My Elder Sister Wanqing" (translated in Chapter V) shows that they competed with one another in the study of books and womanly work.

The two young cousins learned to write poetry together in their childhood. They often discussed poetry writing and exchanged what they learned from studying. Sometimes they assigned each other rhymes for composing poems, as described in a couplet from a later poem composed by Qu Jingkun: "I recollect those days when we tried hard to depict fragrance and to match the assigned rhymes. / We discussed poetry on quiet nights, shoulder to shoulder" 刻香分韻憶當年,靜夜論詩每比肩 (Qu Jingkun, Preface). On one occasion at least they were inspired by colorful fresh flowers, and were too impatient to wait to put on make-up before writing poems about them: "We imagined that the scenery outside was like a curtain with a fresh green background. / Right after combing our hair, we composed poems" 想見一簾新綠底,梳頭才罷便

¹⁰⁴ See Note 91 in this chapter.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

吟詩 (1:10a). It was said that Qu Bingyun was very good at writing short verse, and that she created a set of fifteen poems, "Songs of Willow Branches" 柳枝辭 ("Liuzhici"), in her childhood. Evidently, these poems were widely circulated. Many years later, the poets Yuan Mei, Wu Weiguang, and Bao Wei still showed an interest in these poems and made positive comments about them. One of the poems reads:

[Poem 1]

Songs of Willow Branches (second poem)

Before the wind a thin shadow dances playfully.	風前瘦影弄婆娑,
If not wrapped in affection, then in regret.	不綰情多即恨多.
Reflected in the water, you admire yourself and happily use it as a bright mirror.	映水自憐明鏡好,
If you gazed upon a slender moon below how much greater would your happiness be?	若臨纖月更如何?

(1:2b)

Qu Jingkun wrote: as a daughter of the Qu family, Qu Bingyun "is good both at writing poetry and at doing womanly work; she is adept at sewing and embroidery" 兼工吟詠女紅, 針黹靡弗精敏 (Qu Jingkun, Postface). In addition, Qu Bingyun had a sound foundation in the classics and historical works. In short, before marriage Qu Bingyun was well trained to be a good housewife and a poet in an elite family.

2.2 A Virtuous Housewife

"More Fortunate than a Goddess"

Qu Bingyun was married to Zhao Tongyu in 1785 when she was eighteen years old.¹⁰⁶ The Zhao family was also a well-known scholar-official lineage in Changshu which had been producing Metropolitan Graduates and Provincial Graduates for many generations. Among Zhao Tongyu's father's generation, Zhao Guikun 趙貴鯤, Zhao Guipu 趙貴樸 and Zhao Guishi 趙貴埏, were all Provincial Graduates, and his mother, Madame Tao 陶, was the daughter of the Metropolitan Graduate (1773) Tao Zhenyi 陶貞一. Also, Madame Tao's four brothers, two of whom were Provincial Graduates, were renowned for both their academic achievements and morality.¹⁰⁷

The Zhao family was wealthy, enabling Zhao Tongyu to have three expensive hobbies: collecting inkstones, building residential houses, and hosting parties. He had a large collection of valuable Duan inkstones, made from a kind of stone from Duanxi, Guangdong province. He called the top nine of them "The Nine guests" 九客 (*Jiuke*) and another group of thirteen "The Thirteen Guests," and gave each a name, calling one that was worth a hundred *mu* of land "A Hundred *Mu*" 百畝 (*Baimu*) and another that was the same value as the former "Jade-like" 琅玕 (*Langgan*).¹⁰⁸

Zhao Tongyu also constructed and decorated buildings. For example, he designed the Jade-Collecting Tower (Yunyulou), The Studio Next to the Goddess of Inkstone Xin (Linxin'ge) and the House Beside Water with Gull Ripples (Ouboguan), as well as villas in the south of the town. Let us take a look at the compound of Yunyulou found in a description by Sun Yuanxiang:

There are seven principal columns in the front hall, two of which are at the west end. It is wide open, without walls between the columns. Although not high, it is well lighted. It is surrounded by several red rails intermingled with gorgeous engravings. The painted ceiling beams resemble variegated mist in height, and in the sunlight the inscriptions on the ridgepoles shine. The place where the white walls look like luminous frost and Xiang curtains are as pure as water is Madam Qu Bingyun's studio "for writing poetry." Inside

¹⁰⁶ In this dissertation I use the western method for calculating age, which is different from the one used by Chinese. According to the Chinese way of age calculation, a child was one *sui* when born and one *sui* was added after each lunar New Year's day. So a person born at the end of the twelfth lunar month, would be two only a few days after birth.

¹⁰⁷ RGCZ, p. 1695.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2049.

it, books and sacrificial tripod vessels are on display. A silk zither's strings are tautly stretched and a chessboard is placed there. Smoke from an incense burner rises and meanders above the desk, and the branches of various plants touch each other. Further along is a bedroom, arched and gently curving, and covered loose and silently. You only smell a hidden fragrance like orchids or plums; although you smell it in your heart, you do not know where it comes from. 樓廣七楹, 兩楹居西之最. 不廓而敞, 非危自明. 繚以紅闌, 間以綺疏. 繪棟霞飛, 雕題景曜. 粉壁霜皓. 湘簾水澄, 陳設圖書彝鼎, 爲夫人唱酬之所. 素琴高張, 紋楸在局, 爐煙烏案, 雜花扣弦. 內則爲臥所, 穹而稍曲, 疏寥翳之. 但聞幽香襲人, 如蘭如棋. 蓋心可得而會, 目不可得而睹.¹⁰⁹

Qu Bingyun liked this building very much, spending most of her time there. She used its name for her poetry collection as well as in the titles of many poems, such as "I Sit in the Jade-Collecting Tower While Snowing" 蘊玉樓坐雪 ("Yunyulou zuoxue," 1: 6a), "Evening Lights in the Jade-Collecting Tower" 蘊玉樓燈夕 ("Yunyulou dengxi," 1:14a), "Linked Lines in Early Summer When We Admire the Moon from the Jade-Collecting Tower" 初夏蘊玉樓賞月聯句 ("Chuxia Yunyulou shangyue lianju," 2:18b) and "To the Tune of the South Tower: Self-Inscription for the Jade-Collecting Tower" 南樓令: 自題蘊玉樓 ("Nanlouling: ziti Yunyulou," c:9b).

The Zhaos was wealthy and scholarly, which suited Qu Bingyun quite well. Like Lin Daiyu, the heroine in *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Honglouloumeng*), she was a talented but fragile young woman, and it is likely that she had been in a weak physical condition since birth, as reflected in one of her "Songs for Willow Branches" written during her childhood:

[Poem 2]

Songs of Willow Branches (fourth poem)

¹⁰⁹ Sun Yuanxiang, *Collected Works from the True Nature Tower* 天真閣集 (*Tianzhen'ge ji*, hereafter TZJ), 1801, 52:18b-19a.

It is not that my body is light, or easily shaken.	非是身輕易動搖,
I was born to be thin and delicate.	生來纖弱不勝嬌。
When I wake in the jade tower I can hardly stand up;	玉樓眠起渾無定,
How many mornings ago	
did the pure chill render me ill?	小病清寒又幾朝?
(1:2a)	

Although this short poem speaks of a twig, we cannot help associating it with the condition of Qu Bingyun's own life. In her second year of marriage, she first began writing on the theme of her illness, which eventually became one of the most frequent topics of her poetry: "Besides the sickness I am suffering, I feel my poetry is emaciated to the bone" 祇覺病餘詩骨瘦 (1:13b). Eleven years later, she summed up the first half of her life in the following couplet:

Idling away half of my life,	
I have been living with poetry;	半世閑身詩裡過,
For ten years,	
my pure happiness has come from sickness.	十年清福病中來。
(2:11b)	

Why did the Zhaos agree to a marriage with this fragile girl while most families wanted a healthy woman to bear children? One possible reason lies in the celebrated background of Qu Bingyun's natal family. The Zhao family established an alliance with a more influential family by the marriage with Qu Bingyun. The other possible reason, as Susan Mann states in her book, was that there were not enough brides for eighteenth century marriage market because of an unbalanced sex ratio. This resulted from the preference for sons in the family system.¹¹⁰ Since Zhao Tongyu was talented and shared Qu Bingyun's interests, and the Zhao family was well off financially, Qu Bingyun's family was also satisfied with the marriage. Qu Jingkun once talked with Qu Bingyun's elder brother about the marriage: "Our sister is talented and exquisite. Now

¹¹⁰ Mann, *Precious Records*, p. 12.

she has gotten a good match. This is luckier than if she had become a goddess" (Qu Jingkun, Postscript).

A Dutiful Wife

We cannot find any evidence supporting the following assertion made by David Hawkes concerning her household life:

[Qu Bingyun was] a delicate and fastidious person who hated household duties.¹¹¹

By contrast, there is a considerable amount of evidence showing that Qu Bingyun was a devoted housewife. As a daughter of an elite family with a background in traditional learning and morality, she had been well prepared for this. Typical of most wives in elite society at the time, Qu performed housework in her marital family that required a great deal of time and effort, and won praise from all members of the Zhao family and its relatives:

She was diligent in doing housework and never arrogant. She put everything in good order. People inside and outside the household respected her as virtuous and filial 躬親操作不自驕逸, 佐理家政井井有條. 中外推孝賢焉 (Qu Jingkun, Postscript).

As most Chinese brides did at that time, during the first few years of marriage, Qu Bingyun did not spend much time with her husband; instead, she accompanied her mother-in-law and other female members in the family. She served the mother-in-law very carefully, not asking the cook to prepare food for her mother-in-law, but taking care of this task in person. Even though Qu was continually sick, she made use of her exceptional cooking skills to please her mother-in-law, and she successfully won praise from the in-laws (See Tao Tingxi, Preface), accompanying her mother-in-law and doing everything the old lady liked. Once when the mother-in-law contracted a skin ailment and could not rest her head on a pillow during the night, Qu happened to also be seriously sick --her legs swelled up as big as her thighs. However, she still waited on

her mother-in-law. For seven days without eating or sleeping, she supported her mother-in-law's waist with her feet and supported her head with her hands. It was said that during that time Qu suffered great agony; pus leaked out of her swollen legs, and her weakened body was exhausted by her prolonged contortions. People were touched by this and came to think of her as a moral daughter-in-law.¹¹² When the mother-in-law later contracted a serious mouth ulcer and could not eat, Qu was very concerned and wrote a poem, "Serving My Mother-in-law by Her Sickbed" 侍姑疾 ("Shiguji") exposing her worries and guilt feelings for not taking good care of her mother-in-law because she was ill herself:

[Poem 3]

By the bedroom doors	
morning and evening linger long;	寢門晨夕恰長留,
When the summer ends, we enter autumn.	殘夏經過又入秋。
I do my utmost but am not sure	
I can fulfill my duty as a daughter-in-law;	竭力詎能襄子職。
My own feeble body may worry my mother-in-law.	孱軀轉恐累姑憂。
I know the nature of food well and	
fear I will feed her something bad.	素諳食性愁多誤,
I strongly hope the medicine will take effect soon.	苦盼醫方效早收。
Dare I say that those ulcers are not in my mouth?	敢說齧疽非我事?
When will the anxiety in my heart end?	寸心耿耿幾時休。
(4:6b-7a)	

In doing the housework, Qu Bingyun regarded cooking and embroidering as two aesthetic pursuits separate from her poetry, painting, calligraphy or music. According to Sun Yuanxiang, she embroidered in the same style she painted, using needles in place of brushes and colorful threads for paints. For example, once one of her poetic mentors,

¹¹¹ David Hawkes, "Hsi P'ei-lan," *Asia Major*, 1959, V. 7, p.119.

¹¹² Sun, *TZJ*, 50:6b.

Wu Weiguang, asked her to embroider his treasured painting of plum trees on a bag. Upon carrying out the assignment, Qu Bingyun first visualized images of the plum flowers, then recreated them in her embroidery, which resembled a painting. She also cooked the way she wrote poetry, developing her own unique recipes. Her husband liked to host parties for his literati friends, and she made food for the parties by using her excellent cooking skills. Sun Yuanxiang was a frequent guest at this couple's parties and according to his accounts, Qu Bingyun would serve rare dishes that none of the guests had seen anywhere else. For example,

[One day,] Tongyu hosted a banquet at the Studio Next to the Goddess of the Inkstone Xin. The food on the menu was surprising and delicious: The thick soup was made of jade-like minced condiments and rice (to be verified). The broth was made of mica, evening mist and heavenly flowers. The congee was made of lotus, erigeron and honey. There were "eight pellets" and "snow milk" in the cheese paste. The soup had "unicorn marrow," "good-for-lungs," jade-like swallow," and "snow balls." All these were Wanxian's handwork 子梁招宴鄰淳閣, 食單奇雋. 羹有玉齏, 玉糝 (記問). 漿有雲英, 沆瀣, 天花. 粥有水芝, 蓬萊, 蜜合. 酪有八丹, 雪乳. 湯有鳳髓益肺, 玉燕雪卵. 皆宛仙夫人手制也.¹¹³

After dinner, Sun wrote a long poem to thank Qu Bingyun, comparing the cooking to poetry writing and highly praising the hostess for both her verse and cooking:

I however remember, from year to year,	
we had banquets in this room.	卻憶頻年宴此屋,
There was a change each time,	
and the dishes were never repeated	一回一變無重複.
Just like essays composed by the hand of a genius	恰似文章妙手成,
Not a single stale word remains.	不留一字陳言熟. ¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Ibid., 12:2a.

An Understanding Wife

My investigation into Qu Bingyun's life has partially proved, but also partially disproved, the following statement:

Wanxian was fond of cleanliness. After she got married to the Zhao family, she at once drew money from her dowry and bought two concubines for her husband, consigning to them all the housework 宛仙愛潔,歸趙後即出奩具,爲夫置兩妾,悉以家事委之.¹¹⁵

It is true that she used part of her dowry to buy a concubine for Zhao Tongyu, and that she assigned the concubine some of the domestic chores. However, Qu Bingyun was a devoted housewife and there were already a cook and maids in the family at the time. Apparently, she did not buy her husband a concubine to avoid housework, but for other reasons.

There is a clue that suggests what the reason was. When both Qu Bingyun and Ye Wanyi 葉婉儀 (courtesy name Tiaofang 苕芳), her sister-in-law, reached the age of twenty-nine in 1796, Qu Bingyun wrote two poems in celebration of their birthdays. In the poem for her own birthday, she refers to her marital life in a self-mocking tone: "For ten years, my pure happiness has come from sickness" 十年清福病中來. In the poem celebrating Ye's birthday, who had four children while Qu had none, Qu mentions her marriage in admiration: "Both romantic love and pure happiness are bearable [for you]" 艷情清福兩能消. Comparing the two lines, we can easily figure out that Qu Bingyun could not easily endure "romantic love" since she was delicate, feeble, and sick most of the time. On the other hand, Zhao Tongyu's sexual desire was very strong, as indicated in a *ci* poem by Qu:

[Poem 4]

To the Tune of Lily Magnolia Flower (Brief Form):

減字木蘭花

¹¹⁴ Ibid 12:2b.

Presented to Ziliang when I Bought Him a Concubine

爲子梁買姬有贈

Real ecstasy!

銷魂真箇，

Having awakened from a dream

the powerful army rises greedily for another battle. 夢醒師雄貪再作。

How couldn't I notice this?

儂豈無心？

I am therefore willing to pawn my gold dowry bracelet.

願典奩中跳脫金。

To seek spring you must start early,

尋春須早，

A wax plum bud with fragrance is perfect for you.¹¹⁶

梅蠟含香正好。

It, like a piece of light cloud flying down

from the Wu peak,¹¹⁷

一朵輕雲，

Is just right for accompanying you.

飛下巫峰恰伴君。

(c: 2b)

This poem reveals that Zhao demanded sex more than one time a night, which was too much for Qu Bingyun. She, however, was willing to satisfy him by using part of her dowry to buy him a concubine. It was a difficult decision to bring another woman into her husband's bedroom. Also, like Lin Daiyu, Qu Bingyun was a sensitive woman who thirsted for romantic love, and, from year to year she used the conventional theme "Double Seven" ("Qixi") to express her innermost feelings of love.

Actually, it was about ten years after she was married that Qu bought Zhao his first concubine as indicated by a poem entitled "I Bought a Maid and Named Her Chunwu" 買婢以春蕪名之 ("Maibi yi Chunwu mingzhi," 2:19b) which was written in the autumn of 1795/96 when Qu Bingyun was in her late thirties. Moreover, it is likely that the woman whom Qu Bingyun bought was not legally a concubine, but rather entered the household in the capacity of maid. In regard to this, the line in this poem, "I pawned my hairpin to buy spring" 典得金釵爲買春 corresponds to the *ci* poem

¹¹⁵ Wanyan Yunzhu, 12:4b.

¹¹⁶ "Plum wax" 梅蠟 (*Meila*) refers to a plum bud alluding to a young girl.

¹¹⁷ "Cloud and rain" in the "Wu peak" refers to sex in Chinese literary convention.

quoted above, which was written in the autumn, as well. The latter urges Zhao to start earlier to "seek spring," while the former alludes to "buying spring." Thus, the *Correct Beginnings*, which states that she did this right after becoming Zhao Tongyu's wife, is incorrect.

The phrase "to buy spring" conventionally refers to the purchase of sex. In this poem, it might have another meaning; that is, to buy the maid named Chunwu (Spring Grass). However, there were undoubtedly maids and a cook in this family already, and if there was need for another one this wealthy family should have been able to afford it. To pawn a part of a dowry for a maid was an omen of the family's decline; however, at the same time, if a wife pawned part of her dowry to buy her husband a concubine he would feel honored and she would be considered virtuous. There probably was also a mocking tone in the name "Spring Grass" given to the maid by Qu. If this is true, it suggests mixed feelings about this matter on the part of Qu Bingyun.

The second concubine was Xu Xiaoshu 徐小淑 (courtesy name Lianqing 蓮卿), who entered the household around 1805 when Qu Bingyun was thirty-seven years old. While it was Zhao who wanted to take in this girl she soon became a bosom friend of Qu Bingyun.

Xu Xiaoshu was a native of Kunshan 崑山, Jiangsu. At the time when Zhao met her, she lived in Changshu with her maternal grandparents who were neighbors of Zhao Tongyu's younger sister. Zhao Tongyu and Xu Xiaoshu met each other when she was fifteen years old. Zhao was entranced by her beauty and he proposed marrying her as a concubine, but her maternal uncle refused. Sometime later, Xu began learning embroidery from Tongyu's sister. One day, the sister said to Xu, "You are delicate. If you marry into a poor family, you will have to face heavy housework. You would not be able to bear it. If you marry a good husband of a wealthy and high-ranking family, it would be good for you, even if you were a concubine." Xu nodded when she heard this, and when Zhao found out that his sister had persuaded her, he talked to her grandmother directly and eventually attained her consent.¹¹⁸

In the Zhao family, Xu always followed etiquette and did her utmost to do whatever was required of her. However, she was quiet and seldom spoke or smiled to anyone, so people started calling her "Ice-maid." She respected Qu Bingyun very much,

for she had known her as a poet since childhood. Although apparently Zhao Tongyu loved the young Xu very much, Qu was not jealous and readily accepted her. Qu even gave Xu the courtesy name "Lianqing" 蓮卿, in which "lian" (lotus) is a homonym of "lian" (憐, to love or pity) and "qing" means "you;" "lianqing" can be interpreted as "to love you." Qu Bingyun expressed her thoughts about this in a poem,¹¹⁹

[Poem 5]

You the unwed girl from the cold boudoir,
are virtuous by nature.¹²⁰ 寒閨不字性偏貞。
Ten years ago you first troubled yourself to know my fame. 十載先勞識我名。
Does the ocean have no capability to accommodate water? 滄海豈無容水量?
Doesn't a bright star desire to accompany the moon? 明星自有傍宵情。
(4:12b)

Qu Bingyun and Xu Xiaoshu proved to be good companions, spending most of their time together.

Qu Bingyun was kindhearted, prudent and sweet by nature, which made it easy for her to get along with everybody in the family, including servants. Although Qu did not bear any children, she looked after two, her nephew Qu Songman 屈頌滿 (1792-1816, courtesy name Ziqian 子謙 and sobriquets Zhoufu 宙甫 and Yinfu 寅甫) and the daughter of Zhao Tongyu and his concubine Chunwu. She always said that Zhao's and Chunwu's daughter was as clever as Zhao and had this little girl accompany her all the time, especially when she was sick or worried. Qu actually played the role of mediator among the family members and made sure that they were all happy. As Zhao Tongyu's uncle, Tao Tingxi, said, "She played *qin* and set to please the family and harmonized the

¹¹⁸ Sun, TZJ, 20:6b-7b.

¹¹⁹ The title of this poem is "Ziliang Bought a Concubine Surnamed Xu, Naming Her Xiaoshu and Giving Her the Courtesy Name Lianqing; also, He Wrote a Poem, 'Hurrying up with Her Dressing and Making-up.' I Therefore Am Writing This Poem to Respond to His Rhymes" 子梁買姬徐氏, 名以小淑, 字以蓮卿; 並賦催妝詩. 因和原韻 ("Ziliang maiji Xushi, mingyi Xiaoshu, ziyi Lianqing; bingfu cuizhuangshi. yinhe yuanyun"), 4:12b.

¹²⁰ This hints at the refusal of the first proposal from Zhao Tongyu.

family like music." The following is a poem that Qu wrote on the New Year's Eve of 1801, revealing her role in the family:

[Poem 6]

On the New Year's Eve of the Xinyou Year (1801)	辛酉除夕
Our shadows project on the jade window lattices when we sit in reunion.	玉櫳人影坐團圞,
From the cypress firewood comes strong fragrance protecting us from cold.	柏子香濃好辟寒。
Below the candle, I idly tease the little girl. Before her cup, again and again,	燭下漫調雛女笑,
I win my mother-in-law's laughter.	尊前頻得老姑歡。
The year happens to a paired number like Mandarin ducks. ¹²¹	年華巧借兜央數,
Among the festival goods, each of us tries to see the wax swallows first. ¹²²	節物爭拈蠟燕看。
I wipe a vase to plant plum blossoms, Which will inform us of the family's well-being in the place of bamboos below the eaves. ¹²³	拂拭涵春供梅萼,
	替佗檐竹報平安。

(4:5b)

Wu Weiguang remarked: "[this poem depicts] the joys of the family and portrays fully her ability to serve her seniors and look after the young folk" 家庭樂事, 寫盡仰事俯育之能 (4:5b).

¹²¹ The Xinyou year was the sixth year of the Emperor Jiaqing's reign. "Mandarin ducks" here refers to even numbers because they always stay together in pairs.

¹²² Wax swallows, silk roosters 絲雞, and rice litchis 粉荔枝 are known as the three festival goods for Chinese New Year's Day.

¹²³ This alludes to a story in Duan Chengshi's 段成式 (ca. 803-63) *Continuation to the Youyang Miscellany* 酉陽雜俎續集 (*Youyang zazu xuji*, Hubei: Congwen shuju, 1877, 10:3a): There was a

2.3 A Well-known Poet from the Mount Yu Region

Zhao Tongyu outlines Qu Bingyun's poetic life as follows:

Qu Bingyun inherited her family learning as a child and became more adept at poetry when she grew up. During her more than twenty years of marriage to me she did not stop studying and writing, which she did after getting the housework done. When our relatives and neighbors got to know her excellence in writing poetry, they all sent their maids, both young and old, with pieces of white paper to beg her to write down poems for them. Frequently, her poems were circulated, and thus, became known and appreciated by the two masters, Yuan Mei of Hangzhou and Wu Weiguang of our city. Qu Bingyun, however, sighed and regretted that she had not yet obtained the ultimate secret of poetry and that she had no intention to be famous. Nonetheless, afterwards many more admirers requested her inscriptions and poems, and Qu Bingyun could never meet the demand. 幼承家學,長益工詩.歸余二十余年,中饋之余不廢研削.戚黨知之,咸屬婢媼以箋素乞書.往往流播,遂爲錢塘袁隨園,同邑吳竹橋兩先生賞.嘆弗獲終秘,然非其意也.自後索題詠者日不暇給 (Zhao Tongyu, Preface).

This outline states that Qu Bingyun inherited her family scholarship and was engaged in poetry writing at an early stage of her life. She became adept at poetry, continued writing it after her marriage, and eventually gained fame. It is certainly worth noticing that Qu was not only renowned for her poetry, and, in fact, possessed "three superb skills" 三絕 (*sanjue*),¹²⁴ for in addition to writing poetry, Qu was also an expert in both calligraphy and painting. She favored the small script (*xiaokai*) style of calligraphy, writing "I greedily copy the thirteen line model calligraphy of the Jin" 十三行帖貪模晉 (2:22a).¹²⁵ And, although Qu Bingyun did not learn painting until after marriage, it

clump of bamboos growing in the yard of Tongzi Monastery. The chief monk reported on the safety of the bamboos every day to the temple. In later times, people called a letter home "bamboo safe report."

¹²⁴ Sun, *TZJ*, 54:5a.

¹²⁵ The *Thirteen Lines* is Wang Xianzhi's 王獻之 (344-486) calligraphy of the prose-poem of the *Goddess Luo* 洛神賦 ("Luoshen fu") written in small character standard script (*xiaokai*), a model calligraphy for students in later ages.

appears that she quickly became good at it, being especially adept at painting flowers and birds in black ink. As a matter of fact, she compiled a multi-volume collection of her own paintings and produced countless pieces as presents for her relatives, friends and other admirers.

Qu Bingyun wrote all her poems in the form of five or seven-character regulated poetry 律詩 (*lüshi*) or *ci* poetry. She herself said that she favored the regulated poetry of the Tang:

I adore the five or seven character poetry of the Tang. 五言七詩酷愛唐
(2:22a)

Among the Tang poets, she particularly honored Li Shangyin 李商隱 (813-858; see the discussion in Chapter V), and of the various periods representative of *ci* poetry, we may assume that she favored Song *ci*, since her commentators compared her *ci* poems to those of the Song writers (See Chapter V). By mastering these restricted forms, she proved that her ability was at least on a par with male poets, if not better.

It is notable that, Qu treated poetry as part of her daily life and wrote poems primarily for ordinary uses. Poetry fulfilled many different functions for her. She sometimes utilized poetry as a pastime. When sailing on a lake together with Zhao Tongyu or other female members of the Zhaos or the Qus, she would “link lines” with them for fun or, when the same group drank wine at home, they would take turns adding a line to a poem as a drinking game. Also, instead of always composing letters in prose, she wrote to her close relatives in the form of poems. Furthermore, she sometimes wrote poems as a diary, recording events in her domestic life. And her poetry writing frequently worked as a kind of therapy when she was bed-ridden. Bao Yi writes:

Maocai [Zhao Tongyu] once told his brother named He that in the recent years Wanxian had frequently fallen ill. Subsequently, she often diverted herself from illness by filling in the prescribed tunes of *ci* poetry 茂才嘗爲盍兄言,宛仙近歲多病,往往以填詞自排遣 (Bao Yin, Postscript).

There can be no doubt that Qu had many reasons to compose verses. However, according to Qu herself, an innate sensibility (or, as Yuan Mei put it, the “nature and inspiration”) was the primary motivation behind her poetry. Even though she wrote poetry to communicate with others and to record events or as a pastime and a kind of therapy, she treated it as a literary creation. She always worked painstakingly, cudgeling her brains to get ideas for poems. Qu sometimes became so obsessed with the composition of a poem that she would either be unable to sleep or could only sleep fitfully. She once wrote,

When after painfully composing a poem

I awakened from a dream and sat alone

Asking for the time, I was told

it was near the fourth watch.¹²⁶

(2:10a)

夢覺苦吟人獨坐，

問時相近四更天。

In a state of frenzy, Qu sometimes beat her favorite inkstone while composing a poem. She wanted to remedy her illness by writing poetry and occasionally this worked, but on one occasion she became so obsessed with a poem that her condition actually worsened. Due to her obsession, writing poetry often became an unbearable mental and physical torment for her, so she wrote, “Not because of the endless illness I grieve over my life, / I did it only because with birth came ‘nature and inspiration’” 不因病久悲身世，祇悔生來帶性靈 (3:15b). However, although she may have sometimes regretted her “nature and inspiration,” she loved poetry and surely for the most part enjoyed reading and writing it.

Zhao Tongyu’s paragraph, which gives an account of Qu Bingyun’s involvement with poetry and her rise to fame, indicates that she often wrote poems on request for relatives and neighbors. Also, as said by Bao Wei, Qu compiled a book of her poems and circulated it among her relatives (Bao Wei, Preface). Thus, Qu’s poems gradually spread beyond the sphere of her family and won her recognition among a much broader readership. After the locally esteemed Wu Weiguang and the influential Yuan Mei

¹²⁶ *Jing* 更 was one of measures of nighttime in pre-modern China. One *jing* equaled about two hours. The fourth *jing* was the time between 1:00 to 3:00A.M..

commended her poems, more and more people, male and female, ordinary and noble, official and literati, came to ask Qu for poems or paintings.

It was in 1794 that Qu Bingyun met Yuan Mei for the first time. Her association with Wu Weiguang probably started a few years earlier. She likely attained fame in the Mount Yu region around 1794, when she was in her late twenties. The line “Ten years ago you first troubled to know my fame” 十載先勞識我名 (4:12b), which is from a poem she wrote to Xu Xiaoshu, who entered the Zhao family in about 1805, can substantiate this chronology. According to Zhao’s outline, Qu Bingyun’s poetic life in her adulthood can be broken down into two periods:

(1) The first period started in 1785, when she married into the Zhao family, and ended in 1793. During these roughly eight years, aside from doing housework, Qu Bingyun was thoroughly involved in writing poetry and associating with poetic members of both the Zhao and Qu families, which prepared her for regional recognition.

(2) The second period started in 1794, when she became a disciple of Yuan Mei, and continued until 1810, when she died at the age forty-three. Qu Bingyun began professional poetic creation after entering Yuan Mei’s female group. She reached her peak of poetic creation when she achieved fame in the Mount Yu area and beyond.

Chapter III Domestic Poetry Circles

In Qu Bingyun's region during the eighteenth-century poetry seemed a fashion of gentry women's circles. Almost every female member of both the Zhaos and the Qus displayed interest in it. Unlike the majority of male poets for whom poetry was an intellectual adventure, these women regarded it a part of their daily life and used it practically as a communication tool and an emotional tie with others much like games or letters. Of course, poetry was an intellectual pursuit as well. For Qu Bingyun, poetry seemed to be a magic wand enabling her to communicate with everyone in her domestic circle and making meaningful connections with them. She kept in touch with at least twenty-one poetically inclined relatives, eleven in the Zhao family and nine in the Qu family (See Figure 3).

3.1 The Zhao Family Poetry Circle

There are many [poetic] talents in the Zhao family in the Mount Yu region.

虞山趙氏多才。¹²⁷ (Yuan Mei)

Qu Bingyun's ability to pursue her poetic pursuits after marriage was largely due to the literary environment of the Zhao family, which had been producing women poets for three generations. Zhao Tongyu's grand-aunt, Madame Wang 王, was an erudite woman who received education in the classics from her father in her early youth. She wrote poems while teaching her own sons, since at the time the family could not afford their education, naming her poetry collection *Poems Drafted after Teaching My Sons (two chapters)* 課餘草二卷 (*Keyucaojuan*).¹²⁸ Zhao Tongyu's aunt, sister and three female cousins were all good poets forming a major part of the poetry circle in the family. Apparently, Qu Bingyun the poet had no difficulty finding like-minded companions in her

¹²⁷ *YMQJ (III)*: BY, 19 of j 8, p. 744.

¹²⁸ This work is mentioned in *RGCZ*, p. 2307, but has not been found.

environment. As a daughter-in-law, she needed to maintain a good relationship with everyone in the family including concubines and maids. Poetry made her a great success in doing so.

Members of the Same Generation

(1) Zhao Tongyu

As her husband, Zhao Tongyu played a major part in Qu Bingyun's marital life. Their conjugal relation falls into Dorothy Ko's "companionate couple" category, "a union between an intellectually compatible couple who treat each other with mutual respect and affection."¹²⁹ Their relatives and friends applauded this union by referring to them as the "fairest mates." Some even compared them to the most famous companionate couple in Chinese culture, Li Qingzhao (1084-ca.1155) and Zhao Mingcheng, despite Qu Bingyun disagreeing with this comparison.¹³⁰

Zhao Tongyu was a gifted writer, excelling in poetry and ancient-style prose. He left behind *Collected Works from the Studio Next to the Goddess of the Inkstone Xin 鄰 滄閣集 (Linxin'ge ji)*.¹³¹ Local intellectual circles recognized him as one of the "Four Talents" (in learning) of the Mount Yu region, the other three being Xi Shichang, Xi Yu 席煜 (courtesy name Yuanchang 遠常, Metropolitan Graduate, 1801), and Sun Yuanxiang. Although he did not know him well, Yuan Mei praised Zhao for being "expert at expressing feelings in poetry" 詩善言情 and made a remark about a couplet from his poem "Facing a Mirror" 對鏡 ("Duijing") being "preeminent" 超絕 (chaojue).¹³² Yuan also selected Zhao's poems twice for his poetry talks and once for his *Continuations of the Collected Works of My Fellows 續同人集 (Xu tongren ji)*.¹³³ There is also an

¹²⁹ Dorothy Ko, p. 179.

¹³⁰ Sun, *TZJ*, 50: 5b.

¹³¹ Zhao Tongyu, *Collected Works from the Studio Next to Goddess of Inkstone Xin 鄰滄閣集 (Linxin'ge ji)*, a Qing Dynasty hand-copied manuscript is found in the Library of the China Social Science Academy (Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan).

¹³² *YMQJ (III)*: BY, 19 of j 8, p. 744 and 22 of j 8, p. 746.

¹³³ Those mentioned in Yuan Mei's poetry talks are "Inscription for the Picture of My Younger Sister Ruobing" 題若冰妹小照 ("Ti Ruobingmei xiaozhao"), "A Pool in A Hill" 山塘 ("Shantang"), "Gathering Water-Chestnuts" 采菱 ("Cailing"), "Passing the Summer" (third poem) 消夏 ("Xiaoxia"), "Facing a Mirror"

anecdote that tells about Yuan Mei hosting a gathering of celebrities from both sides of the Yangzi River at Sui Garden. Zhao happened to be in Jinling writing a provincial examination and he was invited to this gathering. As part of the festivities some guests composed poems extemporaneously and exchanged them with one another. Zhao attracted the admiration of many when he composed an excellent impromptu poem in the same rhyme as the poem given to him. Zhao Tongyu, however, failed the provincial examinations on a number of occasions, so he did not get any government appointments except as an Instructor 教諭 (*Jiaoyu*).¹³⁴

In the first few years of their marriage Qu Bingyun and Zhao Tongyu did not spend much time together because she accompanied her mother-in-law and he was busy preparing for the examinations. After Zhao became tired of the examinations and abandoned his attempts and after his mother died, the couple had increased opportunities to stay together, even though Zhao brought in concubines. After purchasing a concubine for her husband, Qu avoided becoming his sex partner and established a relationship with Zhao that was more equal in nature. Therefore, some people recognized the couple as “Literary Soulmates” 文字相知 (“wenzi xiangzhi,” Shao Yuanyao, Preface). Qu Jingkun appreciated Zhao Tongyu, saying, “My brother-in-law Ziliang is extraordinarily talented and famous” 妹夫子梁負逸才, 有聲譽 and once described what poetry meant to this couple:

As the zither (*qin*) sounds and the harp (*se*) resonates,¹³⁵ harmonious and peaceful is the couple inside the green windows, one singing and the other responding, [their poems are pure] like polished jade and smoothed ice. Thus, their poetry writing improves 琴鳴瑟應, 雍雍靜好, 綠窗唱和, 漱玉鏤冰, 是以詩益工. (Qu Jingkun, Postscript)

對鏡 (“Duijing”) and “Chanting for White Peonies” 詠白牡丹 (“Yong Baimudan”). *YMQJ (III)*: BY, 19 of j 8, p. 744 and 22 of j 8, p. 746.

Those selected for the *Continuations of the Collected Works of My Fellows* are “Presenting to Master Yuan Mei” 呈隨園夫子 (“Cheng Suiyuan fuzi”) and “Celebrating Master Yuan Mei’s Birthday” 壽簡齋夫子 (“Shou Jianzhai fuzi”). *YMQJ (VI)*: *Continuations of the Collected Works of My Fellows* 續同人集 (*Xu tongren*, hereafter XT), p. 245. These poems are sorted into the “Gentry Women Category” 閨秀類 (“Guixiulei”) in the collection, probably because Yuan Mei regarded Zhao Tongyu as a dependant on the female disciple, Qu Bingyun.

¹³⁴ Sun Yuanxiang, however, said that Zhao Tongyu was not interested in being an official. See Sun, *TZJ*, 13:9a.

The couple enjoyed physical and emotional intimacy, as well as intellectual harmony. They moved around from one building to another throughout the year. In the summer, they lived in a villa south of the city; moved to the Studio Next to the Goddess of Inkstone Xin in the fall in order to admire the view; and went back to the Jade-Collecting Tower in winter time. Side by side, the two discussed poetry or composed poems. Frequently, they used poetry to entertain themselves or to convey subtle feelings about one another. As can be seen from the following poem, poetry was a key ingredient in their happiness:

[Poem 7]

Miscellanies on the Remaining Spring Days (second)

殘春雜詠(第二首)

Last night by the lamp, I stayed up late
to compose a poem painstakingly.

昨宵燈下苦吟遲,

I did this behind my man's back
without letting him know.

背卻檀郎未遣知。

This morning I finish the final draft and copy it out,
Asking my man to guess whose poem it is.

脫稿今朝書一遍,
教郎猜是甚人詩。

(2:5b)

When his wife died, Zhao Tongyu was grief-stricken and on numerous occasions recalled their happy union as spouses and soulmates. He wrote, "I feel lonely and cannot bear to watch the lonely moon above" 寂寞更堪孤月上 (Zhao Tongyu, Preface). About this, Sun Yuanxiang remarked that while in the past many men had lamented the passing of a beautiful woman, none had felt such lament for a woman because of her talent.¹³⁶

(2) Zhao Ruobing

¹³⁵ *Qin* and *se* are Chinese stringed instruments.

Zhao Ruobing was Zhao Tongyu's younger sister. She was vivacious, and candid and had talent for both poetry and painting. Both Zhao Tongyu and Qu Bingyun liked her very much; a poem by Zhao, which Yuan Mei commended and selected for his poetry talks, portrays her as a teenager:

I recollect those years when you were	
deep in the women's quarters unwed.	憶得深閨未嫁年,
While I held a book reading,	
you looked at it over my shoulder.	阿兄把卷妹隨肩.
When the maid reported that wine was ready	小紅剛報醪釀放,
You quickly made yourself up and arrived first.	草草梳妝到最先. ¹³⁷

Zhao Ruobing was one of the most affectionate to Qu Bingyun among the female members of the Zhao family. In their association, poetry was the most frequent topic of conversation. Qu's poem "Chatting the Night away with Ruobing" 與若冰姑夜話 ("Yu Ruobinggu yehua") recounts their tender conversation on an evening in the fall of 1785 after Qu had just become a member of the Zhao family. The second stanza reads,

[Poem 8]

We always have heart-to-heart chats,	
of which many are profound.	出口蘭言多蘊藉,
The most gentle and soft ones are about poetic lines,	
with which we are mostly concerned.	關心詩句最溫柔.
Sitting together,	
we do not notice that evening has passed.	坐來未覺黃昏過,
Outside the door curtain	
the moonlight flows like water.	簾外蟾光水樣流.
(1:3a -b)	

¹³⁶ Sun, *TZJ*, 50:6b.

¹³⁷ *YMQJ (III)*: BY, 19 of j 8, p. 744.

The two ladies sometimes shared a drink at home or went sightseeing together. In a poem "In a Late Afternoon in Autumn I Bring Ruobing to Three Bridges for a Boat Cruise" 秋暮偕若冰三橋放櫂 ("Qiumu xie Ruobing sanqiao fangchao," translated in Chapter VI) Qu describes one of their activities together: the two went on an outing in a pleasure boat and were inspired to compose poems. There are eleven other poems in the *Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower* recording their shared activities and expressing their joy of meeting and sorrow of parting. One of them is entitled "To the Tune of Song of Immortals in a Cave: Ruobing Has Delayed Visiting Me" 洞仙歌: 遲若冰不至 ("Dongxian'ge: chi Ruobing buzhi," translated in Chapter V). It expresses Qu's deep longing for Ruobing, who had not come home for a while, after marriage.

(3) Zhao Tongyao

Zhao Tongyao 趙同曜 (courtesy name Xunxian 洵嫻), the daughter of Zhao Guikun 趙貴鯤 (Student by Purchase Fourth Class 監生 *jiansheng*), was another Zhao woman who was affectionate to Qu Bingyun. Tongyao began studying the classics, Buddhism and literature when she was a child, and had a good understanding of them. She liked Yuan Mei's poetry the best among contemporary authors and deemed it to be both knowledgeable and insightful.¹³⁸ She studied poetry and wrote her own poems during her teenage years, producing two works, the *Draft from the Cloud Stopping Tower* 停雲樓稿 (*Tingyunlou gao*) and the *Poetry Draft from the Laurel Room* (one chapter) 月桂軒詩稿一卷 (*Yueguixuan shigao yijuan*).¹³⁹ Yuan Mei also selected her poems, "On Double Seven" 詠七夕 ("Yong Qixi"), "On a Mirror" 詠鏡 ("Yong jing"), and "Chrysanthemum" 菊 ("Ju") for his poetry talks.¹⁴⁰ However, Yuan guessed incorrectly her relationship with Zhao Tongyu, saying "A person named Tongyu, whose courtesy name was Ziliang, I gather, is an elder brother of Xunxian" 有名同鈺字子梁者, 疑是

¹³⁸ The Qing scholar Jiang Dunfu 蔣敦復 listed Zhao Tongyao in the "Table of the Names of Yuan Mei's Female Disciples" 隨園軼事: 隨園女弟子姓氏譜, *YMQJ* (VIII): *Anecdotes of Yuan Mei* 隨園軼事 (Suiyuan yishi, hereafter *YS*), pp.100-4, but no references are found to support this assertion.

¹³⁹ These two works are mentioned in *RGCZ*, p. 3038, but have not been located.

¹⁴⁰ *YMQJ* (III): *BY*, 16 of j 8, p. 743.

洵嫻女士之兄。¹⁴¹ This was contradictory to Qu Bingyun's lines addressing Tongyao which indicate that she was the only child of her parents:

You stand out, singly, without siblings.	獨秀亭亭弟妹無,
Your mother cherishes you like a bright pearl.	高堂珍惜比明珠。
(1:18b)	

Qu Bingyun and Zhao Tongyao became sworn sisters right after Qu came to the family. The two also had many congenial conversations concerning poetry. The following poem recounts one of their cheerful conversations at night:

[Poem 9]

On the First Day of Autumn I Invite Xunxian to Chat the Night Away (second stanza)	立秋日邀洵嫻 姑夜話
Wine glasses overflow as I set them up.	酒漫將樽設,
In advance, I have asked a maid to float melons. ¹⁴²	瓜先教婢浮。
I will then invite the Celestial Girl to descend	好邀仙珮降,
To chat with me by a dark night lamp.	同話夜燈幽。
(1:12a)	

Over three years, the two women frequently exchanged their ideas on poetry and wrote poems in response to each other. Tongyao then married Shao Guangrong 邵廣融 (Provincial Graduate) and though she remained in the same region, the marriage allowed the two sworn sisters fewer chances to meet. Instead they had to send their

¹⁴¹ *YMQJ (III): BY*, 19 of j 8, p. 744.

¹⁴² This line alludes to the sentences in "A Letter to the Magistrate of Zhaoge Wu Zhi" 與朝歌令吳質書 ("Yu Zhaogeling Wu Zhi shu") by the Emperor Wen of the Wei, Cao Pi: "To float sweet melons in a clear fountain and to sink red plums in cold water" 浮甘瓜於清泉, 沉朱李於寒水, Xiao Tong comp., *Literary Selections 文選 (Wenxuan)*, Hong Kong: Shangwu, 1936, p. 924. Cao's sentences refer to the preparation for a banquet in the summer. In later times, people used "to float melons and sink red plums" as a metaphor for the preparation of a summer banquet.

maids to deliver poems which conveyed their friendship and opinions. In the first year of marriage Zhao Tongyao gave birth to a son—her parents were very happy with this. However, on the twenty-seventh day of the ninth month of 1788, when her parents had just treated their relatives to a traditional banquet called "happy pot-cakes and soup" 喜餅喜湯 (xibing xitang) in celebration of the birth Zhao died of dystocia. Qu wrote an elegiac verse "Weeping for Xunxian" 哭洵嫻 ("Ku Xunxian"), giving an account of their friendship and mourning her:

[Poem 10]

I recall when I married four years ago.	憶得來歸四載前，
Having just come to recognize each other's faces,	
we loved each other.	纔經識面荷相憐。
With one single sentence	
we reached an agreement joining our hearts.	一言訂得同心契，
Hence, you allowed me	
to follow you shoulder to shoulder. ¹⁴³	便許追隨阿姊肩。
(1:18a)	

(4) Zhao Bingqing

Among Zhao Tongyu's female cousins, Zhao Bingqing was unique by virtue of her filial piety. She was the daughter of Zhao Guishi, the Prefect of Funing 福寧 in Fujian province. He was well known as a "pure official" and it was said that he could hardly support his family on his salary. Bingqing herself obtained fame both for poetry and filial piety. She authored the *Draft Remaining after the Fire in the Home of My Refuge* 寄生館焚餘稿 (*Jishengguan fenyu gao*) prefaced by the prestigious poet

¹⁴³ There is a note on this couplet by Qu Bingyun: "We became sworn sisters."

Zhao Yi 趙翼 (1727-1841) and mentioned by several sources.¹⁴⁴ In 1807, she was commended by the royal court for being a pious daughter.

It is said that when she was nine years old Zhao Bingqing read a story in *The Intrigues of the Warring States* 戰國策 (*Zhan'guoce*) about a girl from the Qi State by the name of Ying'erzi who refused all offers of marriage in order to wait on her parents for life. Zhao Bingqing made up her mind to do the same, taking an oath not to get married so as to serve her parents forever. She once sliced off some flesh from her buttock to cure her mother's illness and, when her father was sick, she prayed to heaven to transfer his illness to herself. It is said in the gazetteer that she worked as a mentor at private schools for females to make money to support her family, which was generally regarded as a father's duty. When her parents died she tried to hang herself but was stopped by her maternal uncle. Afterwards, she permanently abstained from meat and embroidered portraits of the Buddha, while kneeling and worshipping all day long for her parents' protection in the other world. She died in her seventies.¹⁴⁵

Qu Bingyun had some association with Zhao Bingqing. Qu admired Zhao for her moral character and Zhao appreciated Qu 's poetry. Once, Qu painted an orchid for Zhao and presented it to her along with the following poem:

[Poem 11]

I Painted an Orchid for My Sister-in-Law Ruoyun

寫蘭贈若蘊姑

You are just as suitable for a girl's quarters,

as a mountain's woods.

也宜閨閣也山林,

A whiff of sacred fragrance fills up

your pure heart.

一片貞香徹素心.

Once, I touched your fragrant tip and was moved.

曾接芳標應化我,

¹⁴⁴ The *Draft Remaining after the Fire in the Home of My Refuge* (one chapter) 寄生館焚餘稿 (*Jishengguan fenyu gao*), printed in 1885, is found in the Libraries of Nanjing, Tianjin, and Changshu. The sources that mention Zhao Bingqing include Wanyan Yunzhu's *Continuation to the Correct Beginnings: Women's Poetry of Our August Dynasty*, Shi Shuyi's *Biographies of Gentry Women Poets of the Qing Dynasty* and Hu Wenkai's *A Study of Women Writings Through the Ages*.

¹⁴⁵ See RGCZ, p. 2686 and Shi Shuyi, 6:23a.

I have to know that a friendship with you is never too deep. 須知相契不嫌深。

(3:20b)

In this poem, Qu Bingyun turns the orchid into a metaphor for Zhao Bingqing's moral character and expresses her appreciation of her friendship with such a strong woman. In return, Zhao wrote three poems to praise Qu for her poetry, of which the following is one:

I open your poetry and read it;

every word is pure.

Among the lines is a one-inch orchid heart, inborn.¹⁴⁶

You the female talent possess three excellences,¹⁴⁷

Clear and fresh like autumn water and

bright like the snow and the moon.

(Zhao Bingqing, Inscription)

展讀君詩字字清，

蘭心一寸是天生。

掃眉才子兼三絕，

秋水澄鮮雪月明。

(5) Tao Lingqing

Tao Lingqing 陶菱卿 was a maternal cousin of Zhao Tongyu and occasionally visited the Zhao family. Since she married the eldest nephew of Sun Yuanxiang,¹⁴⁸ Tao had a friendship with Qu Bingyun and Xi Peilan and attended the gathering of the twelve female relatives and friends of Qu and Xi (See the details about this gathering in Chapter V).

Qu Bingyun had heard a lot about Tao's beauty before meeting her in 1799, but she was also impressed by her demeanor when she met her face to face:

When socializing with people

you keep away from vulgar etiquette.

周旋禮數都離俗，

¹⁴⁶ "Orchid heart" is a metaphor for purity.

¹⁴⁷ "The three excellences" refers to poetry, painting and calligraphy.

¹⁴⁸ Since Xi Peilan called Tao Lingqing "My eldest daughter-in-law" (see Xi, 5:10b), and her only living son Sun Xiangtang 孫香棠 married a girl by the name of Manxian 曼仙, it is likely that Tao Lingqing was the wife of the eldest nephew of Sun Yuanxiang.

Your conversation and demeanor
rise above the world of dust.
(3:3b)

談吐風華更出塵。

Tao and Qu became poetic friends after this meeting. However, Tao died young after giving birth to a child, which made Qu very sad. Qu wrote two poems mourning her in "Inscription on a Portrait of Lingqing Left Behind" (4:9a-b).

Seniors and Male Members

(1) Zhao Gui'e

Zhao Gui'e (courtesy names Mingxiang 茗香 and Mengyue 夢月), one of Zhao Tongyu's aunts, was the daughter of Zhao Hongzhang 趙宏漳 (courtesy name Runfu 潤夫, Tribute Student 貢生)¹⁴⁹ and the wife of Cao Ru'ao 曹汝鰲 (Dependent Tribute Student 附貢生). She was also an accomplished poet and her collection was called *Draft Poems from the Tea Fragrance Residence* 茗香居詩草 (*Mingxiangju shicao*).¹⁵⁰

Zhao Gui'e and Qu Bingyun read each other's poetry, Zhao contributing comments about eight of Qu's poems and a verse critique on her work in general, all included in Qu's printed poetry collection. Also, they exchanged ideas and praise of each other in poetic form. For example, after reading a commendatory poem by Zhao, Qu wrote one to thank her entitled "My Aunt Mingxiang Presented Me a Poem, Over-Praising Me, So I Am Writing to Thank Her" 外姑母茗香夫人以詩見贈, 獎譽過深, 賦此呈謝 ("Waigumu Mingxiang furen yishi jianzeng jiangyu guoshen fuci chengxie"):

You granted me a piece of superb writing
like a precious jade.
But I am embarrassed, for I lack talent
corresponding with your praise.

親賜瑤華絕妙章,
愧無才思可相當。

¹⁴⁹ RGCZ, p. 1640.

And, in return, Qu glorified Zhao Gui'e's poetry and calligraphy, by saying:

Your poetry follows the Tang rhymes
and eliminates ornateness.

詩主唐音消綺麗,

Your calligraphic work imitates that of the Jin,
from which come purity and naturalness.

書模晉帖出清蒼.

(1:10b)

(2) Tao Tingxi and Shao Yuanyao

Tao Tingxi was Zhao Tongyu's maternal uncle. He wrote a preface to Qu Bingyun's poetry collection, which mentions her good personality, including her filial piety for her mother-in-law and her love of her husband, in addition to pointing out the naturalness and intelligence of her poetry. Tao was apparently among Qu Bingyun's readers and seem to have known a lot about her.

Shao Yuanyao, who was Zhao Tongyu's nephew, was another male reader of Qu's poetry. He contributed a preface to the *Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower*, in which he expresses his admiration for her talent in poetry and painting, as well as her close relationship with Zhao Tongyu.

The Concubine and the Maids

(1) Xu Xiaoshu

Although Xu Xiaoshu was Zhao Tongyu's concubine, she spent a lot of time with Qu Bingyun acting as her maid. Each day, Xu joined Qu early in the morning (at six o'clock) when she got up for Buddhist meditation, and stayed with her during the daytime either inside Qu's studio or outside in the surrounding areas. Some evenings, they would sit up chatting for a long time. As stated in three of Qu Bingyun's poems, the two women often talked privately for the most part about

¹⁵⁰ This work is mentioned in Hu Wenkai's book, has not been located.

poetry. From Qu's poetic descriptions, both of them must have enjoyed their talks very much. In one line, Qu writes:

We are chatting softly in the yard,
allowing the flowers to listen.

中庭細語憑花聽

(4:21b).

And, in a *ci* poem, Qu describes one of their gentle and pleasurable conversations:

[Poem 12]

To the Tune of Butterflies Lingered Over Flowers:
I Sat Idly with Miss Xu Lianqing on a Cold Evening
(Second stanza)

蝶戀花:
寒夕與徐姬連卿閑坐:

We laughed and talked, time passing
while we shared wine and tea.
Outside our candle-lit room, a frosty bell
Rings, sending another evening off.
Tonight's remaining feelings should be brought
into our dreams.

笑語移時盅茗共。
燭外霜鐘，
又把昏黃送。

The sky is high; the moon is thin; between them
our poetic souls indulge every whim.

今夜餘情應入夢。
天高月瘦詩魂從。

(c:15b-16a)

Poetry connected their souls, enabling them to have emotional intimacy with each other; the boundary between the wife and the concubine vanished. It is said that after Qu died, Xu could not bear her sorrow; when Zhao Tongyu asked her to run the household, which means to assume a wife's duty, she said, "I dare not refuse to manage the household temporarily. However, you'd better have another wife. I will eventually serve

Madam Qu in the nether world" 暫攝不敢辭, 然君宜繼室. 妾終侍夫人地下耳.¹⁵¹
In the following year, after giving birth to a son, Xu starved herself to death.

(2) Chunwu

The gentle, kind and docile Chunwu was bought for Zhao Tongyu for sexual purposes, but she also waited on Qu Bingyun as a maid. Qu always had Chunwu accompany her, especially when working on a poem—Chunwu was responsible for the preparation of ink, brushes and writing paper. The mistress liked to call the maid by the name of a plant from Qu Yuan's *Encountering Sorrow*, and was happy to read out her draft poems to her, as shown in the following lines:

I named you after a plant	
of the Xiao and Xiang River.	瀟湘芳草呼名字
You listen to me chanting poems	
in our women's quarters.	閨閣吟詩聽主人。
(2:9a)	

Also, Qu Bingyun occasionally conversed about poetry with Chunwu and encouraged her to get more involved in it. In a poem addressed to the maid, Qu wrote,

It is not that you cannot pursue literature, ¹⁵²	風雅未嘗無汝分,
Let your body be imbued	
with ink fragrance and flower vapor.	墨香花氣染通身。
(2:9a)	

(3) Lu Ansu

¹⁵¹ Sun, *TZJ*, 20:6b.

¹⁵² "Fengya" 風雅 is a metaphor of literary pursuits. "Feng" stands for the *Guofeng* poems and "ya" for the *Daya* and *Xiaoya* poems in the *Classic of Poetry*.

Lu Ansu 陸安穌 (courtesy name Huixiang 蕙纒) was the daughter of Qu Bingyun's cook Zhang Ciyu 張次玉. She frequented Qu's house and sometimes stayed there for several days. Qu found this eight-year-old girl precocious and taught her poetry. Thus, the two started enjoying a teaching-learning process, which caused them to always stay up late at night.

The disciple admired her mentor very much and, under her direction, studied Tang poetry. Lu selected favorite lines from Tang poems that she had learned and compiled them into a book. Usually, the mentor composed her own poems while the disciple studied ancient poems, and the two took pleasure in this. Qu recalled, "You took me as a mentor in your heart" 心靈只認我爲師 and "You accompanied me whenever I was chanting a poem by the red window" 每向紅窗伴詠詩 (2:11b).

Lu Ansu, however, was very prone to illness and contracted a serious disease at fourteen. Qu became very worried about Lu when one day she received a package from her, containing a portrait of Lu and a book of selected Tang poetic lines. Upon the receipt of these, Qu knew the situation had become worse. One month later she heard the bad news—her disciple was dead. Qu felt that her heart was broken and she composed a set of two poems "Weeping for Lu Huixiang" 哭蕙纒 ("Ku Huixiang"), one of which was praised by Yuan Mei for its sincerity and naturalness. She also wrote a poem in response to Zhao Tongyu's poem commemorating Lu "On the Funeral Day, Ziliang Wrote a Poem as an Offering at Her Tomb. I Read It in Tears and Write Mine to the Same Rhymes" 蕙纒葬日, 子梁爲詩往奠其墓. 潛然和之 ("Huixiang zangri Ziliang weishi wangdian qimu shanran hezhi," 4:7b). Qu's sorrow over losing Lu lasted for years; she was sometimes reminded of her poetic disciple on special occasions, as the one described in her poem, "When Painting a Hui Flower I Thought of Huixiang" 寫蕙有感蕙纒 ("Xie Hui yougan Huixiang," 3:22a-b).

3.2 The Qu Family Poetry Circle

After Qu Bingyun's marriage, the Qu family changed: Qu Jingkun and Qu Bingyun married into other families, while Qian Zhen came to the Qus as a bride. After Qian Zhen's death Ye Wanyi became the second bride of the Qu family and gave birth

to several children who grew up while Qu Bingyun was alive. Besides maintaining a close relationship with her cousin, Qu used poetry to successfully establish an intimate relationship with her sisters-in-law Qian Zhen and Ye Wanyi, respectively, and with the younger generation and some older relatives.

Members of the Same Generation

(1) Qian Zhen

Qian Zhen 錢珍 (courtesy name Wenru 溫如), a native of Changzhou in Jiangsu province, was the first wife of Qu Baojun. She married into the Qu family at fourteen in 1786 and died while giving birth to a child two years later. Qian was from a gentry family; her father took office somewhere as a General Administration Circuit 觀察 (Guancha). She received a good education and became adept at poetry in her teens. It was said that she was very bright and could compose a poem in a very short time. Hu Wenkai's *A Study of Women Writings Through the Ages* mentions Qian Zhen's poetry collection entitled *The Draft Left Behind from the Small Jade Orchid* 小玉蘭遺稿 (*Xiaoyulan yigao*), but it is nowhere to be found today.

Perhaps because their parents died very early, Qu Bingyun and her younger brother Qu Baojun grew up without experiencing parental love; Bingyun loved Baojun like a mother and extended her love to his wife. Also, because of their mutual interest in poetry, the two women became sworn sisters shortly after Qian married. Qu Bingyun regularly went back to her parental family to chat with Qian, as described in Qu's "On a Winter Night, Together with Wenru" 冬夜與溫如 (translated in Chapter VI). She also went on outings and played poetry games with Qian, as depicted in another poem by Qu, "We Link Lines when Going by Boat" 舟行聯句 (translated in Chapter VI). In the autumn of 1786, before Qian left for a short visit to her parents' family, Qu wrote a poem "Parting from Wenru Who Is Coming Home" 別溫如歸 ("Bie Wenru gui") to express her unwillingness to part. The two sworn sisters read each other's poems and provided comments. In a verse commentary "Written On Wenru's Poetry Volumes" (translated in Chapter VI), Qu Bingyun values Qian's poetry as "pure and fresh," with clear and melodious rhymes.

In the beginning of the third month of 1789, when Qian had just returned from another visit to her paternal family, she sent a note to invite Qu Bingyun to come for a short stay. Due to her illness, however, Qu could not come until the 15th. Unexpectedly, only three days after Qu came, Qian died of a miscarriage. In a set of ten poems, "Weeping for Wenru" (1:22a), Qu expresses her sorrow and regrets over not coming sooner. Qu carefully reviewed the poetic manuscript that Qian left behind,¹⁵³ sighing to read her neat writing in the small regular script (*xiaokai*). She marveled at the first poem in the collection, which was about peach flowers, a common metaphor for "A beautiful woman who has an unfortunate life" ("hongyan boming"). Qu thought it was an augury of Qian's death (See 1:22b).

(2) Ye Wanyi

Ye Wanyi, a daughter from a gentry family in Wuxian, Jiangsu, became Qu Baojun's second wife. She gave birth to at least four children: two sons, Songman and Yuman 羽滿 and two daughters, Rulan 如蘭 and Mengchan 夢蟾.

Ye Wanyi happened to have been born on the same day and the same year as Qu Bingyun, and she was also a good poet and painter, so they had many things in common. Only after a few meetings Ye Wanyi and Qu Bingyun took an oath as sworn sisters, and their intimate association with each other in poetry and painting attracted admiration from their contemporaries. *Modern Talks about Intellectual Circles* 墨林今話 (*Molin jinhua*) states:

[Qu Bingyun and Ye Tiaofang] consulted each other [about poetry and painting] and their contemporaries called them "wonderful friends in the women's apartments" 互相商榷, 時稱閨中勝友.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ It is likely that Qu Bingyun was the compiler for *The Draft Left Behind from the Small Jade Orchid*. However, here Qu only mentions that she sealed Qian Zhen's poems up in an embroidery box for safekeeping.

¹⁵⁴ Shi Shuyi, 6:22a. The author of the *Nowadays Talks about the Intellectual Circles* mistakes Qu Bingyun for Ye Wanyi's younger sister.

How did they get fame as “wonderful friends in the women’s apartments”? The *Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower* includes a few of poems providing some details about the women’s activities concerning poetry and painting, as in the line, “Many times we competed with each other in poetic talent when drinking wine” (2:14b) 幾曾把酒鬥詩才. The poem “Responding to Tiaofang by Matching the Rhymes of Her Poem, ‘Appreciation of Chrysanthemum in the Embroidering Bag Study, I Am Writing this Poem to Her” 和繡囊書屋賞菊詩韻寄茗芳 (“He xiunang shuwu shangju shiyun ji Tiaofang,” 2:14b) also indicates that they amused themselves with poetry games. In addition, Qu and Ye wrote poems on the occasion of giving gifts to and receiving them from each other. Such poems by Qu include “Written to Accompany the Chestnut Blossom Mirror and Lotus Inkstone that I Am Presenting to Tiaofang” 以菱花鑑荷花硯贈茗芳各副以詩 (translated in Chapter VI), “Tiaofang Presented Me with Snow Claws¹⁵⁵ after the Snow” 雪後茗芳以雪爪見賞 (“Xuehou Tiaofang yi xuezhao jianshang,” 3:20a) and “Tiaofang Presented Me with Sprays of Plum Blossoms for My Vase, so I Am Writing this Poem in Return” 茗芳折梅贈余供瓶,報之以詩 (“Tiaofang zhemei zengyu gongping, baozhi yishi,” 4:20b-21a).

Poets and painters, they often combined poetry and painting. For example, once the two women collaborated on a painting done according to the theme of a couplet by Li Bai (701-62). Zhao Tongyu interpreted their work as a symbol of the two painters’ friendship and called it “The Orchid and the Trumpet Creeper Come in a Pair,” alluding to the fact that “orchid” (*lan*) is a word in Qu’s sobriquet and Ye’s courtesy name, Tiaofang, means “fragrant trumpet creeper.” Qu Bingyun was very happy with this interpretation and wrote a poem to note the event, with the following preface:

Tiaofang and I did a painting together, which is derived from Li Bai’s lines, “A pair of pearls come out from the bottom of an ocean, / They are a treasure worth several cities.” Ziliang changed the title to ‘Images of Orchid and Trumpet Creeper in a Pair.’ I am writing this poem to record this” 茗芳與余合繪一圖,采李青蓮詩“雙珠出海底,俱是聯城珍”之意.子梁改爲蘭茗合影.詩以記之 (3:8a-b).

¹⁵⁵ “Snow claws” refers to white birds’ claws.

Another similar event involved Xi Peilan. Once again, Qu and Ye jointly did a painting of two plants and asked Xi Peilan to name it. Both Xi Peilan and Qu Bingyun wrote verses to record the event. Xi's poem was entitled "Wanxian Painted an Orchid and Tiaofang Added Some Chrysanthemums to the Painting and They Asked Me to Inscribe a Title on It" 宛仙畫蘭一枝, 茗芳補菊一叢. 囑余題其名 ("Wanxian hualan yizhi, Tiaofang buju yicong. Zhuyu ti qiming")¹⁵⁶ and Qu's was called "Tiaofang and I Painted an Orchid and Chrysanthemums Together" 茗芳合寫蘭菊 ("Yu Tiaofang hexie lanju," 3:16a).

Perhaps because Qu was very grateful to Ye for assisting her younger brother and for giving birth to children for the family, she wrote many poems to celebrate Ye, such as "Inscription on the Picture of Tiaofang" 題茗芳小影 ("Ti Tiaofang xiaoying," 2:17a-18b), "Written in Celebration of Tiaofang's Birthday: it is the same day in same year as mine" 壽茗芳: 與余同歲同日 ("Shou Tiaofang: yuyu tong sui tongri," 2:12a) and "Presented to My Younger Brother's Wife Ye Tiaofang" 贈弟媳葉茗芳 ("Zeng dixi Ye Tiaofang," translated in Chapter VI). The last one praises Ye for her virtue, demeanor, talents and her soft, passionate, diligent and light-hearted personality.

(3) Qu Jingkun

Qu Bingyun and Qu Jingkun had been constant companions from their childhood through to early adulthood. Before entering their twenties, Bingyun went to the Zhao family, while Jingkun became the wife of Yu Zhao 俞照 (courtesy name Jinghuan 鏡寰 and sobriquet Langting 朗亭), who was Expectant Appointee of the Palace Secretary 候選中書. Like Bingyun, Jingkun also carried on her literary pursuits after marriage and later became an accomplished poet, leaving behind a collection entitled *Collected Poems and Prose from the Remaining Surplus Study* 留餘書屋詩文集 (*Liuyu shuwu shiwenji*).¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Xi, 5:4a.

¹⁵⁷ This collection is mentioned in Hu's book, but has not been found.

Although they still lived in the Mount Yu region, the two cousins could hardly get together, a situation that became worse after Jingkun left the region. Since her father-in-law Yu Tingbo 俞廷伯 (courtesy name Xinfu 新甫 and sobriquet Maoyuan 懋園, Metropolitan Graduate) took office as Prefect of Huoshan in Anhui province, the entire family, including Jingkun and her husband, moved there with him.¹⁵⁸ Bingyun and Jingkun missed each other very much. They used “a poetic mailbox” 詩筒 (*shitong*), as Qu Bingyun put it, to convey their affectionate feelings and poetic opinions. So, in the *Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower*, there are a few verses concerning Jingkun, such as “Missing My Elder Sister Wanqing” (translated in Chapter VI), “Written for Expressing the Feeling of Missing My Elder Sister Wanqing” 寄懷婉清姊 (“Jihuai Wanqing jie”) and “Matching the Rhymes in ‘Flowers Falling’ by My Elder Sister Wanqing” 和婉清家姊落花韻 (“He Wanqing jiajie luohua yun”). All of the above poems express the feeling of loss. When Jingkun talked about such poems by Bingyun, she recalled: “In 1795, when I went to Beipei for a visit to [Yu] relatives, Bingyun sent me a fan with a poem inscribed on it, in which the feeling of longing is expressed through words. 乙卯 1795 余省親北沛, 妹寄我便面, 賦詩示意. 離悰別緒情見乎詞 (Qu Jingkun, Postscript).

It is understandable that Qu Bingyun talked mostly about poetry with her poetic friends—they might not have had many other topics to discuss. However, growing up together with Jingkun, Bingyun was still obsessed with their conversations on poetry. Qu Jingkun recalled that whenever they had a chance to get together, the two cousins stayed in each other’s company all the time, chatting about poetry:

Each time when she came back to our paternal home, she sat with me side by side or put her bed next to mine, talking poetry until dawn 每遇歸寧日, 與余促坐聯床, 談詩達旦 (Qu Jingkun, Postscript).

How fascinated with poetry they were!

¹⁵⁸ RGCZ, pp. 1711-3.

Male, Senior and Junior Members

(1) Qu Baojun

Qu Baojun 屈保均 (courtesy name Yishi 貽石) was Qu Bingyun's only sibling. Both of them were under the guardianship of their grandparents after their parents died. Although there is no reference to Baojun sharing Bingyun's interest in poetry, according to the "Domestic Regulations" of the Book of Rites, a sister and her brother can be raised and educated together until one of them reaches age nine;¹⁵⁹ Bingyun and Baojun were very likely both taught similar subjects by their erudite grandfather.

Qu Baojun was the inheritor of both the scholarship and the moral traditions of the Qus. He once was appointed Assistant Prefect of Zhaoqing 肇慶通判 (Zhaoqing tongpan), but for some reason he took office as the Acting Vice Prefect of Chaozhou 潮州同知 (Chaozhou tongzhi). In Chaozhou, he advocated classical learning by restoring academic institutions there, using regulations of the most prestigious academy in the Tang dynasty, the Academy of Bailudong 白鹿洞書院, to run them. Baojun was a "pure official" who never accepted bribes. We are told that he refused a total of a thousand pieces of gold from the past and current Magistrates of Chenghai 澄海 who wanted to bribe him for personal purposes. Baojun died of disease while in service, and since he did not leave any money behind, his family had to sell his books and paintings to raise enough to bring his coffin back home.¹⁶⁰

(2) Qu Songman and Ji Lanyun

Qu Songman was Baojun's eldest son. When he was a child, Qu Bingyun brought him to live with her and treated him as her own child. She started his education early and ensured his interest in poetry. Qu Songman became a good poet and painter

¹⁵⁹ See Sun Xidan comp., pp. 754-73.

¹⁶⁰ *RGCZ*, p. 2134.

when he grew up and authored the *Draft Left Behind from the Ink Flower Immortal House* 墨花仙館遺稿 (*Mohua xianguan yigao*).¹⁶¹

Ji Lanyun 季蘭韻 (courtesy name 湘娟) was Qu Songman's wife. She also left a work behind, entitled *Collected Works from the Chu Orchid Land Tower* (twelve chapters) 楚畹閣集十二卷 (*Chuwan'geji shierjuan*), which was printed together with Qu Songman's poetry.¹⁶²

(3) Bao Yin, Bao Wei and Bao Fen

Bao Yin was Qu Bingyun's maternal aunt and a fellow-disciple of Yuan Mei (Bao Yin's poetic relationship with Qu Bingyun will be described in Chapter IV). Bao Wei and Bao Fen were Qu Bingyun's maternal uncles (See biographical accounts of them in Chapter II). They also associated with Qu Bingyun in poetry writing within the scope of the family, since Bao Wei wrote a preface to the Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower and many comments on its poems, while Bao Fen wrote a biography of Qu Bingyun included in this collection.

Qu Bingyun's use of poetry is both unique and impressive. Her poetry functioned as a bridge making her relationships harmonious and intimate across generations, social status and lineages in the domestic circles.

In a traditional Chinese family, the bride had to face several potential difficult relationships: with her mother-in-law 婆媳 (*poxi*), with her sisters-in-law 姑嫂 (*gusao*), with the wives of her husband's brothers 妯娌 (*zhouli*), and possibly with the concubine/s 妻妾 (*qiqie*) as well. So, the texts on women's moral education all include instructions on these relationships. For example, in his *Rules for Women*, Lü Kun tells daughters-in-law: "[A bride] bears another surname, but lives with those who were born of the same parents, which

¹⁶¹ Qu Songman's *Draft Left Behind from the Ink Flower Immortal House* 墨花仙館遺稿 (*Mohua xian'guan yigao*), printed by Mohua xian'guan in 1847, is found in the Libraries of Beijing University and Changshu.

¹⁶² This collection was printed together with Qu Songman's *Draft Left Behind from the Ink Flower Immortal House*. See Note 161 in this chapter.

constitutes grounds for quarrels and arguments”異姓而處人骨肉之間構釁起爭。¹⁶³ His father Lü Desheng 呂得勝, who wrote a colloquial version of the textbook for women’ moral education called *The Language of Female Children* 女小兒語 (*Nüxiaoeryu*), asks the bride to yield to her husband’s sisters and his brothers’ wives, warning “If you do not yield to the younger sisters and those wives, which of them would yield to you?” 小姑妯娌你不讓他那個讓你。¹⁶⁴ As for the wife-concubine relationship, the most bothersome of all, Lü Kun reasons, “The wife and the concubines were not born of the same parents, and none of them have the virtue that Ehuang and Nüying had, but they are expected to be with one heart and to go the same way. Isn’t this difficult?” 嫡妾非同胞之親, 無英皇之賢而欲其志同行也不亦難乎¹⁶⁵

Qu Bingyun was involved in all these potentially troublesome relationships, except for the one with the wives of her husband’s brothers. To make matters worse, she had two apparent weaknesses which could easily have resulted in being despised by her marital family. First, she could not give birth to children. The infertility of a wife was regarded as a serious offence to tradition listed as the second reason among the “Seven Reasons for Divorcing a Wife” 七去 (“Qiqu”).¹⁶⁶ The other weakness was that she had long ago contracted a liver disease and often had to interrupt housework, including waiting on her mother-in-law.

In spite of all the above troublesome relationships and weaknesses, Qu Bingyun became the favorite daughter-in-law of the Zhao family. She was the soul mate of the concubine Xu Xiaoshu, an intimate of her husband’s younger sister Zhao Ruobing, as well as the sworn sister of the first daughter-in-law of the Qus, Qian Zhen, and the second one, Ye Wanyi. This was largely because poetry helped her manage these relationships successfully. As we have seen, through poetic association with her relatives and maids, Qu not only developed physical proximity but also emotional intimacy with them. In the course of her and other

¹⁶³ Zhang Fuqing comp., p. 79.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 55.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 81.

¹⁶⁶ The other reasons specified are “not being filial to parents-in-law,” “committing adultery,” “jealousness,” “having a nasty disease,” “talkativeness,” and “committing stealing.” 不順父母, 淫, 妒, 有惡疾, 多言, 盜竊. See Zhang Fuqing comp., p. 59.

family members composing verse and reading and commenting on each other's poems, they communicated their innermost feelings to one another, eliminating any psychological distance among them.

Qu Bingyun wrote poems in her social interaction with other family members, from which she got inspirations for writing poems and topics to write about. Her poems were meant to be read by the people whom she associated. Qu's poetic creation was "a social action," as Marilyn M. Cooper describes it. Also, as Nancy Chodorow suggests, seeking and maintaining good relations with others in the family circles instinctively motivated Qu to write poetry. Unlike writers who, as Cooper assumes, treat writing as an intellectual adventure, Qu Bingyun and her familial poetic fellows used poetry in a practical way, treating it as part of their life. Thus, they connected poetry with domestic life and specifically with women's experience.

By way of connecting and interacting with her domestic poetry circles, Qu Bingyun got motivated and increasingly involved in poetry. Hence, her poetic concepts started to form and her techniques improved. These domestic poetry circles established Qu's poetic-social network before she entered Yuan Mei's female disciple group, cultivated her talent and prepared her road to future accomplishment as an expert poet.

Chapter IV **Becoming a Member of Yuan Mei's Female Disciple Group**

It was in the third month of 1794 that Qu Bingyun first paid her respects to Yuan Mei as a disciple. Yuan Mei recounted this event in a paragraph written after reading two chapters of the poetry manuscripts that Qu brought him when they met:

Wanxian is the granddaughter of my *Tongnian*¹⁶⁷ of 1738, Mr. Qu Zengfa (Xingyuan). In the third month of Jiayin (1794) when I passed through Mount Yu on a boat trip, Wanxian paid her respects to me under the blossoming cherry trees and acknowledged me as her mentor. She then handed me two chapters of her poems [to read] 宛仙爲余戊午同年屈君省園之女孫。甲寅三月，舟過虞山，宛仙拜余於海棠花下。呈詩二卷。(Yuan Mei, Preface)

Also, as Qu's closest friend and one of Yuan's favourite female disciples, Xi Peilan was very happy about the event and wrote a poem to celebrate it.¹⁶⁸

In Yuan's female disciple group, besides Yuan himself, Qu Bingyun mainly associated with Xi Peilan, Gui Maoyi, and Bao Yin who lived in the same region as Qu. She also had some contact with the members outside her region, such as Zhang Yuzhen of Songjiang 松江 (modern Shanghai), Qian Mengtian of Wuxing 吳興 (modern Huzhou), and Wang Qian of Suzhou. Furthermore, Qu Bingyun had much contact with the male followers of Yuan Mei. Through the interactions with these able poets, Qu became an expert poet and gained recognition in the Mount Yu region and beyond.

4.1 Yuan Mei's Teaching of Poetry to Gentry Women

¹⁶⁷ *Tongnian* 同年 ("Same Year") or *Nian Xiongdi* 年兄弟 ("Year-Brother") refers to the examinees who passed the Civil Service Examination in the same year.

¹⁶⁸ This poem is found in Xi Peilan's poetry collection entitled "Hearing that Wanxian Has also Met Master Yuan Mei as a Disciple, I Am Extremely Happy and Present [Them with] This Verse-Letter" 聞宛仙亦以弟子禮見隨園，喜極奉簡 ("Wen Wanxian yiyi dizili jian Suiyuan, xijifengjian"), Xi, 3:1b.

Yuan Mei was one of the most outstanding poets of the Qing dynasty, due to the uniqueness of his personality and the originality of his work. His theory of "nature and inspiration" 性靈 (*xingling*), advocating free self-expression, was very well-received by poetry circles, and his poetry impressed readers by its sincerity, originality and creative use of tradition. More strikingly, in his late years, Yuan Mei devoted himself to literary education for women. Although he was not the first man who took on female disciples, for the first time in Chinese history, he openly associated with a large group of young women and taught them poetry, a bold action against Confucian tradition.

Yuan Mei accepted his first female disciple, Chen Shulan 陳淑蘭, in 1783, when he was sixty-seven years old. Over the next seven years, five women poets asked him to be their mentor and were accepted by him. From 1790 onward, however, Yuan took the initiative and sought out women poets to be his disciples and openly associated with them until his death in 1798.

Fifty-six Female Disciples

How many women writers were members of Yuan Mei's disciple group? Who were they? Scholars' opinions regarding the exact number of Yuan Mei's female disciples vary. Jiang Dunfu 蔣敦復, in his "Anecdotes of Yuan Mei: Table of the Names of Yuan Mei's Female Disciples" 隨園軼事: 隨園女弟子姓氏譜 ("Suiyuan yishi: Suiyuan nüdizi xingshi pu")¹⁶⁹ published in 1864, suggests that Yuan had fifty-seven female disciples. However, Jiang's table only lists thirty-seven names, among which so far just thirteen have been confirmed as actual disciples of Yuan Mei.¹⁷⁰ Jiang does not

¹⁶⁹ YMQJ (VII): *Anecdotes of Yuan Mei* 隨園軼事 (*Suiyuan yishi*, hereafter YS), pp. 100-4.

¹⁷⁰ The thirty-seven names on Jiang Dunfu's list are Zhou Yuezun 周月尊 (courtesy name Yixiang 漪香), Fang Yunyi 方筠儀 (courtesy name Langqing 琅青), Gui Maoyi, Wang Shen 汪紳 (courtesy name Xunwei 巽爲, sobriquet Shunzai 順哉), Tao Qingyu 陶慶餘 (courtesy name Shansheng 善生), Ge Xiuying 葛秀英 (courtesy name Yuzhen 玉貞), Wang Qiong 王瓊 (courtesy name Biyun 碧雲), Yang Qionghua 楊瓊華 (courtesy name Peiying 佩英), Zhang Yuwu 張玉梧 (courtesy name Qiuyun 秋雲), Zhang Jue 張珏 (courtesy name Yuquan 玉全), Zhang Bingyi 張秉彝 (courtesy name Xingquan 性全), Ye Lingyi 葉令儀 (courtesy name Yixin 翼心), Zhou Xingwei 周星薇 (courtesy name Tianxiang 天香), Chen Danyi 陳淡宜 (courtesy name Juren 菊人), Song Jingjuan 宋靜娟 (courtesy name Shouyi 守一), Pan Suxin 潘素心 (courtesy name Peilan 佩蘭), Gao Yunzhen 高韞珍 (courtesy name Danxian 淡仙), Wang Heng 王姮 (courtesy name Xiyang 榭影), Jin Dui 金兌 (courtesy name unknown), Yan Jingfu 嚴靜甫 (courtesy name unknown), Wu Li'nian 吳荔娘 (courtesy name unknown), Zhuang Tao 莊濤 (courtesy name Songshi 松石), Wutong 梧桐 (this is a given name; her surname is unknown), Xiuxiang 袖香 (this

list the twenty other female disciples whose works were included in Yuan Mei's poetry selection.¹⁷¹ Since there is no such version of the selected poems extant today, we cannot know exactly who the identities of those women mentioned were. A modern Chinese scholar and expert on Yuan Mei studies, Wang Yingzhi 王英志, states that Yuan Mei had "more than forty female disciples." However he only lists thirty-nine out of that number.¹⁷²

A Japanese scholar, Goyama Kiwamu 合山究, has conducted a survey of Yuan's female disciples.¹⁷³ His resulting research paper entitled "The Female Disciples of Yuan Mei" 袁枚と女弟子たち ("En Bai to jodeishitachi") greatly helped me in tracing those disciples. I have tabulated the names of the disciples in the chronological order in which they joined Yuan's entourage (See "Appendix"). I mention only those women who have been confirmed as falling into one of the following categories:

is a given name; her surname is unknown), Yuexin 月心 (this is a given name; her surname is unknown), Wu Hui 吳蕙 (courtesy name Xiangyi 香宜), Huang Zhen 黃楨 (courtesy name Xiongyi 雄宜), Zhang Yaoying 張瑤英 (courtesy name unknown), Wang Yuzhen 汪玉軫 (courtesy name 宜秋 Yiqiu), Yuan Shufang 袁淑方 (courtesy name Liqing 麗卿), Wang Mingyu 汪銘玉 (courtesy name Hesheng 和馨), Shi Baoyin 史鮑印 (This is a mistaken name of Bao Yin. Yuan Mei's "Shi Baoyin" refers to Bao Zungu (Yin) of Changshu, see *YMQJ* (VI): *On Yuan Mei's Eightieth Birthday* 隨園八十壽言 (*Suiyuan bashi shouyan*, hereafter SY), p.107. Jiang mistakenly took her as the eldest sister of Bao Zhihui), Di Fang 狄方 (courtesy name Shaorou 少柔), Zhao Tongyao, Zhang Xunxiao 張洵霄 (courtesy name Lucheng 露城), Bi Zhizhu (Hui) 畢智珠 (courtesy name Lianting 蓮汀), and Ma Cuiyan 馬翠燕 (courtesy name Tianxiang 添香).

Among the above names, so far only Gui Maoyi, Wang Shen, Zhang Bingyi, Pan Suxin, Jin Dui, Zhuang Tao, Wutong, Xiuxiang, Yuexin, Wang Yuzhen, Yuan Shufang, Zhang Xunxiao, and Bi Zhizhu have been confirmed as actual disciples of Yuan Mei. See Appendix, "A Table of Yuan Mei's Female Disciples" in this dissertation.

¹⁷¹ This poetry selection was likely a version of the *Selected Poems by Yuan Mei's Female Disciples* and that the twenty women poets mentioned in it were the key disciples.

¹⁷² The names on Wang Yingzhi's list are Tao Qingyu, Jin Yi 金逸, Jin Dui, Wang Bizhu 王碧珠, Zhang Xunxiao, Zhou Yuezun, Yan Ruizhu 嚴蕊珠, Wang Yuzhen, Wu Qiongxian 吳瓊仙, Yuan Shufang, Gui Maoyi, Qu Bingyun, Xi Peilan, Bi Hui (Zhizhu), Liao Yunjin 廖雲錦, Zhang Yuzhen 張玉珍, Zhang Yuwu, Bao Zhihui 鮑之蕙, Lu Yuansu 盧元素, Xu Dexin 許德馨, Qian Mengtian 錢孟鈿, Luo Qilan 駱綺蘭, Chen Shuying (Shulan) 陳淑英 (淑蘭, Wang writes, "Only one of them, Chen Shuying 陳淑英, was from Nanjing;" here, Wang mistakes Chen Shuying for Chen Shulan), Sun Yunfeng 孫雲風, Sun Yunhe 孫雲鶴, Zhang Yaoying, Wang Zuanzu 汪纘祖, Wang Shen, Wang Zhong 汪仲, Chen Changsheng 陳長生, Qian Lin 錢林, Sun Tingzhen 孫廷楨, Xu Yuxin 徐裕馨, Zhang Jue, Ye Lingyi, Pan Suxin, Wang Qian 王倩, Dai Lanying 戴蘭英, and Wang Yuru 王玉如. See Wang Yingzhi, *A Study of the Poetry School of "Nature and Inspiration" 性靈派研究 (Xinglingpai yanjiu)*, Shenyang: Liaoning University Press, 1998, p. 32.

¹⁷³ Goyama Kiwamu, "The Female Disciples of Yuan Mei" 袁枚と女弟子たち ("En Bai to jodeishitachi"), *Bungaku ronshu*, 31. (August, 1985), Kyushu: Bungakukenyukai, College of General Education, Kyushu University, pp. 113-54.

1. Those who attended one of three *Poetry Gatherings* 詩會 (*Shihui*) called by Yuan Mei. The first two gatherings took place at Lake Tower by West Lake in 1790 and 1792 respectively, and the third one at Brocade Grain Garden 繡谷園 (*Xiuguyuan*) in Suzhou in 1792.
2. Those who were depicted in the "Painting Thirteen Female Disciples Asking for Advice at Lake Tower" 隨園十三女弟子湖樓請業圖 ("Suiyuan shisan nūdizi hulou qingye tu") and its continuations.¹⁷⁴
3. Those who were mentioned in the *Selected Poems by Yuan Mei's Female Disciples* compiled by Yuan Mei.
4. Those who had personal contact with Yuan as disciples, where Yuan confirmed such a relationship.

Unlike Goyama, I exclude Wang Zhong, Wu Rouzhi 吳柔之, Zhang Yaoying, Yao Xiuying 姚秀英, Wang Qiong, Ju Jingwen 鞠靜文, and Jiang Wanyi 蔣宛儀 from Yuan Mei's female entourage. Wang Zhong was the younger sister of Wang Shen. The only connection between Wang Zhong and Yuan Mei is that Yuan asked Wang Shen to send his regards to Wang Zhong and to pass his poem to her.¹⁷⁵ Wu Rouzhi almost became a disciple. Wu regretted both not having asked Yuan to be her mentor when she first met him in 1788 and having to miss the gathering in 1790 due to an illness.¹⁷⁶ Zhang Yaoying was the wife of Yuan's nephew, Wang Jian'an 王建庵. Yuan mentioned her twice in his poetry talks and selected one of her poems for his *Continuation of Collected Poems of My Fellow Poets*.¹⁷⁷ However, no references can be found regarding her status as Yuan's disciple. There are also no references to the relationship between Yao Xiuying and Yuan, except for one poem by her that was selected for Yuan's *Continuation of Collected Poems of My Fellow Poets*. As for Wang Qiong, the granddaughter of Wang Wenzhi, Yuan highly appreciated her poems and selected some of them for his poetry talks and *Continuation of Collected Poems of My Fellow*

My thanks to Dorothy Ko for introducing me to this article.

¹⁷⁴ "Thirteen Female Disciples Asking Yuan Mei for Advice at Lake Tower" actually includes eighteen women poets in total. See a discussion of this painting in this chapter.

¹⁷⁵ *YMQJ* (V): CD, p. 222.

¹⁷⁶ See Wu Rouzhi's poem "Seeing off Master Yuan Mei at Lake Tower," *YMQJ* (VI): XT, p. 224.

¹⁷⁷ See *YMQJ* (III): SH, 25 & 26 of v 10, pp. 325-6, and *YMQJ* (VI): XT, p. 224.

Poets.¹⁷⁸ However, when Yuan wanted to visit her, she declined on moral grounds.¹⁷⁹ Ju Jingwen was a poet of Shandong province. Her poems were introduced to Yuan by Sun Yunfeng, but otherwise there were no contacts between the two. This can probably be attributed to the great distance between their residences. As for Jiang Wanyi, *Pure Talks from the Paulownia Shade* 桐陰清話 (*Tongyin qinghua*) does not give any proof for its claim that she was Yuan's disciple.¹⁸⁰

I add Qian Mengtian to the list because her uncle Qian Weiqiao 錢維喬 (1739 - 1806) recommended her as a disciple to Yuan.¹⁸¹ Qian also attended the 1790 gathering at West Lake. The five anonymous women who were accepted in 1797 should also be taken into account because Yuan regarded them as his disciples. However, besides the poem written by Yuan that describes his joy of having these women as his disciples, no further references are found to their status.

Three Poetry Gatherings

From 1790 to 1792 Yuan called three gatherings for women poets. This was the most significant action that Yuan took in terms of acting as a mentor for women poets. Through these gatherings, he actively sought literary women and taught them poetry openly.

On the 13th of the fourth month, 1790, Yuan Mei called the first gathering of thirteen literary women at West Lake in Hangzhou to discuss poetry.¹⁸² In the late third month or the early fourth month, Yuan Mei went to Hangzhou to sweep the graves of his ancestors.¹⁸³ He lodged at the house of Sun Jiale 孫嘉樂, the Surveillance Commissioner, at West Lake. Sun Jiale was an admirer of Yuan, and his two daughters, Sun Yunfeng and Sun Yunhe, had been Yuan's disciples for one or two years. Yuan asked Sun Yunfeng to invite, on his behalf, local gentry women for a poetry gathering.

¹⁷⁸ See *YMQJ* (III): *SH*, p. 595 and *YMQJ* (VI): *XT*, p. 238.

¹⁷⁹ *Shi*, 6:13b.

¹⁸⁰ Ni Hongyun 倪鴻雲 merely states that Jiang Wanyi "learned to write poetry from Yuan Mei and thus she was called 'a female disciple of Yuan Mei'" 從隨園老人學詩稱女弟子. *Pure Talks from the Paulownia Shade* 桐陰清話 (*Tongyin qinghua*), reprint, Shenjiang, 1874, 5:26a.

¹⁸¹ Qian Weiqiao, *Collected Works of Zhuchu* 竹初全集 (*Zhuchu quanji*), v 3, Goyama, p. 133.

¹⁸² *YMQJ* (III): *BY*, 19 of v 1, p. 553, *YMQJ* (V): *CD*, p. 221, and *YMQJ* (VII): *NS*, pp. 28 and 30.

¹⁸³ A ceremony of paying respects to the deceased people.

While it is said that thirteen women who brought their own poems or paintings attended this gathering, the presence of only ten women at this first gathering has been confirmed. Their names are Sun Yunfeng, Sun Yunhe, Zhang Bingyi, Xu Yuxin, Wang Shen, Wang Zuzan, Wu Shushen, Sun Tingzhen, Feng Hui, and Qian Mengtian.¹⁸⁴ The gathering was held in Lake Tower of the Sun house, which was situated at the foot of the lakeside hills and faces West Lake. Yuan hosted a banquet, in which the women "surrounded the Star of Longevity" 環聚於老人星側,¹⁸⁵ listening intently to him talking about poetry. They asked him various questions about their writing and reading of poetry, and Yuan answered them with great patience. Both Yuan Mei and his female followers were absorbed in the discussions, as described in Sun Yunfeng's preface to the "Painting of Thirteen Female Disciples Asking for Advice at Lake Tower,"

Asking about diction,

they left wine glasses idle.

問字樽閑

Talking about the Classics,

they did not notice dishes getting cold.

談經席冷。¹⁸⁶

In addition to discussions, some of the women had composed poems particularly for this occasion. For example, Yuan described Wang Shen at the gathering,

Facing guests, she waved her brush writing down her poem, using a talent like Xi

Daoyun¹⁸⁷ to depict the character of the flowered hairpin. 對客揮毫, 以詠絮之才,

寫簪花之格¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁴ Sun Yunfeng's preface to "Farewell At Lake Tower" (*YMQJ* (VII): *NS*, p. 30) mentions that Sun Yunfeng and her sister joined the gathering. Also, when talking about this gathering, Yuan Mei wrote, "thirteen women poets, such as Zhang Bingyi, Xu Yuxin, Wang Shen et al, gathered at Lake Tower to learn poetry from me" 女公子張秉彝, 徐裕馨, 汪紳等十三人以詩受業, 大會於湖樓 (*YMQJ* (I): *SJ*, p. 793). Furthermore, Wang Zuzan, Wang Shen, Wu Shushen, Sun Tingzhen, Feng Hui, and Qian Mengtian each wrote a farewell poem on the occasion of the 1790 gathering, mostly with the title of "Farewell to Master Yuan Mei at the Treasure Stone Villa." These poems were recorded in *Continuation of Collected Poems of My Fellow Poets*. *YMQJ* (VI): *XT*, pp. 226-8.

¹⁸⁵ *YMQJ* (V): *CD*, p. 221.

¹⁸⁶ *YMQJ* (VII): *NS*, p. 29.

¹⁸⁷ Xie Daoyun 謝道韞 (ca. 350) was a well-known female poet of the Jin Dynasty (265-420). It was said that Xie Daoyun was a prodigy. When she was a child, her uncle, Xie An 謝安, once asked her, "Which poem is the best in the *Classic of Poetry*?" Xie Daoyun answered, "Ji Fu wrote an eulogy, / which is mild like pure wind." "吉甫作頌, 穆如清風."¹⁸⁷ Xie An commented, "This answer contains a poet's deepest

Both Yuan and the women were pleased with the gathering and, Yuan proudly spread word of his undertaking to many of his friends.

Some two years later, Yuan held two more poetry gatherings, one in Hangzhou and the other in Suzhou. It was in the late second month of 1792 when Yuan returned from Mount Tiantai, located in east Zhejiang province. On his way home, he stopped at Hangzhou and called a gathering of female poets in the Sun house at West Lake. Fifteen women were invited, but only seven attended. We know the names of five of these seven women, namely, Xu Yuxin, Qian Lin, and Pan Suxin in addition to the two daughters, Yunfeng and Yunhe, of the Sun family. Yuan Mei recounted this gathering in his *Continuation of the Poetry Talks at Sui Garden*,

This year, I called a poetry gathering of seven female disciples of mine in Lake Tower. The prefect Ming Xizhe sailed from Qingbo Gate to visit us. He chatted with those women for quite a while and came to know that they were all gentry women from respectable families, with whom his family has maintained a friendship for generations. He therefore lent his luxurious boat to this group of women for admiring the view. He also presented them with some silk blankets and bead curtains. He rode on horse back to his official mansion. Shortly after, he sent two tables of delicious food along with seven jade *Ruyis*,¹⁸⁹ brushes, and fragrant beads as gifts to these gentry women. At that time, this pleasurable affair was on everybody's lips in the gentry circles. 今年,余在湖樓招女弟子七人作詩會。太守明希哲先生(保)從清波門打槳見訪,與諸女子茶話良久;知是大家閨秀,與公皆有世誼。乃留所坐玻璃畫船,鑄褥珠簾,爲群女游山之用。而獨自騎馬還衙。少頃,遣人送華筵二席,玉如意七枝,及紙筆香珠等物,分贈香閨爲潤筆,一時紳士艷傳韻事¹⁹⁰

interest and charm." When it was snowing, Xie An uttered a poetic line: "What is it like when these white snowflakes swirl" 白雪紛紛何所以? A cousin of Xie Daoyun replied with a line: "Sprinkling salt in the sky may compare to it" 散鹽空中差可擬。Xie Daoyun: "Not as good as the trope: 'willow catkins rise in the wind'" 未若柳絮隨風起。Xie An was very happy with Xie Daoyun's line. People therefore praised Xie Daoyun for having "a talent for chanting willow catkins." See Fang Xuanling 房玄齡, *A History of the Jin Dynasty: Biography: Wang Ningzhi's Wife by the Surname of Xie* 晉書: 列傳: 王凝之妻謝氏 (*Jinshu: Liezhuan: Wang Ningzhi qi Xieshi liezhuan*), Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974, p. 2516.

¹⁸⁸ YMQJ (V): CD, p. 221.

¹⁸⁹ *Ruyi* is an S-shaped ornamental object made out of jade, which is a symbol of good luck.

¹⁹⁰ YMQJ (III): BY, 44 of v 5, p. 670.

The gathering lasted the entire day. The sequence of their activities on that day seems to be as follows: In the morning, they assembled at Lake Tower where Yuan Mei and the women in attendance discussed poetry for a while. Wang Wenzhi then appeared as he happened to be in Hangzhou at the time, talking to the women and inscribing his calligraphy on fans for some of them. Ming Xizhe then came to chat further with the women, and around noon the women and Yuan had a banquet, the food of which was part of Ming's gift. In the early afternoon, Yuan and his female disciples went outside to admire the view along the northern hills. In the late afternoon, they returned to Lake Tower and had some food again while each composed a poem with an appointed rhyme. Finally, Yuan presented the women with writing paper, brushes, and inkstones, talking about poetry with the women and commenting on the poems, which they brought him. He even kept talking at the banquet and while admiring the view of the hills.¹⁹¹

Immediately after the gathering by West Lake in Hangzhou, Yuan Mei stopped again at Suzhou on his way home and called another gathering of women poets who lived in the area. He asked Jiang Zhu, a local female poet, to invite female poets on his behalf, or as Jiang wrote, "I acted as messenger to ask each of those famous gentry women to come" 招諸名媛, 珠爲使者.¹⁹² The total number of the participants is unknown, but according to the poems selected in Yuan's *Continuation of Collected Poems of My Fellow Poets*, Zhang Zilan, Gu Kun, You Danxian, Jin Dui, Zhou Lilan, and He Yuxian were participants in the gathering. Jin Yi lived in the area but was unable to come due to illness. Jiang Zhu also did not attend, although she acted as a messenger prior to the gathering. The gathering was held at Xiugu Garden where Yuan Mei's host, Sima Qingya 司馬晴崖, prepared a banquet for Yuan and his female followers. Yuan read the poems the women had brought to him, commented on them, and assigned the women to write poems for the occasion. The participants who met Yuan at the gathering became his disciples.

¹⁹¹ YMQJ (VII): NS, pp. 28-30.

¹⁹² YMQJ (VI): XT, p. 235.

The Nature and Method of Yuan Mei's Teaching

Yuan Mei had brilliant insights into literary education, and his disapproval of three types of teaching practised by early scholars reveals his thoughts about the teaching of poetry. First, Yuan opposed references to spiritual and abstract matters in teaching:

The sages' way of teaching always focuses on material and concrete matters, not on abstract matters. Therefore, the 'orthodox words' include the *Classic of Poetry*, the *Book of History*, and the *Rites of Zhou*, but not the *Classic of Changes*. This is because the sages did not want to show off their brightness and intelligence by dealing with those abstruse and mysterious issues. 聖人教人, 總在下學, 而不在上達. 故所雅言者, 有詩書禮, 而無周易, 不肯以幽深玄遠之言, 自誇高妙¹⁹³

Second, Yuan disagreed with the generally accepted ideas that poetry students should study the classics before writing poetry. He said,

Recently, a notable poet has been teaching the writing of poetry. He has been telling his students that they must read all the classics and their commentaries before writing poetry, which they would be able to pass down to later generations. 近日有巨公教人作詩, 必窮經讀注疏, 然後落筆, 詩乃可傳¹⁹⁴

Third, Yuan Mei argued against placing emphasis on technique and metrical skills when teaching one how to write. He stated,

Scholars in phonetics do not need to be good at poetry. [In contrast,] weren't Li Bai, Du Fu, Han Yu, and Su Shi clumsy at the pronunciation of their poetry? [Also,] when Mao Lumen¹⁹⁵ taught writing prose, he especially educated the students in the skills of "beginning, continuing, turning, and concluding," but the prose by Mao's entourage

¹⁹³ YMQJ (V): *Remaining Writings from the Correspondence* 牘外余言 (*Duwai yuyan*, hereafter YY), p. 4.

¹⁹⁴ YMQJ (III): BY, 7 of v 1, p. 548.

¹⁹⁵ Mao Kun 茅坤 (1512-1601, courtesy name Shunfu 順甫, sobriquet Lumen 鹿門) was a famous scholar and writer of classical prose during the Ming Dynasty.

was pretty mediocre What this hints at is really worth contemplating. 講韻學者, 必不工詩. 李杜韓蘇不鏗鏗於反切引證也? 茅鹿門講文, 專事起承轉合, 而鹿門之古文甚庸. . . . 此中消息, 最耐人思¹⁹⁶

Yuan did not consider poetry as being something abstruse, but rather as a kind of written form expressing the inner feelings of human beings. Therefore, a poet mentor should not elaborate endlessly on profound principles to his students. Also, as poetry writing is not a matter of learning, the study of the classics or of phonetics is not necessarily a prerequisite for composing a good poem. In addition, poetry writing is not a matter of technique but rather an expression of the "nature and inspiration" of human beings. It would harm the expression of spontaneous inspiration if a poet is too immersed in developing one's skill.

These three "taboos" show that Yuan attempted to make poetry writing an approachable, tangible, and spontaneous activity: a person who wanted to write poetry did not need to be concerned with the profound classics or complicated techniques. The only thing he or she needed to have was true "nature and inspiration." In Yuan's teaching practices, advising female disciples individually on their specific works was the major part, which includes "personal consultation," assigning works and commenting on completed works.

(1) Personal Consultation

"Asking about diction" 問字 (*wenzi*) refers to one's personal consultation about writing, and was a frequent term used in the associations of Yuan with his female disciples. When they met with Yuan, the women usually brought in some finished or unfinished poems and consulted him regarding advice on diction. They also asked Yuan some questions they encountered in their study of other subjects, such as the classics. When Luo Qilan came to see Yuan for the first time, she had her poetry with her and was prepared to "ask about words." The following poem she wrote describes their first meeting:

¹⁹⁶ *YMQJ* (V): YY, p. 7.

I heard your fame twenty years ago	
when I was in the woman's quarters.	閨閣聞名二十秋，
But I did not meet with “Jingzhou” until this morning.	今朝才得識荊州。
I hurried myself to the window of your study	
asking about diction.	匆匆問字書窗下，
For the time being,	
I handed in my new poems as my tuition.	權把新詩當束修 ¹⁹⁷

“Jingzhou” alludes to Yuan Mei. In his letter “To Han Jingzhou” 與韓荊州書 (“Yu Han Jingzhou shu”),¹⁹⁸ Li Bai quotes a saying, “Do not hope to be born as a Marquis above ten thousand people, / I only wish to meet Han Jingzhou” 生不用萬戶侯，/ 但願一識韓荊州, to praise Han Zhaozong 韓朝宗 who held the position of Military Chief 長史 (*Changshi*) in Jingzhou. Like Yuan Mei, Han liked to promote young and less advanced people or recommended them for a higher position, and therefore he was very famous in elite circles. This poem illustrates a typical conversation at the meetings between Yuan and his female poetry disciples. Personal consultation was the most practical way for such female poets to obtain a clear answer from an experienced poet regarding a particular problem. Yuan Mei preferred this particular method of teaching poetry, openly offering his insights into the particular choice of words in a poem. Whenever he gathered with his disciples, he reminded them to bring their poems.

However, traditional Chinese society placed many obstacles between Yuan and his female disciples, which made their meetings difficult. For example, shortly before her death, Jin Yi stated regrettably that she had not had the opportunity to meet Yuan and been unable to ask him many questions related to poetry.¹⁹⁹ Yuan and his female disciples sometimes wrote to each other to deal with the problems that the women encountered, Yuan's letters, "In Answer to Lady Sun Yunfeng" 答孫碧梧夫人 (“Da Sun Biwu furen”), "To Lady Qian Mengtian" 寄浣青夫人 (“Ji Wanqing furen”), "To

¹⁹⁷ Luo, 1:12:a.

¹⁹⁸ Li Bai, *Complete Works of Li Bai* 李太白全集 (*Li Taibai quanji*), compiled by Wang Qi 王琦, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977, p. 1239.

¹⁹⁹ *YMQJ* (II): WAIJ, p. 587.

Lady Pan Suxin" 寄潘素心夫人 ("Ji Pan Suxin furen") and "To My Cousin Wang Shen" 與汪順哉世妹 ("Yu Wang Shunzhai shimei") having been written for this particular purpose.²⁰⁰

In one of her poems, Sun Yunfeng mentioned that Yuan lectured to his disciples when they gathered at West Lake: "Why was I so lucky to attend his lectures at a banquet. /In the famous hill, everywhere, he held a teacher's pointer" 安得講筵爲弟子, 名山歲處執吟鞭.²⁰¹ Yuan Mei might have lectured briefly when he gathered with his disciples at West Lake, but he was not likely to have given separate academic lectures.

(2) Assigning Works

Yuan sometimes made his disciples write poems. At the end of the gathering in 1790, he assigned each disciple a rhyme to compose a poem on the topic of farewell. Sun Yunfeng, for example, was given the rhyme, "gui" 歸; Sun Yunhe got the rhyme, "lin" 臨; and Qian Lin, the rhyme "shan" 山.²⁰² In addition to this, at the end of the Suzhou gathering, all the women in attendance wrote a poem with the same title, "We Assemble at Xiugu Garden to See off Master Yuan Mei Who Is Returning to Jinling" 集鏞谷園送隨園先生還金陵 ("Ji Xiuguyuan song Suiyuan xiansheng huai Jinling"). In his personal interactions with his female disciples, Yuan often asked them to inscribe paintings or to reply to some of his poems. For example, he requested Sun Yunfeng, Qu Bingyun, Qian Lin, Lu Yuansu, and Wu Xiaqiong, respectively, to inscribe the painting of the "Thirteen Female Disciples Asking Yuan Mei for Advice at Lake Tower." He also asked several of them to inscribe the "Painting of an Elegant Gathering" 雅集圖 ("Yajitu") of his fellow male poets and himself. Although Yuan usually specified requirements when he assigned works to the women, they were quite simple and straightforward, as shown in the following passage, which is from a letter to Wang Shen,

²⁰⁰ YMQJ (V): CD, pp. 108, 123, 174 and 222.

²⁰¹ YMQJ (VII): NS, p. 26, YMQJ (VI): XT, p. 226.

²⁰² Ibid., pp. 26, 82, and 94.

I am attaching a fan on which I inscribed my poem, "Impromptu Verse on the Events at Lake Tower," to this letter in order for you to reply with a poem, . . . Please just write your own inspiration. You do not need to follow the original rhymes strictly or the number of two poems. 寄上書扇一柄<<湖樓即事>>詩求世妹和之, . . . 隨諸君興之所到, 不必拘原韻, 亦不必拒詩二首之數也²⁰³

Yuan Mei encouraged his female disciples to publish, an encouragement that made them work harder in order to produce high quality poems. He often "solicited poems" 征詩 (*zhengshi*) or called for submissions from women poets for his poetry talks and anthologies. Some of his female disciples, such as Qu Bingyun, Sun Yunhe, and Wang Bizhu, gratefully mentioned that Yuan had solicited some of their poems.²⁰⁴ Sun Yunfeng also mentioned that Yuan delegated her to collect women's poems.²⁰⁵ Due to his fame as a poet, it was a great honour for poets to have their works included in the *Poetry Talks* and other selections that he compiled.

Many of Yuan's female disciples were bestowed this honour. In addition to including a number of works by women poets in his *Poetry Talks*, *Continuation of the Collected Poems by My Fellow Poets*, and *Collected Poems in Celebration of My Eightieth Birthday*, Yuan also compiled two special poetry selections which contained only poems written by his female disciples. The first one, which is no longer extant and of unknown title, contained the poems of thirteen women, and the second one, entitled *Selected Poems by Yuan Mei's Female Disciples*, contains the works of twenty-eight women.

(3) Written Commentaries

Apart from oral commentaries, Yuan also provide written commentaries on his disciples' poems. For example, in the letter to Wang Shen, Yuan told Wang that he had made comments on her poems and selected some for his poetry talks:

²⁰³ *YMQJ* (V): *CD*, pp. 221-2.

²⁰⁴ See *YMQJ* (VI): *XT*, p. 224, and *YMQJ* (VII): *NS*, p. 104.

²⁰⁵ *YMQJ* (VI): *XT*, p. 233.

I have commented in writing on the poetry drafts that I took home with me, and I have chosen the most outstanding ones for inclusion in my poetry talks. 帶歸詩稿都以加墨擇尤佳者, 粹入詩話中²⁰⁶

Sun Yunfeng gratefully mentioned that "the Master made remarks on my poetry collection" 先生曾評余會卷.²⁰⁷ Yuan usually made brief comments on his female disciples' poems, and we will see such comments on Qu's poems in Chapter V. He also wrote passages evaluating the poetry of his female disciples in general; sometimes, he did this to preface his female disciples' collections before they were printed. So far we know that Qu Bingyun's and Xi Peilan's published collections include such passages as prefaces, and that the poetry collections of Chen Shulan, Pan Suxin, Qian Mengtian, Bao Zhihui, and Luo Qilan were published with prefaces by Yuan.²⁰⁸

It was the nature of Yuan's teaching method to offer individual advice to his disciples regarding the quality of their specific works. Based on this fact, we know that Yuan's relationship with his female disciples was more one of a "mentor and his disciples" than that of a "teacher and his students." In contemporary English usage, a "mentor" is defined as "an experienced person who advises and helps a less experienced person" while a "disciple" is "someone who believes in the ideas of a great teacher, especially a religious one, and tries to follow them." A "teacher" is "someone whose job is to teach," while "teaching" is "the general word for helping a person or group of people to learn something." A "student" is "someone who is studying at a school, or a university."²⁰⁹ These definitions indicate that the "mentor and disciples" relationship usually exists between an accomplished person in a certain field and his followers. A mentor and his disciples usually deal individually with practical issues and in an informal educational environment. The "teacher and students" relationship is between a learned person and learners who usually come together to examine both

²⁰⁶ *YMQJ* (V): *CD*, pp. 221-2.

²⁰⁷ *YMQJ* (VII): *NS*, p. 26.

²⁰⁸ Some of these prefaces are also found in *YMQJ*: Yuan Mei's preface to Chen Shulan's collection is found in *YMQJ* (II): *WAIJ*, p. 125, his preface to Pan Suxin's collection is in *YMQJ* (VI): *XT*, p. 231, and the one to Bao Zhihui's collection is in *YMQJ* (II): *WAIJ*, p. 137.

²⁰⁹ *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (third edition)*, Edinburgh Gate: Person Education Limited, 1995.

theoretical and practical issues in a formal educational environment. This is not the case with Yuan and the women poets who learned from him.

4.2 Qu Bingyun's Association with Yuan Mei and His Followers

While Yuan did not hold any further poetry gatherings after the one at Xiugu Garden in 1792, he still actively sought women poets to enlarge his entourage. In Changshu Yuan recruited four women poets, Xi Peilan, Qu Bingyun, Gui Maoyi, and Bao Yin, who became his leading female disciples soon after entering his group.

Contacts with Yuan Mei

Unlike most of her fellow female disciples, Qu Bingyun lacked a male relative who provided a connection with Yuan Mei. It is possible that Wu Weiguang introduced Qu Bingyun to Yuan Mei. Wu had recommended the best local male poets to Yuan as disciples or poetic friends, and he admired Qu very much for her poetry and acted as her poetic mentor before she met Yuan. Another person who may have served as an intermediary was Xi Peilan, who became Yuan's disciple one year prior to Qu.

However, Qu Bingyun and Yuan Mei had another reason to be on intimate terms, for her grandfather was a *Tongnian* of Yuan Mei. Both Qu Bingyun's grandfather, Qu Zengfa, and Yuan Mei passed the Civil Service Examination for the Provincial Graduate degree in 1738. In ancient China, the relationship between *Tongnian* was regarded as being almost as close as that between *Tongmen* 同門 ("Fellow Students") which itself was equivalent to that of siblings.

Since women were habitually restricted to the inner quarters, Yuan Mei usually made trips to meet his female disciples. Compared to the locations of most of her fellow poets in Yuan Mei's female disciple group, Qu's hometown, Changshu, was a fair distance from the places usually visited by Yuan, being located approximately two hundred kilometres southeast of Nanjing, the site of Yuan's estate, and about seventy kilometres northeast of Suzhou. However, since Changshu lies at the foot of Mount Yu, a scenic spot, the city was attractive to Yuan Mei. Once when he was visiting Suzhou he went there sightseeing. It is alleged that on the trip to Changshu, he happened to

look through a window at a beautiful girl weaving near the west gate of the city, and that he stared at her for quite a while until the locals spotted him and promptly attacked him.²¹⁰ After he accepted Xi Peilan and Qu Bingyun as his disciples, he sometimes made a detour to Mount Yu when traveling south to Nanjing. Qu Bingyun met with Yuan at least twice at her home, as shown by the following poetic line by her, in which the "thatched door" is a self-depreciatory expression for "my house" and "the literary star" is a simile for Yuan:

My thatched door, twice, was shined on by the literary star. 蓬扉兩度照文星
(2:16b)

According to Sun Yuanxiang, when Yuan Mei called on Qu Bingyun in her house, Qu served him tea made by herself from roses, orchids, plum blossoms, sweet scented osmanthus, and oranges called "Buddha's Hand." Yuan Mei enjoyed it very much and called it "Five Blossoms Dew" 五花露 ("wuhualu"). Sun attended the meeting and wrote a poem about this tea.²¹¹ Qu might have also met Yuan somewhere else, as for example in the house of Wu Weiguang or Xi Peilan, since it is said that Yuan visited Mount Yu three more times after 1794, the year in which he accepted Qu as his disciple.²¹² Yuan Mei and Qu Bingyun also planned to meet each other again in the eighth month of 1798 on his return from Mount Luming 鹿鳴, but unfortunately, Yuan died before that date.

There were many obstacles that hindered the meetings of Qu and Yuan. In addition to the inconvenient location of Qu's hometown, Qu had contracted liver disease and it became more and more serious as time passed. This might have prevented her from participating in more activities involving Yuan, but, in the course of their associations, Qu wrote three sets of five poems to Yuan, which provide some details about their contacts. More importantly, Yuan Mei wrote many comments on Qu's poetry collection, which are of essential significance for studying the interactions between the mentor and his disciple, to be discussed in the next chapter. The titles of those poems

²¹⁰ See *YMQJ* (VIII): *Anecdotes about Yuan Mei* 隨園軼事 (*Suiyuan yishi*, hereafter *YS*), p. 28. This book is frequently quite unreliable.

²¹¹ *TZJ*, 9:12b.

²¹² Wang Yingzhi, p. 296.

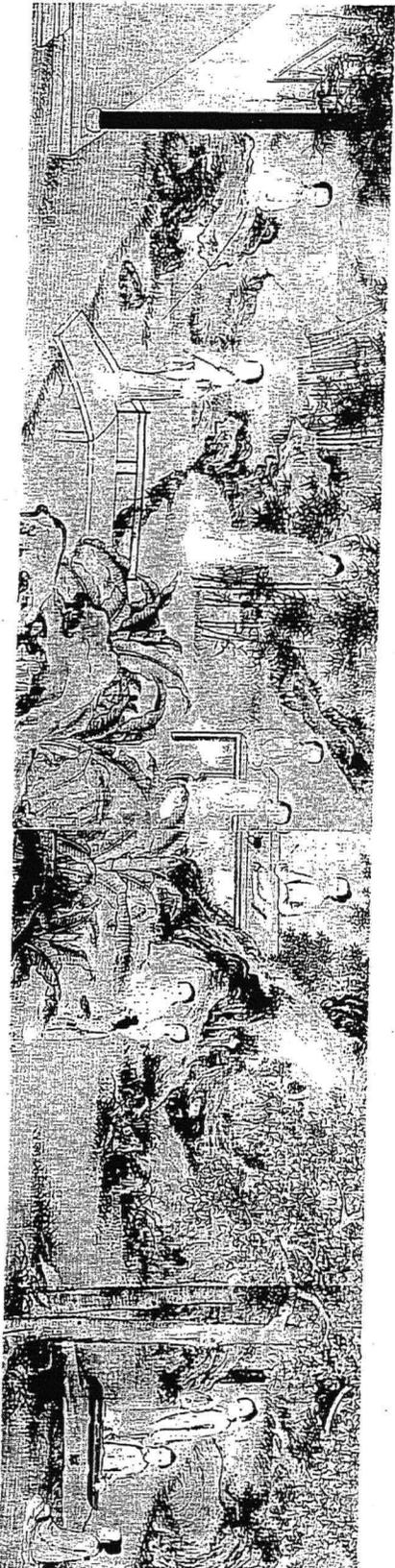
are: "Master Yuan Mei Ordered Me to Write on the Painting Thirteen Female Disciples (two poems)" 隨園先生命題十三女弟子圖 ("Suiyuan xiansheng mingti shisan nüdizi tu," 2:10b), "Five Days Before the Summer Solstice Master Yuan Mei Met Me and Presented Me with Red Damask; I Am Writing to Thank Him" 長至前五日, 蒙隨園先生見過, 並拜紅綾之賜; 賦詩呈謝 ("Changzhi qianwuri meng Suiyuan xiansheng jianguo, bingbai hongling zhichi, fushi chengxie," 2:16b-17a), and "Daohua [Xi Peilan] and I Became Sworn Sisters and Painted Together the 'Painting of the Orchids;' Master Yuan Mei Inscribed a Poem on it; I Am Writing This Poem by Using His Rhyme to Thank Him" 余與道華約爲姊妹, 因繪如蘭圖, 隨園先生題詩其上. 依韻呈謝 (Yuyu Daohua yuewei jiemei, yinhui rulantu, Suiyuan xiansheng tishi qishang, yiyun chengxie," 2:12a-b) These poems reveal how Qu and Yuan interacted with each other both as poets and as friends, writing poems on each other's paintings and presenting them to each other along with gifts of silk or poems.

Yuan Mei thought highly of Qu Bingyun. After reading the poetry manuscripts which Qu brought to Yuan when they first met, Yuan said: "When I was reading them I surprisingly got to know that Zhonglang had a successor!" 披閱之餘, 嘆中郎爲有後矣 (Yuan Mei, Preface). Zhonglang refers to the famous writer and calligrapher Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133-192) of the East Han Dynasty who was Cai Yan's father. In the chaos caused by the wars of the late Han, his daughter, Cai Yan, was kidnapped by Xiongnu 匈奴 soldiers and was forced to marry their king. Cai Yan stayed with the Xiongnu for twelve years and finally was ransomed back. She described her miserable experiences in a set of poems entitled "Eighteen Beats of the Xiongnu Flute" 胡笳十八拍 ("Hujia shiba po").²¹³ Cai Yan was greatly admired by people in later ages, and that Yuan Mei compared Qu Bingyun with Cai Yan shows his admiration for her.

Around 1795 Yuan asked his friends You Zhao 尤詔 and Wang Gong 汪恭 to make a painting of thirteen female entitled "Painting of Thirteen Female Disciples Asking Yuan Mei for Advice at Lake Tower." In addition to Qu Bingyun, this painting includes Sun Yunfeng, Sun Yunhe, Xi Peilan, Xu Yuxin, Wang Zuanzu, Wang Shen,

²¹³ *Jia* is a kind of the reed instrument.

Figure 4. "Painting of Thirteen Female Disciples Asking Yuan Mei for Advice at Lake Tower" by Wang Gong and You Zhao and its continuation by "Mr. Cui" and their colophons (reprint, Shanghai: Shenzhen guoguang she, 1929).



Yan Ruizhu, Liao Yunjin, Zhang Yuzhen, Qu Bingyun, Jiang Xinbao, Jin Yi, and Bao Zhihui, as well as Yuan Mei and his niece by marriage Dai Lanying (See figure 4).²¹⁴ Qu Bingyun sits together with Liao Yunjin and Zhang Yuzhen by a small rectangular table. Later on, Yuan asked another of his friends Mr. Cui 崔 to paint Cao Ciqing, Luo Qilan, and Qian Lin separately as a continuation of the painting. It is said that in the third month of 1796 Lu Yuansu was added to the continuation.²¹⁵ Therefore the "Thirteen Female Disciples Asking Yuan Mei for Advice at Lake Tower" and its continuation actually include eighteen women poets in total.²¹⁶

The setting for this painting is the poetry gathering at Lake Tower by West Lake in 1790, but among the women in the painting Qu Bingyun, Xi Peilan, Yan Ruizhu, Jin Yi, Dai Lanying, Luo Qilan, Lu Yuansu, and Cao Ciqing did not attend any poetry gatherings, because they entered Yuan's female group after the gatherings took place, and Liao Yunjin, Jiang Xinbao, and Bao Zhihui probably did not attend. Also, around 1795, when the painting was created, Yuan had already more than forty female disciples. Apparently, Yuan only included his favourite female followers, mostly those who were important women poets and actively associated with him.²¹⁷

Qu Bingyun was also chosen in the two versions of *Selected Poems by Yuan Mei's Female Disciples*. It has been shown that Yuan Mei compiled a poetry selection of

²¹⁴ You Zhao and Wang Gong, "Painting of Thirteen Female Disciples Asking Yuan Mei for Advice at Lake Tower," Shanghai: Shenzhou guoguangshe, 1929. Also see, Host of Xiaohengxiang, p. 153.

²¹⁵ See Lu Yuansu's poem, "On the Twelfth day of the Third Month of the Bingchen Year (1796), Master Yuan Mei Visited Mr. Qian. He Painted the Continuation of the "Painting Asking Yuan Mei for Advice at Lake Tower" and added me to it." 丙辰三月十二日, 隨園夫子過訪錢郎, 畫續湖樓請業圖, 以元素附焉 ("Bingchen sanyue shi'er ri, Suiyuan fuzi guofang qianlang, hua xu hulou qingye tu, yi yuansu fu yan"). (YMQJ (VI): SY, p. 247). However, Lu's image is not included in the version of the continuation that I mention here.

²¹⁶ In her poem, "Master Yuan Mei Ordered Me to Inscribe the Painting Thirteen Female Disciples Asking for Advice at Lake Tower," 隨園先生命題十三女弟子湖樓請業圖 (Suiyuan xiansheng ming ti shisan nüdizi hulou qing ye tu), Xi Peilan mentioned twenty-six female disciples in the painting because she wrongly assumed that the continuation would have consisted of another thirteen women. (See Xi, 4:2a-b). However, no references to the number twenty-six are found; all other sources prove the number of women poets as thirteen plus four, thus excluding Lu Yuansu.

²¹⁷ This painting also served as a means to advocate women's literary education. Yuan showed it to many people and asked them to inscribe in it. According to the descriptions of a copy of the painting in Host of Xiaohengxiang 小橫香主人 comp., *A Grand Collection of Unofficial Historical Records of the Qing Dynasty* 清代野史大觀 (Qingdai yeshi daguan, v 9, reprint, Shanghai: Wenyichubanshe, 1992, p. 151) and Ge Xucun 葛虛存 comp., *Anecdotes of the Celebrities of the Qing* 清代名人軼事 (Qingdai mingren yishi, reprint, Jiangsu: Guangling guji keyinshe, 1992, 15:5a-b), there were thirty-two inscriptions on the copy, several written reflections of reading the painting as well as some narratives of buying and selling the painting. We therefore believe what we are told: This painting was well circulated in society and it provided a major topic for conversations among people at the time.

his thirteen or eighteen female disciples at the same time when he had them painted. Qu was certainly included. In his postscript to the painting, Yuan wrote, "There are poems from each of them; now I am sending them to a publisher" 諸人各有詩, 現付梓人.²¹⁸ There is a line in Xi Peilan's verse inscription on the painting saying, "Following the example of the *Jade Terrace*, [Yuan Mei] selected new poems to print" 選刻新詩 仿玉臺.²¹⁹ A note in Qu Bingyun's verse inscription of the painting further proves this fact:²²⁰

The Master selected poems by the thirteen female disciples and had them printed. Mine were also included. 先生選刊十三女弟子詩, 余亦得與其列 (2:10b).

In the fifth month of 1796, Yuan Mei finished editing the *Selected Poems by Yuan Mei's Female Disciples*, which included works by twenty-eight contributors, and had it published. Compared to the first anthology, this selection excluded the works of Xu Yuxin, Wang Zuanzu, Wang Shen, Jiang Xinbao, and Cao Ciqing, which possibly appeared in the first selection of eighteen women poets, and included the works of fifteen others not part of the first selection: Chen Changsheng, Wang Yuru, Chen Shulan, Wang Bizhu, Zhu Yizhu, Bao Zhihui, Zhang Xunxiao, Bi Zhizhu, Xu Dexin, Gui Maoyi, Wu Qiongxian, Yuan Shufang, Wang Huiqing, Wang Yuzhen, and Bao Yin. The selection's table of contents is as follows.²²¹

²¹⁸ The Host of Xiaohengxiang, p. 151.

²¹⁹ Xi, 4:2a. The *Jade Terrace* refers to the *New Songs of the Jade Terrace* 玉臺新詠 (*Yutai xinyong*) which was compiled by Xu Ling 徐陵 (507-ca. 582).

²²⁰ However, in this inscription, there is a line with a note attached to the second poem which reads, "When you compile a new poetry anthology, you solicit my draft, (the Master considers that my poems are fewer than other female disciples, and ordered me to provide my latest work for selection 新刊詩本搜余草, 先生以女弟子詩中筠詩獨少, 命續呈近著備選). It is likely that "new poetry anthology" referred to the second selection, *Selected Poems by Yuan Mei's Female Disciples*, because Yuan only compiled two selections by his female disciples. In this version, the number of poems by each female disciple was a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 82. Those leading disciples, who had a large number of poems published in this selection, are Xi Peilan with fifty-two, Jin Yi with eighty-two, Sun Yunfeng with forty-four, Luo Qilan with forty-three, Zhang Yuzhen with thirty-three, and Wang Qian with forty-two. Qu's expression "fewer," is likely a comparison with these leading disciples' poems, but Qu Bingyun's poems are missing from the extant version of this selection. It is unknown how many of Qu's poems were actually selected.

²²¹ Yuan Mei comp., *Selected Poems by Yuan Mei's Female Disciples*, 1796. Modern punctuated edition: Shanghai: Dada tushu gongyingshe 大達圖書供應社, 1934.

Volume 1. Xi Peilan, Sun Yunfeng

Volume 2. Jin Yi

Volume 3. Luo Qilan, Zhang Yuzhen, Liao Yunjin, Sun Yunhe

Volume 4. Chen Changsheng, Yan Ruizhu, Qian Lin, Wang Yuru, Chen Shulan,
Wang Bizhu, Zhu Yizhu, Bao Zhihui

Volume 5. Wang Qian, Zhang Xunxiao, Bi Zhizhu, Lu Yuansu, Dai Lanying,
Qu Bingyun, Xu Dexin

Volume 6. Gui Maoyi, Wu Qiongqian, Yuan Shufang, Wang Huiqing,
Wang Yuzhen, Bao Yin

However, in today's extant version of this selection, poems by Qu Bingyun, Zhang Xunxiao, Bi Zhizhu, Qu Bingyun, Xu Dexin, Gui Maoyi, Yuan Shufang, Wang Huiqing, Wang Yuzhen, and Bao Yin are missing.²²²

Yuan Mei compiled and published this book one year prior to his death. It should be considered as Yuan Mei's ultimate achievement in his teaching career. In this anthology Yuan selected those who were both outstanding poets and active members of his entourage.²²³ The publisher, Wang Gu 汪穀 (1754-1821), was a famous collector of calligraphy, paintings and other antiques, and good friend as well as a poetic disciple of Yuan Mei. According to Wang's preface to this book, in the fifth month of 1796 Yuan brought it to Suzhou and asked Wang to publish it. Because there had not been such a book before, this selection drew much attention from society and became very famous soon after it was published, and even became very popular in Japan.

Associations with Fellow Female Disciples and Other Female Poets

Yuan Mei's female entourage did not form one large group, but rather various small groups. Those groups were either based on the women's family lineages or on the region from which they came. For example, one group based on family lineage included

²²² Hu Wenkai may have seen a near complete version of this selection because he says that only Gui Maoyi's works did not appear while her name was listed in the table of contents. Hu, p. 933.

²²³ The presence of some of poems might have been due to courtesy, as for example in the cases of the works of Wang Bizhu and Zhu Yizhu who were the concubines of the publisher Wang, in spite of the fact that Wang asked Yuan to take them out when he found his concubines included. (See Wang Gu's preface to this selection, *YMQJ* (VII): NS.

women such as Sun Yunfeng, Sun Yunhe, and Wang Yuru who were related to Sun Chunyan, whereas another group based on regional origin included women like Jing Dui, Zhang Yunzi, Gu Kun, and He Yuxian, who lived in Suzhou. All the members of these small groups had individual connections with Yuan Mei, but at the same time were connected with one another within their small group. Four of Yuan Mei's female disciples come from the Mount Yu region: Qu Bingyun, Xi Peilan, Gui Maoyi, and Bao Yin.

(1) Xi Peilan

Xi Peilan was the prized female disciple of Yuan Mei. She composed the *Poetry Collection from the Permanent Truth Tower* 長真閣詩集 (*Changzhen'ge shiji*), which includes seven chapters of *shi* poems and one of *ci* poems. Xi and Qu were sworn sisters and poetic friends for half their lives. From about 1790 onward, when Qu was twenty-three years old and Xi was twenty-eight, the two started to associate closely with each other.²²⁴ At the time Qu and her husband, Zhao Tongyu, lived in the northern suburbs of Changshu and Xi and her husband, Sun Yuanxiang, moved to this area and became their neighbours. The two couples shared an interest in poetry and art, paying frequent visits to each other. Since Zhao Tongyu enjoyed hosting parties, they sometimes had parties in the Zhao home, and the two women often exchanged small gifts such as flowers, oranges, fans, tea, and soup.

Qu and Xi often exchanged their ideas about poetry and stated their opinions about each other's work. Also, they frequently exchanged poems. There are more than twenty poems concerning Xi by Qu, and fifty-three poems related to Qu by Xi. Xi named herself "Peilan," "orchid," and Qu gave herself the sobriquet "Xielan," "associate orchid." Both of them liked to create images of orchids in poems or paintings as symbols of their friendship, and Qu once painted an orchid and Xi inscribed a verse on it entitled "Written on Qu's Painting of an Orchid" 題宛仙畫蘭 ("Ti Wanxian hualan"):

Exquisite orchid, its two stems touching across,

²²⁴ This is according to the time when the poems concerning Xi Peilan appeared in Qu's poetry collection and vice versa.

is ingeniously depicted.
It is exactly as if the stems had the same heart
and are considerate to each other.
In one simple sketch, a pair of shadows
Are like those times
when Peilan herself leans against Xielan.

玲瓏妙腕寫交枝，
恰稱同心宛轉思。
一幅白描雙影子，
佩蘭親傍協蘭時。²²⁵

Together, they created the "Painting of the Orchids" 如蘭圖 ("Rulantu") on which Yuan Mei inscribed a poem found in Qu's poetry collection and not surviving in Yuan's collected works:

Having the same fragrance, and like-minded,
both of the images are superior.
The painting portrays you in the prime of life.
You two beauties have finished
picking orchids at the Xiang River,
And become sister flowers within the human world.
(2:12b)

並臭同心影亦佳，
丹青寫出好年華。
二妃采罷湘蘭後，
化作人間姊妹花。

The expression "two beauties" alludes to Ehuang 娥皇 and Nüying 女英, the concubines of the legendary Emperor Shun 舜, who drowned in the Xiang River and became goddesses. In this poem, Yuan Mei likens Qu and Xi to these two deities in order to point out that the sworn sisters had similar characters and personalities. Qu and Xi were both well known in the region, as indicated by Wu Weiguang's statement that "Lady Xi Daohua and Lady Qu Wanxian live in the same city and gained fame at the same time" 席夫人道華, 屈夫人宛仙同邑以居, 並時而出 (Wu Weiguang, Preface).

(2) Gui Maoyi

Gui Maoyi married Li Xuehuang 李學瓚 (courtesy name Anzhi 安之, sobriquet Fuxuan 復軒), a Student by Purchase Fourth Class 監生 (*Jiansheng*) in Shanghai and the author of the *Remaining Poems from the Comfortable House: one chapter* 枕善居詩剩一卷 (*Zhenshanju shisheng yijuan*).²²⁶ Her father, Li Chaoxu 李朝煦, was a General Surveillance Circuit 巡道 (*Xundao*) and her mother, Li Xinjing 李心敬 (courtesy name Yiming 一銘), was also a well-known poet. Gui had a variety of printed poetry collections with the general title "Poetry Draft After Having Finished Embroidering" 繡餘詩草 ("Xiuyu shicao").²²⁷ She also had her poetry jointly printed with that of her mother in *Poetry Collections of the Two "After"s* 二餘詩集 (*Eryu shiji*).²²⁸ Gui associated actively with Yuan Mei after becoming one of his disciples.²²⁹ Since Gui did not have the same stable finances as Qu Bingyun and Xi Peilan, she had to travel back and forth between the provinces of Zhejiang and Jiangsu to make a living by teaching female students in spite of her poor healthy.

Gui befriended both Qu and Xi and sometimes went back to Changshu with her husband to visit them. Gui exchanged various poems with Qu and Xi, and once she got Qu Bingyun to write poems on her paintings, among which are "Impromptu Verse: Responding to Madam Gui Maoyi's Poem in the Same Rhyme" (two poems) 即事和歸佩珊夫人韻 ("Jishi he Gui Peishan furen," 3:22a-b), "Written for Gui Maoyi on Her

²²⁵ Xi, 3: 9b.

²²⁶ This poetry collection is found in Shanghai Library.

²²⁷ The *Draft After Having Finished Embroidering* (one chapter) 繡餘草一卷 (*Xiuyucaoyijuan*) is found in Shanghai Library; *Continuation of Draft After Having Finished Embroidering* (Not separated into chapters) 繡餘續草不分卷 (*Xiuyu xucao bufenjuan*) and *Continuation II* (one chapter) 再續草一卷 (*Zaixucaoyijuan*), *Continuation III* (one chapter) 三續草一卷 (*Sanxucaoyijuan*) and *Continuation IV* (one chapter) 四續草一卷 (*Sixucaoyijuan*) are found in Nanjing Library; *Continuation V of Draft After Having Finished Embroidering* (Not separated into chapters) 繡餘五續草不分卷 (*Xiuyu wuxucao bufenjuan*) is found in Shanghai Library; *Recent Draft After Having Finished Embroidering* (one chapter) 繡餘近草 (*Xiuyucaoyijuan*) is found in Tianjin Library; *Continuation of Draft After Having Finished Embroidering* (one chapter) 繡餘續草一卷 (*Xiuyu xucao yijuan*) is found in the libraries of Beijing, Changshu, Nanjing, Shanghai, and China Science Academy (in Beijing); and *Draft After Having Finished Embroidering* (five chapters) 繡餘續草五卷 (*Xiuyu xucao wujuan*) is found in the libraries of Beijing, Anhui, and Changshu.

²²⁸ The *Poetry Collections of the Two "After"s* 二餘詩集 (*Eryu shiji*), printed by Li's Studio in 1788, contains Li Xinjing's *Draft After Having Eaten Books* (one chapter) 蠹餘草一卷 (*Duyucaoyijuan*) and Gui Maoyi's *Small Draft After Having Finished Embroidering* (one chapter) 繡餘小草一卷 (*Xiuyucaoyijuan*) is found in Nanjing Library.

'Painting of Lan'gao Searching for Poetic Lines " (four poems) 蘭皋覓句圖爲佩珊題 ("Lan'gao mingju tu wei Peishanti," 3:22b-23a), and two other *ci* poems (c: 13a-b). Gui and her husband seemed to have been closer to Xi and Sun than to Qu and Zhao, usually lodging at Sun's house when they visited Changshu, and exchanging more poems with Xi and Sun than with Qu and Zhao.

These three women, however, were regarded as like-minded friends and they enjoyed fame for their poetry in the region. In his preface to Qu's poetry collection, Chen Wenshu listed Qu, Xi and Gui as the "three outstanding poets" of the Mount Yu region. Also, Sun Yuanxiang wrote a verse "A Song of the Three Friends of the Orchid Boudoirs" 蘭閨三友歌 ("Lan'gui sanyou ge") in celebration of their friendship, which included the following lines:

The three orchids are of the same breath	三花同一氣，
More fragrant than the combination of a hundred other flowers.	勝如百和香。
The three ladies are of the same heart,	三人同一心，
Of double elegance their words are.	其言倍芬芳 ²³⁰

(3) Bao Yin

Bao Yin was the author of *Draft Poems from the Collecting-Writing Tower (four chapters of shi poems; one chapter of ci poems)* 藏翰樓詩稿四卷詞一卷 (*Canhanlou shigao sijuan ci yijuan*).²³¹ Bao was Qu Bingyun's maternal aunt. She married Shao Guangrong after Shao's first wife Zhao Tongyao, who was Zhao Tongyu's cousin, died. Bao was especially skilled at *ci* poetry, having learned it from a male *ci* poet by the name of Hesan 盩三. Yuan Mei praised Bao for her erudition, calling her the "Lady Scholar" 女翰林.²³² Both Qu Bingyun and Xi Peilan exchanged their poems

²²⁹ Also, in her later years, Gui Maoyi had close contact with the famous poets Shu Wei 舒位 (1765-1816) and Gong Zizhen 龔自珍 (1792-1841). See Zhu Zejie 朱則傑, *A History of Poetry of the Qing Dynasty*, 清詩史 (*Qing shi shi*), Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1992, pp. 362 and 268.

²³⁰ *TZJ*, 14:4b.

²³¹ This collection is mentioned in *RGCZ*, p. 3038, but has not been found.

²³² See the note in Qu, 3:2a.

with Bao, Qu writing a set of two poems "Thanks to Madame Bao Yin for Her Having Inscribed My Fan: Matching the Same Rhymes as in Her Inscription" 謝鮑尊古夫人見題畫扇: 即次原韻 ("Xie Bao Zungu furen jianti huashan ciyuanyun," 3: 2a), and Xi composing a set of four poems entitled "Written for Bao Shuyun's Picture: Matching the Rhymes of His Younger Sister Bao Yin" 題鮑叔韞照: 次令妹尊古韻 ("Ti Bao Shuyunzhao: ci lingmei Zungu yun").²³³

(4) Other Local Female Poets and a Painting of a Gathering

Qu Bingyun organized a gathering of the above fellow female disciples as well as other local female poets and had them portrayed in "A Painting of the Flower-like Historians in the Flower Bud Palace" 蕊宮花史圖 ("Ruigong huashi tu"). This was a very interesting event since the painting was intentionally created to compete with similar paintings of male celebrities. Twelve women were included in it: Qu Bingyun, Xi Peilan, Gui Maoyi, Bao Yin, Qu Wanqing, Ye Wanyi, Zhao Ruobing, Tao Lingqing, Li Canhua 李餐花, Xie Cuixia 謝翠霞, Yan Caifeng 言采鳳 and Jiang Shuxin 蔣淑馨.

According to Sun Yuanxiang, Qu Bingyun invited eleven female poets to gather in her house on the fifteenth day of the second month of 1796 in celebration of the "Birthday of a Hundred Flowers." At this party, they came up with the idea of painting themselves in a fashion of the "Elegant Gathering" 雅集圖 ("Yajitu"), in order to transmit their names to later generations. Since they did not want to be painted in current costumes, they decided to borrow styles from ancient beauties, selecting pictures of twelve famous ancient beauties and assigning each of them the role of a monthly flower goddess. Then, by drawing lots, these poets decided who would take the position of each monthly goddess. The designs for their images in the painting are as follows:

(i) Xie Cuixia dressed in the costume of Jiang Caiping 江采蘋 (died 756),²³⁴ designated as the Flowering Plum Goddess in the first month;

²³³ Xi, 2: 7b.

²³⁴ She was one of the concubines of the Tang Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗. The Emperor called her "Plum Blossom Lady" 梅妃 because she liked plum blossoms.

- (ii) Yan Caifeng dressed in the costume of Xie Daoyun, designated as the Orchid Goddess in the second month;
- (iii) Qu Bingyun dressed in the costume of Lady Guoguo 虢國夫人 (died 756),²³⁵ designated as the Flowering Pear Goddess in the third month;
- (iv) Bao Yin dressed in the costume of Yang Yuhuan 楊玉環 (719-756),²³⁶ designated as the Peony Goddess in the fourth month;
- (v) Qu Wanqing dressed in the costume of Madame Pan 潘夫人 (died 502),²³⁷ designated as the Pomegranate Flower Goddess in the fifth month;
- (vi) Ye Wanyi dressed in the costume of Xi Shi 西施,²³⁸ designated as the Lotus Flower Goddess representing the sixth month;
- (vii) Li Canhua dressed in the costume of Su Ruolan 蘇若蘭, designated as the Begonia Flower Goddess in the seventh month;
- (viii) Gui Maoyi dressed in the costume of Chang'e 嫦娥,²³⁹ designated as the Osmanthus Fragrance Goddess in the eighth month;
- (ix) Zhao Ruobing dressed in the costume of Jia Peilan 賈佩蘭,²⁴⁰ designated as the Chrysanthemum Flower Goddess in the ninth month;
- (x) Jiang Shuxin dressed in the costume of Madame Huarui 花蕊夫人,²⁴¹ designated as the Cottonrose Hibiscus Goddess in the tenth month;
- (xi) Tao Lingqing dressed in the costume of Yuan Bao'er 袁寶兒,²⁴² designated as the Camellia Flower Goddess in the eleventh month;
- (xii) Xi Peilan dressed in the costume of Lingbo Immortal 凌波仙子,²⁴³ designated as the Narcissus Goddess in the twelfth month.

²³⁵ Lady of Guoguo was one of Yang Guifei's elder sisters. She was conferred upon the title of the "Lady of Guo State (guo)" in 749.

²³⁶ Yang Yuhuan was the imperial concubine of the Tang Emperor Xuanzong.

²³⁷ Madame Pan (nicknames Yu'er 玉兒 and Yunu 玉奴) was the concubine of Marquis Donghun 東昏侯 of the Southern Qi 齊 (479-502).

²³⁸ Xishi was a beauty of the Yue 越 State of the Eastern (770-256 B.C.) Zhou Dynasty 東周.

²³⁹ The Moon Goddess.

²⁴⁰ Unknown.

²⁴¹ The "Madame Hua'rui" was the title of the concubine of a King of Shu 蜀 of the Five Dynasties (907-960). There were the Former King and the Latter King of the State. The "Madame Hua'rui" here refers to the Latter King's concubine, Madame Xu, who was a talented writer.

²⁴² Unknown.

Yuan Mei was excited about the painting and wrote a postscript to it.²⁴⁴ He also asked many other celebrities as well as his disciples to write poems on this painting and had it widely circulated. One of his female disciples, Zhang Yuzhen, wrote a *ci* poem entitled "Xizi's Makeup" 西子妝 ("Xizizhuang") on this painting.²⁴⁵

(5) Fellow Female Disciples Beyond the Region

Qu Bingyun had some contact with Yuan Mei's female disciples outside the Mount Yu region, which is revealed by the fact that she wrote a set of three poems, "For Madam Zhang Yuzhen's *Ci Poems from the Evening Fragrance Residence*" 張藍生夫人玉珍 <晚香詞鈔> ("Zhang Lansheng furen Yuzhen Wanxiang cichao," 3:21a), as a critique for Zhang Yuzhen's poetry collection and a set of two poems for Wang Qian's self-portrait, "For Madame Wang Qian's 'Leaning against Bamboos'" 王梅卿女士倚竹圖 ("Wang Meiqing nüshi yizhutu," 3:13b). Qu also wrote a *ci* poem by matching the rhymes in Qian Mengtian's *ci* poem inscribing the paintings she collected. Qu's *ci* poem is entitled "To the Tune of Golden Filament Melody: For the Volumes of the Ink-wash Paintings of Flowers and Birds by the Female Historian Li Jinsheng of the Ming Dynasty, Using Madame Qian Mengtian's Rhymes of the Verse Inscribing the Painting Volumes" 金縷曲-題前朝女史李今生水墨花鳥卷用卷中錢浣青夫人原韻 ("Jinlüqu: tiqianchao nüshi Li Jinsheng shuimo huajuan yong juanzhong Qian Mengtian furen yuanyun").

Associations with Sun Yuanxiang, Wu Weiguang and Other Male Poets

(1) Sun Xuanxiang

Sun Yuanxiang (1760-1829, courtesy names Zixiao 子瀟 and Changzhen 長真, sobriquet Xinqing 心青) was a noted poet of the Qing. He authored poetry and prose

²⁴³ Unknown.

²⁴⁴ This postscript has not been found.

collections entitled *Collected Works from the True Nature Tower* 天真閣集 (*Tianzhen'ge ji*) and *Outer Collection* 外集 (*Wai ji*). Sun did not get a Provincial Graduate degree until 1795, when he was thirty-five years old, and it took him another ten years to obtain his Metropolitan Graduate degree. With this latter degree, he assumed the positions of Hanlin Bachelor 庶吉士 (*Shujishi*) and Assistant Proofreader 協修官 (*Xiexiu guan*), but shortly resigned from both posts. Instead, Sun devoted much of his life to teaching at four academies 書院 (*Shuyuan*), among the academies of Yuwen 毓文 in Anhui.

Sun Yuanxiang was the top male disciple of Yuan Mei. In 1788, when Yuan visited Mount Yu for the first time, Sun was already a skilful poet. Wu Weiguang recommended him to Yuan Mei, together with five other accomplished scholar-poets of the area, after which, Sun became Yuan's disciple.²⁴⁶ As husband and wife, Sun and Xi Peilan were another "companionate couple." It was said that Sun started to learn poetry writing after he married Xi and spent most of his time exchanging poems with Xi and her female friends.²⁴⁷ However, Gui Maoyi teased him about this in a poem written in celebration of his success in getting the Provincial Graduate degree in 1795,

I however laugh at Qin Jia who has unmatched talent, 卻笑秦嘉才絕世，
But who has been lowering his head before a mirror stand. 一生低首鏡臺前。²⁴⁸

"Qin Jia" was the name of the well-known poet Xu Shu's 徐淑 (ca. 147) husband and alludes to Sun's poetic activities with women, including his wife Xi Peilan, Qu Bingyun

²⁴⁵ Guo Zeyun 郭則沄, *Jade Flakes from Qing Poetry* 清詩玉屑 (*Qingshi yuxie*), v. 8. See You Zhenzhong 尤振中 and You Yiding 尤以丁, *Collected Commentaries on Qing Ci poem Poetry* 清詞紀事會評 (*Qing ci jishi huiping*), Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 1995, p. 634.

²⁴⁶ Wang Yingzhi, p. 296. Sun shared Yuan Mei's ideas about poetry and he upheld Yuan's theory of "nature and inspiration." Just like Yuan, Sun greatly valued and placed emphasis on the true feelings and spontaneous emotions of a poet. However, Sun and Yuan differed from each other in that Sun accentuated individualism while Yuan treated it as equal to sincerity.

²⁴⁷ Sun Yuanxiang did not know anything about poetry when he was a child. It was when he married Xi Peilan in 1776 that he started to learn about poetry. It was said, "Sharing a study desk, [Sun Yuanxiang and Xi Peilan] read books, and they were both each other's teacher and friend" 共案而讀, 互相師友. Sun once wrote a poem for Xi, "Shown to My Wife" 示內 ("Shi nei"), which also records their mutual happiness: "We use the inner quarters as our classroom. / And place a book horizontally before us two" 有賴閨房如學舍, 一編橫放兩人看. Shi, 6:1a.

²⁴⁸ Xi, 6:2a.

and Gui Maoyi herself. “A mirror stand” refers to women, and “lowering his head before a mirror stand” suggests that Sun followed women around. Sun Yuanxiang wrote many informative pieces about Qu Bingyun: in addition to a great number of comments on her poetry, Sun wrote narratives about Qu’s buildings, about the parties at her house and her husband's inkstones, commentaries on her paintings, a biography of Qu, eulogies for her husband’s concubine Xu Xiaoshu, and finally, a eulogy for Qu.

(2) Wu Weiguang

Wu Weiguang (1744-1803, courtesy names Zhefu 愬甫 and Zhixu 執虛, and sobriquets Zhuqiao 竹橋 and Hutian Waishi 湖田外史) was the most prestigious scholar-poet in the Mount Yu region and played the leading role in the local literati circles.

Wu Weiguang was appointed to the position of Secretary of the Ministry of Rites 禮部主事 (*Libu zhushi*) in his early years but soon resigned. He was very prolific, producing a number of scholarly works and poetry collections.²⁴⁹ He was a bibliographer

²⁴⁹ *Collected Works from the Unadorned Hall (Not separated into chapters)* 素修堂集不分卷 (*Suxiutangji bufenjuan*) is found in Fudan University Library; *Collected Poems from the Unadorned Hall (twenty-four chapters and one chapter of supplement)* 素修堂詩集二十四卷補遺一卷 (*Suxiutang shiji ershisi juan buyi yijuan*), printed in 1812, is found in the libraries of Nanjing, Xiamen and Taiwan Normal University; *Collected Poems from the Unadorned Hall (twenty-four chapters, six chapters of continuation and one chapter of supplement)* 素修堂詩集二十四卷後集六卷補遺一卷 (*Suxiutang shiji ershisijuan houji liujuan buyi yijuan*), printed in 1812, is found in the libraries of Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Guangdong and People’s University of China; *Collected Works from the Unadorned Hall (four chapters of the prose left behind)* 素修堂集遺文四卷 (*Suxiutang ji yiwen sijuan*) is found in Changshu Library; *Poetry Draft of Wu Weiguang (two chapters of shi poems and one chapter of ci poems)* 執虛詩抄二卷詞抄一卷 (*Zhixu shichao erjuan cichao yijuan*) is found in the libraries of Beijing, Nanjing, Changshu, Wenzhou, Qinghua University, Fudan University, and Huadong Normal University; *Poetry Draft of Wu Weiguang (Not separated into chapters)* 吳竹橋詩稿不分卷 (*Wu Zhuqiao shichao bufenjuan*) is found in Shanghai Library; *Two Chapters of Fragrant-Mirror Poems by Grand Historians Wu and Sun* (Joint collection with Sun Yuanxiang) 吳孫二太史香奩詩二卷 (與孫原湘合集) (*Wu Sun er taishi xianglianshi er juan*) is found in the libraries of Nanjing and Changshu.

Several other works by Wu Weiguang including the *Music Bureau Poetry from the Small Paddy-Field* 小湖田樂府 (*Xiao hutian yuefu*, 13 chapters), *Collected Poems from the Unadorned Hall* 素修堂詩集 (*Suxiutang shiji*, 31 chapters), *Poetic Themes and Techniques of Du Fu* 杜詩義法 (*Dushi yifa*, 4 chapters), *Six Advantages of the Tang Poetic Meter* 唐律六長 (*Tanglü liuchang*, 4 chapters), *A Commentary on the Poetry of Su Shi and Lu You* 蘇陸詩評 (*Su Lu shiping*, 12 chapters), *Corrections of Ci Poetry* 詩餘辨訛 (*Shiyu bian'e*, 2 chapters), *A Reading of the Ci Poetry of Jiang Kui and Zhang Yan* 姜[夔]張[炎]詞得 (*Jiang Zhang cide*, 2 chapters), *A Textual Examination of Dialects* 方言考據 (*Fangyan kaoju*, 2 chapters), and *Former and Later Collections from the Ancient-Modern Stone Study* 古今石齋前後集 (*Gujin shizhai qianhou ji*, 60 chapters) are mentioned in Zhang Huijian 張慧劍 comp.,

and had a collection of thousands of books, naming his study "One Volume of Flowering Plum Tower" 梅花一卷樓 (Meihua yijuan lou), and "Embracing Book Tower" 擁書樓 (Yongshu lou).²⁵⁰ He had a book-stamp named "Haiyu Wu's Historical Stamp for Embracing Book Tower" 海虞吳氏擁書樓圖史 ("Haiyu wushi yongshu lou tushi").

Just like Yuan Mei, Wu abandoned his official career at the earliest opportunity and devoted himself to studying, writing, traveling and associating with other poets, and frequently got together with his literary friends. In Changshu, the literati he was in close contact with included Mao Chen 毛琛, Wang Dai 王岱, Zhang Xie, Sun Yuanxiang and Wang Jiaxiang 王家相.

Wu Weiguang was Yuan Mei's best friend and follower in the Mount Yu region, and they frequently paid visits to each other. Yuan selected some of Wu's poems for his poetry talks and for his *Continuation of Collected Poems by My Fellow Poets*. Also, Wu had been Qu Bingyun's poetic mentor before Yuan accepted her, and had much more contact with Qu than Yuan, writing the most comments on her poems.

(3) Xi Shichang, Zhang Xie, Chen Wenshu and Wang Gu

In the Mount Yu region, Qu Bingyun also had contact with Xi Shichang and Zhang Xie, both of whom were Qu Bingyun's readers and commentators. Xi Shichang, who was Xi Peilan's brother, authored a collection entitled *Prose (one chapter), Shi Poetry (one chapter), and Ci poetry (one chapter) from the Red Snow Tower* 紅雪樓文稿一卷詩抄一卷詞抄一卷 (*Hongxuelou wengao yijuan shichao yijuan cichao yijuan*) and a book on the *Explanations of Words* 說文 (*Shuowen*); he had a considerable reputation as a scholar in the region.²⁵¹ Xi Shichang wrote a verse preface to the *Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower* and comments on seventeen poems in

Chronological Table of Literati of Jiangsu in the Ming and Qing Dynasties 明清江蘇文人年表 (*Mingqing jiangsu wenren nianbiao*), Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1986, but have not been found.

²⁵⁰ Qu Honglie 瞿鴻烈 comp., *Gazetteer of Changshu* 常熟縣志 (*Changshu xianzhi*), Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1990, p. 834.

²⁵¹ *The Prose (one chapter), Shi Poetry (one chapter), and Ci poetry (one chapter) from the Red Snow Tower* 紅雪樓文稿一卷詩抄一卷詞抄一卷 (*Hongxuelou wengao yijuan shichao yijuan cichao yijuan*), printed in 1810, is found in Nanjing Library and the *Explanations of Words* 說文 (*Shuowen*) is mentioned in Hawkes (p. 115), but has not been found.

the collection. Zhang Xie, Sun Yuanxiang's brother-in-law, was also a local celebrity, and contributed comments about five poems in Qu Bingyun's poetry collection.

Outside of the Mount Yu region, besides Yuan Mei, Qu Bingyun had contact with Chen Wenshu of Qiantang, a well-known poet and critic of the eighteenth century. Chen Wenshu and Qu Bingyun read each other's poetry and provided their comments to each other. Chen contributed a preface to Qu's *Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower* and comments on two poems in the collection, while Qu wrote a verse commentary, together with Zhao Tongyu, on Chen's poetry collection, *Drafts for Chanting from the Celestial House of the Jade City* 碧城仙館吟稿 (*Bicheng xian'guan yin'gao*).

Qu Bingyun may also have been acquainted with Wang Gu of Hangzhou, the publisher of *Selected Poems by Yuan Mei's Female Disciples*, since she wrote a set of three poems, "For Mr. Wang Gu's Painting of *The Trying-Inkstone Study*" 汪心農先生試硯齋圖 ("Wang Xinnong xiansheng Shiyanzhai tu," 3: 4a-b).

It was of great significance for her poetic life that Qu Bingyun became a member of Yuan Mei's female disciple group. The second period of Qu's poetic life started she joined this group. During this period her poetic creation became mature and reached its peak and she achieved fame in the Mount Yu area and beyond.

Taking Yuan Mei as her mentor meant that Qu Bingyun had decided to ignore the Confucian tradition. The action that Yuan Mei accepted so many women and openly gathered with them to study poetry defied tradition. Such actions in themselves would encourage Yuan Mei's female disciples to overlook Confucian teachings in their poetic creations and their everyday lives. There is no doubt that Qu was influenced by Yuan Mei's anti-traditional thought, which freed her from Confucian teachings and enabled her to write what was on her mind without much restraint.

Qu Bingyun was one of the female disciples who greatly benefited from Yuan Mei's tuition. Yuan opposed abstruse and mysterious issues in teaching writing poetry and did not necessitate the study of the classics, technique or metrical skills. This put his female disciples at ease and enabled them to become more involved in the writing of poetry. This might be part of the reason why Qu still took "trivial" things from her everyday life as her subject matter after joining Yuan's group and why she wrote poems

in a genial style. More importantly, Qu Bingyun was exposed to all three major traits of Yuan's teaching: (1) since Qu met Yuan a couple of times, she was able to discuss specific problems of poetry composition with Yuan face to face in the way of "asking for diction." (2) Yuan Mei "solicited poems" from Qu twice for poetry selections of his female disciples; these which were kinds of "work assignments" that "forced" Qu to write more high-quality poems. (3) Yuan Mei commented on Qu's poems directly concerning various aspects of poetic creation; this way of teaching was probably the most helpful for Qu and will be discussed further later in this dissertation.

By joining Yuan's female group, as well as by organizing the poetry gathering of her fellow female poets and associating with the male followers of Yuan Mei, Qu Bingyun further revealed her desires to seek connection with others in writing poetry. All of Yuan's female followers, as well as the male ones, with whom Qu Bingyun associated during this period, were expert poets at a literary level much higher than that of Qu's family poetry circles. After becoming a member of Yuan Mei's female disciple group, Qu began her mature creation period and developed as an expert poet through interaction with other members. Reading each other's poetry and responding to it in writing within this group, which will be discussed in the next chapter, was especially helpful in Qu's journey to becoming an accomplished poet.

Chapter V **Within a Feminist Discourse Community: Interactions Through Critical Comments**

Qu Bingyun, her fellow disciples in the Mount Yu region and their mentor, Yuan Mei, formed a feminist discourse community in which everyone shared the principles of Yuan Mei's 'nature and inspiration' theory and his feminist poetics. Through their interaction they explored women-related poetic issues together and integrated them into their writing principles and interpretative strategies. Reading each other's poetry and responding to it in writing was a primary mode of interaction within this discourse community.

This chapter mainly examines the comments on Qu Bingyun's poetry by Yuan Mei, Xi Peilan, Gui Maoyi and Bao Yin, who are responsible for 250 out of the total 347 remarks and commentaries included in the printed copy of the *Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower*. The remarks, which come after Qu's poems, are about particular lines, couplets, stanzas, or poems (see Figure 5) and the commentaries, which are printed as prefaces, postfaces or inscriptions, are mostly on Qu's poetry as a whole. All of the remarks and commentaries are appreciative. The commentators may have also suggested some changes or made direct corrections to the poems in the manuscript, but no references to such suggestions and corrections have been found. Also, it was not appropriate to make one's own critical remarks if someone else had already done so. Therefore, there is only one remark in existence for each poem or part of a poem. Another possible reason for this omission was lack of space, because Qu Bingyun had only one manuscript circulating among her fellow poets when she was alive.

These remarks/commentaries are a precious record representing the primary mode of interaction within this discourse community: reading each other's poetry and responding to it in writing. This interaction model was enhanced by the members' 'dialogic reading'²⁵² and by circulating only one copy of the text at a time. As a member,

²⁵² Here I use Adrienne Rich's term. See Rich's "Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson," in her *On Lies, Secrets and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1979.

Figure 5. Comments of Yuan Mei, Xi Peilan, Gui Maoyi and Bao Yin on Qu Bingyun's poems

頭九生涯戀筆牀。口脂好與助梅妝。玉樓今夜紅氍毹。少刻宣爐一寸香。

二九雲鬢草草榮。任他日影下闌干。自家藏得連環玉翠袖。中間好辟寒。

三九風嚴信暗驚。到黃昏漸作邊聲。分明一片關山月。却在死灰瓦上明。却從對面拍

四九同雲夜色暝。不知積雪滿空庭。一宵錦被寒生粟。想見星期臥畫屏。

五九房櫳麗旭新。瓶花綵勝細鋪陳。憑君莫話尋梅樂。恐有牛衣對泣人。有事外遠

六九椒花製錦篇。蠅頭細楷寫雲箋。疏檣已有黃蜂到。領畧幽香近水仙。映舍工妙

七九新年樂事多。花間調按躡燈歌。尋常妝束翻宮樣。背胛垂雲瘦玉搓。

八九風光取次添。薄寒小院夜厭厭。玉堦人靜烏龍臥。一片梨雲鎖翠簾。

九九寒消二月初。一庭風日鳥聲疏。花幡早繫金鈴挂。添箇紅窗種藥鉏。

韞玉樓詩卷一 三

偏吹翠樹不飄香。盡著花衰老婢閒。先向火尋梅人。來未歸家敢誇道。韞工吟筆也拂雲牋效第八句集

蠶梅絕句集

半開疏葉抱檀心。折向妝臺豔似金。自有玉梅雙鬢滿。此花分與侍兒簪。

雪豔鏡光小閣中。綠紗窗格鎖玲瓏。鑑香剝愛穿花去。壁鏡深疑有路通。清景恰成詩世界。樓中

寒香影外四蹄烟

踏莎行 秋士夫人秋閨遺夢遺像

漏隔花敲鏡。含風動美人。心事隨秋種。迷離深鎖一窗愁。惺忪小結三更夢。冰簟波平紗廚烟凍。如何永夜拋侬空。零簾獨自聽吟蟲。敗香何處棲云鳳。美人句是生新

蝶戀花 英文與徐烟蓮別開坐

紙閣梅花寒不凍。身坐花前。香在街頭動。醉却鑑熏無可用。幾枝豔雪春人擁。語笑移時盡

韞玉樓詞鈔 五

Qu Bingyun contributed poems that are representative of her poetic concepts and other members “unfolded the text as a living event” during their reading. All discourse community members were engaged in an intimate conversation by reading the same copy of the text: one passed the manuscript to another after reading and making his/her comments. Thus, each member was able to read the others' comments while reading the poems.

5.1 Yuan Mei's Comments

Yuan Mei's comments appearing in the *Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower* include a preface-like passage and short remarks about ten poems in the first two chapters of the collection, which are the two-chapter manuscript Qu Bingyun brought to him when she first became his disciple.

Overall Assessment and Feminist Reading

The following paragraph is taken from the preface-like passage. In it Yuan Mei assesses Qu Bingyun's poetry as a whole:

Recently, there have been many poets who consider 'nature and inspiration' fundamental, but those who consider poetic meter fundamental are few. Wanxian is able to avoid relying on [any previous masterpieces] and does not use ancient clichés, but her poetry is in accord with the standards set forth by the Tang poetic worthies. Poetry like this is rarely found among the works of male poets, let alone among the works of female poets
近日詩人主性靈者多,主格律者少.宛仙之詩能一空依傍,不拾古人牙慧,仍不失唐賢準繩.求之須眉中未易多得,況其爲閨閣耶?

(Yuan Mei, Preface)

This paragraph points out that: (1) Qu Bingyun put equal weight on 'nature and inspiration' and poetic metre, whereas the majority of poets at the time placed a stronger emphasis on 'nature and inspiration' and ignored poetic metre. Her poetry maintained the metrical regulations of classical poetry but did not contain its clichés; (2) Qu wrote her own poetry instead of imitating the works of her

predecessors, and her poetry was original; (3) Qu's poetry was of a quality higher than rest of her contemporaries.

Even though Yuan's phrase "let alone among the works of female poets" seems to be sexist, this paragraph shows that his reading of Qu Bingyun is essentially feminist, because he views her poetry in the framework of the contemporary poetry circles and endorses it more than the poetry of the male poet majority in terms of its balancing the two fundamentals of poetry. Yuan's feminist reading of Qu Bingyun can also be justified by his feminist criticism. Yuan Mei holds that poetry is more suited to women than to men and that women can produce the best poetry. This is because literature was originally a woman's domain and study was initially a woman's activity.

The Ming critic Zhong Xing 鍾 惺 (1574-1624) deemed female poetry superior to male poetry. His assertion is derived from the belief that "poetry is a creature of serenity." Because women are excluded from men's public and political endeavours, they have innate serenity, a mind that ensues from their detachment from the physical materiality of the public men's world.²⁵³ Unlike Zhong Xing, Yuan Mei's feminist assertion lies in his literary theories of "nature and inspiration," in which individual spontaneous feelings and ingenuity in poetic creations are emphasized. Yuan believed that the most excellent poetry came from a poet's intuition and spontaneous emotions, particularly from his/her romantic emotions. He explains:

Poetry is the product of human feelings. A poet must first have feelings, which cannot be dispelled, and only can he compose a poem, which can be handed down. Among all these feelings, romance is paramount 夫詩者,由情生者也.有必不可解之情而後有必不可朽之詩.情所最先,莫如男女.²⁵⁴

In this explanation, Yuan makes it clear that the feelings necessary for producing the best poems are not political loyalty or patriotism, but romantic love. By accentuating romantic love, Yuan promotes equality between men and women, or

²⁵³ Zhong Xing, *Selected Poems by Famous Ladies* 名媛詩歸 (*Mingyuan shigui*), ca. before 1626.

²⁵⁴ *YMQJ* (II) *WJ*, p. 527.

at least suggests that women are the equal of men. Both Yuan Mei's and Zhong Xing's feminist declarations concern women's inner world and physical location. However, Yuan's theory puts emphasis on the inner world, while Zhong Xing's calls attention to the physical location. Yuan's theory applies to women who are not physically restricted, which is more compatible with the social conditions in Ming-Qing time when women traveled a lot more than before. In contrast, according to Zhong, a woman should be secluded in order to compose good poems.

Yuan Mei's and Zhong Xing's assertion that women make the best poets is similar to the assertions of some present-day feminists such as Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler. They would argue that "poetic language" is especially suited to women. They reason that "poetic language" is "the recovery of the maternal body within the terms of language." Jacques Lacan holds that the paternal law, termed "the Symbolic," structures all linguistic signification and so becomes a universal organizing principle of culture itself. Opposing "the Symbolic," Julia Kristeva proposes "the Semiotic" as a source of effective subversion of the paternal law. According to Kristeva, in its semiotic model, language is engaged in a poetic recovery of the maternal body. The primary drives that "the Symbolic" represses and "the Semiotic" obliquely indicates are now understood as maternal drives. Not only do those drives belong to the mother, but they also characterize the dependency of the infants' body of either sex on the mother. She further claims that the emergence of multiplicitous drives into language is evident in "the Semiotic" and that the domain of linguistic meaning is distinct from "the Symbolic." While "the Symbolic" is predicated upon the rejection of the mother, "the Semiotic," through rhythm, assonance, intonations, sound play and repetition, represents or recovers the maternal body in poetic speech. Poetic language, in contrast to the paternal language or "the Symbolic," breaks apart the usual, univocal terms of language and reveals an irrepressible heterogeneity of multiple sounds and meanings. Poetic language has its own modality of meaning, which does not conform to the requirements of univocal designation. It can be used by either sex or multiple gender identifications. Poetic language, however, is especially suited for women because it is the maternal

body manifest in poetic speech.²⁵⁵ The feminist theories of Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler, as well as Zhong Xing's and Yuan Mei's, are interesting and plausible. However, socio-historical conditions in both the West and China restricted women on the poetic realm.

Some scholars may consider the point that Yuan Mei made in his paragraph—Qu Bingyun's poetry being "in accord with the standards set forth by the Tang poetic worthies"—as being at odds with his 'nature and inspiration' theory. However, it may also express Yuan's disappointment with the large number of contemporary poets who upheld his 'nature and inspiration' but ignored poetic metre. More importantly, Yuan Mei might have wanted to confirm Qu Bingyun's superiority to many male poets by mentioning her ability to combine the spirit of 'nature and inspiration' with the poetic forms she had mastered. After all, regulated poetry took shape during the Tang Dynasty and was commonly regarded one of the highest achievements of that period.

Remarks on Poems: Sincerity and Ingenuity

Yuan Mei's feminist reading is illustrated by his critical remarks on Qu Bingyun's individual poems. The rest of this section is devoted to their discussion, which will not follow the same order as the one in which the remarks appear in the *Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower*.

(1) Yuan Mei remarked in "Written On Qian Zhen's Poetry Collection" 題溫如詩卷 ("Ti Wenru shijuan"):

[Poem 13]

In the girls' quarters you were younger
but monopolized the intelligence.

閨房生小擅聰明，

At fifteen, when wed,
you were the youngest.

十五來歸齒最輕。

²⁵⁵ See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge / New York / London: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, Inc., 1990, pp. 81-9. For detailed discussions on poetic language, see Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1984, and

I was the one who cared about you the most;	相對關情惟我甚，
I love the pure poem that you just uttered.	新詩脫口愛君清。
Every time when amid burning incense, we sat together, exchanging poems,	唱酬每共然香坐，
You completed yours quickly, without beating time on an earthen bowl.	敏捷無須擊鉢成。
A book of poems is pure like icy snow;	一卷自如冰雪淨，
Clear and crisp chanting comes from the depths of jade orchid.	玉蘭花底脆吟聲。

(1:14b-15a)

Regarding the poem's naturalness of expression Yuan wrote,

It is fluent and elegant, like a bullet out of a slingshot. Yuan Mei 流麗如彈丸脫手。
隨園 (1:14b-15a).

(2) Yuan Mei also critiqued "Mourning Lu' Huixiang" 哭陸蕙纒 ("Ku Lu Huixiang"). This poem expresses Qu's deep sorrow for her poetic disciple's death:

[Poem 14]

Last year I saw you off in front of the painted building.	去年送汝畫樓前，
Nearly a year has passed and you are not yet back.	不到樓中幾一年。
From the beginning of autumn I have been dreaming about you.	自入秋來形夢寐，
Whoever came I asked about your daily activities.	每逢人至問餐眠。
I was startled to learn that there was something red, like jade, in your spittoon.	唾壺驚化紅成玉，

Your brush is now left idle, and writings are like smoke. 遺筆空餘墨似煙。
 If I knew there would be
 no more meetings after our parting, 早識別時無後會,
 How could I have taken your returning home so lightly? 宜教歸計竟翩然?
 (2:11b)

Yuan's comments were,

The emotions are true and the words are superb, and each word is like a drop of tears. If written in the Tang Dynasty, it certainly would have surpassed Yuan Zhen and Bai Juyi. Yuan Mei 情真語至, 一字一淚. 若在唐時, 亦必壓倒元白. 隨園 (2:11b).

Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779-831) and Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846) led the "New Music Bureau Movement" in the Tang Dynasty. This movement encouraged poets to follow the Music Bureau poetry tradition of the Han Dynasty, which expressed authentic emotions and mirrored social reality in a colloquial style. The poetry of Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen was exemplary work in this style, and here Yuan's confirms the excellence of Qu's verse.

(3) Yuan Mei highly appreciated the poem "Autumn Dew" 秋露 ("Qiulu"):

[Poem 15]

An old crane speaks, halfway in the sky.	老鶴半空語,
In the dead of the night, the autumn looks purer.	夜深秋更清.
When draining dew, lotus leaves are elegantly round.	瀉荷圓有致,
Wet cassia coldly keeps silence.	濕桂冷無聲.
I feel cool air moistening my clothes.	涼氣霑衣覺,
I see the pale light appearing, mirroring the moon.	微光映月生.
Do not worry about the slippery mossy path.	不愁苔徑滑,
Few people are going to walk down it.	直是少人行.

(1:3b)

Yuan Mei remarked,

Every line captures the true soul of autumn dew. Yuan Mei 句句是秋露神理. 隨園 (1:3b).

Yuan means that this poem appeals to all of the reader's senses instead of appealing only to the sense of sight. It does not depict the appearance of dew, but the reader can feel the dew when reading each line.

(4) Another poem Yuan Mei commented on is "Rain on a Spring Day" 春日雨 ("Chunri yu"):

[Poem 16]

A parrot extends her remaining dream,	鸚鵡拖殘夢,
Murmuring about the early morning chill.	喃喃話曉寒.
She does not roll up the rhinoceros-screen,	
out of laziness, ²⁵⁶	犀簾慵未卷,
Jade bamboo shoots accompany new meals.	玉筍佐新餐.
When a gust of spring wind blows strongly,	一片東風緊,
She lets both of her silk sleeves fall loosely.	雙垂羅袖寬.
At this moment, the colours of peaches and willows,	此時桃柳色,
Mixing with the rain, are making the riverbank gorgeous.	和雨艷江干.

(1:8a-b)

Yuan Mei wrote that this poem was

“Full of grace and charm.” [Yuan Mei 一起風致嫣然. 隨園 (1:8a-b)]

²⁵⁶ “Rhinoceros-screens” literally refer to door or window screens made from the rhinoceros horn, but in fact most of these screens were made from bamboo.

(5) Yuan Mei also specifically pointed out the techniques in "Songs of Passing the Chill Days During the Double-Nine Days Period (third poem)" 九九消寒曲 ("Jiujiu xiaohan qu"). The poem reads,

[Poem 17]

In the third <i>nine-day</i> period, ²⁵⁷ the wind is severe	
sounding like a secret and frightening signal.	三九風嚴信暗驚,
In the evening, gradually, it turns to frontier sounds.	到黃昏漸作邊聲。
The wind is clearly a piece of	
"Moonlight over the Frontier Pass Mountain"	分明一片關山月,
But now it shines on the 'mandarin-duck' tiles. ²⁵⁸	卻在鴛鴦瓦上明。
(1:21a)	

Yuan Mei observed,

The word "but" concludes the poem by beating out an opposite rhythm. Yuan Mei "卻" 從對面拍合. 隨園 (1:21a).

This poem depicts the wind of the "third *nine-day* period," which is usually strong and chilly, appealing predominantly to the aural senses of the reader. The first couplet compares the wind to a secret and frightening signal, and then to frontier sounds, alluding to a battlefield. The second couplet uses a phonetic play to create a compound image: "to shine" 明 (ming) and "to sound" 鳴 (ming). In its original meaning, the phrase "moonlight in Frontier Pass Mountain" in the third line effects a turn to the visual sense, but since it is also a tune sung by soldiers of garrison frontiers,²⁵⁹ "Moonlight over the

²⁵⁷ From the date of the winter solstice onward, every nine days count as one "nine-days" until the ninth nine-day.

²⁵⁸ The expression "Mandarin ducks" traditionally alludes to a couple. Here, the "Mandarin duck tiles" refers to the house of the poet and her husband.

²⁵⁹ "Moonlight in Frontier Pass Mountain" is originally the title of a tune of the Han Dynasty Music Bureau. See Guo Maoqian 郭茂倩 ed., *A Collection of the Music Bureau Poems* 樂府詩集 (*Yuefu shiji*), Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979, pp. 334-9. It became a tune for soldiers' song on garrison frontiers after the Wei and Jin Dynasties.

Frontier Pass Mountain” suggests the aural sense, too. In the closing line the author makes use of this compound image with both visual and aural senses to conclude the poem: the word “but” overtly indicates its visual nature while pointing to the aural character of the wind. This is what, most likely, Yuan Mei means by saying “The word ‘but’ concludes the poem by beating out on opposite rhythm.”

(6) Yuan Mei also discussed the closing line of Poem 1, "Songs of Willow Branches (fourth poem)" (translated in Chapter II):

If you gazed upon a slender moon below
how much greater would your happiness be? 若臨纖月更如何?

Yuan Mei commented:

The three characters, "how much greater" (geng ru he), are ingenious and lifelike. Yuan Mei "更如何" 三字靈宛. 隨園 (1:2b).

Yuan's critical remarks above illustrate his appreciation of Qu Bingyun's ability to balance the spirit of 'nature and inspiration' with poetic rules. Wang Zhenyuan and Wu Guoping maintain that Yuan Mei's theory of "nature and inspiration" includes two essentials, "nature and feelings" 性情 (xingqing) and "intelligence and ingenuity" 靈機 (lingji).²⁶⁰ The former tends to be feelings generated when a poet's individuating nature responds to a specific occasion, and the latter refers to a poet's intelligence and ingenuity illustrated by his creations.²⁶¹ Yuan's critical remarks on Poems 13, 14 and 15 are mainly consistent with the first essential, "nature and feelings." For example, Poem 13 speaks sincerely about the two sworn sisters' friendship from when they first met to the present time, as well as about Qian Zhen's poetry and its natural association with her personality. Poem 14 depicts the living image of Lu Ansu and her feelings for the poet; it is itself a natural revelation of the poet's sorrow for this little girl's death. The three other comments concern mostly the second essential, "intelligence and ingenuity."

²⁶⁰ Wang Zhenyuan 王鎮遠 and Wu Guoping 吳國平, *An Outline of Literary Criticism of Qing China* 清代文學批評史 (*Qingdai wenxue piping shi*), Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1995, pp. 479-91.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 486.

In these comments Yuan Mei praises Qu's ingenuity in creating images and in diction which effect the originality and interest of her poems. There is another poem by Qu that is said to have been "highly appreciated by Yuan Mei the Old Man of Suiyuan" 隨園老人所激賞 (2:14b), probably for the same reasons:

[Poem 18]

Double Seven Festival of the Yimao Year (1759)

乙卯七夕

The moon tent and the curtain of stars

shine on your gorgeous dress.

月帳星帷照艷妝，

You are making yellow silk with a loom

as if you were composing a palindrome.²⁶²

回文機錦織流黃。

If immortals really regarded each year as one day,

仙家若果年如日，

You would be too busy working by the Milky Way

night after night.

夜夜臨流亦太忙。

(2:14b)

Since none of Yuan's comments on this poem appear in the *Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower*, we do not know what aspects of this poem Yuan Mei appreciated. However, the poem's ingenuity can point to some: The "moon tent" and the "curtain of stars" are conventional images, but the poet uses them to create a vast, bright and shining backdrop to the Weaving Maid.²⁶³ Also, the poet compares the Maid's weaving "yellow silk" to the composition of a palindrome poem, suggesting that the Weaving Maid does not only have skill in weaving, but that she also has talent for writing. This is also an ingenious and original allusion to the expression "begging skills" 乞巧 ("qiqiao") that is the major part of the Double Seven Festival in which women competed in household skills, mainly weaving.

²⁶² "Palindrome" 回文 or 迴文 (Huiwen) is a phrase or sentence that is the same when reading it backwards. "Palindrome" also refers to a poetic genre; a poetic palindrome usually can be read backwards and both vertically and horizontally.

²⁶³ The Weaving Maid is a legendary figure, separated from her lover the Cowherd by the Milky Way but allowed to meet him once a year on the seventh day of the seventh month.

Remarks on Poems: Women's Experience and Intellectual Capability

When reading Qu Bingyun, Yuan Mei also took note of the female subjectivity in the poems and authorized its legitimate representation.

(7) One poem Yuan Mei commented on is "Songs of Passing the Summer (third poem)" 消夏詞 ("Xiaoxia ci"):

[Poem 19]

The plum rains lasted for over ten days.	梅雨綿綿十日余,
For quite a while, the rue	
has distanced itself from the Mt. Bo censer.	芸香久與博山疏.
Having hoped for a breezy day,	
I feel cool this morning.	關心風日今朝爽,
I prepare to sweep away flowers' shadows	
to sun my books.	豫掃花陰爲晒書.

(2: 2b)

Yuan Mei commented,

This is what an intellectual in a boudoir cares about. Yuan Mei 是閨中讀書人心事。隨園 (2: 2b).

This critical remark suggests that the poet is concerned about her books getting damp during the continuous plum rains. The rue mentioned in line two is a kind of material for making incense. By burning this incense intellectuals drove away bookworms and thus protected their books. Mt. Bo is a kind of a censer, shaped like a mountain and since "bo" 博 also means "broad knowledge," "Mt Bo" also suggests 'a mountain of books.' This line states that the incense has not been used for a long time, suggesting that the poet was worried about her books.

(8) Yuan Mei also commented on "No Moon on the Night of the Mid-Autumn

Festival: Repeating the Previous Rhymes (third poem) 中秋無月：疊前韻 (“Zhongqiu wuyue die qianyun”):

[Poem 20]

A fragrant banquet just ended	
my small window is empty.	芳筵乍散小窗虛，
It's only the first watch of night.	才是譙樓一鼓餘。
I hastily pack away the draft of my painting,--	畫稿匆匆收拾起，
There is still time for me	
to read a book by the oil lamp.	挑燈猶及再看書。

(2:10a)

Yuan's remark was:

[The poet is] going to take the women's examination for the Cultivated Talent degree.
Yuan Mei 將應女秀才試耶。隨園 (2:10a).

Since there was no Cultivated Talent degree for women, this critical note is a gentle tease, for Qu treasured time very much and studied very hard. It can also be interpreted as an encouragement for Qu to write about the details of her daily life.

The above remarks show that Yuan Mei was clearly aware that the text he was dealing with was the female one and should therefore contain female subjectivity consistent with his 'nature and inspiration' theory. He was happy that he had found it: in the text a female speaks about her concerns and about her domestic life. Yuan Mei's notes are simple, but they express his support of the representation of the female self. Therefore, they are of considerable significance. When women tried to write literary works they may not have been producing women's literature, because some women wrote entirely from a man's point of view. For example, the nineteenth-century English women poets tried to achieve patriarchal authority through metaphorical transvestism or

male impersonation.²⁶⁴ The “male-like” women writers of seventeenth-century China competed with men in men’s fields.²⁶⁵ Yet, only if women express their own concerns in their works and encode the female subjectivity into poetry, can there exist a women’s literature.²⁶⁶

(9) Yuan Mei also wrote a critical note about "Green Pearl" 綠珠. In this poem Qu Bingyun reveals her positions on a historical female figure:

[Poem 21]

A seven-foot-long coral opens like a brocade curtain.	七尺珊瑚錦帳開,
Shi Chong after all knew how to love a talented girl,	季倫原自解憐才.
Flinging herself from the top of the building,	
she was right to have died in front of her master.	墜樓宜向君前死,
This was not something a bright pearl could buy.	不是明珠買得來.
(1:7a)	

Yuan Mei’s note reads:

It has broad significance. Yuan Mei 所包者廣. 隨園 (1:7a).

Green Pearl (? - 300), who was pretty and talented at playing flute, became the mistress of Shi Chong 石崇 (249-300, courtesy name Jilun 季倫), who served in the palace of Queen Jia 賈. Shi Chong liked her very much, but unfortunately, a favourite of King Sima Lun 司馬倫 by the name of Sun Xiu 孫秀, also desired her, and when Sun asked Shi for Green Pearl, he was refused. So, Sun framed Shi and prompted the King to arrest him and his family, and when the soldiers came for them, Green Pearl killed herself by jumping down from the top of her tower.

²⁶⁴ Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *the Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980, p. 66.

²⁶⁵ See Ko, pp. 115-42.

²⁶⁶ See Judith Butler, pp. 1-34, and Catherine Belsey, “Constructing the Subject: deconstructing the text,” in Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl ed., *Feminisms*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991, pp. 593-609.

Qu uses the name of this woman to create a metaphorical image: A “Green Pearl” comes out of the “coral” that is like a “brocade curtain.” The two gorgeous objects, “coral” and “brocade,” provide the context for Green Pearl, and at the same time, this mixture of a natural object and a man-made object suggests her twin qualities—deity and human, symbolizing her extraordinary beauty and talent. The poet emphasizes that Shi Chong loves Green Pearl mainly because of her talent, distinguishing her from those women who committed suicide by throwing themselves into water or leaping from towers out of chastity. On the other hand, Shi Chong loved Green Pearl mainly due to her talent, suggesting that the couple shared musical interests. That Yuan Mei commended the imagery and the motif may also reveal his admiration of the love between the couple.

(10) Yuan Mei provided notes for “Words for Double-Seven Festival (fourth poem)” 七夕辭 (“Qixi ci”) and selected this poem for his poetry talks.²⁶⁷ The poet’s thoughts conveyed in this poem are contrary to convention:

[Poem 22]

Flowers, by nature, are gracefully lithe

while the dew looks cold.

Beyond the emerald railing the Jade Ropes lower.²⁶⁸

Where do the ordinary magpies come from,

That have luckily perched overnight on the clouds?

(2: 8a)

花自輕盈露自淒，

碧闌干外玉繩低。

不知何處凡鳥鵲，

僥倖雲霄一夜棲？

Yuan’s observation was,

²⁶⁷ *YMQJ (III): BY*, p. 744.

²⁶⁸ “Jade Ropes” refers to the two stars of the Big Dipper on the north end, and “The Jade Ropes lowering” suggests the night is late, as in Xie Tiao’s 謝朓 (464-499) line “The Jade Ropes lower over the Imperial Palaces” 玉繩低建章 in his poem “When I Was Rushed to Take a Mission in Nanjing I Left Xinlin at night for the Capital, Presented to my colleagues in West Prefectural City” 暫使下都，夜發新林至京邑，贈西府同僚 (“Zanshi xiadu yefa Xinlin zhi Jingyi zeng Xifu tongliao”), Xie Tiao, *Collected Works of Xie Tiao* 謝宣城集校注 (*Xie Xuancheng ji jiaozhu*), collated and annotated by Hong Shunlong 洪順隆, Taipei, Zhonghua shuju, 1969, pp. 216-7.

[The poet], uttering much veiled satire, deserves the same honour as Grand Master Song.
Yuan Mei 口多微詞,不愧宋大夫. 隨園 (2: 8a).

According to legend, on the seventh night of the seventh lunar month, called the "Double Seven Festival," the Weaving Maid and the Cowherd, who are separated from each other in the sky, have their annual tryst. Magpies gather together over the Milky River to make a bridge for the couple to meet. It was customary for people to glorify the magpies for making this meeting possible, but the poet does not deem the magpies as being on a mission of self-sacrifice. She mocks them as being ordinary birds that want a chance to perch on the holy clouds, subverting the magpies' selfless motive into a worldly one. "Grand Master Song" (Song Yu 宋玉, ca. 290-ca. 223 B. C.) was a great writer of Chu whose works contain much "veiled satire"--indirect criticisms--about the King of Chu.²⁶⁹

That Yuan spoke highly of the above two poems suggests that he is praising the poet's intellectual capability. The two poems disclose Qu Bingyun's judgments on two types of characters, one historical and the other legendary. Both are commonly found in two major genres of classical poetry—"historical poetry" 咏史 (yongshi) and "poetry describing objects" 咏物 (yongwu). Qu's judgments on the historical figure and the legendary figure are different from those of traditional perspectives. She did not praise Green Pearl for her chastity, but for the love that Shi Chong and she derived from their shared musical interests. Also, Qu subverted the conventional viewpoint in decoding the magpies' motive: Instead of assuming that it is a holy one, she points out that it may have selfish intentions. Both judgments reveal that Qu emphasizes literary figures' personal purposes rather than alleged public purposes. Yuan Mei's praise of Qu's intellectual capability is related to his feminist ideas that can be seen in similar statements. He often praised women and disparaged men when comparing the two sexes. He said, for example, that Luo Qilan, one of his leading female disciples, was superior to men in insight:

²⁶⁹ Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145-ca. 87 B.C.) indicates that Song Yu "dared not criticize the King of Chu in a direct way in the end" 終莫敢直諫 in his *Historical Records: Biography of Qu Yuan* 史記: 屈原賈生列

From my observations, Luo Qilan is kind-hearted and prudent, and she devotes herself to strict learning. She has brilliant insights, compared to which "great men" look like mere babies' 以余觀之, 佩香媿媿淑慎其身, 溺苦於學. 其高識遠見視大男子裁如嬰兒而.²⁷⁰

Yuan Mei made similar comments about his first female disciple, Chen Shulan 陳淑蘭. Since her husband Deng Zongluo 鄧宗洛, a Government Student, lost his position at an academic institute and eventually drowned himself, Chen was extremely sad. After burying him and choosing an heir for the Deng family, she hanged herself. Yuan Mei eulogized Chen by writing her biography, in which he compares the couple and deems the husband to be inferior to the wife in many ways. Virtue and outlook on life are among the most telling distinctions between the two: "Mr. Deng died because of poverty while Shulan died out of righteousness. They both died, but their deaths are as different in weight as Mount Tai and a feather" 鄧生爲貧死, 淑蘭爲義死. 均死也, 而泰山鴻毛之輕重判焉.²⁷¹

Yuan Mei was not the first scholar who argued against sexism in estimating a woman's intellectual capability. A century before, Li Zhi claimed that women had the same capabilities in learning as men and said that they should have the same opportunities to study Daoism as men, disputing a theory that women were shortsighted when it came to learning.²⁷² Some scholars, Wang Yingzhi, for example, rightly pointed out a connection between Yuan Mei's and Li Zhi's promotion of female education.²⁷³ However, compared to his predecessor, Yuan Mei went much further by confirming women's intellectual abilities in both learning and ordinary life.

傳 (*Shiji: Qu Yuan Jiasheng liezhuan*, reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959, v 84, p. 2491). Scholars see this statement as an implication that Song Yu criticized the King of Chu in an indirect way.

²⁷⁰ Preface to Luo Qilan,

²⁷¹ *YMQJ (II): WJ*, j 31, p. 559.

²⁷² Li Zhi states that women did not see things the same as men because women were restricted to their quarters, while men could go anywhere they wished. He wrote, "We can say there is a distinction between male and female, but can we say there is a distinction between the sight of males and females? We can say one sees a short or long distance, but can we say all far-sighted persons are male and all short-sighted ones are female" 故謂人有男女則可, 謂見有男女豈可乎? 謂見有長短則可, 謂男子之見盡長, 女人之見盡短, 又豈可乎? Li Zhi, *A Book to Burn / Continuation of A Book to Burn* 焚書 / 續焚書 (*Fenshu / Xu Fenshu*), Taipei, Hanjing wenhua shiye youxian gongsi, 1984, p. 59.

²⁷³ See Wang Yingzhi, Preface to *YMQJ*.

5.2 The Comments of Xi Peilan, Gui Maoyi and Bao Yin

When commenting on Qu Bingyun, Xi Peilan, Gui Maoyi and Bao Yin highly praised her works. In the meantime, they gave “purity” as the primary criterion for evaluating a female text, witnessing the female self-representation in Qu’s works and affirming her mastery of the art of poetry in all aspects.

Purity: Primary Criterion for the Female Text

Xi Peilan wrote two verse comments that express similar ideas, one of which is included in the *Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower*. It is entitled "On Wanxian's Poetry Collection: Following the Rhyme Scheme of the Poem 'To Celebrate My Birthday' in this Collection" 題宛仙詩彙次卷中自壽詩韻 (“Ti Wanxian shihui ci juanzhong zishoushi yun”),²⁷⁴ and states her observations on Qu’s poetry in general:

Your exquisite heart is like a jade mirror stand;	心是玲瓏玉鏡臺,
Nowhere does its clear light contact dust.	清光何處著塵埃。
I suspect it is from an earlier life of the moon on the mirror,	直疑明月前身化,
As it long ago had an immortal style and body of the Way.	早帶仙風道骨來。

After you play a zither,	
only a lonely crane echoes your music	琴罷一聲孤鶴迴,
From a mountain hollow where	
thousands of flowers blossom in every direction.	山空四面萬花開。
Your paper for writing poetry	
does not need to be in the bird-track form,	吟牋那用鳥絲格,
The cloud-like leaves of autumn	
can be cut and tailored naturally.	秋葉如雲自剪裁。

(Xi Peilan, Inscription)

²⁷⁴ The other verse commentary is compiled in Xi Peilan’s own collection, Xi, 3:7b-8a.

The expression a “Jade Mirror Stand” (“Yujingtai”) first appeared in Liu Yiqing's 劉義慶 (403-444) *New Stories and Tales of the Times* 世說新語 (*Shishuo xinyu*), referring to a mirror stand made of jade.²⁷⁵ Associated with the second line “Nowhere does its clear light touch dust,” however, this term ought to be seen as an allusion to the Buddhist monk Shenxiu's 神秀 (605-706) famous poem (gāthā) that compares the heart to a mirror: “The body is as a pipal tree, / The heart is like a bright mirror stand, / Wipe it at times, / Do not let it be tarnished by dust” 身是菩提樹, 心如明鏡臺。時時勤拂拭, 莫使有塵埃。²⁷⁶ This allusion functions as a metaphor for the pure mind revealed in Qu's poetry.

Gui Maoyi also wrote a verse inscription using metaphorical language as an appreciation of Qu's poetry in general:

Not defiled by even a speck of dust,	不著纖塵埃,
Your talented ²⁷⁷ brush is born in the heavens.	天生此綵毫。
It is enriched by seven emotions;	七情含丰满,
This book of poetry	
matches <i>Encountering Sorrow</i> .	一卷配離騷。
The orchid snow is sprinkling lightly;	蘭雪微微灑,
The pine-tree wind is aloof high.	松風落落高。
Your pure thoughts stop the night moon;	思清停夜月,
With plentiful talents you depict the autumn billows.	才富寫秋濤。
(Gui Maoyi, Inscription)	

²⁷⁵ Liu Yiqing 劉義慶, *The New Stories and Tales of the Times* 世說新語校箋 (*Shishuo xinyu jiaojian*), collated and annotated by Xu Zhen'e 徐震堦, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984, v 3, p. 458.

²⁷⁶ China Association for Buddhism 中國佛教協會 comp., *Chinese Buddhism* 中國佛教 (*Zhongguo fojiao*), Beijing: Zhishi chubanshe, 1982, j 2, p. 134. Shenxiu's biography is found in Zanning 贊寧, *Accomplished Monks of the Song Dynasty* 宋高僧傳 (*Song gaosengzhuan*), j 8, pp. 755-6, in Shanghai Bookstore 上海書店 comp., *Accomplished Monks Through Ages* 歷代高僧傳 (*Lidai gaosengzhuan*), Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1989.

²⁷⁷ “Talented brush” 綵毫 (Cai hao) alludes to Zhang Heng's 張衡 (78-139) prose-poem entitled “Rhapsody on Contemplating the Cosmos” (“Sixuan fu”) 思玄賦, in which there is a line “The talented embellishment and carved jade are bright!” 昭綵藻與瑯瑤兮! The Tang scholar Li Shan 李善 glosses

Bao Yin's postface is a prose critique that concerns all aspects of Qu's poetry:

From my point of view, the essence of Wanxian's poetry is pure and its ideas are meaningful. Her poetry is original and not tinged with the habitual practice of the "rouge and powder."²⁷⁸ The poet has upheld 'nature and inspiration' so that her poetry is fresh. But there is something even more profound about her *ci* poetry's meanings: it is clever in forming concepts and the chosen words are gorgeous; let alone, these words appropriately reveal her elegant and sorrowful moods in which the readers linger and ignore the colourful and charming words of emotions. This is the heritage of *ci* poetry of the Southern Tang. Her poetry is characterized by its lofty and outstanding words and style, and thus it is excellent work among celestials Since ancient times, writers who have something depressing their souls usually generate outstanding work. They embody their depression in poetry, so that the mood is especially touching. Wanxian's *ci* poems at times manifest a melancholic tone through soft and beautiful words. Perhaps because of this she could not enjoy longevity. If this is the case, I cannot help grieving for her 余觀宛仙之詩,骨清而思雋,戛戛乎不染脂粉之習.固已標舉性靈不能不新矣.乃其詞則又有深者焉,微獨會意巧而遣辭妍,抑有以達其芬芳悱惻之懷,使人低迴而不置其情文斐媿,則南唐之遺韻也.其筆韻高秀則中仙之逸品也. . . .自古文之工也,大抵中有所抑而協之音律,則尤足動人.今宛仙之詞綿麗之中時有淒惋之致.其不得享永年.儻以是也余又不能不為宛仙悲也 (Bao Yin, Postface).

All of the above critiques appreciate Qu's poetry highly for its quality of "purity," which suggests that these women poets regarded purity as a fundamental criterion for judging a female work. Their concept of purity is seen in their figurative or plain descriptions of the mind, the imagery and the language of Qu's work:

First, the poetic mind of her work is unsullied. Xi uses metaphorical language to describe the mind through poetry, alluding to Buddhist teachings. Gui also indicates that the mind is not touched by "dust," resembling the pure soul of a Buddhist laywoman. A

the word "talented" (*cai*) as 'literary talent' 綵,文綵也. See Xiao Tong comp., *Literary Selections* 文選 (*Wenxuan*), Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1936, p. 303.

²⁷⁸ "Rouge and powder" refer to feminine traits.

pure mind, however, does not mean lack of emotions. On the contrary, as Gui points out, it is enriched with “seven emotions” and “pure thoughts.” Bao Yin also sees an especially melancholic mind in Qu’s *ci* poetry. These women make it clear that a poet should have a soul untarnished by worldly concerns but enriched by emotions and thoughts. In other words, a pure mind comprises unsullied emotions and thoughts that are transcendent, noble and profound, as illustrated in some of their remarks on Qu’s individual poems:

A work transcending the earthly 超然出塵之作 (Bao Yin).²⁷⁹

The meanings entrusted are noble and remote 托意高遠 (Xi Peilan).²⁸⁰

The tone of language is noble and transcendent 語調高逸 (Xi Peilan).²⁸¹

Second, Qu’s poetic imagery is bright and limpid. In their comments, Xi Peilan compares Qu’s images to “the moon on the mirror” and both Xi and Bao Yin make an allusion to “xian” 仙 (celestial beings, fairy-like beings). These indicate that their concept of a pure image resembles the one that Yan Yu 嚴羽 (died ca. 1260) describes in his *Canglang’s Poetry Talks* 滄浪詩話 (*Canglang shihua*). Yan writes: a poetic image is similar to the image of an antelope hanging by its horns in a tree to escape discovery by hiding its traces. It is pure and elusive, like

Tones in the empty air, color in a face, moonlight in the water, and an image in a mirror
如空中之音, 相中之色, 水中之月, 鏡中之象.²⁸²

Even though differing from Yan Yu, who makes use of Chan Buddhism to illustrate his concept of poetic imagery, Xi Peilan and Bao Yin allude to celestial beings/fairy beings

²⁷⁹ This comment is about “A Picture of Heavenly Fragrance and Moonlike Image of Lady Wang Yuehan of Renhe” 仁和女士王月函天香蟾影照 (“Renhe nüshi Wang Yuehan tianxiang chanying zhao”), 2:9a-b.

²⁸⁰ This comment is on “A Pearl Orchid” 珠蘭 (“Zhulan,” 1:10a), in which the image of an orchid symbolizes virtue.

²⁸¹ This comment is about “To the Tune of Picking up Mulberry Fruits: The Painting of An Orchid” 采桑子：畫蘭 (“Caisangzi: hualan,” c: 17b), which personifies the orchid as a talented beauty.

²⁸² This translation is taken from Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992, p. 405. For a detailed discussion of this image, see this book, pp. 410-2.

to manifest qualities of poetic imagery similar to what Yan describes: brightness, limpidity and, therefore, transcendence.

Third, her poetic language is natural. Xi Peilan uses natural phenomena to suggest this quality of Qu's poetry, saying, "The cloud-like leaves of autumn / Can be cut and tailored naturally." Gui Maoyi identifies Qu's "inborn talent" for creating poetic works that are as natural as "the orchid snow sprinkling lightly." Bao Yin remarks about a *ci* poem entitled "To the Tune of Touching Up Carmine Lips: The Beginning of Spring" 點絳脣: 立春 ("Dianjiangchun: lichun," c: 9a), "As if it comes naturally from her mouth" 如脫於口 (c: 9a). These women's concept of pure language resembles a natural language free from adornments.

When commenting on poetry, these women poets may use "purity" to praise one aspect of a poem or to characterize the entire work. Examples of the latter are Bao Yin marvelling at Qu's poem "A Banana Leaf Fan" 蕉扇 ("Jiaoshan," 1:4a-b) by calling it "extremely pure" 清絕 (1:4a-b) and Xi Peilan commenting on another poem entitled "A Night Chat with My Sister-in-law Ruobing" 與若冰姑夜話 ("Yu Ruobing gu yehua," 1:3a-b): "The entire poem is pure and beautiful" 通體清麗 (1:3a-b).

The poetic purity that Xi, Gui and Bao espouse is apparently based on their understanding of poetry, which mainly follows Yuan Mei's poetics. Their understanding of this term is therefore well-matched with Yuan Mei's nature and inspiration theory. As indicated in her postface, Bao Yin relates the "purity" and originality of Qu's poetry to her upholding of nature and inspiration. Xi Peilan identifies Qu's work with "the poetic style of Yuan Mei" 隨園的派 (1:11b),²⁸³ while she also considers it to be "pure." Yuan Mei may not have agreed with the Buddhist allusion to "discarding the material world," but he maintained that a poet's individual positions should not be affected by worldly concerns and advocated the ingenious creation of imagery in order to convey spontaneous feelings. He also favoured natural expressions. Yuan Mei himself used "purity" to evaluate poetry, especially when talking about women's poetry. For example, he praises Xi Peilan's poetry, saying, "My female disciple Xi Peilan's poetic talent is pure and marvellous" 女弟子席佩蘭詩才清妙.²⁸⁴ When talking about a fourteen-

²⁸³ This comment is on "Songs of Gathering Lotus" (eighth poem)²⁸³ 采蓮曲 ("Cailianqu"), 1:11b.

²⁸⁴ *YMQJ (III)*: BY, 8 of j 11, p. 740.

years-old girl, he stated that her “poetic brush is pure and elegant” 詩筆清雅。²⁸⁵ Yuan commended another female disciple Wu Qiongxian and her husband Xu Shanmin 徐山民 by saying, “The couple’s poetry is of inborn purity and marvelousness” 二人詩天機清妙。²⁸⁶

Originally, “purity,” (*qing*) signifying “limpid,” was an antonym of “turbid” 濁 (*zhuo*), as seen in early sources such as “Oh, the Canglang River’s water is pure” 滄浪之水清兮 in *Mengzi*²⁸⁷ or “The River’s water is pure and it ripples” 河水清且漣漪 in the *Classic of Poetry*.²⁸⁸ In later times people also used “purity” to symbolize human virtue, meaning “unsullied” or “free from worldly concerns.” For example, the term “pure officials” (*qingguan*) refers to officials who are free from corruption, while “pure woman” (*qingbai nüzi*) stands for a woman who is chaste. In her informative and insightful article, “A Guide to Ming-Ch’ing Anthologies of Female Poetry and Their Selection Strategies,” Kang-i Sun Chang suggests that late Ming scholar started using “purity” to characterize women’s work and states, “Zhong Xing relies on an alleged female ‘purity’ (*qing*) to make his argument—claiming that ideal poetry must come from this quality of *qing* (purity) with which women are innately endowed.”²⁸⁹ Zhong Xing, however, merely uses it to characterize a woman’s mind revealed in poetry. Xi Peilan, Gui Maoyi and Bao Yin extend this term to include imagery and language, for the reason that a female’s text has special traits in many ways. Because of this, these women may have noticed that there was a need for special criteria for evaluating a woman’s text, and attempted to establish such criteria by using “purity” to comment on Qu’s texts.

Witness: A Woman’s Self-Representation

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 8 of j 12, p. 741.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 34 of j 10, p. 904.

²⁸⁷ Jiao Xun 焦循, *The Exact Implications of Mencius 孟子正義 (Mengzi zhengyi)*, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987, p. 498. This is a quotation by Mencius from the *Lyrics of Chu: Old Fisherman 楚辭: 漁父 (Chuci: Yufu)*, *Lyrics of Chu 楚辭 (Chuci)*, Shanghai: Saoye shanfang, 1912, p. 98.

²⁸⁸ “Cutting Sandalwoods” 伐檀 (“Fatan”), in Gao Heng 高亨 annotated, *A Modern Annotated the Classic of Poetry 詩經今注 (Shijing jinzhu)*, Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1980, p. 147.

²⁸⁹ Kang-i Sun Chang, “A Guide to Ming-Ch’ing Anthologies of Female Poetry and Their Selection Strategies,” in Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang ed., *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.

Apart from their inscriptions and postscript to the *Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower*, Xi Peilan, Gui Maoyi and Bao Yin each made specific remarks about Qu Bingyun's individual poems: Xi commented on forty-three poems and Gui and Bao on fourteen each, totalling seventy-one passages. The following part in this section discusses the remarks that have not been previously referred to, in the hope of revealing the range of the women poets' comments.

In her "Reading Ourselves," Patrocínio P. Schweickart observes that the female reader of women's literature at first testifies to the content as being a true experience of a woman: "The feminist reader speaks as a witness in defence of the woman writer." So, the first feature of the female reading of a woman's text is "the tendency to construe the text as the manifestation of the subjectivity of the absent author—the voice of another woman."²⁹⁰ When reading Qu's poems, Xi, Gui and Bao encounter the subjectivity of another woman, Qu, and recognize her experience by comparing it to that of their own. Especially, as close friends of the author, they see a character in the poems as similar to the one in real life and discover the poet's feelings, emotions and ideas as compatible with those of the poet in reality.

The following group of remarks by Xi Peilan and Bao Yin attest to Qu's domestic life expressed in her poems:

{ Group 1 }

[1] The readers seem to hear the poet talking inside a green window 如聞綠窗人語 (Xi Peilan).²⁹¹

[2] A pure scene of the woman's quarters is depicted ingeniously 閨中清景妙筆寫出 (Bao Yin).²⁹²

[3] A pure and cold scene is ingeniously depicted 清冷之境妙筆寫出 (Bao Yin).²⁹³

²⁹⁰ Patrocínio P. Schweickart, "Reading Ourselves" in Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl ed., *Feminisms*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991, pp. 537-9.

²⁹¹ This comment is about "Shown to the Jade Girl" 示女璧人 ("Shi nübiren"), 4:13b.

²⁹² This comment is about "I Sit in the Jade-Collecting Tower While Snowing" 蘊玉樓坐雪 ("Yunyulou zuoxue"), 1:6a.

²⁹³ This comment is about "Listening to Rain; in Responding to Tongyu's Poem" 聽雨和子梁 ("Tingyu he Ziliang"), 2:3b.

The comments in Group 2 are indications of the similarities between poetic feelings, intentions and judgments and those expressed by Qu:

{Group 2}

[4] The one who laughs at the infatuated immortal is just a blindly loving person herself. How many infatuated people are there in this world? 笑仙痴者正是痴情人也世間能有幾人乎 (Bao Yin).²⁹⁴

[5] There is profound affection, which is indirect but lingering 一片情深縈迴曲折 (Xi Peilan).²⁹⁵

[6] Head over heels in love [with the image of the lotus] 一往情深 (Bao Yin).²⁹⁶

[7] Infatuation is also a matter for poetry 癡情亦是韻事 (Gui Maoyi).²⁹⁷

[8] The words are most sad and gorgeous 辭致哀艷 (Xi Peilan).²⁹⁸

[9] This sorrowful music was obtained from Qin Guan 悽戾之音得之淮海 (Bao Yin).²⁹⁹

[10] Thoughts of elegance and dignity overflow the brush's tip 端莊之旨溢於毫顛 (Xi Peilan).³⁰⁰

[11] The judgments when [the poet praises the moon and disparages the black clouds] are fair 評別允當 (Gui Maoyi).³⁰¹

[12] There is an epiphany that can be told 妙悟可與人道 (Xi Peilan).³⁰²

²⁹⁴ This comment is about "To the Tune of Magpie Bridge Immortal: Double Seven Festival in the Intercalary Sixth Month" 鵲橋仙: 閏六月七夕 ("Queqiaoxian: run liuyue qixi"), c: 14a-b.

²⁹⁵ This comment is on "Seeing Qian Zhen off Who Is Visiting Her Parents' Home" 別溫如歸 (Bie Wenru gui), 1:13a.

²⁹⁶ This comment is about "Songs of Gathering Lotus" (fifth poem) 采蓮曲 ("Cailian qu"), 1:11a-b.

²⁹⁷ This comment is about "Mixed Odes on the Remaindering Days of the spring" (eighth poem) 殘春雜詠 ("Canchun zayong," 2:6b), in which the poet shows her infatuation with the moonlight.

²⁹⁸ This comment is about "Four Narrative Poems on the Renovations to the Tomb of Hedongjun [Liu Rushi 柳如是, born ca. 1620, courtesy name Miwu 靡蕪 and Sobriquet Hedongjun 河東君]: Responding to the Rhyme in Daohua's Poem" (third poem) 重修河東君墓紀事四首和道華韻 ("Chongxiu Liu Rushi mu jishi sishou he Daohua yun"), 4: 23b.

²⁹⁹ This comment is about "To the Tune of Garden Is Filled with Fragrance: Autumn Atmosphere" 滿庭芳: 秋意 ("Mantifang: qiuyi"), c: 16a-b. Qin Guan 秦觀 (1049-1100, courtesy name Shaoyou 少游 and sobriquet Huaihaijushi 淮海居士) authored *Collected Works of Huaihai* 淮海集 (*Huaihai ji*).

³⁰⁰ This comment is about "Written on the Floating Jade Inkstone" 題浮玉硯 ("Ti fuyu yan"), 3:18b.

³⁰¹ This comment is about "The Mid-Autumn Night" (first poem) 中秋夕 ("Zhongqixi"), 2:3a.

[13] After reading these poems I began to understand that ancient Buddhists must have faced a wall full of paintings in the west wing when they meditated on the Dao 古禪悟道須畫滿壁西廂, 讀此始解 (Bao Yin).³⁰³

In the following group of observations, Xi Peilan identified a character in the poems with the author herself:

{Group 3}

[14] This portrait of the lotus is a self-portrait of the poet 爲荷寫照即爲夫人自寫照 (Xi Peilan).³⁰⁴

[15] Her personality is seen in the painting-like imagery of the poem 即畫見品 (Xi Peilan).³⁰⁵

[16] There is a human being in the poem 詩中有人在 (Xi Peilan).³⁰⁶

[17] This poem is from your immortal bones 自是君身有仙骨 (Xi Peilan).³⁰⁷

[18] Isn't the lady in that tower a heavenly person 樓中人豈非天人乎 (Xi Peilan)?³⁰⁸

[19] The analogy is just right. It is also a speaking of herself 比擬切當亦作者自道也 (Xi Peilan).³⁰⁹

It is a common belief that writing mirrors the writer. Traditional poetics holds that "the poem articulates what is on the mind intently 詩言志."³¹⁰ Ye Xie 葉燮 (1627-1703)

³⁰² This comment is on "There Is a Jade Lotus for Sale" 有玉藕一枝求售者 ("You yuou yizhi qjushouzhe," 4:3b) in which Buddhism is the main subject matter.

³⁰³ This comment is about "A Spring Night" (first and second poems) 春夜 ("Chunye," 1:23a-b), in which a spring night is viewed from the point of view of a lay Buddhist.

³⁰⁴ The comment is on "Lotus" 荷花 ("Hehua"), 3:9b-10a.

³⁰⁵ This comment is on "Peony" 牡丹 ("Mudan"), 4:16b.

³⁰⁶ This comment is about "A Couple of Butterflies in the Falling Petals" 落花雙蝶 ("Luohua shuangdie," 4:1a), in which the poet expresses her thoughts through the personification of the butterflies.

³⁰⁷ This comment is on "The Double Seven Festival of the Yimao year [1795]" (first poem) 乙卯七夕 ("Yimao qixi," 2:14a), in which the description of a celestial situation reflects Qu's own character.

³⁰⁸ This comment is about "Impromptu Verse on the Mid-Autumn Night" 中秋夜即事 ("Zhongqiu ye jishi," 1:16b-17a), in which there is an interaction between the moon palace and the lady who lives in a tower.

³⁰⁹ This comment is about "A Plum Tree" 梅 ("Mei," 4:21b), which personifies the plum tree as a slim talented beauty.

explains this in detail in his *The Origins of Poetry* 原詩 (*Yuanshi*): “If one’s nature and emotions are in the writing of poetry, then the poem must also have a face” 作詩有性情必有面目. Thus, “every poem is seen through the person, and in turn every person is seen through the poem” 每詩以人見人又以詩見.³¹¹ There is no doubt that Xi, Gui and Bao followed this theory when they associated a poem with its author.

However, their remarks were not derived just from this theory but also from their own observations. For example, when Bao Yin talks about a melancholy mood in Qu’s *ci* poems, she relates this to Qu’s suffering from illnesses: “In recent years, Wanxian frequently fell ill and she always comforted herself by composing a *ci* poem” 宛仙近歲多病, 往往以填詞自排遣 (Bao Yin, Postface). Xi, Gui and Bao believe that Qu’s poems were written out of her own ‘nature and inspiration’ and truly speak of her mind. They declare the revelation of female subjectivity by connecting to the author’s real experience and by comparing it to their own experience. More importantly, these women critics confirm the representation of the female subjectivity and approve of it.

Techniques: “Anxiety of Authorship”

All other remarks on Qu Bingyun’s poems by Xi Peilan, Gui Maoyi and Bao Yin concern the art of poetry, which can be derived from traditional poetics. These constitute the major portion of such comments—forty-five out of seventy-one. This suggests that Xi, Gui and Bao were eager to identify the traditional art of poetry utilized in Qu’s poems.

To appreciate a poem by Qu Bingyun, these women poets pointed out the correct or creative use (or sometimes simply the mere use) of the traditional poetic technique. The following concern the organizational rules of regulated verse:

{Group 4}

³¹⁰ The translation is taken from Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, p. 26.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 576 and 578.

[20] The first four characters [漁郎去後 Yu lang qu hou (A young fisherman has just gone)] are arranged most methodically. Also, the following lines are pure, leisurely, open and vast 起四字安頓佈置最爲得法. 下亦清逸開曠 (Xi Peilan).³¹²

[21] The beginning is like that of Wen Tingyun's *ci* poems 起似飛卿樂府 (Xi Peilan).³¹³

[22] The opening line is transcendent 起手超忽 (Gui Maoyi).³¹⁴

[23] [The poet] resumes pentasyllabic form to write about a painting. The opening is marvellous and the closing is interesting 起五字寫畫, 題神結趣 (Xi Peilan).³¹⁵

[24] The third and fourth lines delicately correspond [to the previous lines] 三四巧切 (Xi Peilan).³¹⁶

[25] By concluding with the painting unusual gusto is created 歸結到圖奇趣橫生 (Gui Maoyi).³¹⁷

[26] The concluding line shifts the mood back [to that of the opening line] 結句能拗轉用意 (Xi Peilan).³¹⁸

These remarks are about the “art of composition” 章法 (*zhangfa*) of the poems. Traditional poetics prescribes that the discourse in a regulated poem should proceed in the sequence of “opening, continuing, turning, and drawing together” 起承轉合 (*qi cheng zhuan he*).³¹⁹ The critic Yang Zai 楊載 (1271-1323) explains specific

³¹² This comment is about "Madame Binghu Goes Spring Outing in Taoyuan" 冰壺夫人桃原春泛圖 ("Binghu Furen taoyuan fanchun tu," 2:1a) of which the keynotes are pleasure and leisure.

³¹³ This comment is about "To the Tune of Deva-like Barbarian: Inscription on a Fan" 菩薩蠻: 題扇 ("Pusaman," c: 4b). Feiqing was Wen Tingyun's 溫庭筠 (812-c. 870) courtesy name.

³¹⁴ This comment is about "Sheng Zizhao's Painting of 'Ballad of the *Pipa*'" 盛子昭琵琶行圖 ("Sheng Zizhao pipaxing tu," 3:12b-13a), in which the first couplet alludes to the Tang Dynasty poet Bai Juyi's 白居易 "Ballad of the *Pipa*" 琵琶行 ("Pipaxing").

³¹⁵ This comment is about "A Small Bamboo" 小竹 ("Xiaozhu"), 4:18a-b.

³¹⁶ This comment is about "A Blossoming Plum in the Twelfth Month: Repeating the Rhyme in the Previous Poem for the Third Time" 臘梅三疊前韻 ("Lamei sandie"), 2:15b-16a.

³¹⁷ This comment is about "On the Painting of 'Lan'gao [Gui Maoyi] Is Searching for Poetic Lines' for Gui Maoyi" (fourth poem) 蘭皋覓句圖爲佩珊題 ("Lan'gao mijutu wei Peishan ti"), 3:23a.

³¹⁸ This comment is about "During My Sickness Daohua Sent Me a Fan on which She Wrote Down My Poem Titled 'Seeing the Spring off' to which Daohua Responded in the Same Rhymes. I Am Writing this Poem again in the Same Rhymes to Repay Her" 病中道華以見和送春詩書扇相寄, 疊韻奉報 ("Bingzhong Daohua yi jianhe songchun shi shushan xiangji, dieyun fengbao," 2:19b), in which there is a *turn* in the last line.

³¹⁹ The translation is taken from Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, p. 478.

requirements for each phase of the sequence: in the opening couplet one must secure a broad area through which to move. Namely, it “must be lofty and far-reaching” 要高遠. The second couplet should “hold tight and not be allowed to slip away” 抱而不脫. The third “should be a transformation, like a sudden peal of thunder breaking over the mountain” 變化如疾雷破山; and the conclusion “may tie up the topic, may step off in a new direction, may shoot like a stringed arrow back into the concepts of the preceding couplets, or may make a reference. One must set at least one line free as a place for dispersal [ending]” 或就題結或開一步, 或繳前聯之意或用事. 必放一句作散場.³²⁰ The above critical notes of Xi, Gui and Bao are consistent with these rules and their requirements. For example, the first three remarks are on the beginning couplets, which are “open and vast,” “like that of Wen Tingyun’s *ci* poems,”³²¹ and “transcendent,” having different ways of being “lofty and far-reaching;” and the last two remarks are about two closing couplets: one “concludes with the painting,” which is a way of “tying up the topic;” and the other “shifts the mood back,” meeting the requirement of “stepping off in a new direction.”

Group 5 are about two interrelated poetic values, “indirection” 婉曲 (*wanqu*) and “reservation” 含蓄 (*hanxu*):

{Group 5}

[27] Sinuousness 婉曲 (Xi Peilan).³²²

[28] Connotative and subtly sinuous 寄託微婉 (Xi Peilan).³²³

[29] [The poet obviously knows about the matter but she] just says, “I do not know” 偏說 “不知” (Xi Peilan).³²⁴

³²⁰ Yang Zai, *Poetic Rules of the Masters* 詩法家數 (*Shifa jiashu*), *ibid.*, pp. 440-3.

³²¹ Wen Tingyun sometimes opens a *ci* poem with a remote or vast image. For example, in the beginning couplet of the *ci* poem “To the Tune of Deva-like Barbarian” Wen associates the hair and the cheek of the female to mountains and clouds: “The mountains on the screen shimmer in the golden dawn. 小山重疊金明滅 / A cloud of hair brushes the fragrant snow of her cheek 雲鬢欲度香腮雪. The translation is taken from Lois Fusek tr., in Victor Mair ed., *The Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature*, New York; Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 305.

³²² This comment is about the line “from ancient time it has been hard to stand alone” in “Ms. Wang Qian Leaning on a Bamboo” 王梅卿女士倚竹圖 (“Wang Meiqing nüshi yizhutu”), 3:13b.

[30] Loyalty is clearer when using the words “not believing” 作不信之詞其貞愈見 (Bao Yin).³²⁵

[31] Endless 不盡 (Gui Maoyi).³²⁶

[32] The “cherishing of spring” goes beyond the language 惜春意 在言外 (Gui Maoyi).³²⁷

[33] Marvellous thoughts emerge one after another 妙意層出不窮 (Xi Peilan).³²⁸

[34] The fourth line is extremely meaningful 第四句雋絕 (Bao Yin).³²⁹

Traditional poetics highly values “indirection,” which mainly refers to an indirect expression and “reservation,” which mostly denotes the connotative. Yang Zai lists “proceeding on too straight a course with no graceful turns” 直置不宛轉 as one of his ten warnings.³³⁰ “Reservation,” the standard explanation of which is “the words are over, but the meaning is endless” 言有盡而意無窮,³³¹ is most appreciated in conventional poetics. In his *The Twenty-Four Categories of Poetry* 二十四詩品 (*Ershisi shipin*), Sikong Tu 司空圖 (837-908) lists it as Category 11, explaining, “It does not inhere in any single word yet the utmost flair is attained. Though the words do not touch oneself, it is as if there were unbearable melancholy” 不著一字, 盡得風流, 語不涉己, 若不堪憂. As such, to “reserve” is to make language connotative. For example, one may

³²³ This comment is about the personification of a lotus in the poem, "A Potted Lotus Has just Started to Grow" 盆荷初長 ("Penhe chuzhang"), 4:14a.

³²⁴ This comment is about "I Am with Ruobing on a Summer Evening" 夏夕同若冰 ("Xiayi tong Ruobing"), 4:18b.

³²⁵ This comment is about Guan Panpan 關盼盼 ("Guan Panpan," 1:7b), which describes a courtesan's loyalty to her master. In the closing couplet, the poet uses “unbelief” to illustrate the courtesan's incredible action of loyalty.

³²⁶ This comment is about "To the Tune of Double Lotus Leaves: On the Painting of 'Picking Lotus Beauty' Requested by Gui Maoyi" 雙荷葉: 折荷美人圖歸佩珊索題 ("Shuangheye: zhehe meiren tu Gui Peishan suoti"), c: 13a-b.

³²⁷ This comment is about "The Flower Festival of the Renxu year [1802]" (second poem) 壬戌花朝 ("Renxu huachao," 4:5b-6a), in which the poet expressed her "cherishing of the spring."

³²⁸ This comment is about "I Painted an Orchid and a Chrysanthemum together with Tiaofang" 與茗芳和寫蘭菊 ("Yu Tiaofang hexie lanju"), 3:16a.

³²⁹ This comment is about "Facing Snow; in the Rhymes of 'Jian' and 'Cha'" (second poem) 對雪用尖叉韻 ("Duixue yong jianchayun," 1:13b-14a), which contains a line "No fragrance is provided by the trees but flowers are everywhere" 樹不生香盡著花, 1:13b-14a.

³³⁰ The translation is taken from Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, p. 436.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 405.

make no reference to unhappiness, but unhappiness is revealed as the basis on which one speaks of something else.³³²

The following group regarding "reversing" 翻 (fan), "fitting in with" 切 (qie) and "roundness" 圓 (yuan) are selected from those concerning particular techniques and poetic values:

{Group 6}

[35] Good at reversing earlier judgments; from this comes endless originality 善用翻筆可謂無窮出清新 (Xi Peilan).³³³

[36] Skilful and fitting in 工而切 (Xi Peilan).³³⁴

[37] [The poem] fits in with the phrase "after having done the embroidering" [of the *Collected Poems after Having Done the Embroidering* by Ji Jingyu 季靜玉繡餘詩彙] 切繡餘 (Gui Maoyi).³³⁵

[38] There are no words in this poem that are not round and inspired³³⁶ 通篇下字無不圓靈 (Xi Peilan).

[39] [This poem] is pure, harmonic and round and turning, just as the falling petals follow the wind and wandering orioles circle trees³³⁷ 清和圓轉如落花依風流鶯繞樹 (Xi Peilan).

"Reversing" or "turning a table upside down" 翻案 (fan'an) means to reverse an earlier judgment, which the critic Wei Qingzhi 魏慶之 (fl. 1240-44) explains: "This is the

³³² Ibid., see pp. 326-9 for a detailed discussion of Sikong Tu's category of "reserve."

³³³ This comment is on "A Potted Plum Tree Tries Blooming in Late Autumn" 季秋盆梅試花 ("Jiqiu penmei shihua"), 4:9b.

³³⁴ This comment is about "An Elegy for My Niece Manxian" 挽再姪女曼仙 ("Wan zaizhinü Manxian"), 3:23b.

³³⁵ This comment is about "On the *Collected Poems after Having Done the Embroidering* by Ji Jingyu" 題季靜玉繡餘詩彙 ("Ti Ji Jingyu xiuyu shihui," 3:10a), in which the poet compares the writing of poetry to the art of embroidering.

³³⁶ This comment is about "Tiaofang and I Painted a Picture Together" 茗芳與余和繪一圖 ("Tiaofang yuyu hehui yitu," 3:8 a-b), in which the images of an orchid and a trumpet creeper symbolize the friendship between Qu Bingyun and Ye Wanyi.

³³⁷ The comment is on "Man Day" 人日 ("Renri," 4:20a-b), which describes the traits of early spring. "Man Day" is the seventh day of the first according to the lunar calendar, 4:20a-b.

method which our elders called ‘turning a table upside down.’ It generally means to reverse the established judgment when using an allusion or talking about a thing” 此前輩所謂翻案法, 蓋反其意而用之也。³³⁸ This method is used when Qu Bingyun writes about a plum tree that “tried blooming in late autumn.” Since plum trees normally blossom in early spring, the one Qu is writing about came into bud very early; Qu, however, writes that it is “a branch that has not bloomed since last spring” 未開枝. This unusual treatment affects the interest of the poem.

The technique, “fitting in with,” means that language used to describe a thing should fit its manner. The critic Liu Xie 劉勰 (ca. 465-522) gives an explanation of this: “Their artful language catches the manner of things like a seal pressed in paste” 巧言切狀如印之印泥。³³⁹ The poem that Xi Peilan commends portrays a living image of Xi’s daughter-in-law. Xi’s comment, “fitting in with,” suggests that the poetic image resembles her daughter-in-law.

The last two critical notes of the above group commend the poems for their “roundness.” This term also suggests “perfection,” suggesting a quality of stylistic smoothness and polish, also an important value. Yan Yu says, “roundness is important in diction” 造語貴圓, and Yang Zai requires a “concept to be presented in a round and lively manner” 說意要圓活。³⁴⁰ The remaining twenty-five critical remarks by Xi, Gui and Bao also refer to the traditional art of poetry.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar maintain that the association of the pen and the paintbrush with the phallus in metaphors of creativity resulted in an “anxiety of authorship” for aspiring women writers in nineteenth-century England: to wield a pen is a masculine act that puts the woman writer at war with her body and her culture. In other words, the female poet must confront her predecessors who are almost exclusively male, and significantly different from her. Not only do these predecessors incarnate patriarchal authority, but they also attempt to enclose the female writer in definitions of her person and her potential that are in a drastic conflict with her subjectivity, her autonomy and her creativity. Thus, a

³³⁸ Wei Qingzhi comp., *Jade Chips of the Pots* 詩人玉屑 (*Shiren yuxie*), Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1978, p. 148.

³³⁹ The translation is taken from Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, p. 282.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 415 and 448.

woman writer experiences “anxiety of authorship,” which is a radical fear that she cannot create as men do. To alleviate her anxiety, she tends to seek a female predecessor who proves by example that a revolt against patriarchal literary authority is possible.³⁴¹

Did Xi Peilan, Gui Maoyi and Bao Yin have such an “anxiety of authorship?” Did a major portion of their remarks relating to traditional art of poetry imply this anxiety?

When confronted with the male-dominated literary history, Xi, Gui and Bao likely developed a fear that they could not write good poems. However, they did not seek a female predecessor to solve their anxiety, as did the nineteenth-century English women writers. In their critical remarks, the only one relating to a female predecessor, Li Qingzhao, was to point out how a line by Qu Bingyun was superior to a line by Li. All other positive references relate to the great male poets such as Qu Yuan, Qin Guan, Wen Tingyun, Li Shangyin, and Zhou Bangyan. This implies that Xi, Gui and Bao wanted to overcome their anxiety in a different way. Xi, Gui and Bao received traditional literary educations and accepted the traditional system of values as legitimate. They, therefore, sought to master the traditional art of poetry to dismiss the anxiety they might have had. Their reading of Qu Bingyun is a reading of part of themselves. They tried to attest that Qu was a qualified writer by connecting her work to the poetic tradition—mastering the poetic tradition proved a poet successful. Most poems that Qu Bingyun composed are in regulated verse or in the *ci* form. Yan Yu indicates, “Regulated verse is more difficult than old-style verse. Quatrains are more difficult than octaves [eight-line regulated verse]” 律詩難於古詩，絕句難於八句，³⁴² *ci* poetry is also a difficult form. Qu might have wanted to prove herself a skilful poet by choosing to write in these forms.

5.3 Qu Bingyun’s Critical Opinions

³⁴¹ See Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, pp. 45-59.

³⁴² The translation is taken from Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, p. 418.

Through other members' readings of her poetry, Qu Bingyun communicated with the rest of the feminist discourse community. Qu also exchanged critical opinions with them in other ways such as talking directly or writing letters. Qu's recorded critical opinions in expository form are found in her letter to Xi Peilan quoted by Sun Yuanxiang in his *Biography 傳 (Zhuan)* of Qu Bingyun.³⁴³ These express Qu's basic understanding of poetry and some special insight into it. Among her critical opinions, those regarding choosing model poets from classical poetry traditions from the perspective of a female poet are especially informative.

Poetic Qualities: Purity, Naturalness and Uniqueness

Qu Bingyun mentioned Yuan Mei's "nature and inspiration" (2:9b) before she met him and at a later time she claimed that she had been "born with 'nature and inspiration" 生來帶性靈 and that her poetry was their product (3:15b). As mentioned before, Bao Yin confirmed that Qu advocates "nature and inspiration." Therefore, it is very likely that Qu studied Yuan's poetics and poetry before becoming his disciple.

In the letter to Xi Peilan regarding poetic basics Qu Bingyun highlights human feelings and emotions 情 (*qing*) and elaborates on their sources. She claims: "As a way [of expression], poetry is best to articulate the feelings and emotions [of a poet] naturally, not to discuss issues" 詩之爲道,以不著議論,自抒情感爲工 (See Sun Yuanxiang, *Biography*). Qu holds that feelings and emotions articulated in poetry come from the poet's self-cultivated mind, in which there are two major elements involved—will 志 (*zhi*) and discernment 識 (*shi*). Qu Bingyun regards the will as primary and describes its cultivation as follows:

[In order to awaken her will, the poet] must cast off her worldly concerns and raise her mind to reach the nobility of Emperor Fu Xi, by cleaning her soul in the Salty Pool³⁴⁴ and

³⁴³ Sun Yuanxiang's *Biography of Qu Bingyun* is included in *YYJ*.

³⁴⁴ The scholar Wang Yi 王逸 of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 B. C.) explains the "Salty Pool" in Qu Yuan's *Encountering Sorrows*: "The 'Salty Pool' is the place where the sun bathes" 咸池,日浴處也. Yu Xueman 余雪曼, *The Exact Implication of the Encountering Sorrow 離騷正義 (Lisao zhengyi)*, Hong Kong: Xueman Yiwenyuan, 1955, p. 144. "Salty Pool" is also the name of the Yellow Emperor's music, as

washing her hair in the Silver Water Pool³⁴⁵ 擺落世事, 抗心羲皇, 濯魂咸池, 晞髮銀湟, 詩人之志也 (See Sun, Biography).

Emperor Fu Xi (2852-2738 B. C.) is a mythical sage. It is said that he first drew the trigrams and that these trigrams became the core elements of the hexagrams of the *Classic of Changes*. Salty Pool is a mythical bathing pool as well as the name of the sage-king Yellow Emperor's music. When Confucian scholars mentioned these sages and legends, they usually emphasized morality. Qu, however, uses them allegorically to describe the process through which the poet can achieve purity and nobility of her soul in order to awaken her will. When her soul becomes pure and noble, the poet achieves a high level of discernment.

Qu continues,

[When one learns how to] identify false styles, she will be able to sing a vocal solo to the finest string, to shake her clothing in rosy clouds, and rest her vision above peaks. She, in other words, achieves a poet's discernment 僞體別裁, 么鉉獨唱, 振衣霞表, 安目頂上, 詩人之識也 (See Sun, Biography).

This passage means that when she has discernment, a poet is capable of selecting true and worthwhile things for her themes and of creating unique and outstanding works of her own. The will and discernment of a poet form the basis for her spontaneously generated feelings and emotions.

These feelings and emotions can be characterized as unique, natural, and free from worldly influences, as Qu explains again in an allegorical way:

the Scholar Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200 B. C.) states in *the Book of Rites: Music* 禮記: 樂記 (*Liji: yueji*): "The 'Salty Pool' is the name of music composed by the Yellow Emperor. Yao augmented and revised this music for his own use." 咸池, 黃帝所作樂名也. 堯增脩而用之. See Sun Xidan, pp. 995-6.
³⁴⁵ "Silver Water Pool" refers to the Milky Way, which is also seen in Su Shi's poem "Responding to Wen Yuke's 'The Garden Pool in Yangzhou'" (thirty poems): Terrace by the Heavenly River:" 和文與可洋州園池 (三十): 天漢臺 (He Wen Yuke Yangzhou yuanchi: Tianhantai):" "The east border of the Heavenly River reaches upward to the Gods" 銀湟左界上通靈. Wang Wen'gao 王文誥 comp., *A Poetry Anthology of Su Shi* 蘇軾詩集 (*Su Shi shiji*), Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982, p. 670.

When [one is like] a plant releasing sprouts out of the dirt and growing and revealing her natural roots, [like] a piece of jade cloud flowing alone, and [like] the plain spring season arriving by no artificial tracks, she has a poet's feelings. 吐棄塵芽, 發露天根, 碧雲獨往, 素春無痕, 詩人之情也 (See Sun, Biography).

In short, Qu Bingyun highlights purity, naturalness and uniqueness in poetic creation. She employs the essence of Yuan Mei's theory of "nature and inspiration" in defining the poet's feelings and emotions by claiming naturalness and uniqueness of feelings and emotions, and singles out "purity" of feelings and emotions--freedom from worldly things--and underscores it, which is consistent with her fellow female disciples Xi Peilan, Gui Maoyi and Bao Yin.

In addition, Qu explores self-cultivation of feelings and emotions. Qu's opinions regarding self-cultivation fall into a conventional frame of poetics, but they are non-traditional in content. Confucian tradition requires a poet to cultivate his will and discernment in morality. For example, the Confucian scholar Ye Xie requires discernment (*shi*), talent 才 (*cai*), courage 膽 (*dan*) and power 力 (*li*) from a poet. In his theory, morality guides discernment, the key element among the four.³⁴⁶ However, the way Qu Bingyun proposes to cultivate her will is through discarding worldly concerns and making the soul pure and noble. Her definition of discernment places emphasis on finding trueness, uniqueness and excellence, not morality.

Li Shangyin: Acknowledged Model and Female Language

Stephen Owen observes that Tang and Song poets often imitate their predecessors and that during the Ming and Qing, there were groups of poets who modeled themselves on Tang or Song poets.³⁴⁷ Although Yuan Mei commends Qu Bingyun for writing on her own instead of imitating the works of her predecessors, she declares that she favours Tang poetry and acknowledges Li Shangyin as her model. The following is an interesting dialogue between Qu Bingyun and Xi Peilan, in which Qu

³⁴⁶ Wang and Wu, p. 296.

³⁴⁷ Stephen Owen ed., & trans., *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911*, New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996, p. 684.

explains why she has chosen Li Shangyin, not Du Fu (712-770) or Li Bai (701-762), as her model:

Du Fu's writing is like a vast ocean's swirling waves caused by playful fighting between [huge] fish and dragons; I dare not imitate him. Li Bai's writing is like rosy clouds in the sky that no ladders can reach; I cannot imitate him. I only have a desire to learn from Li Shangyin 少陵如大海迴瀾,魚龍博戲,不敢學也.太百如朱霞天半,絕人梯接,亦不能學.乃所願則在玉溪耳 (See Sun, Biography).

When Xi Peilan heard this, she challenged Qu by stating that Li Shangyin writes about fairy worlds and palace ladies; his poetry is like that of the "Poetic Style of Romance" 艷體 (*Yanti*), and its language is secretive. Replying that it is worthy of imitation, Qu said that Li was a very talented poet but his unconventional behaviour led him to be dismissed from political circles, and in order to escape further persecution, he had to express his thoughts in an indirect way. His way of writing poetry was derived from the *Airs* 風 (*Feng*) of the *Classic of Poetry* and should not be considered secretive. Also, some of Li's poems that were in the guise of fairy tales and love stories actually voice the frustrations of his political career, echoing Qu Yuan's *Encountering Sorrows* as well as the *Lesser Odes* 小雅 (*Xiaoya*) of the *Classic of Poetry*. Qu voices her disagreements with the opinions that Xi Peilan stated by asking, "Why do some people criticize Li Shangyin's poems as nonsense and treat them as continuations of the *Fragrant Mirrors* 香奩 (*Xianglian*) or the *Jade Terrace* 玉臺 (*Yutai*)"³⁴⁸ 奈何以無稽蚩謫躋其詞,於香奩玉臺之亞乎 (Sun Yuanxiang, Biography)?³⁴⁹

³⁴⁸ The *Fragrant Mirrors* is a poetry style initiated by the late Tang poet Han Wo's 韓偓 (ca. 842-923) *Collection from the Fragrant Mirrors* 香奩集 (*Xianglian ji*). This style was used to write about women and items found in their boudoirs. The *Jade Terrace* style was derived from the *New Songs of the Jade Terrace*, an anthology of love poems and witty poems about the royal court compiled by Xu Ling. The *Jade Terrace* style was subsequently used in the imperial palaces to write about romance. It became popular during the Six Dynasties (420-589) and came to be known as the *Palace Poetry Style* 宮體 (*Gongti*). All these styles were referred to with a derogatory term, the *Poetic Style of Romance* in later times.

³⁴⁹ It is worth noting that Qu Bingyun consciously excludes Du Fu and Li Bai and chooses Li Shangyin as her model, even though Du Fu and Li Bai were widely recognized as the greatest poets of Chinese tradition. Du Fu, the "poet-historian," closely observed contemporary political and social conditions and created powerful poetic images illustrating them. Li Bai, "a poet of fantasy" in Stephen Owen's words (See Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature*, p. 398), wandered through east and southeast China

To model oneself on a poet means mainly to learn from the themes and the language of that poet. As a woman whose life was primarily restricted to the family domain, Qu acknowledges that Li Shangyin, not Du Fu and Li Bai, is most familiar to her. Although she cannot find many similarities between Li Shangyin's experience and her own, the themes of his poetry share her poetic interests since he writes mainly about love, friendship and women. She learns from both Li's poetic themes and his language while disregarding the political overtones of his poems. For example, Qu Bingyun employs conventional images of peach blossoms as the symbol for Arcadia, which may be credited to Li Shangyin's frequent use of fairy tale imagery and similar symbols.³⁵⁰ She also borrows a number of words directly from Li Shangyin's poetry, for example, *tanlang* 檀郎 (my man),³⁵¹ *yaose* 瑤瑟 (jade zither)³⁵² and *jingkai* 鏡檻 (framed mirror).³⁵³ Also, Qu derives many images from those of Li. For example, she recreates the image of "a veined dust-proof rhinoceros-horn" 文犀爲辟埃 from Li's "The rhinoceros [horn] protects from the dust and the jade protects from the cold" 犀辟塵埃玉辟寒,³⁵⁴ the image of "a message about the young girl" 青娥消息 from Li's "I am expecting a message from the green sparrow" 消息期青雀,³⁵⁵ and "I feel cold and my heavy quilt seems thin like gauze" 冷覺重衾薄似羅 from Li's "how many layers is this fragrant gauze thinner?" 香羅薄幾重.³⁵⁶ Some of these words and images

and created unusual and ingenious poetic images to illustrate the marvels of nature. Since Li Shangyin unwisely moved from one political camp to another, he became involved in many feuds and his career was obstructed, causing him to create ambiguous images of love, friendship, women and historical figures to voice his frustrations.

³⁵⁰ An example of Qu Bingyun's images of peach blossoms is in her poem, "To the Tune of Picking Mulberry-Leaves Girls: Peach Blossoms" 采桑子: 桃花 ("Caisangzi: taohua," translated in Chapter VI).

³⁵¹ Qu Bingyun used "tanlang" in Poem 7, which Li Shangyin had used in his poem "My Elder Brother Wang Shi'er, Together With Weizhi, Has Visited Me and Invited Me for a Light Drink. Since the Day for Me to Mourn My Wife's Death Approaches, I cannot Go, yet I Write this Poem to Send to Them" 王十二兄與畏之員外相訪, 見招小飲, 時予因悼亡日近, 不去因寄 ("Wang Shi'er Xiong yu Weizhi yuanwai xiangfang jianzhao xiaoyin, shi yu daowangri jin, buqu yinji"), Ye Congqi 葉蔥奇, *Annotations and Commentaries on the Poetry of Li Shangyin* 李商隱詩集疏注 (*Li Shangyin shiji shuzhu*), Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1985, p. 151.

³⁵² Qu Bingyun used "yaose" (also refers to jade zither) in Poem 53 (see Chapter VI), which had been used in Li Shangyin's "The West Creek" 西溪 (Xixi), Ye, p. 105.

³⁵³ Qu Bingyun used "jingkan" in Poem 26 (see Chapter VI), which had been used in Li Shangyin's "The Framed Mirror" 鏡檻 ("Jingkan"), Ye, p. 339.

³⁵⁴ See Poem 33 in Chapter VI and Li's poem "The Jade City" 碧城 ("Bicheng"), Ye, p. 174.

³⁵⁵ See Poem 40 in Chapter VI and Li's poem "The Goddess Temple" 聖女祠 ("Shengnü ci"), Ye, p. 365.

³⁵⁶ See Poem 35 and Li's "Left Untitled" 無題 ("Wuti"), Ye, p. 396.

appeared in other poets' works prior to Qu, but it is likely that Qu Bingyun learned them from Li Shangyin.

As Alicia Ostriker points out, language is primarily male-oriented, but women have always tried to "steal" it from men to express their own experiences. However, women writers needed to revise male-oriented language to have it in their power, to seize speech and make it express what they mean, namely, to make it a specifically female language.³⁵⁷ Qu Bingyun perfectly demonstrates how this occurs. She had to make use of the language of classical Chinese poetry, which is a male-oriented one, to write about her feelings and experiences as a woman. Qu found it difficult to adapt Li Bai's language of bizarre imagery and Du Fu's language of social and historical imagery for her own use, but she found Li Shangyin's language much more useful for her purposes.

Qu chose not to borrow the language from the *Fragrant Mirrors* and the *Jade Terrace* poems, even though they are more directly related to women and their lives, for the possible reason that the *Fragrant Mirrors* and the *Jade Terrace* had a bad reputation and were not rich in masterpieces. However, Li Shangyin was considered the most outstanding poet of the Late Tang, although people compared some of his poems with those of the "Poetic Style of Romance." Qu argued against this comparison and instead likened his work to the *Classic of Poetry* and the *Encountering Sorrows*, both of which started the Chinese literary tradition and represent orthodox poetry. Thus, Qu claimed that her poetry too represented orthodox verse.

As we have seen, the members of this feminist discourse community took the principles of Yuan Mei's 'nature and inspirations' and his feminist theories as their basis. They also explored women-related poetic concepts further through their interactive activities, a major model of which, reading-commenting, has been discussed in this chapter.

All the members affirmed Qu Bingyun to be a good poet and gave their approval of her expression of a woman's experience in poetry. Yuan Mei reads Qu

³⁵⁷ Alicia Ostriker, "The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking" in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women Literature, and Theory* (Elaine Showalter ed., New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), pp. 314-37.

in a more personal and friendly way, while the female members read Qu from a more collective-public viewpoint and try to connect her poetry with tradition. This discrepancy is likely due to the gender differences explained by Nancy Chodorow: women always try to connect themselves to others, while men frequently seek separation from the rest of the world. Therefore, these women liked to discover connections between their creations and authority, through which they felt to be legitimized. Yuan Mei, however, was more concerned with individualism in poetic creation, which meant that Qu was a success from his poetic standpoint.

The classical poetic techniques and values that women liked to follow stemmed from a patriarchal culture but were not necessarily gendered as male. Unlike images and metaphors which were created by men in previous times and which embody the male ideology, forms and techniques become largely independent from the culture they were derived from; they can be used to express men's ideology, and can also be utilized to articulate female thoughts. In order to prove Qu as an outstanding poet, Yuan Mei also points out that Qu Bingyun observes poetic conventions. This by no means indicates that Yuan Mei thinks of classical forms as the male authority.

Though imperceptibly, these women had in fact begun to revise tradition in order to make it fit their own particular needs. For instance, their understanding of "purity" for evaluating a female text and Qu Bingyun's choice of Li Shangyin as her language model are of great significance when viewed in the framework of developing women's literature, because these facts evidenced that the women started exploring traits of women's literature and particular ways of creating it.

A writer and her discourse community are inter-determined. She accepts the writing principles and interpretative strategies in a discourse community of which she is a member. Then, she joins the activities of the community, generating new ideas to be added to the theories. In turn, the community informs her of new ideas that will re-shape her concepts and writing practices. During the course of this particular interactive activity, namely reading-commenting on Qu's poetry, this feminist discourse community had gained new ideas, especially the ideas about female writing of poetry. The discourse community would inform Qu Bingyun as well as other members of the newly formed theories, which would in turn re-shape their poetry.

Chapter VI Poetry

Qu Bingyun's poetry is primarily family-oriented. It falls under two categories, (1) her domestic life and (2) her social networks. The poetry in the first category focuses on Qu's family life and natural phenomena found in her domestic surroundings (hereafter referred to as "home-based nature"). The poetry in the second category concerns Qu's relations with others outside her domestic sphere. Qu's poetry opens up a world of a gentry woman's private life and feelings to an extent had not been seen much earlier in classical Chinese poetry.

6.1 A Gentry Woman's Domestic Life: Poems on Family Life and 'Home-Based Nature'

On Family Life

Qu Bingyun frequently celebrates the details of her domestic life, writing about almost everything she encounters in her daily life: getting up early, going to bed late, reading books, writing poetry, or learning to paint. She also chooses household objects, as well as her family including herself, as her subjects. Qu, however, has to face a problem when she chooses to write about her daily life, namely, there is no preferable 'aesthetic distance' between the poet and what she writes about—daily life is too familiar to inspire her to write poetry. Edward Bullough defines aesthetic distance as "psychical distance," which is a sense of separation between "one's own self" and the object of aesthetic contemplation—a sense that permits the observer to experience the object in isolation from his or her personal concerns and from all "practical needs and ends."³⁵⁸ A certain psychical distance is also necessary for literary inspiration because the poet needs to reduce familiarity with the object, as people's senses are more responsive to novelty. Yet, Qu Bingyun's poetic creations prove that she overcame the lack of aesthetic distance.

The following excerpts are selected from a set of twelve poems entitled "Miscellany on the Remaining Spring Days" 殘春雜詠 ("Canchun zayong"), which are about her everyday activities in late spring—working in the yard, watering in-door potted lotus, drying out tea, changing seasonal cloths, preparing for a party, obtaining a maid, watching the moon at night, buying roses, going to show her new poem to her husband, working on a painting, and so on.

[Poem 23]

Miscellany on the Remaining Spring Days (fifth poem)

The living cherry wood flames fumigate new tea.	櫻桃活火焙新茶,
Fragrance comes out of the silver walls of jasmine blossoms.	香出銀牆梔子花.
Its green shadows were clear, all day, pure as water.	終日綠陰清似水,
The ripples now are motionless, soaking my window gauze. ³⁵⁹	微波不動浸窗紗.

(2:6a)

[Poem 24]

Miscellany on the Remaining Spring Days (sixth poem)

To wash inkstones and to burn incense— endless chores.	洗硯熏香事不閑,
I have to have a maid follow me around.	隨身添個小雅鬟.
I call her using the name of the Xiang River's plant	呼名便借湘江草,

³⁵⁸ Edward Bullough, *Aesthetics: Lectures and Essays*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957, pp. 93-6.

In order for her to put down soft roots

in "many an acre."³⁶⁰

好托柔根九畹間。

(2:6a)

Poem 23 captures the occasion of drying out tea, which Sun Yuanxiang describes as, "extremely quiet and obscure and there are humans in it" 靜極幽極, 人在其中 (2:6a). Although it gives readers an impression of stillness and silence, this poem is actually filled with motion. The speaker is behind the scenes, but she dominates the poem—she sees the cherry-like flames burning, smells the fragrance of jasmine flowers and tea, visualizes the tea growing in the fields fresh like pure water and finally her mind's eye returns back to the room and "sees" the "ripples" of the fragrance soaking the window gauze. Poem 24 gives an account of the poet obtaining a maid because there are too many chores. Since there is an allusion to the line "I have tended many an acre of orchids"³⁶¹ in the *Encountering Sorrow*, readers know that the poet calls the maid by a name containing the word "orchid" (*lan*) and that she will 'cultivate' the maid in poetry. Also, largely due to this allusion, the imagery is enriched because reality intertwines with the poetic world, the present with the past.

The following three poems were composed after Qu Bingyun got up early in the morning; here the "jade ropes" may refer to the rain outside her door and the "whitewashed pillars" to patches of rain in the distance:

[Poem 25]

Early Morning in My Room for Collecting Lotus (first poem) 集芙蓉室早起

The potted orchids bloom

and the potted plum trees follow.

盆蘭花發又盆梅，

³⁵⁹ The Chinese used to fumigate tea with jasmine flowers. "The silver walls" refer to the fumigating oven made of tin, while the "green shadows" are reminiscent of tea growing in the fields. "The ripples" figuratively describe a strong fragrance.

³⁶⁰ "Many an acre" alludes to Qu Yuan's line "I had tended many an acre of orchids" 余既滋蘭之九畹兮. This translation is taken from *The Songs of the South: An Ancient Chinese Anthology of Poems by Qu Yuan and Other Poets* (David Hawkes trans., Harmondsworth: Penguin Book Ltd., 1985), p. 69.

³⁶¹ Hawkes, p. 69.

In my closed bedroom, delicate fragrance
circles a hundred times.
The maid is not, after all, a great talent.
On arrival, she opens the green windows first.

閉屋幽香味百回。
畢竟小鬟非俊物，
到來先把綠窗推。

(4:8a)

[Poem 26]

Early Morning in My Room for Collecting Lotus (second poem)

Below the emerald bamboo curtain,
rain murmurs.
Between jade ropes and a framed mirror
I am watching a block of topless whitewashed pillars.
The window lattices are clear; inside them
I seem to sit in a deep valley.

碧筠簾下雨潺潺，
人在瑤徽鏡檻間。
一帶粉垣高不盡，
房櫳清似坐深山。

(4:8a)

[Poem 27]

Early Morning in My Room for Collecting Lotus (third poem)

I hesitate downstairs and go to bed upstairs.
Using a jade stairway I pass up and down nimbly every day.
This morning, I go downstairs earlier,
As someone has urged me to dip my writing brush.

樓下槃桓樓上眠，
玉梯來往日翩然。
今朝卻下高樓早，
爲有人催染翰先。

(4:8a)

When she gets up earlier than usual one morning the poet obtains a fresh sensation of the blossoms of potted plants, the rain outside and the stairway, which are ordinary objects in her home surroundings. The first quatrain describes a moment when

she feels that the fragrance of blossoms is especially delicate, yet she soon loses it. The second expresses how she feels when she sits in her room while it is raining: the rain is like jade ropes falling from the sky and murmurs on the ground near the door curtain. In the distance, the waves of rain resemble topless pillars that make Qu's room appear like a deep valley. The two objects--the clear window lattices in front of her through which she is watching the rain far away and the framed mirror behind her-- seem to broaden the space where she is sitting. Xi Peilan comments on the line, "The window lattices are clear, inside which / I seem to sit in a deep valley" in the following way: "[This] has not been said by anyone" 未經人道 (4:8a).

In the last quatrain, the poet explains why she has gotten up so early that day. After gaining recognition in her region, Qu received many requests for her poems, paintings and calligraphy works, but she does not mention in the poem what kind of work she is going to do and for whom. In this quatrain, the poet also discloses some information about the structure of her house and her daily life: her bedroom is upstairs and her study and living rooms are downstairs; she goes up and down everyday by using a "jade stairway."

Qu often singles out one of her home objects to write about, and one spring day she wrote a poem about her mirror:

[Poem 28]

Facing a Mirror

對鏡圖

Too lazy to express my spring sorrows
with the strings on paulownia wood.³⁶²

懶將春恨寄絲桐，

Idly, I lean on my dressing table,
asking the mirror to speak for me.

閑倚香奩託鏡通。

How can I, make this round ice-like thing
deep as the moon,

安得圓冰深似月，

So I can fly into the Great Cold Palace

after making myself up?

妝成飛入廣寒宮。

(2:7a)

Qu's "spring sorrows" in this poem may allude to her unhappiness about love, or even her sadness over falling petals, but in any case she expresses these emotions through a mirror that she faces everyday. After associating the mirror with a round piece of ice and comparing it to the moon, Qu imagines that one day she will fly through the mirror to the fairy palace she sees in it. When reading this poem, Wu Weiguang exclaimed with admiration: "These imaginings are unusual" 夷匪所思 (2:7a)!

Qu Bingyun also wrote some poems about her family members and their lives, as seen in Poem 6, "On the New Year's Eve of the *Xinyou* Year (1801)," which depicts the joy of the whole family and shows Qu's devotion to serving her seniors and looking after her juniors, Poem 4, "To the Tune of Lily Magnolia Flower (Brief Form): Presented to Ziliang when I Bought Him a Concubine," which reveals her consideration for her husband and his strong sexual drive and Poem 3, "Serving My Mother-in-law at Her Sickbed," which is about her worries of not being able to take good care of her mother-in-law due to her own poor health.

In the following poems, Qu takes the roles of wife and guardian, respectively:

[Poem 29]

Parting from My Husband Who Is Going
to the Provincial Examinations (first poem)

送外省試

On an autumn evening, I am sending you off.
The red candle, producing a blossom,
seems emotional.

迎秋之夕送君行,
紅燭生葩覺有情。

I wish you could get rid of
your 'fondness for the flowers and moon,'
From now on, do not be known only for poetry.

願得破除花月興,
從今不獨以詩名。

³⁶² "The strings on paulownia wood" refers to a zither, as the Chinese use paulownia wood to make

(1:19a-b)

[Poem 30]

Parting with My Husband Who Is Going
to the Provincial Examinations (second poem)

The crescent moon shines on our tilted wine glasses.

一彎眉月照傾觴，

When a short separation approaches

How could we be reluctant to talk for long?

小別何嫌話太長？

Don't sigh when you hold a *jiaotong* zither again.

莫抱焦桐生慨息，

In this world, there still is a 'Cai Zhonglang'.³⁶³

人間還有蔡中郎。

(1:19a-b)

[Poem 31]

Shown to the Jade Girl

示女璧人

You, the little daughter of a concubine, are litchi-like.

側生小女荔枝同，

You accompany me when I experience

worries and disease.

伴我愁中與病中。

I have been making nothing of hardships

to bring you up.

辛苦不辭將汝撫，

Smart you are;

your demeanour is much like your father's.

聰明頗有阿耶風。

zithers.

³⁶³ “*Jiaotong*” (“charred wood of paulownia”) and “Cai Zhonglang” allude to a story of Cai Yong 蔡邕 (Cai Zhonglang, 132-192) in the *History of the Later Han Dynasty*, which says: “Cai Yong heard the sounds of burning firewood of paulownia when someone was cooking with it and knew that the firewood was good for making zithers. He asked to cut off a piece of it to make a zither. It made a beautiful sound. Since the end of the zither was charred, contemporaries called it the ‘charred end zither.’” 人有燒桐以爨者，邕聞火烈之聲知其良木。因請而裁爲琴，果有美音，而其尾猶焦，故時人名曰焦尾琴焉。 See Fan Ye 范曄, *The History of the Later Han Dynasty History: The Biography of Cai Yong* 後漢書蔡邕傳 (*Hou Hanshu: Caiyouzhuàn*), Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe youxian gongsi, 1971, p. 3098.

A flowering plant must grow high as early as possible

to reach green windows.

花須趁早簷窗綠，

Being anxious that your studies are delayed

I have taught you by a flaming candle.

書怕擔遲課燭紅。

My face looks severe but I love you in my heart.

顏貌自嚴心自愛，

Do not hurry when you flip coins or fight with flowers.

簸錢鬥草莫匆匆。

(4:13b)

The above poems resemble those of Yuan Mei addressing his family members in their straightforwardness and colloquialism. Poems 29 and 30 were written around 1788, when Qu and her husband were in their twenties. In the first one the poet speaks from the traditional perspective of a moral instructress, making a demarcation between poetry and a man's career pursuits and urging her husband to pursue his career, most likely with the government, instead of indulging in poetry. This illustrates Qu's traditional values, while her demarcation indicates that at the time poetry was not treated as a serious calling but as an amusement. In the second poem, the poet seems to be consoling her husband by indicating that, in the future, if he would like to entertain himself by writing poetry she could join him. Sun Yuanxiang comments on Poem 29 by saying "this is the ancient theme of advising and encouraging" 勸勉古意 (1:19a-b), while Wu Weiguang commends Poem 30: "This is really a legacy of the *Airs* and the *Odes* [of the *Classic of Poetry*]" 真風雅之遺 (1:19a-b).

"Shown to the Jade Girl," which addresses the daughter of a concubine is filled with caring and sounds like a gentle conversation. Xi Peilan says that she read this poem "as if she was hearing the conversation inside the green windows" 如聞綠窗人語 (4:13b). In other words, the poem resembles a loving mother talking with her children in her boudoir. Traditionally, a male poet addresses his family members, usually a son or a wife, in works with titles such as "Shown to My Son" or "Shown to My Wife" to express what he cannot or he does want to express orally. Qu Bingyun does not want to inform the little girl of something through her poem, because it is hard for a child to interpret. She, however, makes use of this tradition to reveal her affection for the girl. Qu did not give birth to any children, but she voluntarily took responsibility for the girl

she addresses in the poem and sometimes she also took care of her brother's son, Songman, who lived in her house. Qu entitles this poem "The Jade Girl," which is complimentary but vague, reflecting an awkward relationship between the poet and the girl who was born to Chunwu whom Qu bought for her husband for sexual purposes.

Qu Bingyun wrote some poems about herself as well. She was an intensely self-conscious poet, as is illustrated by her self-eulogy, which reveals her confidence as a poet and her traditional values:

[Poem 32]

Wanxian's Self-Eulogy: on the Mid-Autumn Festival
of *Gengwu* (1798) of the Jiaqing Reign Period

嘉慶庚午中秋
宛仙子自贊

Why do you look so thin and "stay on the dead twig?"

子神胡羸集於枯也?

Why do you wear the melancholy expression of autumn?

子顏胡愁氣在秋也?

Who are you?

子爲誰耶?

A declined orchid or

蘭之衰耶?

A withered chrysanthemum?

菊之萎耶?

Alas!

噫!

The legacy of my ancestor's *Encountering Sorrow*?³⁶⁴
(Preface)

其我祖離騷之遺耶?

Qu wrote this self-eulogy at the age thirty, after she had already become an accomplished poet. In it she identifies herself as a professional poet, not an amateur or one who considers poetry a mere pastime. By alluding to the orchids and

³⁶⁴ In the first line, the phrase "to stay on the dead twig" is taken from a story in the *National Documents: Jin Document* 國語: 晉語 (*Guoyu: Jinyu*, Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935, p. 101): Just like the birds that prefer flourishing branches to dead twigs, courtiers liked to make friends with those in power and not with those who lost power. Qu Yuan, however, would rather "stay on a dead twig"--be solitary--than associate with the mean ministers. The "orchids" and "chrysanthemums" in the fourth and fifth lines allude to the images in the *Encountering Sorrow*. Qu Yuan declared that he "had tended many an acre of the orchids" (See Hawkes, p. 69), suggesting that he had trained many young people who would perpetuate his literary and political pursuits. Qu Yuan also claimed that he had cultivated his virtues by assimilating many kinds of "fragrant plants" including chrysanthemums: "In the morning I drank the dew that fell from the magnolia;/ At evening ate the petal that dropped from chrysanthemums." Hawkes, p. 70.

chrysanthemums Qu Yuan says he cultivated, Qu Bingyun suggests that she is among his inheritors, and by referring to "staying on the dead twig" she declares that she has Qu Yuan's virtue of staying away from worldly advancement even if it means being solitary. In the introduction to their anthology of traditional Chinese women writers, Kang-I Sun Chang and Haun Haussy indicate that an allusion to an early poet "establishes lines of filiations and affiliation" and acts as "a kind of sociality across the centuries, the circulation of tokens and gestures that keep the tradition alive."³⁶⁵ This statement can help explain Qu Bingyun's above allusions. Namely, when making the connection between Qu Yuan and herself, Qu Bingyun naturally acknowledges that she is a legitimate poet even though due to her modest nature she says that she is merely a "declined" or "withered" inheritor of Qu Yuan.

Qu Bingyun's entire life was devoted to poetic creation, as she indicated one year prior to writing her self-eulogy:

[Poem 33]

Words for Celebrating My Thirtieth Birthday

三十自壽辭

The autumn tinge, fresh and colourful,

shines on my tower's terrace.

鮮艷秋色映樓臺，

Why do I need a veined "dust-proof rhinoceros-horn"³⁶⁶

那用文犀爲辟埃？

Having idled away half of my lifetime,

I am living with poetry.

半世閑身詩裡過，

In recent ten years,

my pure happiness has been derived from disease.

十年清福病中來。

My shadow projects itself on the orchid window gauze

when I sit by burning incense.

蘭窗紗影和香坐，

³⁶⁵ Sun Chang and Haun, p. 6.

³⁶⁶ "Veined dust-proof rhinoceros horn" refers to a legendary rhinoceros horn that was dust-proof, of which Ren Fang 任昉 (460-508) gave the following account: "The rhinoceros that prevents dust is a sea animal. Its horn is dust-proof. If it is placed on a cushion, the horn prevents the cushion from being soiled even by a single particle of dust. 卻塵犀，海獸也，然其角辟塵。致(置)之於座，塵埃不入。Ren

The flowers of my disordered hair bun

bloom in front of the mirror.

In this world, I don't think that fine silk is the best.

I am happy with the cotton skirt,

which was made when I got married.

(2:11b-12a)

蓬鬢花枝對鏡開。

未覺人間羅綺好，

布裙喜是嫁時裁。

The theme of autumn is conventionally melancholic.³⁶⁷ Yet, the autumn setting of this poem is pleasant, summing up Qu's life with two major themes, poetry and disease. She is content with her life because of poetry despite her constantly failing health. This poem also reveals Qu's preferred life-style: a simple and cozy one rather than a luxurious one, which reflects the traditional intellectual values of Confucius: "The gentleman rests at ease in poverty"³⁶⁸ 君子固窮。

Poetry and disease have been Qu's companions since a very tender age and they have significantly affected her life. As she puts it in the above poem, "My pure happiness has been derived from disease." This is because Qu had been able to enjoy poetry partly due to the bad health that freed her from a lot of housework. However, she also suffered from a disease that was unbearable at times. In many poems Qu describes her physical and psychological torment caused by the disease. The following are two of them:

[Poem 34]

Feeling of the disease

病懷

Too stunned to see chrysanthemum petals

on the cold green lichen,

I've not opened my red windows several days.

驚心殘菊冷蒼苔，

幾日紅窗未遣開。

Fang, *The Accounts of Things Strange* 述異記 (*Shuyi ji*, 2:10a), in *A Book Collection of the Han and Wei Dynasties* 漢魏叢書 (*Hanwei congshu*), v. 89:2, Hunan: Hunan Yiwen Shuju, 1894.

³⁶⁷ See Note 373 in this chapter.

³⁶⁸ Zhao Cong annotated, *The Analects of Confucius: Duke Ling of Wei*, p. 328.

In the sickbed I especially cherish time
as it passes like flowing water.

In my dreams, I formed those lines
so they have nothing to do with talent.

Geese pass over my tower to a message,
While my swallow-like hair drops onto
the cloud-like pillows.

I should burn some incense again as medicine,
After laughing at the most 'talented' silvers and leaves.
(2:15a)

病裡流光偏可戀，

夢中得句豈關才。

雁傳風信當樓過，

燕掠雲鬟墮枕來。

當取香焚還當藥，

笑佗銀葉最多材。

[Poem 35]

Writing by Chance to Divert Myself from Liver Disease

肝病偶遣

I have no way out of great pain
when the spring comes.

I use silvers and leaves to ease my sick body,
but they have not done any good.

I lie, my eyes often wide open, as clear as water,
I feel cold and my thick quilt seems thin like silk.

The medicine does not help when
I toss and turn.

Seeing new blossoms of plum trees
I start to be afraid of idling away the time.

In bed my hair falls down depressingly,
like heavy clouds.

I have dropped hairpins and abandoned pearls
for a month.

(1:18a)

可奈春來病又多，

鎮殘銀葉未曾瘥。

眠常雙眼清如水，

冷覺重衾薄似羅。

藥力不勝愁宛轉，

梅花新放恐蹉跎。

睡鬟絡索頽雲重，

釵簪珠拋一月過。

In both poems, "silvers and leaves" refer respectively to needles used in acupuncture and to Chinese herbal medicine. In Poem 34, there is a pun in the concluding line: "material" 材 (cai) is a homonym of "talent" 才 (cai). This pun means that although there are various "talents" (materials) involved in medicine, they did not cure her disease. Having taken the medicine for a long period of time, Qu lost her confidence in the medical treatment. Instead of taking more medicine, she worships Buddha and asks him to relieve her pain. In Poem 35 Qu describes her bitter experience of long-term liver disease that might have resulted in some psychological problems. Since this poem exposes Qu's anguish in a way that is so true to life and unique, Zhao Mingxiang comments, "People who have not experienced the disease cannot understand her situation" 非親嘗者不知 (1:18a).

The above poems make it clear that the familiarity of her family life was not an artistic problem for Qu. She had acute aesthetic sensibility and unusual imagination, which enabled her to be inspired by familiar situations. When Qu called her maid by the name of a fragrant plant alluding to the *Encountering Sorrow*, she betrayed herself as an inheritor of that literary work. The fact that she desired to fly to the fairy palace though a mirror in her room showed that the boundaries between history and present and between literary or fantastic worlds and reality disappeared for her. Qu lived in an artistic/fantastic world that she had created herself. The readers get a glimpse of that world through some details in Qu's descriptions of her daydreams such as: "I am confused if this is my body or a butterfly's? / The words of Zhuangzi are not false"³⁶⁹ 是身是蝶縱模糊, 語出蒙壯理不誣, and, "I feel that there are numerous fantasies in this world" 覺來世上原多幻 (2:23b). Since Qu fantasized about her life and her surroundings and made them artistic she became a part of the artistic/fantastic world that she created; this way, she did not need to distance herself from her fantastic world to live her life and get her inspirations.

On 'Home-Based Nature'

³⁶⁹ *Zhuangzi: All Things Being Equal*: "Long ago, Zhuang Zhou dreamed he was a butterfly fluttering among trees, doing as he pleased, completely unaware of a Zhuang Zhou. A sudden, awakening, and there, looking a little out of sorts, was Zhuang Zhou. Now, I don't know whether it is Zhou who dreamed her was a butterfly, or whether a butterfly dreams he's Zhuang Zhou." This translation, in which I change

Qu Bingyun wrote many poems on natural phenomena found in her home surroundings such as weather, seasons, time, planets, trees, flowers, birds and even worms. About eighty-five out of five hundred twenty-eight poems in her *Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower* are on such themes. Qu projects her personal disposition, judgements, values and feelings onto the imagery of nature in her poems, making them strongly subjective. For example, when she writes on a natural object, Qu tends to describe her sense of the object instead of its real appearance. Yuan Mei suggested this in his praise of Poem 15, "Autumn Dew:" "Every line captures the true soul of autumn dew." Readers can sense the soul of an object even when they do not see it, and, they get a better sense of authenticity when they explore the soul of the object rather than reading a faithful description of its physical appearance, as illustrated by the following two poems:

[Poem 36]

A New Autumn Evening

新秋夕

By chance, slightly ill,

I circle my winding corridor.

偶扶小病繞迴廊，

I find that even their leaves are perfumed

when the lotuses stay still.

荷靜方知葉也香。

The sky moves about disorderly,

while the stars make sounds.

碧落亂移星作響，

The Silver Bay hangs obliquely;

the river shines.

銀灣斜掛水生光。

Deep in the bushes, slumbering butterflies are dreaming

sweetly this autumn.

深叢宿蝶甜秋夢，

In the darkened corners insects are chanting

on this cool and bright night.

暗壁虫吟耿夜涼。

"Chuang Chou" into "Zhuang Zhou" according to the *pinyin* system, is taken from *The Essential: Chuang*

I want to descend the steps to walk about further.
I hesitate, as I may not be able to bear so much dew.
(4:22a)

心欲下階行一遍，
未勝多露故徬徨。

There are some bizarre images created in this poem—the lotuses are still and quiet, while the stars move around and produce sounds, and the moon hangs over the river, making the water shine. The poet, rather than portraying real stars and moon in the sky, depicts their images reflected in the lotus pool, where, because of the ripples, reflected images of the stars seem to fall down and move about disorderly, crashing into each other and making sounds. "The Silver Bay" conventionally stands for the moon when it wanes like a hook. It is also reflected in the river, as if the moon were hanging in the sky of water. The above images are the poet's impressions of natural objects, which are unusual but vivid and realistic. Lingke 凌客 comments, "this poem is pure and gorgeous; its closing line especially betrays the legacy of the *Airs*" 亦清亦艷. 結處尤得風人之遺 (4:22a). The readers may not be able to associate the closing line with the *Airs* of the *Classic of Poetry*, but they can appreciate the purity and gorgeousness of the poem's imagery.

The readers can further enjoy similar imagery in the following poem about the moon, a frequent theme in the *Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower*.

[Poem 37]

The Moon on the Night of the Sixteenth

十六夜月

A slice of the Silver Toad's image
Is blown up by the wind to the jade sky.
I am still unsure if tonight's full moon³⁷⁰
Is as round as last night.

一片銀蟾影，
風吹上碧天。
還疑今夜望，
未減昨宵圓。

Tzu (Sam Hamill and J. P. Seaton trans., Boston & London: Shambhala, 1998), p. 18.

³⁷⁰ There are four phases of the moon that frequently appeared in classical Chinese poetry: the new moon 朔 (*shuo*), the first quarter 上弦 (*shangxian*), the full moon 望 (*wang*) and the last quarter 下弦 (*xiaxian*). The full moon, according to the lunar calendar, is at the fifteenth day.

My poetic thought is pure like water;
The flowers' fragrance becomes light mist.
Unaware of being under pure dew,
I lean on the window alone.

詩思清如水，
花香澹作煙。
不知清露下，
猶自倚窗前。

(1: 4a)

Qu Bingyun wrote this autumn poem around 1785, right after getting married. She describes the moon on the sixteenth day of the lunar calendar, possibly the day after the Mid-Autumn Festival, when it is supposed to be at its brightest. In the poem, the "Silver Toad," a common metaphor for the moon, is blown to the sky by the wind. From there it shines down on the world in the speaker's "poetic thought," which is "pure like water" (another conventional trope). It also extends to "a smoke of flower fragrance." The "pure dew," which also echoes the light of the "Silver Toad," is secretly "soaking" through the speaker's clothes. At night, in a peaceful and delighted mood, the speaker leans on a window watching the "Silver Toad." In her imaginative world, the speaker's poetic thought and the smell of the flowers become visual, and while the "pure dew" may be not real, the light of the "Silver Toad" is. She murmurs to herself, wondering if the "Silver Toad" is as round as last night's and about her lack of awareness of the "pure dew." Wu Weiguang remarks, "The sixth line captivates the soul and gets at the marrow, while the closing line has a long-lasting flavour" 六句鉤魂吸髓，結亦味長 (1:4a). Qu makes her family life an artistic world of which she is part; she also takes part in the nature, not merely as an observer but as a participant.

Some of Qu's poems on nature are identified as masculine in style by Sun Yuanxiang. Since poetic tradition is a male tradition, it is natural for some to associate a number of Qu's poems with those of male poets. Yet, because Qu writes about what she perceives, her 'masculine' images are not necessarily created in masculine style, but rather it is the masculine style of an object that the poet senses. The poem about heavy rain reveals is a good example of this:

[Poem 38]

Heavy Rain (first poem)

大雨

The ink-like rain crashes on my windows
from the turmoil of the cloudy sky.
Vying to fly from the eaves troughs
like hundreds of spurting fountains.
Afraid that the rice blossoms' fragrance
will be drown and killed,
I shout at the maid to walk through water,
and look in front of the gate.

壓窗如墨亂雲天，
屋溜爭飛百道泉。
祇恐稻花香浸殺，
呼鬟踢濕看門前。

(3:10b-11a)

Initially, readers may relate the first two lines that so vividly capture the images of violent rain to Li Bai's "masculine style" poems, but when they read on, they realize that it is a very female perception of the rain. The poet, after all, describes the rain as "heavy and scary," while a male may regard it as nothing serious and treat it lightly. There is also a female sympathy for the plants in this poem.

Another example is "To the Tune of Celebrating the Pure Morning: Watching Plum Trees In a Mountain Temple" 慶清朝: 山寺觀梅 ("Qingqingzhao: shansi guanmei") which Sun Yuanxiang regards as masculine. The first stanza, on which Sun makes his comments, reads:

[poem 39]

Snow caresses your robe, making it lighter.
Wind combs your temples, making them thinner.
Fragrance comes from an ancient Buddha niche.
A piece of pure cold and
A mild smell of sandalwood fuse together.
Here, who held horizontally an iron flute,³⁷¹

雪拂衣輕，
風梳鬢薄。
香來古佛龕中。
清寒一片，
旃檀和氣交融。
此地誰橫鐵笛，

³⁷¹ "Holding horizontally an iron flute" alludes to the lines, "To trouble you more holding horizontally an iron flute, / blow a music for a group of immortals" 更煩橫鐵笛, / 吹與眾仙聆 in Hu Yin's 胡寅 (1098-

To call back the spring and wake up jade dragons?³⁷²

Idly I stand and stare at the surroundings--

There the cold fragility

Wrap the fragrant shrubs.

(c 7)

尋春喚醒玉虬龍？

閒凝佇，

四圍冷脆，

裹住芳叢。

The depicted images in this *ci* poem appear to be remote, indifferent, and calm. Sun Yuanxiang sees these images as "pure, masculine, contemplative, and melancholic" 清雄沉鬱 and says, "I did not expect to see these qualities in a woman's poetry" 未意闈閣得之. However, Qu created these images from her impression of the "remoteness, indifference and calmness" of her surroundings, and the tropes and allusions that she used in creating these images are quite feminine: wind "combs" the temples and snow "caresses" the robe, and shrubs are "fragrant." The allusions, "[who] holding horizontally an iron flute" and "[the music] waking up jade dragons," seem to be masculine. They, however, create a series of vivid images of the wind and snow to give the readers a beautiful scene that is not masculine at all: The wind is blowing and making a sound like music of "an iron flute." It stirs up snow as if jade dragons were woken up and flying.

Qu also makes use of nature to express her various moods and convey her thoughts and values, as Yuan Mei has pointed out that Poem 19, "Songs of Passing the Summer" (third poem), exposes the cares of an intellectual in the boudoir, while Poem 22, "Words for the Double-Seven" (fourth poem), expresses Qu's ironic opinions about magpies. In the following *ci* poem Qu utilized the traditional theme "grievous autumn"³⁷³ 悲秋 ("beiqiu") to express her worries:

1156) poem entitled "Presented to Mr. Liu When I Travel in Mt. Wuyi" 游武夷贈劉生 ("You Wuyi Zeng Liusheng"), Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮, Ni Qixin 倪其心 et al comp., *Complete Song Poems* 全宋詩 (*Quan Song shi*), Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1998, v 33, p. 20997.

³⁷² "Jade dragons" alludes to flying snow, as in a line, "Jade dragons chilled Mt. Yan overnight" 峴山一夜玉籠寒 in Lü Yan's poem "I Am Writing This Poem by a Sword in Snow in Xiangyang" 劍畫此詩於襄陽雪中 ("Jianhua cishi yu Xiangyang xuezhong"), *Complete Tang Poems* 全唐詩 (*Quan Tang shi*), Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960, v.24, section 858, p. 9698. "Qiulong" 虬龍 is a legendary smaller dragon with horns.

³⁷³ Since autumn is a season of decline, traditionally, poets expressed a melancholy mood through depicting the experience of autumn. It was commonly accepted that Song Yu's line "Grievous! Autumn is as an atmosphere" 悲哉秋之爲氣也 started the theme of "grievous autumn" in classical Chinese

[Poem 40]

To the Tune of Fragrance fills the Garden:

Autumn Atmosphere

Flowers are cut from light gauze.
Paulownias pat their cold emeralds.
I felt the chill when opening the curtains.
A message about the young girl
Will be brought to my sick bed.
Over and over, my mind is racing,
My surroundings fill me
With endless pure cold.
I idly stand staring at
A string of goose images
When the word "melancholy" stands before my eyes.

Vaguely, I seem to hear
A hollow but clear sound
Coming in the melody of a flute
And asking the sparse bushes:
Have the butterflies woken up from their short dreams?
Earlier, there was slim rain.
Now, again, the setting sun
Makes the sky a little clearer.

滿庭芳: 秋意

花翦輕羅,
桐敲冷翠。
開簾覺道涼生。
青娥消息
將次到桃笙,
幾遍心頭忐忑。
便兜來,
無限淒清。
閑凝佇,
一繩雁影,
愁字望中橫。

依稀如聽得,
虛空爽籟,
帶著簫聲。
問疏叢,
眠蝶小夢可曾醒?
早是纖纖瘦雨。
又斜陽,
弄作微晴。

poetry. The famous critic Lu Ji 陸機 (261-303) further defines this theme saying "[A poet] grieves for the leaves falling in harsh autumn" 悲落葉於勁秋. Song Yu's line is in the *Songs of the Chu. Nine Changes* 楚辭: 九辯 (*Chuci: jiubian*, 8:91), Wang Yunwu 王雲五, *A Collection of Book Series* 叢書集成 (*Congshu jicheng*), v. 1810, Changsha: Commercial Press, 1939. Lu Ji's line is in *The Poetic Exposition on Literature* 文賦 (*Wenfu*) translated by Stephen Owen. See Owen, p. 336.

Do you know--
Has Song Yu of the orchid boudoir
Been secretly sad a long time?
(c:16a-b)

還知否，
蘭闈宋玉，
久已暗傷情？

This poem shows that Qu is overcome by worries. When writing the poem she was likely waiting for information about her poetic student Lu Anshu 陸安蘇 who was seriously sick at the time. The poem alludes to Song Yu's line, "How sad is Autumn's atmosphere"³⁷⁴ 悲哉秋之爲氣也, which started the theme of "grievous autumn" in classical Chinese poetry. Instead of following the common practice of writing poetry on the theme that focuses on the decline of the year, Qu Bingyun borrows the meaning of Song Yu's line to create a grievous atmosphere. The first stanza creates a scene dominated by "endless pure cold" and features a representative sign of autumn--geese flying south.³⁷⁵ Since geese sometimes fly in a horizontal-shaped formation in addition to the V-formation, Qu compares their flight to a horizontal stroke representing the word 'melancholy.' After experiencing the tactile sense of coldness and the visual sense of "melancholy" which act as backgrounds to an autumn atmosphere, in the second stanza the poet introduces the sounds of autumn--"a hollow but clear sound"--and compares it to the melody of a flute that sounds like sobbing. This natural sound seems to ask whether butterflies have woken up and are aware of the melancholy of the female Song Yu. This closing line refers readers to both the allusion and the poet herself, hinting at the main idea of the poem.

In a series of poems about natural objects in her paintings, Qu reveals her thoughts regarding integrity, as shown in the following two.

[Poem 41]

Inscribing My Painting Albums (two poems of twelve) 自題畫冊十二

³⁷⁴ Wang Yunwu, v. 1810, 8:91.

³⁷⁵ Geese are migratory birds, nesting in the north of China in spring and migrating to the south after mid-autumn. Therefore, autumn is called a "geese season" 雁天 [Yantian].

Bamboo (second poem)

竹

I hold a brush to paint your image,
Which transcends worldly things
 in an entirely unattached mind.
Although I can convey your strong joints
I have difficulty depicting your modest heart.
(4:15b)

握筆描君子，
超然整素襟。
但能傳勁節，
難寫到虛心。

[Poem 42]

Orchids (fifth poem)

蘭

A loyal and loving heart
Was turned into "many an acre" of orchids.
Nowadays, the soul of the solitary minister
Still haunts the riverbank of Chu.
(4:16a)

一腔忠愛心，
化爲蘭九畹。
至今孤臣魂，
猶繞楚澤畔。

These poems prove once again that Qu valued the traditional elite integrity that was passed on to her by her clan. "Bamboo," in which the "joint" (*jie*) is a homonym for "integrity" (*jie*), and the "unattached mind" (*sujin*) suggests modesty, conveying conventional image of a detached and modest human character. The "Orchids" alludes to her ancestor Qu Yuan again, representing his loyal and loving heart. She mentions the "many an acre of orchids" and today's "haunting soul" in order to suggest that she has inherited Qu Yuan's moral character.

Qu Bingyun's poetry about nature is full of ingenuity, as Yuan Mei mentions, "Rain on a Spring Day" (Poem 16) is of "grace and charm" and "Songs of Passing the Chilly Days During the Double-Nine Day Period" (Poem 17) "beats time to harmonize the lines with their opposites." Also, her "Songs of Willow Branches" (Poems 1 and 2)

are reminiscences of Yuan Mei's ingenious quatrains on natural objects. The following poems, "Songs of Gathering Lotus" (second) and "A Paulownia by the Window" provide more examples of the ingeniousness of Qu's poetry.

[Poem 43]

Songs of Gathering Lotus" (second)

采蓮曲

Clean from your light make-up of lead powder,

洗卻鉛華澹澹妝

You, white lotus, are purer and more fragrant.

白蓮花發更清香。

I like you for your aroma and purity.

相憐恰是儂芳潔，

When coming out of the boudoir after a bath

you look sweet and charming.

浴罷含嬌出洞房。

(1:11a)

[Poem 44]

A Paulownia by the Window

窗前梧桐

Desolated, you often make yourself a shady tree

蕭疏常弄一樹陰，

When you set off the window, it looks especially deep.

襯得簾櫳分外深。

Even though people have not appreciated

your solitary nobility,

就使孤高人不賞，

You will turn into a pure zither after death.

身後還得作清琴。

(1: 4a)

The first poem personifies the lotus as a beautiful woman. Although this image is derived from Li Bai's line, "From clear water a lotus appears"³⁷⁶ 清水出芙蓉 and the

³⁷⁶ See Li Bai, "After Turmoil of the War, I Was Exiled in Yelang by the Grace of Heaven; Now I Miss My Old Friend and I Am Pouring out My Heart to the Prefect of Jingxia, Wei Langzai" 經亂離後，天恩流夜郎，憶舊游書懷贈江夏韋太守良宰 ("Jing luanli hou, tian'en liu Yelang, yijiuyou shuhuai, zeng Jiangxia Weitaishou Liangzai"), Li Bai, *Complete Works of Li Bai*, p. 574.

metaphor of a lotus as a young girl is conventional, Qu's personification is created skilfully. As Zhao Mingxiang comments, "both a human being and an object find their image in the poem" 人與物俱佔身份 (1:11a); readers can interpret these lines either as an image of a young girl or a lotus. The second poem describes the paulownia as one with a noble heart unknown to others, but the paulownia, persists in making its nobility recognized by turning itself into a zither after death. Xi Zikan sees "profound implications" 命意高遠 (1:4a) in this poem, and readers may consider it ironic.

Since there is a long tradition of poetry about nature, Qu Bingyun could use numerous brilliant poems to enrich her own creations. Qu's poetry about home-based nature undoubtedly benefited from the long classical tradition, and in it some traditional themes and imagery can be found. She, however, used traditional themes and imagery in her own special ways and renewed them in many ways, for example, as Sun Yuanxiang points out "To the Tune of Picking Mulberry-Leaves Girls: Peach Blossoms" 采桑子: 桃花 ("Caisangzi: taohua," c: 14) is about a "conventional subject matter, but there is something unconventionally arousing" 熟題而有生致 (c: 14) and "New Moon: Responding to Ziliang" (first poem) 新月和子梁 ("Xinyue he Ziliang," 3:4a), which is on a popular theme, is marked by Qu as "a record of novelty" 標新領異. 四句託興尤婉轉玲瓏 (3:4a). Compared with her poems on family life that are, in fact, more original in subject matter and language, Qu Bingyun's poems on natural phenomena are still quite skilful and have received more appreciation from her feminist discourse community, as well as from readers and critics outside the community.

6. 2 A Gentry Woman's Social Network: Poems on Her Relations with Others

Approximately forty percent of the poems in the *Collection from the Jade-Collecting Tower* have as their subject Qu Bingyun's relationships with her poetic friends, neighbours and admirers and distant relatives, which I shall call "relational poems." Qu's relational poems include a large portion of occasional verses, but the concept of relational poetry differs from that of occasional poetry. According to M.H. Abrams, "Occasional poems are written to adorn or memorialize a specific occasion, such as a birthday, a marriage, a death, a military engagement or victory, the dedication

of a public building, or the opening or performance of a play."³⁷⁷ Thus, occasional poems do not necessarily involve others, while relational poems do, with the subject as an addressee or a co-speaker. For instance, Qu's poem "On the New Year's Eve of the Xinyou Year (1801)," is a typical occasional poem, but since it does not address someone in particular or is co-composed with someone else, it cannot be considered a relational poem. Relational poems included in this section are those related to Qu's friends, mentors, admirers as well as birth and marital relatives; here I exclude poems about the members of Qu's own family--her mother-in-law, husband and his concubine and their daughter--as the poems related to them have already been discussed in a preceding section of this chapter.

The number of relational poems composed by Qu is striking. Qu used poetry as a licence to affiliate herself with various literary, cultural and social communities in the Mount Yu region and beyond, in addition to tying herself closer to other members of her birth and marital family clans.

On Various Occasions and Emotions

The most important characteristic of Qu Bingyun's relational poems is their geniality. In these poems, the speaker is mostly the poet herself, and the addressee is also often a real individual, not a fictional or generic one. These works are naturally sincere and genial, because the true speaking self addresses a real audience, especially when the two have a close relationship. As illustrated by the poems written about special occasions, outdoor boat cruises, indoor chats, giving and receiving gifts and celebrating a special day, the poet often speaks her mind to members of her social network. For example, one day, late in the afternoon, when Qu brought Zhao Ruobing to the "Three Bridges" for a boat cruise, she wrote:

[Poem 45]

In a Late Afternoon in Autumn I Bring Ruobing

秋暮偕若冰

³⁷⁷ M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms (third edition)*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1971, p. 116.

to Three Bridges for a Boat Cruise

三橋放櫂

In spring people go boat cruising,

人放春游櫂，

But I prefer a plain autumn,

儂偏愛素秋。

When the mountains are dyed by red leaves,

山憑紅葉染，

Where the water flows together with jade clouds.

水與碧雲流。

To convey chrysanthemums, light feelings are better.

載菊情宜澹，

To seek poems,

we are at the right place in this hidden scenery.

尋詩景得幽。

The especially clear places in the bright valley

谿光清絕處，

Are reserved for the setting sun.

更爲夕陽留。

(1:13a)

This poem was written around 1786, when Qu entered the second year of her marriage. In the late afternoon, she and Zhao Ruobing went to the "Three Bridges," a famous scenic spot at the foot of Mount Yu.³⁷⁸ In this poem, she relates her peaceful and delightful mood and her viewpoints about poetry to Ruobing, while they paddle through the quiet river. The poet says that she likes the plain autumn best--this may reflect her attitude toward fame and wealth. The second stanza in which she mentions poetry deepens this idea: on the surface, the speaker is talking about a poetic issue, but the word "chrysanthemum" suggests a meaning beyond. Since this plant traditionally symbolizes autumn, in this particular situation the word "chrysanthemum" reminds the reader of Tao Qian (365-427), who gave up public life and returned to his garden and fields, and of his famous couplet, "I pick a chrysanthemum by the eastern hedge, / Off in the distance I saw south mountain" 采菊東籬下，悠然見南山。³⁷⁹ Although the speaker depicts scenery as "plain," it is actually colourful: red leaves cover the hills and are reflected in the river; the river also reflects images of "jade clouds;" in the sunlight, the valleys are bright and clear, and they are going to be coloured red by the rays of the setting sun. The "setting sun" in the closing line echoes the word "late afternoon" in the

³⁷⁸ Sun Yuanxiang, Wu Weiguang and many other literati in the Mount Yu region wrote poems on their spring outings at this scenic spot. See *RGCZ*, p. 62.

tile of the poem. Wu Weiguang comments that this poem "begins with a contrast and closes by suggesting [an upcoming action, the setting of the sun]. The skills are seen in both parts" 起用托筆, 結用透筆; 具見作法 (1:13a). Apparently, Qu is the speaker in the poem, while Zhao Ruobing is the addressee.

Qu Bingyun liked to talk with others and she wrote many poems about her night chats with her close female friends. "On the First Day of Autumn, I Invite Xunxian (Zhao Tongyao) to Chat the Night Away" 立秋日邀洵嫻姑夜話 ("Liqiuri yao Xunxiangu yehua," 1:12a) gives an account of Qu's cheerful preparation of wine and melons before Zhao Tongyao's visit and another poem, "Chatting with My Sister-in-Law Ruobing at Night" 與若冰姑夜話 ("Yu Ruobinggu yehua," 1:3a -b) is, as the title suggests, about a night chat with Zhao Ruobing. According to those poems, Qu is intoxicated by conversation topics, mostly concerning poetry, and by quiet nights. One night, when Qu and Qian Zhen sat up for a very long time, Qu wrote the following poem about their conversations:

[Poem 46]

On a Winter Night I Am with Wenru (Qian Zhen)

冬夜與溫如

Having sat a long time deep in conversation,

譚深因坐久,

Our love for each other is like this deep night.

相戀是深更。

My sleeves are thin, so I know the frost is heavy.

袖薄知霜重,

The lamp is dark, and I feel the bright moonlight.

燈昏覺月明。

Chrysanthemums have withered

but are still like a painting's images.

菊殘猶畫影,

The water clock is still chanting.

漏靜尚吟聲。

Pure leisure like this,

似此清閑致,

In this world only you and I can enjoy.

人間我與卿。

(1:17b)

³⁷⁹ This translation is taken from Owen with minor changes. See Owen, p. 316.

This poem was written around 1787, when Qu was twenty years old and her marriage was in its third year. The poet chats with her sworn sister, Qian Zhen, who is Qu's brother's wife, on this cold, quiet night, when the frost is heavy and the lamp is dark. The dominant sense of the images is "depth," which symbolizes the friendship between the two women. At the same time, Qu's plants are like artwork and the clock seems to chant a poem, as if both of them are praising the friendships between the two sworn sisters. Zhao Gui'e comments, "Both the hearts and their tracks are pure in this charming story within a woman's boudoir" 心跡雙清. 閨中韻事 (1:17b).

Exchanging gifts with her relatives and friends was a common occurrence in Qu's life. On the occasions when Qu presented gifts to her relatives and friends, she sometimes wrote poems and when she received gifts, she also wrote thank-you poems. As mentioned above, when she met Yuan Mei and received his gift of fine silk, Qu wrote a poem entitled "Five Days Prior to the Summer Solstice, Master Yuan Mei Met Me and Presented Some Red Damask. I Am Writing this Poem to Thank Him." The following two poems are further examples:

[Poem 47]

Written for the Chestnut Blossom Mirror
and Lotus Inkstone that I Am Presenting to
Tiaofang (first poem)

以菱花鑑荷花硯
贈茗芳各副以詩

Like a pond of tin-like water, cold and limpid,
You are best among the seven treasures
cast for the carved dowry case.
Now, say goodbye to the worrying appearance of
the sick person
And go, inviting a beauty to reflect her clear image.
(3:8a)

一泓鉛水冷盈盈,
七出彫奩鑄最精。
辭卻病人愁裡影,
別邀傾國照分明。

[Poem 48]

Thanking Daohua for Giving Me Buddha-Hand Oranges 謝道華餉佛手柑

I am grateful for the present of these fruits,

gorgeous like gold.

Their Buddha-fragrance is right for me in my sickbed.

I look at them as if I face again the picture of you

holding flowers;

It is as good as meeting and holding your hand.

It is not today that you began caring about me.

Only my one-inch heart knows that you support me.

I am sorry I cannot repay your steadfast kindness.

Now I put my palms together at the dressing desk, --

dare I refuse your present?

(2:20b)

果艷黃金感贈遺，

佛香恰與病中宜。

宛然重對拈花影，

抵得相逢握手時。

熏染固非今日始，

提攜惟有寸心知。

拳拳雅意慚無報，

合掌妝臺詎敢辭？

The first poem was written when Qu presented a mirror to Ye Wanyi, and the second one is a thank-you verse to Xi Peilan. In every couplet of the second poem, there is at least one instance of word play related to the gift of oranges, which is called "Buddha-Hand Oranges." The "Buddha's fragrance" in the first couplet refers to the good smell of the fruits and to the ideas of Buddhism, at the same time. "The picture of you holding flowers" in the next alludes to the picture of Xi Peilan that Yuan Mei asked Qu to inscribe, in which Xi holds a bouquet of flowers. The word "holding" hints at "hand," which is a word in the name of the oranges. Thus, the phrases "holding hands," "supporting me," and the word "steadfast" in the following two couplets also refer to this. The closing line, "I put my palms together," also suggests 'hands,' as well as the gesture of worshipping Buddha.

Qu Bingyun wrote poems as gifts as well. Such poems were usually executed in a manner that shows the appreciation of the recipient. In commenting on Qu's poem presented to Ye Wanyi, Sun Yuanxiang writes, "every poem that Qu presents to someone is like a portrait of that person. She is the 'Gu Hutou' among poets" 每贈一人則其人如繪。詩中顧虎頭也 (2:7a). "Gu Hutou" stands for Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之 (ca.

345-406), whose sobriquet was Hutou and who is recognised as the most talented painter of pre-Tang China. The poem about Ye Wanyi describes Ye as a virtuous and talented wife: she is soft, passionate and light-hearted, and her demeanour is natural; she is good at playing music, doing calligraphy and writing poems; she is also diligent in housework such as gardening and embroidering:

[Poem 49]

Presented to My Younger Brother's Wife Ye Tiaofang

贈弟媳葉茗芳

From the top floor of the tower

you blow forth the sound of a flute

樓頭吹出洞簫音，

To express tender feelings deep as a river.

一往柔情似水深。

Taking your man's place,

you inscribe cursive script on fans.

屬草替郎題扇子，

After planting flowers together with a maid

you rest under the eaves' shade.

種花攜婢立檐陰。

Incomparably pure jade bits fly about,

飛來玉屑清無比，

As you finish cutting cloth, elegant and ingenious.

翦出香繪巧不禁。

You are light-hearted and your demeanour is natural,

舉動天然瀟灑甚，

Like Xie Daoyun's "air that is close to

a mountain forest."³⁸⁰

謝娘風度近山林。

(2:7a)

Qu Bingyun was a passionate individual. Poetry proved a good channel for her to vent various emotions, especially when she mourned the deaths of her relatives or friends, or longed for their company. In total, Qu wrote eight sets of 25 elegiac poems in her adulthood. It seems that women's lives in Qu's times were very difficult. Many

³⁸⁰ "Xie Daoyun's air of woods near a mountain" alludes to a description of Xie's demeanor in Liu Yiqing's *New Stories and Tales of the Times: Virtuous Women* 世說新語: 賢媛 (*Shishuo xinyu: xianyuan*): "Madame Wang's (Xie Daoyun) expression is relaxed and bright and therefore it bears the air near woods" 王夫人神情散朗故有林下風氣. Liu Yiqing, v 19, p. 378.

women in Qu's social network died of various diseases and accidents, especially while giving birth to children. Qu's three sisters-in-law--Qian Zhen, Zhao Tongyao and another one whose name is unknown--died this way. When Qu writes an elegiac poem, she usually addresses it to the dead, as if she is chatting with this person. As readers can see from Poem 14, "Weeping for Huixiang," which Yuan Mei praised highly, this way of writing makes her elegiac poems colloquial, genial and emotional. Qu's poems on longing are written in the same way--the poet 'directly' speaks to the missed person. A poem about longing for Zhao Ruobing reads:

[Poem 50]

To the Tune of Song of Immortals in a Cave:

Ruobing Has Delayed Visiting Me

When the plum tree blossoms

I ask,

“We have promised each other to meet

in the remaining days of the year,

but does your fragrant heart forget this?”

Let alone, this morning,

from the eaves magpies have sent me a message,

and last night in my boudoir

I did divination by the light of the lamp.

I stand still for a long time,

But cannot hear your pendant rings sounding.

Where does the clever flute come from

Along with the spring wind,

Sending my yearning for you out of the town?

洞仙歌:

遲若冰不至

梅花放矣,

問殘年有約,

底事芳心便忘卻?

況辰檐鵲訊,

夜閣鐙占.

凝佇久.

不聽佩環吹落.

聰明何處笛,

帶著春風,

送我相思出城郭.

I'd pick a southern branch of a tree,³⁸¹
But sheer chill
 blocks my view, in addition to
Several layers of curtains.
By the perfumer,
I sit idly and murmur to myself:
Since I have dreamt about you,
You will come, no mistakes made!
(c:18a)

便欲折南枝，
一片清寒，
又封住，
幾重簾幕。
依熏籠，
閒坐自沉吟，
既夢見，
君來料應非錯！

This poem is unusual, in that the speaker's thinking processes are vividly depicted. At the end of year, when her potted plum tree has bloomed, the poet speaks of her longing for Ruobing and waits. The night before she made a divination to confirm Ruobing's visit and that morning she also noticed the magpies crowing outside--this was believed to be a sign of a guest. While the speaker is waiting she watches the blooming plum tree and asks whether the guest has forgotten her promise. Then, the speaker stands still by the doors and listens intently for any sounds from the outside. But no sounds of human activity are heard--only the music of a flute comes from nearby. She hopes that the music will take her longing to Ruobing. Although she cannot see far away because of "several layers of curtains," the speaker believes that her guest will definitely come. This is an excellent psychological exposure of longing and waiting. Lingke comments, "It is done by a pure and expert writing brush. [In reading this poem] I feel that Baishi the Old Immortal has not gone far 清老之筆, 覺白石老仙去人不遠 (c:18a).³⁸²

In contrast to the above poem, which focuses on a single moment, the one Qu wrote about missing her cousin Qu Jingkun mentions unforgettable details of their lives together when they were children, effectively conveying the poet's feelings of affection for her cousin:

³⁸¹ "To pick a southern branch of a tree" conventionally symbolizes the feeling of nostalgia or longing for someone.

³⁸² "Baishi the Old Immortal" refers to the famous *ci* poet Jiang Kui 姜夔 (ca.1155-1209) whose sobriquet was Baishi Monk 白石道人.

[Poem 51]

Missing My Elder Sister Wanqing

懷婉清姐

"Walking in a line" I was younger
and happy in our girls' quarters.³⁸³
I followed you shoulder to shoulder
but was born in the same year as you.
Each of us read books over and over,
striving for faster memorization,
We are both smart in learning embroidery, but
I admit your work is better.
Talking about demeanours,
yours is naturally refined and elegant.
If we compare talent,
I should kneel down to you.
Today, our dream-like souls are burdened
by separation.
But we are lucky to have a poetic mailbox
for communicating.

雁行生小樂閨中，
肩自相隨齒卻同。
宛轉讀書爭早熟，
聰明學繡讓先工。
即論風度原嫺雅，
若較才情拜下風。
今日夢魂勞兩地，
往來還喜有詩筒。

(1:15b)

Composed by Request: Inscribing, Responding to and Linking Poems

Although poetry composed by request had existed for a long time, it was normally considered an inferior category because it is not inspired but produced "following an emperor's order" 應制之作 (*Yingzhi zhizuo*) or "responding to an occasion" 應景之作 (*Yingjing zhizuo*). The great critic Liu Xie distinguishes between

"writing for expressing feelings" 爲情造文 (weiqing zaowen) and "creating feelings for writing" 爲文造情 (weiwen zaoqing), defining the former as "writing true feelings" and the latter as "writing false feelings."³⁸⁴ Readers usually connect poetry written on request with "creating feelings for writing" and consider it an expression of false feelings.

Qu Bingyun wrote many poems on request. Although they are composed for various occasions, many of these works still expressed Qu's true feelings and voiced her social and literary opinions, as well as demonstrating her mastery of poetic technique.

Verse inscriptions account for a major part of Qu Bingyun's poems on request for portraits, paintings, poetry collections, fans, and so on for her friends, neighbours and relatives. After she became famous, Qu also won a great number of admirers and virtually everybody in the Mount Yu area wanted a poem from her. In one poem Qu mentioned an admirer from her neighbourhood, "My neighbour's daughter has just learned to read a few words, / Yet she also has asked me to write a poem on her fan" 鄰女閨中粗識字, 也將扇子索題詩 (2:2a). Those who were not acquainted with Qu personally asked her for poems through friends, relatives or neighbours. Sun Yuanxiang was one of such 'messengers,' informing her that a Chief Pacifier 都闡 (*Dukun*) asked for her inscription on his painting. Most of Qu's inscriptions are true poetic creations, among the better was the one she wrote on the painting of the scholar Fang Xie's wife:

[Poem 52]

On the Painting *Spring Outing to the Peach Spring*

冰壺夫人

Owned by Madame Binghu, who Is the Wife of Scholar

桃原春泛圖

Fang Xie from West of the Yangzi River

--江右方秀才變配

A young fisherman just left

when you, the beauty, arrived

漁郎去後美人來,

³⁸³ "Walking in a liner" alludes to the order of age by comparing to geese flying in a certain formation.

In a boat, like a lily leaf light, but stable as a cup. ³⁸⁵	蓮葉舟輕穩似杯。
The spring water is so affectionate that it does not raise any waves.	春水多情無浪起，
The jade peach trees also smile at you with all their blossoms.	碧桃含笑盡花開。
The roads to the fairy spring are not blocked by green mountains.	仙原不隔青山路，
When you go there, bring your jade mirror stand.	家具應攜玉鏡臺。
Then, once you have washed your fragrant clothes,	從此衣香經一澣，
The sky wind won't be able to blow fine dust onto them.	天風吹不上纖埃。
(2:1a)	

Painting is spatial art, while poetry is temporal art. In the painting, a beautiful woman is paddling a lightweight boat in a river. The poet reproduces this scene in a temporal sequence: a young fisherman has just gone, when the beauty arrives; the "spring water" supports her boat in a friendly way, and peach blossoms on the hills by the river smile at her, a situation in which the beauty seems to head towards fairyland. The poetic scene is alive with action from the past to the present, and eventually to the future. The speaker of the poem kindly tells the beauty that the fairyland is open to her, echoing the phrase "the Peach Spring" in the title of the painting, and advises her to bring the river with her to be a mirror when she goes there.

Some of her inscriptions convey Qu's social values and aesthetic views and can be read as social or literary critiques in poetic form. For example, in her poem on a painting of a chaste widow's house Qu praises the widow for her integrity. The arrangement of the poem is such that the first stanza focuses on the widow's honour

³⁸⁴ Zhou Zhenfu 周振甫, *Annotation of The Literary Mind Carves Dragons 文心彫龍註釋 (Wenxin diaolong zhushi)*, Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1981, p. 347.

³⁸⁵ A boat as "stable as a cup" alludes to a Buddhist Monk called "Bei Du" 杯度 ("Sailing in A Cup") who often sailed in a wooden cup. According to Hui Jiao 惠皎, "The name of the one called "Bei Du" is unknown. He often rides in a wooden cup crossing rivers. . . . Without using oars or being pushed by the wind, his cup moves quickly, as if it flies 杯度者不知姓名, 常乘木杯度水, . . . 憑之度河, 無假風櫂, 輕疾如飛. *The Biographies of the Excellent Monks 高僧傳 (Gaosengzhuan)* v. 10, p. 390, in J. Takakusu 高楠順次 and K. Watanabe 郎渡邊海旭 comp., *The Tripitaka in Chinese (revised, collated,*

and the second on her house, in which "bamboo shoots," a "pine boat" and a "house" resonate with the "Bamboo-Pine House" in the title:

[Poem 53]

The Painting of the *Chaste Mother Yuan*
Residing in the Bamboo-Cypress Building

袁節母
竹柏樓居圖

A cloud of sadness rises from this sheet of paper:
You have been widowed for ten years of cold chastity.
Your heart is still like the rising sun,
 and your original vow stands true.
Your body is like a floating cloud,
 because you made light of worldly concerns.
Bamboo shoots grow stronger after frost.
The water becomes entirely clear
 after pine boats pass.
Your tower stands as high as integrity,
Surpassing a hundred feet of worldly fame.

一片悽涼紙上生，
孀居冰操十年成。
心如初日盟無改，
身比浮雲念已輕。
竹箭每思霜後勁，
柏舟曾逝水俱清。
此樓與節同高峙，
壓倒人間百尺名。

(4:6a)

Many male poets and officials of rank also recognized Qu's fame and felt honoured to have her inscriptions. For example, the District Magistrate 大令 (*Daling*) Du Meixi 杜梅谿, the Minister of Justice 司寇 (*Sikou*) Wang Shuyan 王述弇, and the Prefect 太守 (*Taishou*) Li Songyun 李松雲 requested Qu's inscriptions for their poetry collections, paintings and portraits, respectively. Also, the publisher Wang Xinnong requested her to inscribe his painting, and the famous poets Chen Wenshu and Wu Weiguang asked Qu to inscribe their poetry collections. The inscription Qu wrote for Wu Weiguang's poetry collection reads:

added, rearranged and edited) 大正新修大藏經 (Tokyo: The Taishō Issai-kyōkankō Kwai, 1927), p.

[Poem 54]

An Inscription for the Grand Historian³⁸⁶ Wu Zhuqiao's

Music Bureau Poetry Collection

from Small Lake Field (first poem)

吳竹橋太史

小湖田樂府題辭

Your "bird tracks"³⁸⁷ are circulated

in all literary circles,

鳥絲傳寫遍詞壇,

Where numerous celebrities fail

to compete with them,

多少名流抗手難.

As if you hold a seven-foot precious jade zither

in a thousand-feet of snow

七尺瑤琴千尺雪,

You, the celestial, sit upright on emerald clouds

playing music.

仙人端坐碧雲彈.

(3:2b)

This is actually a verse commentary on Wu Weiguang's poetry, stating that: (1) Wu's poetry is outstanding as compared to that of many talented poets of the time; and (2) it is characterized by purity. Qu articulates these opinions through a series of images: the celebrities in poetry circles having difficulty competing with Wu's poetry; Wu playing a zither in a thousand feet of snow (which alludes to the purity of his verse); and Wu, as a celestial, sitting on clouds playing his harp (this suggests a high level of the poetry because of the saying that goes, "Highbrow songs find few singers.")

As Qu Bingyun's reputation grew, so did the number of requests for her poetry. Since there can be found no mentions of Qu selling her works, it is very likely that she wrote for her admirers for free, except for when some of them brought Qu gifts when requesting a poem or painting from her. Qu was overburdened with countless requests,

2095.

³⁸⁶ "The Grand Historian" refers to a member of the Imperial Academy in the Qing Dynasty.

³⁸⁷ The term "bird's tracks" traditionally refers to writings.

which had a detrimental effect on her health, so that she finally sighed and said, "it has taken illness for me to know that fame is such a burden" 身病方知名是累 (3:19b).

Qu's liver disease became more serious because of her incessant writing and painting, and according to Zhao Tongyu, Qu was sometimes bedridden for months at a time. When she wrote or painted in her sickbed, the ink she spattered around her mixed with drops of medicine, staining the bench and table at her bedside. She finally had to ask Zhao to decline further requests:

[Poem 55]

In My Sickbed I Asked Ziliang to Decline
Requests for Poems or Paintings

病中語子梁
謝索詩畫者

Only for relieving my illness did I learn how to scrawl.
Do not consider me a poet or a painter.
Now that the patient is drained of energy.
If a single piece is misplaced

只因遣病學塗鴉，
那算詩家與畫家。
今日病人心血盡，

I will eventually lose the chess game.³⁸⁸

一棋誤著到頭差。

My dried inkstone has been knocked to pieces

and I am unable to stand the strain;

枯硯敲殘力不支，

I am a pink silkworm that produces not yet hardened silk.

紅蠶猶吐未僵絲。

Back when I did not drink the fragrant tea,³⁸⁹

翻思未飲香茗日，

I was always proud of myself every time I held a brush.

盡有拈毫得意時。

(3:18a)

Qu Bingyun enjoyed writing response poems 和詩 (*heshi*) as well as "linking poems" or "linking lines" 聯句 (*lianju*). These poems are included in this section

³⁸⁸ A free translation of the fourth line would be "Misplacing a single stroke could make a work unsuccessful." It hints that, since Qu Bingyun is sick she might make some mistakes when creating a poem or a painting, and that even one single misplaced stroke will make a work unsuccessful.

³⁸⁹ "The fragrant tea" alludes to fame, because 'tea' 茗 (*ming*) is a homonym of fame 名 (*ming*) in Chinese.

because Qu was sometimes requested to respond or felt it was necessary to respond to a poem presented to her or concerning her. Similarly, when she wanted to link lines she was required to co-operate with another poet. Qu Bingyun frequently exchanged poems with others in her network, and when she wrote poems in response, she did so in all the traditional ways, as follows: (1) "Responding to the rhyme" 和韻 (*heyun*), that is, using the same rhyme as the one used in the poem to which she is responding; (2) "Using the rhymes" 用韻 (*yongyun*), or 依韻 (*iyiyun*), 步韻 (*buyun*), that is, using the same words of the rhyme as used in the poem to which she is responding, but not necessarily in the same order; (3) "Matching the rhymes" 次韻 (*ciyun*), that is, using the same rhyme words in the same order as used in the poem to which one is responding. Generally speaking, the last technique is more difficult than the first two. The following poem is written by "matching the rhymes" of Yuan Mei's inscription (see the translation in Chapter VI) to Qu Bingyun's and Xi Peilan's joint painting "Orchid-like":

[Poem 56]

Because Daohua and I Became Sworn Sisters, We Painted	余與道華約爲姊妹,
<i>Orchid-like</i> . Master Yuan Mei Inscribed a Poem on It.	因繪如蘭圖,隨園先生
Using His Rhyme I Write this to Thank Him	題詩其上.依韻呈謝

By chance, we obtain a good inscription by a great brush.	偶蒙緣筆品題佳,
From now on, the "rouge faces" are	
in the company of the 'speckled hair.'	從此朱顏並發華.
The painted orchids have a noble air.	畫裡幽蘭高韻格,
They will see a marvellous lotus below	
when bowing their heads.	一時低首妙蓮花.

(2:12a-b)

Qu uses the same rhyme words in the same order that Yuan Mei uses them in his poetic inscription, namely, "jia" 佳 (good), "hua" 華 (gorgeous), and "hua" 花 (flower). In the first couplet, the metaphors of "red faces," which conventionally allude to young

women, and the "gorgeous hair," which is a complimentary term for the white hair of aged people, are cleverly created to symbolize the connection between Yuan Mei and the two sworn sisters. In the closing couplet, "an ingenious lotus" is a double metaphor alluding to both Yuan's inscription and the Buddha. The personified orchids, which represent Qu and Xi, gaze at Yuan's inscription at the bottom of the painting with respect, as if they were looking at the Buddha.

Linking poems is a great test of one's skill and ingenuity. Qu liked to play such games with her poetic fellows, and when Qu and Qian Zhen (Wenru) went on a boat outing, they linked the following poem:

[Poem 57]

We Link Lines when Going by a Boat

舟行聯句

(Wenru):

A light boat, quivering, goes beside the hills.

(溫如):

扁舟搖曳傍山行,

(Wanxian):

In dusk, the scenery is obscure.

(宛仙):

暮色朦朧景未明。

On both shores reed catkins fly,
like shattered raindrops.

兩岸荻花如雨碎,

(Wenru):

A beach of cold moonlight is pure as frost.

(溫如):

一灘寒月與霜清。

From the ends of the earth

flying swans cry, remote and resonant .

天邊嘹唳飛鴻遠,

(Wanxian):

Leaves fall on the surface of the river,
sparsely and lightly.

(宛仙):

水面蕭疏落葉輕。

We love the deep valleys, so extremely beautiful,

爲愛幽谿無限好,

(Wenru):

We did not notice that it was already the first watch
when returning home.

(溫如):

歸時不覺已初更。

(1:17a-b)

The above poem is surprisingly coherent; as if it is only one poet had composed it. In this work, the authors describe the scenes near and far, as well as their unforgettable boat ride. The similes of the reed catkins and the mist are well co-ordinated.

Linking lines is more of an exercise in matching words, tone and rhymes than original creation of poetry. However, it is crucial that the two poets co-operate closely in addition to sharing aesthetic interests and at being at a similar level. Linking lines reveals Qu's close intellectual relationships with members of her network. Also, Qu regards linking lines as a form of creation and takes it seriously, as she writes, "Linking lines has the same difficulty for a poet as producing silk has for a spring silkworm" 聯吟也等春蠶苦 (2:16). However, since two people take turns joining lines, it usually does not take very long to complete a poem. As such, the linked poems partially written by Qu cannot be regarded as an accurate representation of her poetic level.

Overall, as the members of her feminist discourse community—Yuan Mei, Xi Peilan, Gui Maoyi, and Bao Yin—have indicated in their comments, Qu Bingyun's poems express her experience as a gentry woman and demonstrate her mastery of the art of poetry.

First, Qu's themes are within the scope of domesticity and its extension to the female network. These themes correspond to the major aspects of her life: daily routines, timely changes of nature, associations with the direct family members, relatives and friends. Her poems expose the readers to a private realm—variety of aspects of her personal life and a range of her innermost feelings, emotions and thoughts.

Second, one salient characteristic of Qu's poems is "purity." This quality of "purity" as described by her fellow female disciples in accordance with Yuan Mei's 'nature and inspiration,' is seen in her moods on various occasions at home and on outings, reflections on different familial objects and natural phenomena, and her cares about family members, affections towards other people, as well as her concerns about books, poetry and study. There is not much concern with the public affairs found in her

poems. Also, since Qu often fantasized about her domestic life, she makes everything around her—including herself—artistic before writing about it. Her poetic imagery naturally comes from her “usual” artistic/fantastic world and it is thus both lifelike and aesthetic and, therefore, “pure.”

Third, there are some signs of Qu Bingyun’s attempts to create a suitable language for describing her experience as different from the men’s. As indicated earlier, since Qu has to use the language of male-oriented classical Chinese poetry that is not adequate to treat her female themes, she chooses Li Shangyin as a model, borrowing the expressions about love, friendships and women’s lives from him. Ultimately, she has to work out her own language, however. Qu’s poetic creations show that she tried to do so.

Although Qu Bingyun wrote in classical poetic forms, readers cannot find many allusions to classical poetry of earlier times in her poetry. Yet, they find numerous references to the vernacular of the age. This shows that she employed classical poetic language as much as she found suitable, but when she could not find words for her particular experience she used the vernacular instead. Qu mixed the vernacular with classical poetic language in some of her poems. For example, in the line “The sky moves about disorderly, / while the stars make sounds” 碧落亂移星作響 (Poem 36), a mixture of “biluo” 碧落 (the jade [stars] are falling), which is drawn from classical language, and “luanyi” 亂移 (to move disorderly), which is vernacular, creates bizarre but vivid and lifelike images of stars reflected in the lotus pool; so does the combination of “laohe bankong” 老鶴半空 (An old crane, halfway in the sky; vernacular) and “yu” 語 (to speak, classical) in the line “An old crane speaks, halfway in the sky” 老鶴半空語 (Poem 15). Also, Qu’s poetry, for all its innovation, is not difficult for the readers to understand: “the silver and leaves” 銀葉 (referring to the needles used in acupuncture and herbal medicine) and the “seasoning orchids” 調蘭 (alluding to cooking) in the context of “The silvers and leaves have not done any good” 鎮殘銀葉未曾瘥 (Poem 35) and “I seasoned orchids that made you happy for you” 調蘭猶侍北堂歡 (4:8b).

Fourth, another salient characteristic of Qu Bingyun’s poems is geniality. Differing from many classical poems where the poet takes a fictive role and speaks to a fictional audience, Qu’s poems always take the form of a real woman speaking to

another real individual. Taking herself as the persona, she sincerely express her feelings and emotions while addressing a real individual, her voice appears friendlier. All these features make her poems genial.

Chapter VII Conclusion

This dissertation has illustrated the accomplishments of Qu Bingyun as a poet mainly through her interaction with the family poetry circle and the feminist discourse community, as well as her unique verse revealing her domestic life and social network. The following chapter discusses the implications of Qu's accomplishment as a poet and assesses her poetry in the context of Chinese women's literature and Chinese literature as a whole.

7.1 Qu Bingyun's Becoming a Poet and Its Implications

Qu Bingyun's experience of becoming an expert poet may shed light on the rise of women writers from the late Ming onward and explain the large increase in their number in the mid-Qing. Scholars of Chinese culture and literature generally attribute the rise of women writers to urbanization, commercialization and the emergence of the printing industry. Dorothy Ko states, "The development of a literate women's culture in seventeenth-century Jiangnan was possible only with the wealth generated by urbanization and commercialization in the region."³⁹⁰ Kang-i Sun Chang maintains that women's increased desire to write is "partly attributable to a dramatic rise of female literacy and the widespread development of printing."³⁹¹ Susan Mann confirms this and points out further that the large increase in the number of women writers in the eighteenth century is due to "the crucial role of writing as a mark of cultivated humanity," especially in writing poetry. In other words, "growing up learned in elite households of the High Qing period meant growing up to write."³⁹² These explanations are plausible. However, we need to go further and think about the following questions: Are there any reasons apart from historical circumstances that may originate from internal sources such as gender behaviour itself and/or from the nature of the writing itself? Although

³⁹⁰ Ko, p. 19.

³⁹¹ Sun Chang, p. 119.

³⁹² Mann, pp. 16-7.

gentry women received education that included basic reading and poetry writing, how did they become accomplished poets?

After receiving basic education and becoming engaged in poetry writing, Qu Bingyun went through two important stages: associating with the family poetry circle and interacting with Yuan Mei's female disciple group. Qu's experiences attest to Nancy Chodorow's theory about the "relational gender identity" of women, as well as Marilyn Cooper's hypothesis of "writing as a social action." First, during the course of learning and writing poetry Qu constantly sought connections with others. She contacted everyone in her birth and marital families who had interest in poetry and also established friendships with many people in the region by way of poetry.

Qu Bingyun also tried to involve those who had not learned poetry. For example, she encouraged her husband's concubine and her maid who were from lower-class families and not well-educated to study poetry, and taught poetry to her cook's daughter. Eventually, she successfully engaged them in poetry and enjoyed sharing poetry with them. Poetry seemed a medium for Qu Bingyun to converse with the rest of the world; in order to get what was on her mind across to people, Qu wanted everybody to learn it. Second, while individualized by her own experiences, Qu Bingyun's poetry was created mostly through her social interaction with others. By associating with other people she became motivated and inspired to write. This is especially true of her interaction with her mentor and fellow female disciples. She, being read and commented on, was greatly encouraged and had her poetic concepts polished and techniques improved.

Qu Bingyun constantly sought connections with other people, and it was during the course of her interactions with them that she became accomplished as a poet. This may imply that a woman writer is more motivated to unite with other people, to involve more people in writing activities and to write in association with others, during which she develops her poetic concepts and art of poetry.

Women grouping together with women was an important phenomenon in late imperial times. Dorothy Ko gives an account of three types of female communities in seventeenth-century China: domestic, social and public. In these communities, poetry was an important activity. It shows that women liked to form groups to deal with things of interest to them more than men did. Also, during the late Ming and Qing, it was

difficult to find a single woman writer in an elite household, as in previous dynasties. Women writers were usually clustered in clans. For example, the family of the Minister of the Ministry of Personnel (*Libu shangshu*) Shang Zuo 商祚 of the late Ming had more than ten women poets in his family: four daughters, two daughters-in-law and at least four grand-daughters. It was said that: “Whenever they had leisure time they went on an outing and ascended a high place, [Shang Zuo’s wife] asked her daughters-in-law and other females to arrange to have pen-rests and inkstone boxes carried with them. They would have rhyming contests on assigned topics” 每暇日登臨, 則令媳女輩載筆床硯匣以隨, 角韻分題.³⁹³ Another example is a southern Fujian gentry family with nine daughters by the names of Zheng Jingrong 鄭鏡蓉, Zheng Yunyin 鄭雲蔭, Zheng Qingping 鄭青蘋, Zheng Jinluan 鄭金鸞, Zheng Changgeng 鄭長庚, Zheng Yongxie 鄭詠謝, Zheng Yufu 鄭玉蕢, Zheng Fengtiao 鄭風調, and Zheng Bingwan 鄭冰紈, who were all poets. According to Liang Yizhen, each of them left behind a poetry collection except for Zheng Bingwan who died early and Zheng Changgeng whose poems did not survive.³⁹⁴

Also, many women gathered to study poetry under the guidance of a prestigious poet or organized a public society to study poetry themselves. Generally, women preferred to study with a female master because there would be no moral obstacles between them. It was said that the poet and critic Shen Shanbao (1808-1862) had “over a hundred women disciples” from gentry families.³⁹⁵ Examples of women’s poetry societies are the Banana Poetry Club formed by Lin Yaqing 林亞清, Gu Si 顧姁, Chai Jingyi 柴靜儀, Feng Xian 馮嫻, Qian Fenglun 錢鳳綸, Zhang Hao 張昊, and Mao Shi 毛媿 and the “Pure Creek Poetry Club” 清溪詩社 whose members were Zhang Yunzi 張允滋, Zhang Feng 張芬, Lu Ying 陸瑛, Li Wei 李徽, Xi Huiwen 席蕙文, Zhu Zongshu 朱宗淑, Jiang Zhu 江珠, Shen Xiang 沈纓, You Danxian 尤澹仙, and Shen Chiyu 沈持玉.

³⁹³ Liang Yizhen, p. 1.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 58. Only Zheng Yongxie’s collection, entitled *Poems from the Flowered-Hairpin Hut* 簪花軒詩抄 (*Zanhuaxuan shichao*), a hand-copied manuscript by Shishui Shanfang, is found in the Fujian Library.

³⁹⁵ Chen Xiang, p. 97.

It had been a tradition in China for the literati to form groups; it seems that “writing is a social action” is particularly true in that country. However, in late imperial times when women writers proliferated, they liked to form groups even more than men. For example, Yuan Mei also had a certain number of male disciples,³⁹⁶ but there have been no references found so far indicating that these male disciples ever formed groups like the female ones.

7.2 Qu Bingyun and Chinese Women's Literature

A Brief Historical Review

It is very likely that Chinese women's literature constituted a natural part of Chinese literature from the very beginning. Although only a few poems in the *Classic of Poetry*, which contains three hundred and five poems of the Zhou Dynasty (1020-249 B. C.), were attributed to women in early sources,³⁹⁷ a large number of poems in the

³⁹⁶ Wang Yingzhi states, “There was a good number of male disciples of Yuan Mei. From 1742 onward, when Yuan Mei was appointed to prefecture in Jiangnan, at least twenty to thirty men took him as poetic master 袁枚男弟子為數甚多, 自乾隆七年 (1742) 外放江南任縣令以來, 從師袁枚者至少有二三十人. Wang Yingzhi, *A Study of the Poetry School of "Nature and Inspiration"* p. 228.

³⁹⁷ For example, the “Lesser Prefaces” 小序 (“Xiaoxu”) to the *Classic of Poetry* by the Han Dynasty scholar Mao Chang 毛萇 (dates uncertain) indicates that “Shade o’ the Vine” 葛覃 (“Getan”) and “Curl-Grass” 卷耳 (“Juaner”) were composed by the Queen Consort 後妃 of Zhou (Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Collected Explanations of the Lesser Prefaces to the Classic of Poetry by the Three Specialists* 詩三家義集疏 (*Shi sanjia yi jishu*), Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987, pp. 16 and 23), “Spring Water” 泉水 (“Quanshui”) and “Bamboo Poles” 竹干 (“Zhugan”) were created by a lady of the Wei State 衛女 (Wang Xianqian, pp. 190 and 299). Also, the “Lesser Prefaces” to the *Classic of Poetry* by Shen Pei 申培 (dates uncertain) of the Han Dynasty attributes “Courtship Song” 關雎 (“Guanju,” the translation is taken from John Turner in John Minford and Joseph S. M. Lau ed., p. 89) was composed by the Queen Consort of Zhou (Wang Xianqian, p. 4-5), “Asiatic Plantain” 采芣 (“Fuyi”) was by the wife of a man of Cai 蔡人之妻 (Wang Xianqian, p. 47), “The Bank of the Ru River” 汝墳 (“Rufen”) was by the wife of a Grand Official of the Southern Zhou 周南大夫之妻 (Wang Xianqian, pp. 56-7), “Dew on the Roads” 行露 (“Xinglu”) by a girl of Shen 申人之女 (Wang Xianqian, pp. 89-90), “The Sun and the Moon” 日月 (“Riyue”) by the wife of Duke Xuan of Wei 衛宣公之夫人 (Wang Xianqian, p. 143), “Running Away” 載馳 (Zaichi) by the wife of Duke Mu of Xu 許穆公之夫人 (Wang Xianqian, p. 257) and “Grand Official's Carriage” 大車 (“Dache”) by the wife of King Xi 息君之夫人 (Wang Xianqian, p. 329).

The Chinese scholar Chu Binjie 褚斌杰 holds that only a few poems attributed to women can be confirmed to be so by historical records. An example is “Running Away.” *Stories of Zuo: the Second Year of Duke Min* 左傳: 閔公二年 (*Zuo zhuan: Min'gong ernian*) recounts the turmoil that corresponds to the experience expressed in this poem and it also mentions that the wife of Duke Mu of Xu composed this poem (See Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 comp., *Annotated Historical Stories of Zuo* 春秋左傳注 (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*), Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981, pp. 266-7). Chu Binjie comp., *An Outline of Chinese*

collection apparently convey women's experiences in their language and thus many are widely considered to have been composed by women.³⁹⁸

In its earliest stage, women's literature spontaneously expressed various aspects of women's experiences, as Sharon Shih-juan Hou indicates in her comments on some short verses of the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States periods (ca. 1100-256 B. C.): "These works were with but a few exceptions highly autobiographical. Subjects range from conjugal devotion, yearning for mates, and nostalgia for homeland to female chastity, filial piety, and womanly prudence, and further to the larger concerns of loyalty to the sovereign."³⁹⁹ In the Han Dynasty, a few palace women wrote about their sorrows in poetic form. For example, Zhuo Wenjun wrote "A Song of White Hair" 白頭吟 ("Baitou yin"), Wang Zhaojun composed "Poems of Grievance" 怨詩 ("Yuan shi"), Ban Jieyu 班婕妤 (48-after 6 B. C.) wrote "Songs of Grievance" 怨歌行 ("Yuan'ge xing"), and Cai Yan authored "Poems of Grief and Indignations" 悲憤詩 ("Beifen shi") and "The Eighteen Beats of the Xiongnu Flute." These works initiated the traditional female theme of the "Poem of Grievance" 怨詩 (*yuan shi*).

During the Period of Division and the Tang dynasty, some palace women, daughters and concubines of high-ranking officials, courtesans and nuns, were renowned for poetry. Among them were Zuo Fen, Shangguan Zhaorong 上官昭容 (664-710), Xie Daoyun, Lu Zhu, Su Xiaoxiao, Li Ye 李冶 (8th century), Xue Tao, Guan Panpan and Yu Xuanji. They mainly wrote about "boudoir grievances," friendship and nature; some palace women also wrote frontier poetry.

Throughout the Song dynasty, those women who had been victimized by wars or misfortunes in marriage produced the majority of surviving women's literary works. This is why the Chinese scholar Su Zhecong 苏者聪 describes women's literature of this period as "full of tears and bloodshed"⁴⁰⁰ 充滿血泪. During the duration of the

Literary History: Pre-Qin, Qin and Han, 中國文學史綱要(先秦秦漢文學) (*Zhongguo wenxue shi gangyao*), Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1986, p. 49.

³⁹⁸ For example, Xie Jinqing's 謝晉青 work entitled *A Study of Women in the Classic of Poetry* 詩經之女性的研究 (*Shijing zhi nüxing de yanjiu*) (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1925) mentions eighty-five poems concerning women, most of which were composed by women.

³⁹⁹ William H. Nienhauser, Jr. comp., *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986, p. 182.

⁴⁰⁰ Su Zhecong, "Introduction" to *Women's Literature of the Song Dynasty* 宋代婦女文學 (*Songdai funü wenxue*), Wuhan: Wuhan daxue chubanshe, 1997.

Ruzhen and Mogols, many women in the royal palace and high-ranking officials' families were wronged, some being kidnapped or forced to go into exile. Also, the Neo-Confucianism prevalent at the time created a harsh socio-cultural environment for women in terms of chastity. This caused women to suffer more than ever, particularly when they had an unfortunate marriage. "Boudoir grievances" thus became the keynote of Song women's literature. Li Qingzhao, esteemed as the most outstanding woman writer of pre-modern China, emerged in this period. In the beginning of her poetic life, Li's poetry celebrated her happy marriage to a man who shared her interest in literature and art. Later she used her poetry to give vent to her sorrows of losing her husband and bitter experiences in the turmoil of war. Her "ci poetry of grievance" helped establish the *Wanyue* style of this genre. Another prominent woman poet of the Song, Zhu Shuzhen, in her poetry collection entitled "Broken-hearted," articulated her loneliness, lament, illnesses and vulnerability.

During the Yuan and Ming dynasties, many women from families of lower-ranking officials, scholars and literati tried their hand at literature and some of them showed much talent in writing poetry. In the late Ming and early Qing, courtesan writers became prominent in the urban areas of Jiangnan. A large number of women entertainers from low-class prostitutes to elite courtesans wrote in the "genre of flirtatious poems."⁴⁰¹ The most gifted and respectable names of such writers include Ma Xianglan 马湘兰 (1548-1604), Jing Pianpian 景翩翩 (fl. 1570's), Xue Susu 薛素素 (ca.1564-1637), Yang Yuxiang 杨玉香 (late 16th century) and Liu Rushi. Courtesan writers wrote mostly about love, celebrating fidelity or scolding a fickle lover. Although their poems often served as lures or advertisements for their business, these women's works were widely published and they helped form the idealization of *qing* (love, emotions or feelings) in scholar-literati circles, according to the studies of Kang-i Sun Chang.⁴⁰² At the same time, however, their use of poetry as "a primary means of written communication between courtesans and their clients,"⁴⁰³ made their poetry seem vulgar to refined readers.

⁴⁰¹ Here I use Paul Ropp's term. See Paul Ropp, "Ambiguous Image of Courtesan Culture in Late Imperial China," in Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang ed., *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997, p. 22.

⁴⁰² Kang-i Sun Chang, *The Late Ming Poet Ch'en Tzu-lung: Crises of Love and Loyalism*, New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1991, p. 119.

⁴⁰³ Paul Ropp in Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang ed., p. 21.

Talking about Chinese women's literature, Stephen Owen states, "In premodern China, women writers usually wrote in a voice unmarked by gender, or they assumed the conventional 'women's' voice constructed by the male tradition. Only rarely do we find someone speaking as a woman against the limitations of gender roles."⁴⁰⁴ This statement means that there was only one tradition—the male tradition—in pre-modern China, and that most women writers followed it, even if they wrote in a "woman's" voice. This judgment is essentially true for women's literature from the Period of Division to the late Ming Dynasty, when a large number of women began to write. John Timothy Wixted has an opinion similar to Owen's. According to his observations, there does not seem to be a separate female literary tradition in China. Wixted writes, "From the material that is extant, there seems little evidence for a separate female literary tradition in China until the late imperial period, in terms of either lineation or language." He examined the materials concerning the famous Song poet Li Qingzhao and found that Li's poetry draws little on the writings of earlier women, nor do later women writers especially emulate her actual writing. This is despite the fact that many of the female authors who pre- and post-date her are retrospectively grouped together with her by later critics in the implicit class of 'women writers,' for which Li Qingzhao is the standard.⁴⁰⁵ Wixted's observation is demonstrated by other facts. "Female genres" such as *ci* poetry and female themes such as the "Poem of Grievance" did not form a female tradition; instead, they belonged to the male tradition. *Ci* poetry, which started in the mid-Tang Dynasty (ca. 766-827), was a sub-genre, originally composed for women singers by men, while the early *ci* poetry often represented a "femininity" constructed by male writers.⁴⁰⁶ As for the "female theme" of the "Poem of Grievance," it was legitimized as part of (the male) tradition generated from Han palace women's verse. Both male and female poets wrote on this theme, in a stereotyped female voice.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁴ Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911*, p. 509.

⁴⁰⁵ John Timothy Wixted, "The Poetry of Li Qingzhao: A Woman Author and Women's Authorship" in Pauline Yu ed., *Voices of the Song Lyric in China*, California: California University Press, 1994, pp. 145-68.

⁴⁰⁶ There is also a special "feminine" style of *ci* called *wanyue* (something like "having a delicate sensibility)."

⁴⁰⁷ For example, a Tang Dynasty poet Jin Changxu 金昌緒 (dates uncertain) wrote a "Poem of Grievance" entitled "Spring Lament" 春怨 ("Chunyuán") in the guise of a female voice. The woman's husband was supposedly on a government mission in the west of Liao:

I am throwing a lump of earth to drive away orioles

打起黃鶯兒，

From the late Ming, along with the rapid spread of women's education, a growing number of women writers-artists became itinerant teachers for females or sold their works to support their families. Dorothy Ko's remarkable book *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* studies these women whom Ko calls "man-like" women. According to Ko, by teaching and selling their works to support their families, these women had assumed male roles. The males were the ones supposed to make a living, while women were supposed to follow the men around. Since these "man-like" women had freedom to travel and assumed some men's responsibilities, they tended not to write on male-created female themes. Instead, they tried to participate in public affairs and wrote about men's concerns. Ko considers Wang Duanshu 王端淑, Huang Yuanjie 黃媛介, and Gu Ruopu (1592-1681) 顧若璞 representatives of such women.⁴⁰⁸ During the mid-Qing or the eighteenth century, according to Susan Mann and Kang-i Sun Chang, women writers became more conscious about their "selves" and injected female subjectivity into their works, while at the same time, insisting on Confucian morality. Susan Mann in her book *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century* states that the eighteenth-century women writers encoded their selves, which can be understood as a figment or reification of consciousness present to itself, in their works. They had a propensity for expressing their own concerns about Confucian morality. Thus, "in a patriarchal culture, they created a women's discourse that upheld Confucian honour while voicing the passions and sentiments that threatened to violate it."⁴⁰⁹ Mann and Sun Chang take Wanyan Yunzhu as a striking example of this. In her compilation of the *Correct*

Because I do not want them to chirp in the trees anymore.	莫叫枝上啼。
Their chirps woke me up from dreams	啼時驚妾夢，
And I cannot go to Liaoxi.	不得到遼西。

(Tao Wenpeng 陶文鵬, Wu Kunding 吳坤定 et al, *A New Translation of Three Hundred of Tang Poems* 唐詩三百首新譯 (*Tangshi sanbaishou xinyi*), Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1993, p. 483).
⁴⁰⁸ For example, Wang Duanshu, who was the author of a poetry collection entitled *Red Chantings* 吟紅集 (*Yinhong ji*), wrote of six men who died for the fallen dynasty of the Ming and praised women who threw themselves into wells, leaped into rivers or cursed soldiers to avoid rape. These are supposedly men's themes. Ko states that this trend of literary concerns and men's themes also influenced women writers who never went outside their quarters. Even though these women did not venture out of their homes, they made known their views on national politics and military affairs in their works. "In taking up genres and subject matters previously reserved for men, they enlarged the possibilities for women and helped bridge the gap between what was perceived as the man's domain and the woman's domain" (Ko, 129-42).

⁴⁰⁹ Mann, *Precious Records*, p. 77.

Beginning, she “adopted the attributes of ‘meekness and gentleness’ as the criteria of selection for her anthology”⁴¹⁰ and “believed that in the female poetic voice, talent and virtue were joined.”⁴¹¹

From the above historical review, we see a Z-shape development of Chinese women’s literature: from the beginnings to the Han Dynasty, women spontaneously wrote about themselves, producing a very limited quantity of works on limited themes. After the Han, women mainly followed the male tradition to write in “feminine genres,” wrote on “women themes” or produced works unmarked by gender. This situation did not change until the late Ming when women started becoming aware of themselves. The fact that the “man-like” women writers partly assumed men’s roles and wrote about public concerns proves women’s self-awareness—they wanted to demonstrate their intellectual power and professional ability as equal to men’s and show their concern about public affairs. However, from the viewpoint of the development of women’s literature, these women writers still worked within the framework of the male tradition. It was in the mid-Qing that women began to be aware of their female experiences and concerns as being worth something in literature, while their Confucian moral concerns represented their connection with the tradition.

Qu Bingyun was a product of her day. Her poetry values a woman’s experience and was derived from the environment of mid-Qing women’s literature. She, however, was different from the representative women writers of the period in many ways.

Three Prototypes of Women Writers of Eighteenth-Century China and Three Stages of European Women’s Literature

Qu Bingyun’s uniqueness can be revealed in an examination of her female contemporaries and a comparison with European women’s literature.

⁴¹⁰ Sun Chang, p. 145. Kang-i Sun Chang indicates that Wanyan Yunzhu's anthology shows how Neo-Confucianism influenced some literati women after the mid-Qing. “In making moral edification her principle of selection, Wanyan Yunzhu seemed to be challenging Yuan Mei's liberal-minded view of literature, according to which spontaneous self-expression came before didactic function of poetry.”

⁴¹¹ Mann, *Precious Records*, pp. 97-9. Susan Mann maintains that Wanyan Yunzhu believed that women’s poetry gave the truest and fullest expression of their moral authority. She, however, did not favour men’s subject matter anymore. The female writers whose work Wanyan admired had usually studied the classics at home. They did not attempt the kinds of public writing that absorbed the men’s Han learning movement; few women, for example published philosophical research during the classical revival.

There emerged three major prototypes of women writers in eighteenth-century China. The first one is the “man-like” women writer. Ko states, “After their debut in the seventeenth-century, professional teachers appeared more frequently by the early and mid-eighteenth century.”⁴¹² The second prototype is women who were concerned with both women’s subjectivity and Confucian morality. There was also a certain number of women writers, the third prototype, who were relatively free from Confucian morality and who concentrated on women’s own concerns.

Yuan Mei’s female disciple group, literary activists among the eighteenth-century women writers, can be regarded as representatives of the third prototype. Most of these women largely freed themselves from Confucian orthodoxy, while the majority of their female contemporaries stuck to it. Their literary concepts, examined in Chapter V, show that they did not include Confucian morality in their literary concerns. Also, outsiders viewed them as rebels against tradition. Some Confucian scholars such as Zhang Xuecheng severely criticized them, and women writers who cared about Confucian teachings did not join them, even if invited. As mentioned in Chapter IV, even though Yuan Mei was a friend of her grandfather, when Yuan wanted to visit Wang Qiong, she regarded this as “indecorous” 非禮⁴¹³ and declined. Another example is Hou Zhi 候芝, who insisted “throughout her work on a conservative standard of feminine behaviour.”⁴¹⁴ Hou lived in Nanjing where Yuan Mei’s estate was located and where her husband was a disciple of Yuan Mei, but Hou did not join the Yuan group. Ellen Widmer explains: “Given Yuan Mei’s dubious reputation from a strict Confucian standpoint, it is very possible that Hou preferred to avoid contact with him.”⁴¹⁵

When looking at Yuan Mei’s female disciple group further, its members can be divided into two types: one consists of women such as Xi Peilan, Luo Qilan, and Sun Yunfeng who were eager to challenge men’s authority and sometimes wrote poems unidentified by gender; they can be called “the radicals.” For example, as stated in Chapter I, Xi Peilan wrote poems to criticize sexism and claim that women possessed

⁴¹² Ko, p. 126.

⁴¹³ Shi, 6:13b. *The Book of Rites: Record of the Dykes* 禮記: 坊記 (*Liji: Fangji*) states, “The Master said, ‘The ceremonial usages serve as dykes to the people against bad excesses (to which they are prone). They display the separation that should be maintained (between the sexes), that there may be no occasion for suspicion, and the relations of the people be well defined.’” 子云: 夫禮, 坊民所淫, 章民之別, 使民無嫌, 以爲民紀者. The translation is taken from James Legge, p. 297.

⁴¹⁴ Ellen Widmer, “Trouble with talent: Zai zaotian of 1828,” in *Chinese Literature, 1999*, p. 132.

⁴¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 138.

qualities usually attributed to men. Also, she competed with men aggressively and thought that she could be superior to male poets. The other type can be called “the moderates” and includes Qu Bingyun, Chen Changsheng, Jin Yi and Zhang Yuzhen.⁴¹⁶ They concentrated on writing about their own experience, and did not protest and were not very aggressive—Qu Bingyun even declined fame.⁴¹⁷ Both types of women writers in Yuan Mei’s female group tended to challenge tradition and strove to produce literature that contains female subjectivity. Yet, the radicals succeeded mainly on the ideological level, while the moderates developed the female features in literature.

The differences among these three prototypes of women writers of eighteenth-century China as well as the two types of members in Yuan Mei’s group become clear when compared with European women writers.

European women’s poetry that matches that of eighteenth-century China did not appear until the twentieth century.⁴¹⁸ However, women’s fiction in Europe was well developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and coincided with a historical shift in women’s positions—middle class women were being made the centre of a growing cult of domestic life and family affection.⁴¹⁹ In her book entitled *A Literature of Their Own* on the subject of English women novel writers, Elaine Showalter characterizes the development of women’s literature in England as the Feminine, Feminist and Female stages. During the Feminine phrase, dating from about 1840 to

⁴¹⁶ For example, Jin Yi wrote many poems on her illness and relations with her husband and friends, while Zhang Yuzhen, widowed early, composed a number of verses on missing her husband and feelings of loneliness as well as on relations with many female friends.

⁴¹⁷ Unlike Xi Peilan and Luo Qilan, who were very eager to get fame, Qu Bingyun always declined fame. According to Sun Yuanxiang, one day he visited Zhao Tongyu and Qu Bingyun at Easy Pavilion 易安閣 (Yi’an Ge), one of their buildings. When Sun saw the name of the building, he made a comparison between Li Qingzhao and Qu Bingyun because Li’s sobriquet was also Yi’an. Qu Bingyun immediately declined this comparison. She said, “I am thinking of changing this name” and asked Sun for a new name for the building. (Sun Yuanxiang, *Biography*). Also, when she learned that she was included in the painting of Yuan Mei’s thirteen female disciples, Qu Bingyun wrote, “I am a disciple but feel embarrassed to be counted, / I am ashamed to have gained fame for little talent 執業羞同列, / 微才愧得名 (2:10b).

⁴¹⁸ The tradition of English women’s poetry begins in the late sixteenth century and the first flowering of women’s poetry is in the seventeenth century, inaugurated by Aemilia Lanier’s *Salve Deus Rex Ludaeorum* (1611). In the eighteenth century, although it subjected them to ridicule and censure, writing poetry was one of the few professions open to middle-class women, one they could pursue in their homes with financial success. Women’s poetry really comes of age in the mid-nineteenth century with the advent of two crucially important women writers, but there were still few women who wrote poetry in Europe as compared with Chinese women in the late imperial period. (See Jan Montefiore, “Women and the Poetic Tradition: The Oppressor’s Language,” in Martin Coyle, Peter Garside, et al ed., *Encyclopaedia of Literature and Criticism*, Detroit / New York: Gale Research Inc., 1991, pp. 208-22).

⁴¹⁹ See Jane Spencer, “Feminine Fictions” in Martin Coyle, Peter Garside, et al, *Encyclopaedia*, pp. 518-30.

1880, women wrote in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of male culture. The distinguishing sign of this period is the male pseudonym as a way of coping with a double literary standard, a national characteristic of English women writers such as George Eliot and Currer Ellis. In the Feminist phase, from about 1880 to 1920, or the winning of the vote, women were historically enabled to reject the accommodating postures of femininity and to use literature to dramatize the ordeals of wronged womanhood. In 1880s, a generation of New Women re-defined the female artist's role in terms of responsibility to suffering sisters. In the Female phrase, ongoing since 1920, women have rejected both imitation and protest—two forms of dependency—and turned instead to female experience as the source of autonomous art. They extend the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature. Representatives of the formal Female Aesthetics, such as Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf, began to think in terms of male and female sentences, and divide their work into “masculine” journalism and “feminine” fictions, re-defining and sexualizing external and internal experience.⁴²⁰

The “man-like” women writers in Chinese literature, who wrote about men's concerns, resembled the Feminine stage of English women writers: they both internalized traditional literary and social standards and strove to imitate the dominant tradition. The representative eighteenth-century Chinese women writers, Wanyan Yunzhu and poets like her, celebrated the selves of women while valuing Confucian morality. These women can be placed between the Feminine stage and the Female stage of English women writers: they still tried to internalize some Confucian tradition, but began regarding the female experience as the source of literature. The radicals of Yuan Mei's female group are somewhat like English women writers in the Feminist stage, who protested against prevailing traditional modes and advocated the minority's (women) values and rights. The moderates of this group, Qu Bingyun and poets like her, are closer to English women writers in the third stage—the Female stage—honoring women's experience as the source of autonomous art.

⁴²⁰ Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977. Also see a summary of these three stages in her “Toward a Feminist Poetics” in her *The New Feminist Criticism: essays on women, literature and theory*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1985, pp. 137-9.

Autobiographical Nature of Women's Work and Development of Women's Literature

The above comparisons show that since Qu Bingyun's work celebrates her experience as a woman, it is closer to the third stage of English women writers. This suggests that Qu's poetry is on an advanced level of the development of women's literature. A question is thus raised: Did an eighteenth-century woman writer have to write works of an autobiographical nature in order to produce true women's literature?

The answer is twofold: at a certain stage, women's works that are of an autobiographical nature are necessary in terms of self-consciousness—the confidence in their female experience as an autonomous source of art. However, women may find other ways of representing their self-consciousness, along with social development and the development of women's literature.

First, women's biographical work manifests their self-consciousness. When talking about the autobiographical genre, Georges Gusdorf holds that it is the product of the conscious awareness of the singularity of each individual life. He states, "The writer of an autobiography who takes delight in drawing his own image believes himself worthy of a special interest." It is "the advent of consciousness of self" that made autobiography possible."⁴²¹ The feminist critic Susan S. Friedman argues against Gusdorf's assertion, maintaining that the cultural precondition for autobiography as being a pervasive concept of individualism is not correct when applied to female autobiographical writing. Female autobiographical writing does not reflect a unique individual identity of each living woman. It projects an image of WOMAN, a category that is supposed to define living women's identity. Friedman employs Rowbotham's ideological focus on collective consciousness and Chodorow's psychoanalytical focus on relational gender identity in reading women's autobiographical writing, maintaining that "the self constructed in women's autobiographical writing is based in, but not limited to, a group consciousness—an awareness of the meaning of the cultural category WOMAN for the patterns of women's individual destiny."⁴²² In spite of the differences between them,

⁴²¹ Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography" in James Olney ed., *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.

⁴²² Susan S. Friedman, "Women's Autobiographical Selves Theory and Practice" in Shari Benstock ed., *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988.

both Gusdorf and Friedman confirm that autobiographical writing comes from conscious awareness of the self—individual self according to Gusdorf, or collective self of women according to Friedman. Chinese literate women in the earliest stages of women's literature wrote spontaneously about things they encountered in their lives and had less awareness of the self as woman. Qu Bingyun and poets like her,⁴²³ however, wrote on a broad range of themes concerning every aspect of their female experience and, more importantly, their writing was based on self-consciousness—their experience had the right to be an autonomous source of art.

Second, the early feminist critic Virginia Woolf made some interesting points regarding biographical characteristics of women's writing. She holds that at the time when the "English woman" was transformed from a nondescript influence, fluctuating and vague, to a voter, a wage-earner, and a responsible citizen, her work became more "impersonal." Woolf states that as women took up their place as full civic subjects in the public sphere, their "relations" would become "not only emotional" but also "intellectual" and "political." Their works would become more engaged with the "impersonal," more "critical of society, and less analytical of individual lives."⁴²⁴

As an individual process and a product of individual's mind, literary creations cannot be "impersonal" and "non-emotional." However, at certain stages of Chinese women's literature (for example, in the pre-Han times and the late imperial periods), women wrote a lot about themselves, consciously or not, and their works were highly personal and emotional. But, as women became progressively more involved in public affairs, they would frequently assume a social role, writing on a broad range of social and political issues. In the present time in both China and Europe, when women take part in social and political affairs, their works are less "personal" (gendered). However, in a pre-modern age, Qu Bingyun and poets like her were at a stage of development of Chinese women's literature that required more attention to women's own experiences than to public affairs.

⁴²³ As the scholars working on Ming-Qing women's writings have observed, there was a strong tendency toward self-representation in the late imperial period. For example, Grace Fong points out: "The autobiographical desire in the textual practices of these educated women is variously manifested in preface materials, genre choice, structural organization of collections, and modes of discourse in self-representation." Grace Fong, "Writing Self and Writing Lives: Shen Shanbao's (1808-1862) Gendered Auto/Biographical Practices," in *NAN NÜ* 2.2 (2000): pp. 259-303.

7.3 Qu Bingyun and Chinese Literature

Qu Bingyun's poetry was read by a large audience; her manuscripts were circulated widely in the Mount Yu region and beyond it when she was alive; her poems were printed and reached even more readers after her death. Qu Bingyun and her female contemporaries were an actual part of Chinese literature. By circulating their works, these women participated in a vast conversation with the rest of the literary world. Kang-i Sun Chang points out that "in fact, not only was the number of women poets in Late Imperial China unprecedented, but many learned women during the period actually did share a world with men. They acted not as auxiliary attachments to a male sphere or as denizens of a parallel female world, but often fully took part in the poetic traditions and expressions that defined the larger cultural and social context."⁴²⁵

Traditional Chinese literature had been a male unitary entity. Qu Bingyun and her female contemporaries broadened Chinese literature by bringing to it new themes, new language and new styles. Women's experience is an important part of human experience and should have the right to be represented in literature, while literature needs to be re-vitalized constantly through the development of new features. The poetry critic James Reeves says, "Poetry is the things said *and* a way of saying it." Poetry is "the series of words represented by printing on the paper together makes a representation of an incident or event which takes place in the mind of the poet." A good poem is the one from which the readers can receive a shock or a surprise. "This is the shock of having a new experience. The reader's experience has been permanently enlarged."⁴²⁶ As indicated by Reeves, in order to give the reader a shock or surprise, the writer should have new things to say or find a new way of saying old things. Qu Bingyun and other "respectable ladies" 閨秀 (*Guixiu*) made their experience in gentry women's quarters a poetic theme and exposed their readers to their private sphere. By doing so, they gave their readers a "shock or surprise."

⁴²⁴ Virginia Woolf, "Women and Fiction," in Virginia Woolf, *Women and Writing*, London: The Women's Press, 1979 [essay first published 1929], summary by Cora Kaplan in "Feminist Literary Criticism: 'New Colours and Shadows' in Martin Coyle, Peter Garside, et al ed., p. 750.

⁴²⁵ Sun Chang, 121.

⁴²⁶ James Reeves, *Understanding Poetry*, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1965, pp. 29-32.

Also, Qu Bingyun and poets like her made a special contribution to classical Chinese poetry by introducing a genial and practical style of poetry, these women writers helped Chinese poetry finalize the shift from the “public self” to the “individual self.”

The assertion in the *Book of Documents* that “The poem intently articulates what is on the mind,” is respected as the “founding principle” 開山的綱領 (“kaishan gangling”) of Chinese traditional poetics.⁴²⁷ It advocates poetry as self-representation. However, from the earliest stages, Confucians had been avoiding interpreting “the mind” as the “individual self.” Instead, they explained it with morality and social affairs for educational and political purposes, turning it into a “public self.”⁴²⁸ For example, the *Great Preface* to the *Classic of Poetry* follows the above assertion, as it claims, “Poetry is that to which what is intently on the mind goes.”⁴²⁹ Surprisingly though, it interprets all the poems in the *Classic of Poetry* in terms of moral significance, and draws from its moral interpretation in stating that poetry “regulates husband and wife to establish filial piety among people, to make their morality honest, to make their customs beautiful, and to improve [their] milieu in society.”⁴³⁰ Therefore, it became conventional for writing poetry to be included in the “three immortal deeds”⁴³¹ which were taken very seriously by the Chinese people in pre-modern times; as Cao Pi 曹丕 (187-226) states:

Generally, writing is a grand undertaking for administrating a country and a great deed which is eternal” 蓋文章,經國之大業,不朽之盛事。⁴³²

⁴²⁷ Zhu Zhiqing 朱自清 *Clarification on “The Poem Articulating What Is on the Mind Intently”* 詩言志辨 (*Shiyanzhi bian*), Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1996, Preface.

⁴²⁸ Here, the “public self” and the “individual self” can be referred to in two modern terms: the “great self” 大我 (*Dawo*) and the “small self” 小我 (*Xiaowo*).

⁴²⁹ The translation is taken from Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, p. 40.

⁴³⁰ This translation is taken from Fusheng Wu, *The Poetics of Decadence: Chinese Poetry of the Southern Dynasties and Late Tang Periods*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998, p. 11.

⁴³¹ The *Stories of Zuo* 左傳 (*Zuo zhuan*) states, “The highest deed is to perform virtuous actions, the second highest is to render meritorious services, and the third highest is to write.” 太上有立德,其次有立功,其次有立言. Yang Bojun comp., p. 1088. Chinese people were encouraged to pursue one of these “three immortal deeds” 三不朽 (*san bu xiu*): “performing virtuous actions” 立德 (*lide*), “rendering meritorious services” 立功 (*ligong*), and “writing” 立言 (*liyan*).

⁴³² Guo Shaoyu 郭紹虞 and Wang Wensheng 王文生 ed., *Selected Critical Works of China Through Ages*, 中國歷代文論選 (*Zhongguo lidai wenlun xuan*), Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1980, v 1, p. 159.

Bearing this belief in mind, Chinese intellectuals devoted their lives to the writing of poetry as a social mission.

There also developed a trend of advocating personal and "trivial" matters in poetry. As Stephen Owen recounts of Chinese pre-modern literature, the intellectuals of the Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern Dynasties were concerned more with personal happiness than state affairs. During the Tang period many poets wrote on social occasions and as a way of personal contacts, and the mid and late Tang was the "age of unusual poetic personalities and self-conscious poetic experiment." In the Song dynasty, many writers wrote literary works as creations of the realm of private life and leisure which could be kept to some degree separate both from the demands of state service and the unremitting moral seriousness of Neo-Confucian self-examination and self-cultivation. Starting from the late Ming to the mid-Qing, there were certain groups of intellectuals who championed freedom and followed their natural inclinations. Trivial things and unplanned surprises were also resorted to as a reaction to the Archaists who championed discipline and "moral seriousness." Li Zhi and Yuan Hongdao (1568-1610) were representatives of this literary movement in the late Ming, while in the mid-Qing, Yuan Mei, carrying on the late Ming's interest in immediacy and genuine expression, advocated poetry of complete spontaneity, through which a person could give free expression to whatever was natural within him or her.⁴³³

This trend of advocating personal and "trivial" matters can be regarded as an effort to shift the poetic "mind" from the Confucians' "public self" to the "individual self." This shift was realized in Ming and Qing times in conjunction with the popularity of literacy in elite households and the spread of poetry through all levels of elite society. Although many mid- and late Qing intellectuals, such as Gong Zizhen and Huang Zunxian, still took writing poetry as a means to voice their political concerns and help social reform, poetry eventually descended from the "grand undertaking" position to more private and prosaic matters. There is no doubt that women wanting to write helped with the realization of this shift. As a large group of women participated in poetry, poetry became less "grand." Especially, as Qu Bingyun and poets like her produced their genial and practical works, poetry became a communication tool and an amusement among housewives, girls and even maids. In a poem addressing her husband Qu

Bingyun writes, "I wish you could get rid of your 'fondness for the flowers and moon,' / From now on, do not be known only for poetry" (Poem 29). These lines imply that poetry was no longer treated as a serious calling but as a pastime. Addressing a real audience, which made poetry genial, and using poetry practically, which made poetry prosaic, Qu Bingyun and poets like her finalized the shift of poetry to the "individual self."

⁴³³ See Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911*, pp. 225, 365-78, 478, 637, 807-12, and 1128-9.

Appendix

A Table of Yuan Mei's Female Disciples

	Name	Residence at the time	Time when became disciple	Way of becoming disciple	Contacts ⁴³⁴	References /Remarks
1	Chen Shulan 陳淑蘭	Jinling	1783	Self-introduction	Many	Selected in NDZJ ⁴³⁵
2	Qian Mengtian 錢孟鈿 (1739-1806)	Wujiang	After 1787 ⁴³⁶	Introduced by her uncle who was a friend of Y	Many	West Lake (1790) ⁴³⁷
3	Sun Yunfeng 孫雲鳳 (1764-1814)	Hangzhou	1788	Introduced by her father who was a friend of Y	Many	Selected in NDZJ; included in QYT ⁴³⁸ ; West Lake (1790, 1792) ⁴³⁹
4	Chen Changsheng 陳長生	Hangzhou	After 1788	Introduced by her stepmother whose father received a <i>jinshi</i> degree in the same year as Y	A meeting with Y in 1788 and a visit to the Sui Garden known to us ⁴⁴⁰	Selected in NDZJ
5	Sun Yunhe 孫雲鶴	Hangzhou	1789	Introduced by her father who was a friend of Y	Many	Selected in NDZJ; included in QYT; West Lake (1790, 1792)
6	Wang Zuanzu 汪纘祖	Qiantang	1790	Attended a poetic gathering	Unknown	Included in QYT; West Lake (1790)
7	Xu Yuxin 徐裕馨 1765-91	Qiantang	1790	Attended a poetic gathering	Many	Included in QYT; West lake (1790, ⁴⁴¹ 1792) ⁴⁴²

⁴³⁴ If marked "many," there were at least three meetings and/or correspondences between Yuan and the disciple.

⁴³⁵ NDZJ refers to *Collected Poems by Yuan Mei's Female Disciples*.

⁴³⁶ See YMQJ (III): SH, 55 of v 5, p. 151.

⁴³⁷ This is to indicate an attendance at the 1790 poetry gathering by the West Lake.

⁴³⁸ QYT refers to the "Painting of Thirteen Female Disciples Asking Yuan Mei for Advice at the Lake Tower."

⁴³⁹ This refers to the presence at the poetic gathering with Yuan Mei by the West Lake in 1792.

⁴⁴⁰ Chen Changsheng's poem, "On Admiring the View at Suiyuan Garden when the Official's Mother and I Were Restrained by the Heavy Wind" 金陵阻風侍太夫人游隨園作 ("Jinling zufeng shi taifuren you Suiyuan zuo"), YMQJ (VI): XT, p. 229.

⁴⁴¹ See Xu Yuxin's poem, "Farewell to Master Yuan Mei at the Treasure Stone Villa," 寶石山莊送簡齋夫子還山 ("Baoshi shanzhuang song Jianzhai fuzi huanshan"). YMQJ (VI): XT, p. 228.

8	Zhang Bingyi 張秉彝	Qiantang? ⁴⁴³	1790	Attended a poetic gathering; her father was a friend of Y	A poem she wrote at the gathering in addition to the gathering known to us ⁴⁴⁴	West lake (1790)
9	Sun Tingzhen 孫廷楨	Hangzhou	1790	Attended a poetic gathering	A poem she wrote at the gathering in addition to the gathering known to us ⁴⁴⁵	West lake (1790)
10	Wang Shen 汪 紳	Qiantang	1790	Attended a poetic gathering	Many	Included in QYT; West lake (1790)
11	Wu Shushen 吳淑慎	Hangzhou	1790	Attended a poetic gathering	A poem she wrote at the gathering in addition to the gathering known to us ⁴⁴⁶	West lake (1790)
12	Feng Hui 馮 蕙	Unknown	1790	Attended a poetic gathering	A poem she wrote at the gathering in addition to the gathering known to us ⁴⁴⁷	West lake (1790)
13	Jiang Xinbao ⁴⁴⁸ 蔣心寶	Unknown	1790/92	Unknown	Unknown	Included in QYT
14	Wang Yuru 王玉如	Hangzhou	After 1790 ⁴⁴⁹	Introduced by her husband who was a friend of Y	Many	Selected in NDZJ;
15	Luo Qilan	Jurong	1791	Self-introduction	Many ⁴⁵⁰	Selected in NDZJ;

⁴⁴² Yuan Mei mentioned Xu Yuxin's presence at this gathering in his foreword to the poem "I Miss the Past Prefect of Hangzhou Mr. Ming Xizhe" 寄懷前杭州太守明希哲先生 ("Jihuai qian hangzhou taishou Ming Xizhe xiansheng"). *YMQJ* (I): *SJ*, p. 865.

⁴⁴³ Yuan Mei wrote, "I was born in the same year as Chai Xingzhi, my fellow townsman. When I was eighteen years old, Mr. Chai and his cousin named Zhang Jingshan, visited me" 余與柴行之同庚。十八歲時，柴與其表兄張靜山見訪。Since Zhang Jingshan was the father of Zhang Bingyi, Zhang Bingyi was likely a native of Qiantang, as was Yuan. See *YMQJ* (III): *BY*, 57 of v 2, p. 594.

⁴⁴⁴ See Zhang Bingyi's poem, "Farewell to Master Yuan Mei at the Treasure Stone Villa," *YMQJ* (VI): *XT*, p. 226.

⁴⁴⁵ See Sun Tingzhen's poem, "Farewell to Master Yuan Mei at the Treasure Stone Villa," *YMQJ* (VI): *XT*, p. 228.

⁴⁴⁶ See Wu Shushen's poem, "Farewell to Master Yuan Mei at the Treasure Stone Villa," *YMQJ* (VI): *XT*, p. 227.

⁴⁴⁷ See Feng Hui's poem, "Farewell to Master Yuan Mei at the Treasure Stone Villa," *YMQJ* (VI): *XT*, p. 228.

⁴⁴⁸ The only mention of Sun Xinbao can be found in Yuan's postscript to the painting in Host of Xiaohengxiang's *A Grand Collection of Unofficial Historical Records of the Qing Dynasty*, p 151.

⁴⁴⁹ Wang Yuru was a concubine of Sun Yunfeng's father. Wang might have met with Yuan Mei when Yuan hosted a poetic gathering in the Sun's house at the West Lake in 1790.

	駱綺蘭 (1756-?)					included in QYT (continuation)
16	Jin Yi 金逸 (1770-94)	Changzhou	1792	Introduced by her husband who was a student of Y	A meeting in 1794; Y wrote an eulogy and an epitaph for her death	Selected in NDZJ; included in QYT; one of Y's "three bosom friends"
17	Liao Yunjin 廖雲錦	Songjiang	1792	Introduced by Y's fifth daughter who was a friend of Liao ⁴⁵¹	Many	Selected in NDZJ; included in QYT
18	Qian Lin 錢林	Hangzhou	1792	Attended a poetic gathering; her father was a friend of Y	Many	Selected in NDZJ; included in QYT (continuation); West lake (1792) ⁴⁵²
19	Pan Suxin 潘素蘭 (1764-?)	Hangzhou	1792	Attended a poetic gathering; her father was a friend of Y	Many	West lake (1792)
20	Xiuxiang ⁴⁵³ 袖香	Hangzhou	1792	Introduced by her husband who was a friend of Y ⁴⁵⁴	Unknown	West lake (1792)?
21	Wutong ⁴⁵⁵ 梧桐	Hangzhou	1792	Introduced by her husband who was a friend of Y ⁴⁵⁶	Unknown	West lake (1792)?
22	Yuexin ⁴⁵⁷ 月心	Hangzhou	1792	Introduced by her husband who was a friend of Y ⁴⁵⁸	Unknown	West lake (1792)?
23	Jin Dui 金兌	Changzhou	1792	Attended a poetic gathering	A meeting in 1791 ⁴⁵⁹ in addition to the gathering	Xiuguyuan ⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁰ Robyn Hamilton wrote, "Luo was a regular visitor to Yuan's garden in Jinling." "The Pursuit of Fame: Luo Qilan (1775-ca.1813) and the Debates about Women and Talent in Eighteen-Century Jiangnan," *Late Imperial China* v 18, No. 1 (June 1997), p. 17.

⁴⁵¹ See *YMQJ* (III): *BY*, 37 of v 5, p. 667.

⁴⁵² See *YMQJ* (I): *SJ*, p. 865.

⁴⁵³ "Xiuxiang" is likely a sobriquet. Her family name and given name are unknown.

⁴⁵⁴ When Yuan met with Ming Xizhe a day prior to the 1792 poetic gathering, Ming "instructed Wutong and Xiuxiang to become Yuan's disciples." [明希哲]即命梧桐袖香二姬受業門下. *YMQJ* (I): *SJ*, v 35, p. 865.

⁴⁵⁵ "Wutong" is likely a sobriquet. Her family name and given name are unknown.

⁴⁵⁶ See Note 450.

⁴⁵⁷ "Yuexin" is likely a sobriquet. Her family name and given name are unknown.

⁴⁵⁸ Yuan Mei wrote a passage about the 1792 poetic gathering at the West Lake, in which Yuan said, "Ming Xizhe has twelve concubines. The one who is good at playing musical instruments is named Wutong, the one who is good at writing poetry is named Xiuxiang, and the youngest is named Yuexin. They all became my disciples one day prior to the poetic gathering" 太守有十二金釵。能琴者名梧桐;能詩者名袖香;最小者名月心。會前一日皆執贄余門。 *YMQJ* (III): *BY*, 44 of v 5, p. 671.

⁴⁵⁹ In her poem, "Assembled at the Xiugu Garden to See off Master Yuan Mei Who Was Retuning to Jinling," which was written in 1792, Jin Dui indicated, "In Jinzhou we first met but parted soon after the meeting, / We now meet again when another year passed" 荊州乍識遣相別,後會重期又一年. *YMQJ* (VI): *XT*, p. 236.

⁴⁶⁰ This refers to the presence at the poetic gathering in the Gold Grain Garden in 1792.

24	Zhang Yunzi 張允滋	Wuxian	1792	Attended a poetic gathering	A gathering with Y ⁴⁶¹	Xiuguyuan
25	Gu Kun 顧琨	Suzhou	1792	Attended a poetic gathering	A gathering with Y ⁴⁶²	Xiuguyuan
26	You Danxian 尤澹仙	Changzhou	1792	Attended a poetic gathering	A gathering with Y ⁴⁶³	Xiuguyuan
27	Zhou Lilan 周澧蘭	Changzhou,	1792	Attended a poetic gathering	A gathering with Y ⁴⁶⁴	Xiuguyuan
28	He Yuxian 何玉仙	Suzhou ⁴⁶⁵	1792	Attended a poetic gathering	A gathering with Y	Xiuguyuan
29	Jiang Zhu 江珠	Suzhou	1792	Attended a poetic gathering ⁴⁶⁶	Unknown	Xiuguyuan
30	Bao Zhihui 鮑之蕙 (?-1810)	Dantu	1792? ⁴⁶⁷	Introduced by her husband who was a friend of Y	Many	Selected in <i>NDZJ</i> ; included in <i>QYT</i>
31	Zhuang Tao 莊濤	Songjiang	1792 ⁴⁶⁸	Introduced by her cousin who was a disciple of Y	Unknown	Y called her "my female disciple" ⁴⁶⁹
32	Xi Peilan 席佩蘭 (1762-1826)	Changshu	1793 ⁴⁷⁰	Introduced by her husband who was a student of Y	Many	Selected in <i>NDZJ</i> ; included in <i>QYT</i> ; Top student of Y; one of Y's "three bosom friends"

⁴⁶¹ See Zhang Zilan (Yunzi)'s poem, "Assembled at the Xiugu Garden to See Master Yuan Mei off Who Was Retuning to Jinling," *YMQJ* (VI): *XT*, p. 235.

⁴⁶² See Gu Kun's poem, "Assembled at the Xiugu Garden to See Master Yuan Mei off Who Was Retuning to Jinling," *YMQJ* (VI): *XT*, p. 235.

⁴⁶³ See You Danxian's poem, "Assembled at the Xiugu Garden to See Master Yuan Mei off Who Was Retuning to Jinling," *YMQJ* (VI): *XT*, p. 236.

⁴⁶⁴ See Zhou Lilan's poem, "Assembled at the Xiugu Garden to See Master Yuan Mei off Who Was Retuning to Jinling," *YMQJ* (VI): *XT*, p. 236-7.

⁴⁶⁵ He Yuxian was a native of Suzhou. She married a man in another city but happened to be visiting her native town of Suzhou when the poetry gathering was held there. In her poem, "Assembled at the Xiugu Garden to See Master Yuan Mei off Who Was Retuning to Jinling," she wrote, "staying in my home town for several days, / I am enjoying the tour to the lakes and hills" 故鄉住幾日,已快湖山游. *YMQJ* (VI): *XT*, p. 237.

⁴⁶⁶ Jiang Zhu was kept from the gathering because of illness. I however count her as a participant because she called the women together for this gathering on behalf of Yuan Mei. She also wrote a poem entitled "Assembled at the Xiugu Garden to See Master Yuan Mei off Who Was Retuning to Jinling." *YMQJ* (VI): *XT*, p. 235.

⁴⁶⁷ There is a note about a joint poem by Bao and her husband entitled "Our Joining Lines in the Form of Long Regulated Poetry" in Celebration of Yuan's Eightieth Birthday" stating, "in autumn 1792, Yuan Mei bestowed us a preface to our *Joint Poetry Collection from Pure Entertainment Tower* 壬子秋,蒙賜清娛閣合刻詩序 in *YMQJ* (VI): *On Yuan Mei's Eightieth Birthday* 隨園八十壽言 (*Suiyuan bashi shouyan*, hereafter SY), v 6, p. 111. It is likely that Bao joined Yuan's entourage around 1792.

⁴⁶⁸ After becoming Yuan's disciple in 1792, Liao Zhiyun wrote Yuan a letter in which she mentioned that her cousin, Zhuang Tao, was also good at writing poetry. Zhuang loved Yuan's poetry and privately regarded Yuan as her mentor. See *YMQJ* (III): *BY*, 37 of v 5, p. 667. Therefore, it is likely that Zhuang became Yuan's disciple in the same year as Liao.

⁴⁶⁹ Yuan regarded Zhuang Tao as his disciple. See *YMQJ* (VI): *SY*, v 6, p. 110

⁴⁷⁰ Xi met Yuan in 1793 and not in 1794, as Goyama says in his paper. Yuan recounted his first meeting with Xi Peilan, "my female disciple, Xi Peilan's poetry is fresh and ingenious. At first, I thought it was her

33	Qu Bingyun 屈秉筠	Changshu	1794	Unknown	Many	Selected in <i>NDZJ</i> (no poems); included in <i>QYT</i>
34	Zhang Yuzhen 張玉珍 (1759-after 1796)	Songjiang	1794	Introduced by her father who was a friend of Y	Many	Selected in <i>NDZJ</i> ; included in <i>QYT</i> ;
35	Zhu Yizhu 朱意珠	Suzhou	1794 ⁴⁷¹	Introduced by her husband who was a friend of Y	Unknown	Selected in <i>NDZJ</i>
36	Wang Bizhu 王碧珠	Suzhou	1794? ⁴⁷²	Introduced by her husband who was a friend of Y	Unknown	Selected in <i>NDZJ</i>
37	Wang Qian 王倩 (1761- 1826) ⁴⁷³	Suzhou	After 1794 ⁴⁷⁴	A nominal daughter of Y	Many	Selected in <i>NDZJ</i>
38	Dai Lanying 戴蘭英	Suzhou	1795 ⁴⁷⁵	The wife of Y's nephew	Many	Selected in <i>NDZJ</i> ; included in <i>QYT</i>
39	Cao Ciqing 曹次卿	Unknown	Around 1795 ⁴⁷⁶	Introduced by her husband who was a student of Y	Unknown	Included in <i>QYT</i> (continuation)
40	Yan Ruizhu	Suzhou	1795/6	Introduced by her mother whose	A meeting known to	Selected in <i>NDZJ</i> ; included in <i>QYT</i> ;

husband who wrote those poems for her. This spring I visited her in the Mount Yu area" 女弟子席佩蘭詩才清妙。余嘗疑是郎君孫子灑代作。今春到虞山訪之。After Yuan read three poems which Xi wrote on that day, he came to recognize her talent for poetry. *YMQJ* (III): *BY*, 11 of v 8, p.740-1. The time of this first meeting was either 1793 or 1794. But it is known that in the spring of 1794, when Qu Bingyun became Yuan's disciple, Xi was already a disciple of Yuan. During Yuan's stay in the Mount Yu area this time, Xi wrote two poems to present to Yuan, not three. They were entitled "On the Third Day in March when Master Yuan Mei Came to Mount Yu I Presented These Two Poems" 上巳日隨園先生來虞; 敬呈二律 ("Shangyiri Suiyuan xiansheng laiyou, jingcheng erlü"). Xi, 3:1b. Another poem, entitled "Two Women's Poetry" 二閨秀詩 ("Er guixiu shi") that was written in the Guichou Year 癸丑 (1793) by Yuan Mei, already indicates Xi's status of a disciple: "talented women are few, / it is rare for me to have obtained the two such talented women. They are Sun Yunfeng in the Jiu Peak area, and Xi Peilan in the Mount Yu region." 掃眉才子少, 吾得二賢難。鶯嶺孫雲風, 虞山席佩蘭. *YMQJ* (I): *SJ*, p.847.

⁴⁷¹ In a poem, "Master Yuan Mei's Eightieth Birthday" 簡齋先生八十壽 ("Jianzhai xiansheng bashi shou"), Zhu Yizhu wrote, "I cleaned my skirt and paid my respects to you more than two years ago" 瀟裙祗謁二年餘, *YMQJ* (VI): *SY*, v 6, p. 111. It was in 1796 that Yuan celebrated his eightieth birthday and Zhu should have been a disciple from 1794.

⁴⁷² Since both Zhu Yizhu and Wang Yizhu were the concubines of Wang Gu, it is likely that Wang became Yuan's disciple in the same year as Zhu.

⁴⁷³ See Lu, p 79.

⁴⁷⁴ Wang Qian married the husband of Jin Yi after Jin's death. It was Yuan Mei who acted as the matchmaker. Jin Yi died in 1794. Yuan accepted Wang as his nominal daughter at about the same time when he made this match. Afterwards, Wang regarded Yuan both as her nominal father and poetic mentor.

⁴⁷⁵ A note can be found in Yuan's poem, "On My Niece Dai Lanying's Painting of Teaching Her Son by an Oil Lamp in Autumn" 題姪媳戴蘭英秋燈課子圖 ("Ti zhixi Dai Lanying qiudeng kezi tu") saying that Dai Lanying" also recently called herself 'a female disciple of Yuan'" 近來亦自稱女弟子, *YMQJ* (I): *SJ*, v 36, p. 877.

⁴⁷⁶ No references are found for the time when she became a disciple of Yuan. However, it is likely that Yuan accepted her at the time when he added her to the painting of "Thirteen Female Disciples Asking Advice at the Lake Tower."

	嚴蕊珠			father was a friend of Y	us ⁴⁷⁷	one of Y's "three bosom friends"
41	Xu Dexin 許德馨	Unknown	Before 1796 ⁴⁷⁸	Unknown	Unknown	Selected in <i>NDZJ</i> (no poems)
42	Yuan Shufang 袁淑方	Wujiang	Before 1796 ⁴⁷⁹	She was a niece of Y	Unknown	Selected in <i>NDZJ</i> (no poems)
43	Wang Huiqing 王蕙卿	Unknown	Before 1796 ⁴⁸⁰	Unknown	Unknown	Selected in <i>NDZJ</i> (no poems)
44	Wang Yuzhen 汪玉軫	Wujiang	Before 1796 ⁴⁸¹	Unknown	Unknown	Selected in <i>NDZJ</i> (no poems)
45	Bao Yin 鮑印	Changshu	Before 1796 ⁴⁸²	Unknown	Unknown	Selected in <i>NDZJ</i> (no poems)
46	Gui Maoyi 歸懋儀 (ca. 1762- ca. 1832),	Changshu/ Shanghai	1796 ⁴⁸³	Unknown	Many	Selected in <i>NDZJ</i> (no poems)
47	Wu Qiong-xian 吳瓊仙 (1768-1804)	Wujiang	1796	Introduced by her husband who was a disciple of Y ⁴⁸⁴	Many	Selected in <i>NDZJ</i>
48	Lu Yuansu 盧元素	Qiantang	1796	Introduced by her husband whose father was a friend of Y	A meeting known to us ⁴⁸⁵	Selected in <i>NDZJ</i> ; included in <i>QYT</i> (continuation)
49	Zhang Xunxiao 張洵霄	Taicang	Before 1797 ⁴⁸⁶	Introduced by her husband who was a friend of Y	Through letters	Selected in <i>NDZJ</i> (no poems)
50	Bi Zhizhu 畢智珠	Songjiang	Before 1797 ⁴⁸⁷	Introduced by her father who was a	Through letters	Selected in <i>NDZJ</i> (no poems)

⁴⁷⁷ See *YMQJ* (III): *BY*, 41 of v 10, p. 808.

⁴⁷⁸ *Selected Poems by Yuan Mei's Female Disciples* was printed in May 1796. The poets selected in this book should have been Yuan's disciples before this date.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*

⁴⁸³ In a poem, "Written for Lady Gui Maoyi's Painting of Seeking Sentences on the Orchid Shore" 題歸懋儀女士蘭皋覓句圖 ("Ti Gui Maoyi nüshi lan'gao miju tu) written in 1795/6, Yuan indicates that Gui was already a disciple. *YMQJ* (I): *SJ*, v 36, p. 906.

⁴⁸⁴ See *YMQJ* (III): *BY*, 34 of v 10, p. 804.

⁴⁸⁵ See Lu Yuansu's poem entitled "On the Twelfth Day of the Third Month of the Bingchen Year (1796), Master Yuan Mei Visited My Husband, Mr. Qian" 丙辰三月十二日，隨園夫子過訪錢郎 (Bingchen sanyue shier ri Suiyuan fuzi guofang Qianlang"). *YMQJ* (VI): *XT*, p. 247. From a note to this poem indicating that Qian Yusha 錢嶼沙 was her father-in-law we know that Lu was the sister-in-law of Qian Lin

⁴⁸⁶ See a note for the poem of Yuan Mei in 1797, "Weeping for the Governor-General of Hubei and Hunan Mr. Bi Qiuyuan" 哭兩湖制府畢秋帆先生 ("Ku lianghu zhifu Bi Qiufan xiansheng"): "Your concubine, Zhang Xiacheng (Xunxiao), and daughter, Bi Zhizhu, are all my disciples with whom I have been in contact by correspondence" 公側室張霞城，智珠女公子，俱通書執贄受業隨園. *YMQJ* (I): *SJ*, v 37, p. 933.

	(1764-?)			friend of Y		
51-55	Five anonymous women	Unknown	1797	Unknown	Unknown	Y wrote a poem regarding their acceptance ⁴⁸⁸
56	Wang Jingyi 王靜宜	Manzhou	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Y regarded her as a disciple ⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ See Yuan Mei's poem entitled "Yesterday, Under the Dongxiasu Pine Trees I Happily Obtained Another Five Female Disciples," 昨冬下蘇松喜又得女弟子五人 ("Zuo dongxia susong xi youde nüdizi wuren") which was written in 1797, *YMQJ* (I): *SJ*, v 37, p. 916.

⁴⁸⁹ See *YMQJ* (VI): *SY*, v 6, p. 111.

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