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## **Gender and Medicine in the Ming Dynasty: Tan Yunxian's (1461-1556) Medical Case Book**



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## Introduction

Compared with modern-day medical students and doctors, medical specialists in the Ming dynasty had quite a different experience in their medical education and career. Before the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century China, the state bureaucracy lacked interest in strictly regulated, institutionalized, and standardized transmission of medical knowledge, as well as access to medical education and medical legitimacy.<sup>1</sup> The Ming dynasty's imperial court's attitude toward the regulation of the medical field was especially indifferent in contrast with the Tang, Song, and Jin-Yuan dynasties.<sup>2</sup> In the Ming dynasty, there were no state-funded medical schools to provide a standardized medical education and no issue of medical licenses. Although in Beijing and Nanjing people could acquire medical degrees through a medical test, those who earned degrees were not considered to be more reliable than those who did not. Furthermore, the most striking situation was that anyone could legally practice medical treatments and claim to be a medical specialist, regardless of how much medical knowledge one had.<sup>3</sup>

The state's complete neglect in controlling the field of medicine created a very free, competitive and chaotic medical market in society. It was free because any person could claim to be a medical specialist and practice all kinds of medical treatments deriving from multiple medical traditions. It was competitive and chaotic because the medical specialists were too many in number and kinds. As a result, medical specialists had to severely compete with each other to make a living. The patients also had a hard time when it came to choosing a medical specialist, because it was difficult to tell if a medical specialist was reliable or not and which kind of medical specialist would be the most suitable one.

The reason why there were various kinds of medical specialists was due to the very different educational backgrounds they had. Medical specialists were educated in multiple ways: some came from medical households and were taught by the family's elders; some taught themselves, and some followed skilled and well-known medical specialists. The different medical education backgrounds produced various kinds of medical specialists, such as literati doctors (*ruyi* 儒醫), hereditary doctors (*shiyi* 世醫), herbalists (*zoufangyi* 走方醫), female doctors (*nüyi* 女醫), midwives (*chanpo* 產婆), medicine grannies (*yaopo* 藥婆), religious healers who came from Taoist or Buddhist temples, or shaman healers (*wuyi* 巫醫), etc. Yet, since there was no standardized medical education for each kind of medical specialist, the boundaries between them were often unclear.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the subsequent use of the term

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<sup>1</sup> Xianglin Lei, "When Chinese Medicine encountered the State: 1910-1948" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1999), 1-21.

<sup>2</sup> Angela Ki Che Leung, "Organized Medicine in Ming-Qing China: State and Private Medical Institutions in the Lower Yangzi Region," *Late Imperial China* 8, no.1 (June 1987): 139-142.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci: 1583-1610*, trans. Louis J. Gallagher (New York: Random House, 1953), 32.

<sup>4</sup> Zhu Pingyi 祝平一, "Yao yi busibing fu du youyuan ren: Ming Qing de yiliao shichang yixue zhishi yu yibing

‘medical specialists’ refer to all kinds of healers. A ‘doctor’ is an almost equivalent term for the character *yi* 醫; someone, who diagnoses patients based on their pulse, gives medicine made with herbs, and gives surgical treatments such as acupuncture and massage. These doctors, such as Confucian doctors, hereditary doctors, and female doctors, were mostly literate and had learned medical theories such as how the *qi* 氣 of *yin-yang* 陰陽 functioned in the body, the network of vessels (*jingluo* 經絡), and transportation holes (*xuewei* 穴位). As for herbalists and religious healers, though they were also called a kind of *yi*, their medical treatment methods and traditions were sometimes very different from those of doctors,<sup>5</sup> so they would be referred to as “healers”.

A wide variety of choices allowed patients of the Ming dynasty obtain absolute authority and autonomy when it came to choosing a medical specialist or how to be treated. It was a common situation that a patient would invite three or more medical specialists to their household at once. Patients sometimes made them discuss with one another about the treatment, sometimes for them to criticize each other and determine who seemed to be the most reliable. It can be seen that patients were also in the very difficult position of having to identify if a medical specialist was trustworthy or not. It was also common that, if a patient took a prescription given by a medical specialist twice and it was not effective, then the patient or the patient’s family would turn to another medical specialist to avoid being mistreated or misdiagnosed.<sup>6</sup>

Besides the autonomy patients had when deciding on medical specialists and medical treatments, other factors added to intensified competition on the medical market, including the widespread education, increase of the number of literati, and the same competitive environment of passing the civil examinations. While participants in the civil examinations increased due to the spread of literacy, the court did not recruit more officials. As a result, many literati, who failed in the civil examinations, sought an alternative career in medicine, which led to a dramatic increase in medical specialists in society.<sup>7</sup> The increase of medical specialists also led to a publishing boom of medical books, which facilitated access to medical knowledge and the growth of a body of self-taught medical specialists in the society.

It was under this highly competitive and diverse medical market background that Tan Yunxian 談允賢 (1461-1556) became a female doctor in the city of Wuxi 無錫. Born into a family which had both scholar-official and medical traditions, she received sophisticated medical education since she was a child. She was taught by her grandmother née Ru 茹氏

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guanxi” 藥醫不死病，佛度有緣人：明、清的醫療市場、醫學知識與醫病關係, *Zhongyang yanjiu yuan jindai shi yanjiu suo jikan* 中央研究院近代史研究所集刊 68 (June 2010): 6.

<sup>5</sup> Zhu, “Yao yi busibing,” 9-13; Chen Xiufen 陳秀芬, “Zongjiao jiushu yu shenxin liaoyu: Ming Qing shiqi de daoyi sengyi yu wuyi yanjiu” 宗教救贖與身心療癒：明清時期的道醫、僧醫與巫醫研究, *Research Report for the Xingzheng yuan guojia kexue weiyuanhui* 行政院國家科學委員會 (October 2010): 6-14.

<sup>6</sup> Zhu, “Yao yi busibing,” 23.

<sup>7</sup> Wang Wenjing 王文景, “Mingdai de ruyi” 明代的儒醫, *Tongshi Jiaoyu Niankan* 通識教育年刊 4 (November 2002): 40-41.

(no life date known) and began her medical career after née Ru passed away. After this, she treated female patients from all levels of social class. When she reached the age of 50, she ordered her son Yang Lian 楊濂 (no life date known) to publish her medical case book *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor* (*Nüyi Zayan* 女醫雜言) in the year 1510. She lived until the very high age of 96. Three decades after her death her grandnephew Tan Xiu 談脩 (no life date known) published a second edition in 1585. In this edition it has remained the only surviving female-written medical book in the Ming dynasty.

The book contains her autobiographical preface and 31 medical cases, as well as a preface and three postscripts written by her younger brother, male cousins, and grandnephew. The preface records in detail her medical education and the process of becoming a female doctor in the Ming dynasty. The 31 cases record the stories of how she effectively healed female patients coming from different social classes and with various kinds of sicknesses. The preface and postscripts written by her male relatives reflect male elites' different perspectives on her medical career. The book is thus a valuable source, offering insights into the world of gender and medicine in the Ming dynasty. It reflects not only Tan Yunxian's medical career but is also offers a glimpse of the lives of women at that time, whose sicknesses were often closely related to their struggles and desires in everyday lives.<sup>8</sup>

Living in a time when the daughters of a gentry family were not encouraged to have medical careers, let alone publish a medical book, it took a great deal of courage to be a pioneer in the medical field, since there were potential risks of ruining her own and her family's reputation. Yet, how she managed to navigate restrictions in society and how her case can be discussed in multiple contexts, is a surprisingly understudied topic.

The most representative and earliest detailed study of Tan Yunxian was done by Charlotte Furth in 1999. In the last chapter of *A Flourishing Yin: Gender in China's Medical History: 960–1665*, Furth's study mostly centers on Tan Yunxian's style of medical treatment, the sources of her medical formulae, her perspective on the causes of diseases, and her concepts and thoughts about the body.<sup>9</sup> Other researchers who work in the field of gender or medical history, such as Angela Ki Che Leung, Yi Ruolan, and Wu Yili, do not go deeply into Tan Yunxian's case, but only mention her name briefly in the larger context of the history of female doctors.<sup>10</sup>

In 2015, a well-translated English version of *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*,

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<sup>8</sup> Tan Yunxian, *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*, trans. Lorraine Wilcox and Yue Lu (Portland: The Chinese Medicine Database, 2015), 7-11.

<sup>9</sup> Charlotte Furth, *A Flourishing Yin: Gender in China's Medical History, 960-1665* (London, Berkeley, and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 285-300.

<sup>10</sup> Angela Ki Che Leung 梁其姿, "Qian jindai Zhongguo de nüxing yiliao congyezhe" 前近代中國的女性醫療從業者, in *Funü yu shehui* 婦女與社會, ed. Li Zhende and Angela Ki Che Leung (Beijing: Zhongguo dabaiké quanshu chubanshe, 2005), 372; Yi Ruolan 衣若蘭, *Sangu liupo: Mingdai funü yu shehui de tansuo* 三姑六婆: 明代婦女與社會的探索 (Taipei: Daoxiang chubanshe, 2006), 63-64; Wu Yili, *Reproducing Women: Medicine, Metaphor, and Childbirth in Late Imperial China* (London, Berkeley, and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), 19-20.

by Lorraine Wilcox and Yue Lue was published. The book includes not only the English translation but also the original Chinese text from the 1585 edition. The book's introduction contextualizes Tan Yunxian not only in the medical history and culture of the Ming dynasty, but also has more details on her family, her sources of prescriptions, and the significance of her case in the context of gender history. However, the discussion of Tan Yunxian under the new perspective of gender history is still limited.

Another notable research project on Tan Yunxian is Luo Sihang's master's thesis completed in 2018. The thesis includes photocopies of a newly found source, *The Tan Family's Genealogy Book* (*Tan shi zongpu* 談氏宗譜), which Luo discovered through a visit to the descendants of the Tan family in Wuxi. The genealogy book records a more detailed family history than in Tan Yunxian's preface, which helps inform how and why the family was able to acquire both scholar-official and medical backgrounds.<sup>11</sup> However, aside from the newly-discovered materials and the more in-depth study into the Tan family, Luo did not make a further approach to research Tan Yunxian's case. Like the previous researchers, her thesis mostly focuses on Tan Yunxian's medical treatments and formulae.

Since previous researchers mostly discussed Tan Yunxian and her medical case book in the context of medical history, new approaches are necessary, by discussing and answering the following questions: What strategies did Tan Yunxian employ to become a female doctor? Besides placing Tan Yunxian's case in the context of medical history, what other perspectives can one take to examine her case? What other fields is her case related to and what other social-historical backgrounds does it reflect? By answering these questions, a fuller picture of Tan Yunxian's life can be construed.

Many notable primary and secondary sources were used to support the argumentation in this thesis. As for the secondary sources, Charlotte Furth's *A Flourishing Yin: Gender in China's Medical History: 960–1665* provided studies not only on Tan Yunxian's case, but also significances of medical case books and the medical culture and at that time. Chao Yüanling and Chen Yuanpeng's research on the emergence of Confucian-scholar doctors elucidated many aspects of the Tan family's status as a medical specialist family in society. Daria Berg's *Women and the Literary World in Early Modern China 1580-1700* was helpful for theorizing of the narrative strategies Tan Yunxian that employed in her preface as compared with other writing women's cases. Lastly, Joseph P. McDermott and Dai Lianbin's research on household publications in the Ming dynasty were vital for the study of *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor* in the context of publication history.

The major primary source for this thesis was Tan Yunxian's autobiographical preface to *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*, as analyzed under Maureen Robertson's self-representation theory. Robertson developed this self-representation theory from studies in

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<sup>11</sup> Luo Sihang 罗思航, "Mingdai nüyi Tan Yunxian 'Nüyi zayan' yanjiu" 明代女医谈允贤《女医杂言》研究 (Master's thesis., Yunnan zhongyi xueyuan, 2018), 8-15, and 95-103.

female writers' prefaces and poems. She emphasizes that a woman's representation of herself in her preface is often contradictory. The contradictions are rooted in the context of living in a patriarchal society, the desire to participate in the male-dominated literary field, and the proper performance of female social identity, as well as her effacing role as a gentry daughter and wife. Female writers were also aware of the ambivalence, and they tried to resolve or cover over the contradiction in their prefaces, often needing to persuade family members that their writings did not violate social norms, and to legitimize their claim of being a female writer.<sup>12</sup>

Besides the discovery of female writers' ambivalence, Robertson also proposes and uses the concepts of self and three kinds of subject, which are the *existential* (or historical) *subject*, *authorial* (or writing) *subject*, and *textual* (or speaking) *subject* to analyze how female writers represent themselves in prefaces or poetry.<sup>13</sup> In Robertson's theory, the concepts relevant to the study of the preface are the existential subject and authorial subject.<sup>14</sup> Robertson defines the existential subject as, "The historical man or woman who, when moved to do so, has chosen to 'speak' through the medium of a literary text. The reader of the text has no direct access to the existential subject."<sup>15</sup> However, the reader may feel as if directly communicating with an existential subject, when the text was written in autobiographical or non-fictional narrative. In other words, the existential subject refers to historical writers who already passed away, but wrote themselves into texts sometimes else in a first-person narrative.

The authorial subject is the existential subject takes that the role of an author, and the author serves as the mediator between the language and literary tradition to represent the existential subject. To do so, the author "selects from among options so that aspects of a given existential subject position are fitted to appropriate elements from the repertory of signifying voices, scenarios, and forms provided by the literary tradition."<sup>16</sup> In short, the authorial subject has to negotiate between the existential subject and the existing literary tradition, to produce a text which properly represents the author's self. Doing it 'properly' not only means that the representation fits the social expectations, but also the literary convention, that allows the author to communicate with the reader through the text smoothly.

As a result, the existential subjects' desires or thoughts would be altered, covered-up, or reduced to fit the literary language and tradition.<sup>17</sup> Tan Yunxian's preface, as discussed in detail in the following chapters, is one of the cases in which an existential subject had to put on 'make-up' to be represented in the text. Her goal is to claim herself as a legitimate

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<sup>12</sup> Maureen Robertson, "Changing the Subject: Gender and Self-inscription in Authors' Prefaces and 'Shi' Poetry," in *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*, ed. Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 175.

<sup>13</sup> Robertson, "Changing the Subject," 176-179.

<sup>14</sup> Robertson, "Changing the Subject," 182-183.

<sup>15</sup> Robertson, "Changing the Subject," 177.

<sup>16</sup> Robertson, "Changing the Subject," 177.

<sup>17</sup> Robertson, "Changing the Subject," 177.



participant in the field of medicine, to earn the legitimacy and qualification of having received a medical education, taking up a medical career, and to build up her reputation as a medical specialist. While achieving her goals, she also has to hide her existential subject's desire and ambition to a certain degree or under the cover of others, to avoid herself or her family being criticized. Although her preface only consists of around 700 characters, every word is written with careful thought and consideration. In every part, in every detail, her authorial subjects' strategies can be traced to represent her existential subject in the best way possible.

Tan Yunxian's preface can be divided into four parts, and these will be discussed in individual chapters to analyze in detail her strategies of presenting herself as a legitimate medical specialist. The division of the parts is based on the different topic they address. Chapter 1 traces Tan Yunxian's family background and the medical history of her family. Chapter 2 examines her medical education and how it mirrors women's education in the Ming dynasty. Chapter 3 narrates the process of her becoming a female doctor and analyzes what strategies she used to earn legitimacy to start her medical career by comparing her case with other male medical specialists. Chapter 4 discusses Tan Yunxian's male relatives' perspective on and portrayal of Tan Yunxian in their postscripts. Chapter 5 explores the publication and preservation of *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*. Chapter 6 explores the struggle and hardship of Tan Yunxian's female patients recorded in the 31 medical cases.

Apart from Tan Yunxian's autobiographical preface, other important primary source employed in this thesis were *The Tan Family's Genealogy Book*, the preface and three postscripts written by Tan Yunxian's male relatives, and the 31 medical cases in *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*. *The Tan Family's Genealogy Book* is used in Chapter 1 to provide more details of the Tan family's family history. The English translation of the texts in *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor* quoted in this thesis were adopted and revised based on Lorraine Wilcox and Yue Lue's published translation. Other Chinese texts are translated by the author as noted in the references.

# Chapter 1

## The Tan Family

Tan Yunxian's family background is the most fundamental condition of her success in her medical career, since the family had both a literati-official and a hereditary doctor history. However, while it is understandable that the hereditary doctor background would help her acquire the chance of receiving a medical education, how did the literati official tradition benefit her career? Furthermore, when she begins her preface by introducing her family, she also first indicates that her family is most well-known for its study of Confucianism, and considers medicine only a secondary skill. It seems odd that she does not stress more the medical background of her family, especially since she is writing as a female doctor.

One reason may be that the Tan family's literati-official history was longer than its medical tradition, so she chose to place the literati-official background before the medical tradition. Another reason was the hierarchy of professional groups in society, which placed the scholar (*shi* 士) in the first rank, whereas the medical specialist belonged to the third group of artisans (*gong* 工). However, it is also very possible that mentioning the literati-official background of her family would be beneficial to her career, because the concept of literati doctor had been developed before the Tan family's encounter with a medical career, and it gradually gained the highest status among medical specialists in the Ming dynasty.

In this chapter, I will explore how the Tan family started to develop both scholar-official and hereditary doctor backgrounds, and how the concept of literati doctor developed during this process. The context will help explain Tan Yunxian's narrative of the history of her family. My analysis will be based on two types of materials: one is the first part of the preface of Tan Yunxian's *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*, and the other is *The Tan Family's Genealogy*.

The first part of the autobiographical preface is worthy of attention, because a closer look into her text is necessary to understand how she portrays and presents her family. The text was translated into English by Lorraine Wilcox and Yue Lu, to which I have made some revisions, the reasons for which are explained in the footnotes:

The Tan family of mine, is well-known for [the study of] Confucianism in Xi [Shan] for generations, since my late great grandfather who was awarded Gentleman-Scholar and Investigating Censor of the Nanjing Hu-Guang District, and he married into the family of Huang Yuxian who was from a long line of doctors from Tongli; my late grandfather was conferred [the title of] Grand Master for Governance and was an official in the Nanjing Ministry of Punishments; at the same time, [the Tan family] also acquired medical fame. My father's older brother became a Secretary and a

Manager in the Ministry of Revenue. My late father was the Laizhou Prefect and he entered the rank of Lesser Grand Master of the Palace; afterward, [the Tan family] was first known for [its success] in the civil examinations, while the use of medicine was not passed down.

妾談，世以儒鳴於錫，自曾大父贈文林郎、南京湖廣道監察御史府君，贅同里世醫黃遇仙所，大父封奉政大夫、南京刑部郎中府君，遂兼以醫鳴。既而伯戶部主事府君、承事府君；父萊州郡守、進階亞中大夫府君後，先以甲科顯，醫用弗傳。

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This passage includes several important points. First, her family had a long history of literati-official tradition. Secondly, it is only starting from her great grandfather that the family acquired a medical background through uxori-local marriage, and established their medical reputation in her grandfather's time. Third, since both her uncle and father were successful in the examinations, they did not take up medicine as a major career.

Tan Yunxian is not exaggerating when using the term “generations” to describe the family's long scholar-official background. Although she does not explain in detail, according to *The Tan Family's Genealogy*, the origins of the Tan Family in Wuxi can be dated back to the beginning of the Southern Song dynasty. When the Emperor Gaozong of the Song 宋高宗 (1127-1162) inherited the throne, Tan Xin 談信 (no life date known), who was an Academician of the Hanlin Academy (*Hanlinyuan boshi* 翰林院博士) followed the emperor from Bianliang 汴涼 to the south in 1127. He settled down in the latter city of Wuxi. However, it was only after five generations that the lineage's descendants first encountered the study of medicine.<sup>19</sup> Tan Xin's fifth-generation descendant Tan Shao 談紹 (no life date known) had an uxori-local marriage with the hereditary doctor Huang Yuxian's 黃遇仙 (no life date known) daughter. Due to this marriage, he inherited the medical knowledge of the Huang family and became a doctor, inaugurating the medical tradition of the Tan family.

Uxori-local marriage is a marriage in which the husband lives in the wife's family by household, and their children will usually take the wife's family name. Wu Yannan's research concludes that the formation of uxori-local marriage in China was due to the situation that, when a man was not able to afford a betrothal gift to marry a wife, then he might have mortgaged himself to the wife's family as free labor instead.<sup>20</sup> Compared with men who have

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<sup>18</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 34. Four changes were made to Lorraine Wilcox and Yue Lu's translation. In addition, according to the records of *The Tan Family's Genealogy*, Tan Gang also studied medicine, but he did not take medicine as his major career.

<sup>19</sup> Tan [...].liang 談□亮, “Yuan xu” 原序, *Tan shi zongpu* 談氏宗譜; Luo, “Mingdai nüyi Tan Yunxian,” 9 and 95. *Tan shi zongpu* is undisclosed material kept by the Tan family's descendants in China. Due to pandemic constraints, it was inaccessible, so the content was transcribed from the master's thesis by Luo Sihang, who visited the Tan family and took photos of a few pages of the *Tan shi zongpu*, included in her thesis. The first character of the name of the author of “Yuan Xu” is too blurred to be identified.

<sup>20</sup> Wu Yannan 毋艳南, “Mingdai de zhui hun: yi zhui xu diwei wei tantao zhongxin” 明代的贅婚:以贅婿地位

virilocal marriages, men in uxori-local marriages usually had a lower status in society and in their wives' families; sometimes they even were being regarded as equivalent to slaves or servants.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, it was originally not commonly seen in traditional society.

It is from the Song dynasty that uxori-local marriage was more commonly practiced in society, such that the government began to see the need to establish laws to regulate uxori-local marriage and protect the husbands' inheritance rights. The reason for the widespread practice of uxori-local marriage was due to the fact that the dowry for daughters was far more expensive than the betrothal gift for a wife; thus many parents decided it was more beneficial to have uxori-local marriages with wealthy family's daughters. Even scholar-officials were willing to arrange uxori-local marriages in order to have a wealthier life.<sup>22</sup> Then, starting from the Yuan dynasty, due to the influence of the Mongolian culture, several new types of uxori-local marriage emerged. Among these new types of uxori-local marriage, two types had a new feature that wasn't seen in the previous dynasty: temporality. The temporary uxori-local marriages gave the husband the chance to shift uxori-local marriage to virilocal marriage after several contract years with the wife's family,<sup>23</sup> which is what happened in Tan Shao's case.

According to Tan Shao's biography collected in *The Tan Family's Genealogy*, his uxori-local marriage may have been due to both poverty and the early death of his parents, which are two common reasons for a man to practice uxori-local marriage.<sup>24</sup> Tan Shao became an orphan when he was three and was raised by his grandmother. Nothing is mentioned about his other relatives. It is possible that the other relatives did not want to take care of him, or were unable to take care of him at the time, suggesting the Tan family line of Tan Shao was in a dire strait. When Tan Shao reached adulthood, Huang Yuxian passed away and his wife, née Zhu 朱氏 (no life date known) became a widow. At that time, her only son was still a minor. It was said that Tan Shao married her daughter and joined the Huang family to help manage the family's estate. After Huang Yunxian's son reached adulthood, Tan Shao returned to the Tan family with his wife and gave back the Huang family's fortune to the son.<sup>25</sup>

From this record, Tan Shao's uxori-local marriage belonged to the type of the return-husband (*guizong nüxu* 歸宗女婿),<sup>26</sup> which allowed him to return to Tan family with his wife and children after the contract years are due. This marriage offered Tan Shao, a poor orphan from a declined scholar-official family, to have a valuable chance to marry a wife from a family similar to his own family's social status. Furthermore, he was also given a chance to learn the medical skills of the Huang family to be able to make a living after his return to the

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为探讨中心 (Master's thesis., Changjiang daxue, 2019), 7.

<sup>21</sup> Wu Yannan, "Mingdai de zhuihun," 7-10.

<sup>22</sup> Wu Yannan, "Mingdai de zhuihun," 10-11.

<sup>23</sup> Wu Yannan, "Mingdai de zhuihun," 12-13.

<sup>24</sup> Wu Yannan, "Mingdai de zhuihun," 14; Luo, "Mingdai nüyi Tan Yunxian," 10.

<sup>25</sup> Luo, "Mingdai nüyi Tan Yunxian," 10.

<sup>26</sup> Wu Yannan, "Mingdai de zhuihun," 12-13.

Tan family. If his medical career was successful, then, he might be able to save a fortune and afford for his children or grandchildren to study for the civil examinations. If they succeeded, he could restore his family's reputation and succeed in upward social mobility after one or two generations. As for née Zhu, she was able to acquire a helper who would not threaten her son's place as an heir to manage the household.

Their deal was satisfactory. Tan Shao's son, Tan Fu 談復 (no life date known) also took a medical career after his father. His biography describes him as knowledgeable, very skilled in medicine, and as having written a medical formula book entitled, *Otherworldly Formulas Passed Down by an Immortal* (*Xianchuan yifang* 仙傳異方). It includes fifteen secret family medicine recipes and was published in 1602 by Chun Jing Tang 純敬堂.<sup>27</sup> Then, Tan Shao's grandchildren, Tan Jing 談經 (no life date known) and Tan Gang 談綱 (no life date known) were both successful in the civil examination and had an official career. By this generation, the Tan family had restored their social status as a scholar-official family once again.<sup>28</sup> However, Tan Yunxian's preface indicates that since their success in their official careers, no one took up medicine as a major career. This situation reflects that, for a gentry family, a medical career was a secondary option, and the best career path was always an official career.

This attitude partly explains why, Tan started her preface not emphasizing her family's medical background but stressed that her family had a long history of Confucian learning. When she wrote “兼以醫名” (also acquired medical fame), “兼” meant “also”, indicating that medicine was a subordinate skill that her family acquired, and that their major business was still the study of Confucianism and officialdom. Mentioning that her uncle and father did not take up a medical career was perhaps also meant to foreshadow her inheritance of the family's medical knowledge afterward. Apart from the above reasons, emphasizing the family's history of classical learning would also elevate her status as a doctor, due to the concept of the “literati doctor” at that time.

## 1.1 Literati Doctors

The term “literati doctor” is seen earliest toward the end of the Northern Song dynasty, and developed fully in the Southern Song dynasty. However, starting from the Tang dynasty, there already had been a trend of assimilating the status of medical specialists to that similar of scholars, eventually leading to the ‘Confucianization’ of medicine, and the formation of the concept of “literati doctor”.

Before the Song dynasty, medical specialists had been regarded as mere artisans (*fangji* 方伎 or *gong* 工). Their social status was below those of scholars and farmers (*nong* 農). The transmission of medical knowledge mostly occurred through three ways: from master to

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<sup>27</sup> Luo, “Mingdai nüyi Tan Yunxian,” 10, and 96; Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Luo, “Mingdai nüyi Tan Yunxian,” 11-12.

apprentice, as part of a family tradition, and from a powerful family collection. Chen Yuanpeng regarded these three ways of transmission as “closed-circuit transmission” (*fengbi shi chuancheng* 封閉式傳承), meaning that medical knowledge was not open to the public, but had to be obtained through special conditions and relationships.<sup>29</sup> These types of transmissions, except for that from master to apprentice, were all hereditary.

However, due to the invention of block printing, the closed-circuit transmission of medical knowledge started to crack open. Some scholars could acquire medical knowledge by studying medical books by themselves and becoming what Yüanling Chao called “scholars-turned-doctors”.<sup>30</sup> When this new group of medical specialists began their medical careers, the first obstacle they faced was to establish their legitimacy in society. Since, at that time, people mostly entrusted their health to hereditary doctors, they had to persuade people that their skills were trustworthy.

Therefore, according to Yüanling Chao’s research, a debate arises among scholars-turned-doctors and medical specialists in the Tang dynasty. The debate concerned the essentials of the training of a doctor (*yi* 醫) through the discussion of the proper interpretation of the passage from *The Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記) that said, “One should not take any medicine from a doctor who does not come from three generations” (醫不三世, 不服其藥).<sup>31</sup> *The Book of Rites* received imperial advocacy in the Tang dynasty and was included in *The Correct Meanings of the Five Classics* (*Wujing zhengyi* 五經正義), which then became the orthodox edition of commented Confucian classics.<sup>32</sup> The main concern was what *sanshi* 三世 actually meant to refer to. There were two diverging interpretations: either literally means three of one family’s generations; or refers to the three traditional medical classics.

The first interpretation argues that the safety and effectiveness of all medicine could only be proven after several generations of usage and examination. In short, this emphasized the importance of medical knowledge and practical experience to be passed down for a long time. Another interpretation stated that of *sanshi* actually collectively referred to the three traditional medical classics: *The Yellow Emperor’s Canon on Acupuncture* (*Huangdi zhenjiu* 黃帝針灸), *The Classic of the Pulse of the Sunü* (*Sunü maijue* 素女脈訣), and *The Divine Husbandman’s Materia Medica* (*Shennong bencao* 神農本草). These three classics also indicate the three major skills of traditional Chinese medicine, which are acupuncture, Chinese herbology, and pulse diagnosis. Those who promoted the study of the medical classics considered that besides experience, it was also necessary to study the classical texts in the training of doctors. Additionally, there were intellectual qualities that one had to possess in

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<sup>29</sup> Chen Yuanpeng 陳元朋, “Songdai ruyi” 宋代儒醫, in *Zhongguo shi xin lun: yiliao shi fence* 中國史新論: 醫療史分冊, ed. Shengming yiliao shi yanjiushi 生命醫療史研究室 (Taipei: Lianjing chubanshe, 2015), 249-250.

<sup>30</sup> Yüanling Chao, *Medicine and Society in Late Imperial China: A Study of Physicians in Suzhou, 1600-1850* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2009), 34.

<sup>31</sup> Cui Gaowei 崔高維, ed., *Liji* 禮記 (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000), 13.

<sup>32</sup> Chao, *Medicine and Society in Late Imperial China*, 28.

order to become a doctor, like being wise and quick-witted, but these characteristics cannot be passed down from one generation to the next.<sup>33</sup>

However, as mentioned before, Yüanling Chao indicates that the true intention beneath this argumentation was neither the proper qualification of doctors nor the safety of medicine, but to challenge the authority of hereditary doctors and elevate the social status of doctors from other backgrounds.<sup>34</sup> The scholars-turned-doctors' strategy was to create a discourse that lay down the necessary textual learning for the training of doctors to establish their legitimacy in society.<sup>35</sup> Also, through the linkage of the Confucian classics, such as *The Book of Rites*, and the three medical classics; they attempted to elevate the social status of doctors from mere artisan that of a scholar.<sup>36</sup> Despite their efforts, during this time, the new interpretation of *sanshi*, the necessary textual education for medical training, and the elevation of the social status of doctors were not widely accepted. This may have been due to the fact that block printing was not wide spread in the Tang dynasty yet, so there were not enough scholars-turned-doctors to join this discourse.

It was from the late Northern Song dynasty that there was a major change in the transmission of medical knowledge, with the rise in the social status of doctors, and the intensified Confucianization of medicine. This is also the time that the term “literati doctor” first appeared and was used in official documents.<sup>37</sup> Three factors contributed to these phenomena: the spreading of book printing industry, a lack of medical resources, and the trend of studying medicine. Chen Yuanpeng's research shows that the increase of printed medical books broke up the closed-circuit transmission of medical knowledge, and made it obtainable for the learned scholars.<sup>38</sup> However, easier contact to medical books alone was not alluring enough for many scholars to learn medicine. Other beneficial reasons attracted scholars to get involved in the field of medicine.

The first reason were the increased competition among literati in pursuing officialdom through the civil examinations, and some of those who failed in the examinations would seek an alternative career in medicine.<sup>39</sup> Since in the Song dynasty there was a serious lack of medical resources and skilled medical specialists, becoming a doctor ensured everyday livelihood.<sup>40</sup> The second reason was due to the elevation of the social status of medical specialist from artisan to learned scholar. Around 1103, the Imperial Academy (*Guozijian* 國

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<sup>33</sup> Chao, *Medicine and Society in Late Imperial China*, 27, and 33-34.

<sup>34</sup> Chao, *Medicine and Society in Late Imperial China*, 27, and 29-30.

<sup>35</sup> Chao, *Medicine and Society in Late Imperial China*, 29-30.

<sup>36</sup> Chao, *Medicine and Society in Late Imperial China*, 27.

<sup>37</sup> Chen Yuanpeng 陳元朋, “Songdai de ruyi jianping Robert P. Hymes youguan Song Yuan Yizhe diwei de lundian” 宋代的儒醫一兼評 Robert P. Hymes 有關宋元醫者地位的論點, *Xin Shixue* 新史學 6, no.1 (March 1995): 185-186; Xu Song 徐松, ed., *Song huiyao jigao* 宋會要輯稿 (Taipei: Xin wenfeng chuban gongsi, 1976), 2200.

<sup>38</sup> Chen, “Songdai ruyi,” 256.

<sup>39</sup> Chen, “Songdai ruyi,” 280.

<sup>40</sup> Chen, “Songdai ruyi,” 257.

子監) established a new department, the Medical Department (*yixue* 醫學), to attract learned scholars to study medicine. Those who graduated from the medical department, could not only receive an official medical certificate and work in the Medical Bureau (*shangyaoju* 尚藥局), but would also be granted an official title. Before this policy, it was recorded in official documents that literati were ashamed to study medicine because medical specialists were only considered “medical artisans” (*yigong* 醫工).<sup>41</sup>

But what made the imperial court establish this new policy and elevate the social status of medical specialists? Chen Yuanpeng argues that it was due to Confucian ideology advocating the study of medicine. Perhaps due to the fact that most scholars-turned-doctors were originally Confucian scholars, even when they turned to take up a medical career, some of them would act according to one of the core Confucian values, benevolence (*ren* 仁), when treating patients.<sup>42</sup> Chen also finds that practicing Confucianism and the purpose of performing medicine can be quite similar. The practice of Confucianism is to achieve the goal of “governing the country in order to bring peace to the world” (治國平天下),<sup>43</sup> while the goal of medical treatment is to “to benefit the world by saving people’s lives” (濟世救人).<sup>44</sup> But how did the literati see the similarity between these two practices? Fan Zhongyan’s 范仲淹 (989-1052) perspective toward medicine may serve as an example to explain the linkage between the two.

Fan Zhongyan once said, “If I do not become a good minister, I wish to become a good doctor” (不為良相，願為良醫). Then, someone asked him, “Why would you gentleman wish [to have] the skills of a good doctor? Wouldn’t [you] be lost to inferiority?” (良醫之技，君何願焉？無乃失於卑耶？) Fang Zhongyan replied, “The one who can benefit the people of [both] grown-ups and children, certainly is the one who serves as a minister. Since [I] cannot obtain [the position of a minister], the one who can still practice the heart of saving people and serve others, no one is comparable to a good doctor” (能及大小生民者，固惟相為然，既不可得矣，夫能行救人利物之心者，莫如良醫).<sup>45</sup> In this dialogue, Fang Zhongyan argues that the position of prime minister and the medical practitioner are both doing the work of saving people and serving others (though evidently in different ways). When one cannot benefit people by good governance, then the second-best option to fulfill this goal is to be a doctor, because curing others’ sicknesses is also an act of “saving people”. His argumentation also links the purpose of a medical career with Confucian scholar’s ideology and with literati’s basis to take medicine as an alternative career after having failed in the civil examinations.<sup>46</sup> This also contributed to the Confucianization of medicine. Medical books

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<sup>41</sup> Chen, “Songdai ruyi,” 287-289.

<sup>42</sup> Chen, “Songdai ruyi,” 267.

<sup>43</sup> Cui, *Lij*, 222.

<sup>44</sup> Wang, “Mingdai de ruyi,” 44.

<sup>45</sup> Chen, “Songdai ruyi,” 264; Wu Zeng 吳增, *Nenggai zhai manlu* 能改齋漫錄, in *Congshu jichengxinbian* 叢書集成新編 11 (Taipei: Xin wenfeng chuban gongsi, 1985), 332.

<sup>46</sup> Wang, “Mingdai de ruyi,” 43.



from the Song dynasty and later periods also often mention this argument.

However, in the Northern Song dynasty the term literati doctor only referred to those who had studied in the Medical Department of the Imperial Academy<sup>47</sup>, and to those Confucian scholars who were also skilled in medicine.<sup>48</sup> It was in the Southern Song dynasty that the definition of the term literati doctor expanded further. In addition, it was also in this period that the term became commonly used in everyday life and frequently appeared in notebook (*biji* 筆記) tales, local gazetteers, as well as prefaces and postscripts to medical books.<sup>49</sup> From these records, the term also included doctors who accepted Confucian thinking, acted in accordance with Confucian moral standards, and within the spirit of Confucianism (*ruxin* 儒心). Regardless of whether they had official titles or were hereditary doctors, they were all considered literati doctors.<sup>50</sup> This phenomenon may have been due to the fact that in 1120, because of political problems, the medical department in the imperial academy was suspended.<sup>51</sup> The failure of keeping the title of Confucian-scholar doctors within the bureaucratic government's system made it difficult for the Confucian-scholar doctors to draw a clear boundary between them and other kinds of medical specialists.<sup>52</sup>

Although the Medical Department was suspended, it was already commonly accepted that the literati doctor's social status outranked other kinds of medical specialists.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, even though in the beginning the formation of textual learning in medicine was to challenge the authority of hereditary doctors, it was now beneficial for hereditary doctors as well as other medical specialists to claim themselves also being literati doctors, and include textual education in their medical training. There were two benefits that could be gained from learning canonical medical texts. First, the symbolic cultural capital that the texts represented could help them earn prestige in society. Secondly, besides the classical texts, they also studied a wide variety of medical books, and the reading of these works could help in their medical training.<sup>54</sup> However, during the Southern Song dynasty some literati still considered medical specialists to be artisans. Zhang Gao 張杲 (1149-1227), a skilled literati doctor from a hereditary family still had to quote Fan Zhongyan's words to encourage the literati who disdained medicine to study medical knowledge.<sup>55</sup>

By the Yuan dynasty, due to the difficulties for Han Chinese to pursue an official career through the civil examinations, many scholars turned to a career in medicine to fulfill their

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<sup>47</sup> Chen, "Songdai de ruyi," 186; Xu, *Song huiyao jigao*, 2203.

<sup>48</sup> Chen, "Songdai ruyi," 291.

<sup>49</sup> Chen, "Songdai de ruyi," 186.

<sup>50</sup> Wang, "Mingdai de ruyi," 39.

<sup>51</sup> Chen, "Songdai ruyi," 291.

<sup>52</sup> Zhu Pingyi 祝平一, "Song Ming zhi ji de yishi yu ruyi" 宋、明之際的醫史與儒醫, *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 77, no. 3 (2006): 419-420.

<sup>53</sup> Zhu, "Song Ming zhi ji," 420.

<sup>54</sup> Chao, *Medicine and Society in Late Imperial China*, 41.

<sup>55</sup> Chen Menglei 陳夢雷, ed., *Tushu jicheng yibu quanlu* 圖書集成醫部全錄 502 (Taipei: Xin wenfeng chuban gongsi, 1979), 43.

Confucian goal in another way.<sup>56</sup> The increase of the number of scholars-turned-doctors resulted in an growing trend to strengthen the ties between Confucianism and medicine. A Confucian-scholar in the Yuan dynasty, Dai Liang 戴良 (no life date known), stated that, “The medicine’s work is about saving people’s lives, it is the closest with our way of Confucianism” (醫以活人為務，與吾儒道最切近).<sup>57</sup> Wang Wenjing considers Dai Liang to be the earliest person to propose the idea of “Medicine and Confucianism [having] the same way” (醫儒同道).<sup>58</sup> The difference between Dai Liang’s idea and Fan Zhongyan’s perspective toward medicine is that Dai Liang’s statement directly links the notion of Confucianism with medicine, whereas the Song dynasty literati do not state this so clearly. Dai Liang was also not the only scholar to propose this concept. Another Yuan dynasty doctor, Ni Weide 倪維德 (no life date known) also argued:

Medicine is one of the skills of the Confucian scholars. [...] [If your] parents and close relatives are sick, then [you] entrust [them] to others, so that reversedly others who are not related to you, control the death and life of your parents. [If] there is one single mistake, then there is no going back for the rest of one’s life.

醫為儒者之一事…父母至親者有疾而委之他人，俾他人之無親者反操父母之死生。一有誤謬，則終身不復。<sup>59</sup>

Ni Weide argued from the point of view of the safety of medicine to propose the necessity for Confucian scholars to study medicine. He was especially concerned about his parents’ health care. His argumentation, later on, became one of the core reasons for literati to study medicine in the Ming dynasty, under the name of “medical filial piety” (*yixiao* 醫孝).<sup>60</sup>

Overall, by the Ming dynasty, the term “literati doctors” referred to scholars-turned-doctors, hereditary doctors acting in accordance with Confucian moral standards, and literati who chose to study medicine out of filial piety. In addition, although doctors never acquired equal status with scholar-officials, despite their continuous efforts, they successfully acquired the highest rank among other medical specialists. Therefore, when Tan Yunxian mentions the Tan family’s Confucian-scholar background in her preface, she may have intended to tell her readers that she was not only a female doctor but also a Confucian-scholar doctor. By emphasizing this point, she may have received more respect in society.

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<sup>56</sup> Chen Yuanpeng 陳元朋, *Liang Song de shangyi shiren yu ruyi: Jianlun qi zai Jin Yuan de liubian* 兩宋的尚醫士人與儒醫:兼論其在金元的流變 (Taipei: Guoli Taiwan daxue chuban weiyuanhui, 1997), 263-273.

<sup>57</sup> Xu Chunfu 徐春甫, *Gujin yitong daquan* 古今醫統大全, vol. 3 (Taipei: Xin wenfeng chuban gongsi, 1979), 451.

<sup>58</sup> Wang, “Mingdai de ruyi,” 44.

<sup>59</sup> Xu, *Gujin yitong daquan*, 450. The text is translated into English by the author of this thesis.

<sup>60</sup> Wang, “Mingdai de ruyi,” 54.

Besides being both female and a Confucian-scholar doctor, Tan Yunxian was also the typical hereditary-literati doctor (*jiashi ruyi* 家世儒醫) of the Ming dynasty. This was another notable shifting in the literati doctors' conception during the Yuan-Ming dynasties. In the Tang dynasty the discourse of the Confucianization of medicine was to challenge the legitimacy of hereditary doctors. However, from the Yuan to the Ming dynasty, the conceptualization of hereditary doctors and Confucian-scholar doctors began to overlap. The claim of having both a hereditary doctor as well as a literati doctor backgrounds was very common.<sup>61</sup> This was due to the establishment of the local Medical Bureau (*yixue* 醫學) of all levels of administration in the Yuan dynasty.<sup>62</sup> The medical bureau was a popular alternative working place for Confucian-scholars who could not enter the court by the civil examinations. Later on, if one became a teacher in the medical bureau, one might have a better chance than in the civil examinations to be assigned to a higher official post.<sup>63</sup> When Qiu Zhonglin studied the Ming dynasty's hereditary doctors' ancestors, he discovered that most of their ancestors served as government doctors in the local medical bureaus. He considered the establishment of the local Medical Bureau in the Yuan dynasty was what led to the formation of a new group of medical specialists, the hereditary-literati doctors in the Ming dynasty.<sup>64</sup>

A noteworthy aside that Qiu Zhonglin also found in his research on the hereditary-literati-doctor families was that they mostly lived in the lower reaches of the Yangtze River, the so-called Jiangnan region. The dense population of medical families in the Jiangnan region thus made the Tan family has better chances to develop a relationship with a medical family than in other regions. The next part will discuss the cause of this phenomenon.

## 1.2 Jiangnan

The first cause of the gathering of the medical families in the Jiangnan region was the so called Jingkang Incident (*Jingkang zhi nan* 靖康之難) in 1127. In 1127, the army of the Jin Dynasty invaded the capital of the Northern Song dynasty, Bianjing 汴京, and captured many imperial family members. As a result, the invasion led to the collapse of the Northern Song dynasty and its control over northern China. The imperial family members who managed to escape fled to southern China, thus resulting in the shift of the political center from the north to the south. Most of the scholar-official families, gentry families, and those who served as imperial doctors (*yuyi* 御醫) followed the imperial family to Suzhou and Hangzhou. The Tan family was also one of the scholar-official families that followed the imperial family to the south. The second reason was the fall of the Jin dynasty, which led to

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<sup>61</sup> Chen, *Liang Song de shangyi shiren yu ruyi*, 224-296.

<sup>62</sup> Leung, "Organized Medicine," 139-142.

<sup>63</sup> Chen, *Liang Song de shangyi shiren yu ruyi*, 270-273.

<sup>64</sup> Qiu Zhonglin 邱仲麟, "Mingdai shiyi yu fu zhou xian yixue" 明代世醫與府州縣醫學, *Hanxue Yanjiu* 漢學研究 22, no. 2 (December 2004): 327-328.

another leave of immigrants from the north to the south, also including some medical families.<sup>65</sup> The third reason was the suspension of the civil examinations for 77 years during the Yuan dynasty, a policy which forced many scholar-official families to turn to medicine as an alternative career. Those who were recruited for the medical bureau, had a better chance to earn an official title or be promoted to a higher official position.<sup>66</sup> These three reasons contributed to the concentration of hereditary medical families and scholar-official families in the Jiangnan region, and many were able to perpetuate their family lines until the Ming dynasty. Tan Yunxian's cousin, Ru Luan 茹鑾 (no life date known) also wrote in his preface, "There are many famous doctors in the Three Wu" (名醫多稱三吳).<sup>67</sup> According to Zhou Qi's 周祈 (no life date) *Investigations into the Meanings of Names* (*Ming yi kao* 名義考), Three Wu in the Ming dynasty referred to Suzhou 蘇州 (Eastern Wu), Runzhou 潤州 (Middle Wu), and Huzhou 湖州 (Western Wu).<sup>68</sup> These three regions are around Lake Tai (*Taihu* 太湖).<sup>69</sup> Ru Luan's description indicates that the regions around Lake Tai were known to be the hometown of many prominent doctors, and it could be because of the high density of medical families in these regions.

Wuxi, where the Tan family settled down, is just right next to Suzhou and also one of the regions around Lake Tai. Therefore, it was no coincidence that the Tan family was able to acquire the transmission of medical knowledge through Tan Shao's uxorilocal marriage. Marriage between a scholar-official family and a medical family was perhaps not unusual in this particular area. Tan Fu's wife, née Ru 茹氏 may also have come from a hereditary medical family in Wuxi. If the Tan family had been living in a place with only little or no medical families, Tan Shao would need to take another alternative career; for example, as a merchant, teacher, or private tutor. Marriages between these two kinds of families were certainly one of the major reasons that led to the formation of hereditary-literati-doctor families in the region.

It was also in this special environment that women had a better chance to receive medical education within the family than in other places. There were some records of female doctors working in this area. For example, *The Golden Case of Wuxi County Gazetteer* (*Wuxi Jingui Xianzhi* 無錫金匱縣志) recorded that née Lu 陸氏 (no life date known), the wife of an imperial doctor called Xu Mengrong 徐孟容 (no life date known), was skilled in medicine. Thus, she was summoned to serve in the imperial court during the Yongle 永樂 era (1403-1424). When she retired, she was granted a fairly good pension.<sup>70</sup> Another famous

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<sup>65</sup> Qiu, "Mingdai shiyi," 329-330.

<sup>66</sup> Chen, *Liang Song de shangyi shiren yu ruyi*, 265-267.

<sup>67</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 32. The original translation is simply "San Wu". San here means the number three.

<sup>68</sup> Zhou Qi 周祈, *Ming yi kao* 名義考 (Taipei: Xuesheng Shuju, 1971), 89.

<sup>69</sup> Tan Qixiang 譚其驥, *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji* 中國歷史地圖集, vol. 7 (Shanghai: Ditu chubanshe, 1982), 47-48.

<sup>70</sup> Pei Dazhong 裴大中, ed., *Wuxi jingui xianzhi* 無錫金匱縣志, vol. 2 (Taipei: Xin wenfeng chuban gongsi,

case was in Anhui 安徽, around the mid-Ming dynasty. A doctor from a famous medical lineage Cheng Bangxian's 程邦賢 (no life date known) wife née Jiang 蔣氏 (no life date known), was skilled in surgery. Her son's wife née Fang 方氏 (no life date known) was also a well-known female doctor who mastered pediatrics. It is recorded that they cured thousands of people every year. There was a saying at that time: "The Cheng family's medical skills, the wives' [medical skills] are better than the husbands' [skills]" (程門醫術, 婦勝於夫).<sup>71</sup> These cases of female doctors show that society had a certain degree of acceptance toward women receiving medical education and having medical careers.

To summarize, the Tan family acquired medical background through a unique case of uxorilocal marriage, which benefited both the Tan family and the Huang family. It is argued that Tan Yunxian's placing of her family's Confucian-scholar background at the forefront of the narration reflects a career hierarchy, but one that was also beneficial to her career due to the construction of a hereditary-literati doctor identity. This takes place within the development of the Confucian-scholar identity, particularly in Jiangnan, where there was a high density of medical households which produced more female doctors than other places.

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1979), 451.

<sup>71</sup> Li Jingwei 李经纬, ed., *Zhongyi renwu cidian* 中医人物词典 (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1988), 72 and 601.

## Chapter 2

### Education

After Tan Yunxian introduces her family's background, she goes on to talk about her medical education in the preface, which was the second step toward her medical career. Her record is a precious resource that offers a glance into female medical education at the time, since her account is the only surviving preface written by a female doctor in the Ming dynasty. This chapter will first explore how Tan received the chance to study medicine, her medical training, how she practiced her skills, and how gender influenced her education. Gender also plays an important role in Tan's narrative, as she also needs to present herself in a way that does not violate and threaten social norms and gender's roles. In order to examine her narrative strategies, it is also necessary to take a close look at her text.

Tan's description of her medical education in the preface can be divided into three parts according to the order of these topics. The first part of the text, describes how she was ordered by her grandfather to learn medicine when she was a child:

My father first worked in the Ministry of Justice and he received my Grandfather and Grandmother Ru [his parents] to live with him. When my hair was hanging down in the style worn by children, I awaited to serve beside my father. He ordered me to sing five- and seven-character poems as well as to read aloud from texts such as those on education of girls or the *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiao jing* 孝經) in order to entertain him while he drank. My grandfather happily said, "This girl is very intelligent; we should not restrict her to ordinary needlework but instead we can let her study my medicine." At that time I was able to memorize but I did not understand the value of the words.

亞中府君先在刑曹，嘗迎奉政府君暨大母太宜人茹就養。妾時垂髻，侍側亞中府君，命歌五七言詩，及誦女教、《孝經》等篇以侑觴。奉政喜曰：「女甚聰慧，當不以尋常女紅拘，使習吾醫可也。」妾時能記憶，不知其言之善也。<sup>72</sup>

The text first presents to the reader a probably very common picture of everyday life in a scholar-official family. When the elders dined, the children would await to serve or perform a talent show to entertain the elders. However, the show is not pure entertainment, it is also often an occasion to showcase talent in literary learning. The most common performance would be singing poems or reciting articles or verses from textbooks and classics that were

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<sup>72</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 34-35. One revision was made on this translation in the 2<sup>nd</sup> line. The original translation was "I waited on my father", which is not wrong, but not clear enough to indicate that she was waiting to serve her father.

needed to study for the civil examination. The more children could read and recite at a young age, the more talented they would be considered. At this time, judging by the hairstyle *chuitiu* 垂髻, Tan Yunxian would be only around four to eight years old. As a child, she still has no clue what a valuable chance her grandfather has given her, and how this chance will forever influence her life, making her step on a path that is quite different from all other women growing up in the inner chambers (*neizhai* 内宅 or *guige* 閨閣) of a scholar-official family.

In the Ming dynasty, ideally, a woman from a scholar-official family should not step outside of her household due to the concept of the Confucian doctrine of separate spheres, in which man dominated the outer, and woman dominated the inner (男主外, 女主内).<sup>73</sup> The outer refers to the world outside of the household, relevant with activities such as taking the civil examination, traveling, working, etc. The inner refers to the inside of the household, relevant with activities such as doing household duties, taking care of family members, and continuing the family line. Also, aside from work divisions, the concept of separate spheres also refers to the different proper living place of the two genders. To maintain the Confucian cosmological order, the most appropriate place for women to be at is in the household, and men should be at the outside.<sup>74</sup> The concept of separate spheres thus limited women's chance of having a career or receiving an education irrelevant with household duties in the Ming dynasty. However, Tan Yunxian was granted an opportunity that builds the first step for her to have a career outside of the household. Also, due to this chance, her name will forever be remembered by later generations.

## 2.1 The Child Prodigy

Showcasing literary talent in early childhood is one of the typical literary trope when it comes to portraying a child prodigy from a scholar-official or imperial household. The earliest portrayal of a child prodigy was the half-divine boy Houji 后稷 in *The Book of Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經), who lacked childish traits and naturally knew how to grow food and survive in the wilds. The case of Houji shows that the early portrayals of child prodigy did not focus on the child's literary talent but stressed the absence of childish traits, as well as their abilities to bring prosperity to people.<sup>75</sup> It is from the Han dynasty that a growing account of talented children who master literary studies and writings arises.<sup>76</sup> The shift in the focus of a child prodigy's talent was due to the requirement for and competitive environment around the pursuit of an official career.<sup>77</sup> To be recommended as a potential candidate to serve in

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<sup>73</sup> Yi, *Sangu liupo*, 105; Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 12.

<sup>74</sup> Yi, *Sangu liupo*, 105-107.

<sup>75</sup> Anne Behnke Kinney, *Representations of Childhood and Youth in Early China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 33-42.

<sup>76</sup> Anne Behnke Kinney, *Representations of Childhood*, 43.

<sup>77</sup> Anne Behnke Kinney, *Representations of Childhood*, 42-44.

government, it was necessary to be well versed in the Confucian classics; and the records of the Han dynasty show that, boys ages from eleven to fourteen had greater frequency to be recommended to the government.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, children had to master the Confucian classics around this age to earn a greater chance to be recommended.

For instance, the famous historian Ban Gu 班固 (32-92) is said to have read through *The Book of Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經) when he was eight and was also able to compose rhymed prose (*fu* 賦). His contemporary, the Confucian scholar Cui Yin 崔駰 (d. 92) was proficient in *The Book of Odes*, *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋), and *The Book of Changes* (*Yi Jing* 易經) at the age of eleven.<sup>79</sup> Since then, the focus on literary talent in the portrayal of the child prodigies continues until the Qing dynasty, and the books these children mastered changed in accordance with the requirement of the imperial court or civil examinations.

Compared with male child prodigies, there are fewer records of female child prodigies who possessed literary talent, due to the imbalance of education resources given to the two genders. According to Anne Behnke Kinney's research, it was until the late former Han dynasty that elite men thought it was necessary to include literary education in women's education. The goal of their literary education was to be obedient to their husband's families, especially the women who lived in the imperial household as empresses, imperial concubines, or servants in order to prevent the domestic problems in the imperial household.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, women's literary education often focused on texts of filial piety and female virtues until later periods as well. From Tan Yunxian's description, the texts she studied as a child included the *Classic of Filial Piety* and books on women's education, the topics of these books being filial piety and female virtues. Recent studies have concluded that it is from the mid-Ming that a trend for women to study and write poetry began, and starting from the Wanli 萬曆 period (1573-1620) onward this became a phenomenon in the society.<sup>81</sup> Tan Yunxian's records correspond with this research; she was living in a time period when the trend of women learning poetry started.

The talented female poet was often portrayed as a child prodigy. This literary trope derives from the famous female poet Xie Daoyun 謝道韞 (no life date known) in *A New Account of the Tales of the World* (*Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語).<sup>82</sup> When Xie describes the snowfall as "rather like willow catkins whirling in the wind" (未若柳絮因風起), and outwits her cousins, she is admired and praised as a female child prodigy by the literati. She later became a literary trope used when praising other talented women, such as the willow catkins

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<sup>78</sup> Anne Behnke Kinney, *Representations of Childhood*, 44.

<sup>79</sup> Transcribed from Anne Behnke Kinney, *Representations of Childhood*, 43.

<sup>80</sup> Anne Behnke Kinney, *Representations of Childhood*, 148-149.

<sup>81</sup> Lian Wenping 連文萍, "Fuxue yu shicai: Mingdai nüjiaoshu zhong de shige zhulu ji pingshu" 婦學與詩才: 明代女教書中的詩歌著錄及評述, *Zhongzheng hanxue yanjiu* 中正漢學研究 26, no. 2 (December 2015): 96-100.

<sup>82</sup> Liu Yiqing 刘义庆, *Shi shuo xinyu* 世说新语 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1986), 66. Translated by Daria Berg, *Women and the Literary World in Early Modern China 1580-1700* (London: Routledge, 2015), 53.



poetess (*liuxu caiyuan* 柳絮才媛) motif.<sup>83</sup> For instance, the Ming dynasty female child prodigy and poet, Xu Yuan 徐媛 (1560-1620) was being praised as the “Reincarnation of Xie Daoyun” 謝娥後身.<sup>84</sup>

The purpose of the narration of child prodigies was not only to admire their talent, but most importantly to explain why they could complete outstanding achievements in their lives, or why they had unusual lives. Being a child prodigy may indicate that one was destined to fulfill extraordinary accomplishments to benefit society. The logic behind this thinking may be due to the idea that talent was something gifted by heaven. Therefore, although women are supposed to only manage duties within the household, if heaven decides to give them talent in writing poetry, it justifies their future role as a poet, as well as their names being known by others outside the inner chambers. In Tan Yunxian’s case, the narration of herself being a child prodigy serves as her first step to legitimize her unusual future medical career as compared with other women growing up in scholar-official households. Her narrative strategy also indicates that although she grew up in a family with a medical background, it was still not guaranteed that she would receive medical education; she had to meet certain requirements.

The first requirement was talent and intelligence. During the process of the formation of Confucian-scholar doctors, there was a discourse on the proper characteristics of a qualified doctor, defined as being wise and quick-witted. Although the discourse’s true intention was to challenge the legitimacy of hereditary doctors, some scholars and hereditary doctors both agreed that these were indeed the necessary characteristics of a doctor. This opinion was passed down to the Qing dynasty.<sup>85</sup>

The second requirement was an order, or permission from elders to allow a woman to study medicine. Although the Tan family had both scholar-official and medical household backgrounds, since the generation of Tan’s father the family no longer depended on a medical career. Also, perhaps due to the reason that it was only two generations that the family had held a medical career or the career hierarchy in the society, the family still considered itself more as a scholar-official family than as a medical family. As a girl in a scholar-official household, it was expected that Tan Yunxian’s duty was to fulfill the duty of managing the matters in the inner chamber after she gets married, rather than having a medical career in the future. Even if she is talented, if she asks to learn medicine herself there were still not enough reasons to support the legitimacy of her behavior. Thus, to avoid the potential criticisms from others, the most suitable narrative would be placing the responsibility on her grandfather. Since it was an order from her grandfather, as a filial child, she must obey his order. Therefore, her unusual learning in medicine can be justified under the cover of filial piety.

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<sup>83</sup> Berg, *Women and the Literary World*, 53-55.

<sup>84</sup> Berg, *Women and the Literary World*, 53.

<sup>85</sup> Chao, *Medicine and Society in Late Imperial China*, 27.

## 2.2 Women's Medical Education

Besides Tan's strategy to legitimize her medical career, the text also offers a valuable source for the women's medical education within the inner chambers at that time. Tan Yunxian's record is the only surviving primary source that can provide a picture of female medical education in the Ming dynasty, and is the only text written by a female medical specialist herself, and not from other male elites' description.

The most common education for women from a scholar-official family would be learning needlework, the *Classic of Filial Pieties*, and all kinds of female education books, in addition to writing poetry. However, Tan Yunxian's ordinary education ends relatively early when she was a child. She notes down in her preface that, after her grandfather's order, the content of her education shifted totally to medicine. In this part, the learning process and materials from her preface will be examined:

Later I read books such as the *Classic of Difficulties* (*Nan jing* 難經) and *Rhymed Pulse Formulas* (*Mai jue* 脈訣) day and night without interruption. When there was free time, I asked Grandmother to explain the principles and could immediately perceive their brilliance without any obstruction [to my understanding]. This was when I understood the value of the words, but I had never tested them.

是後讀《難經》、《脈訣》等書，晝夜不輟，暇則請太宜人講解大義，頓覺了無窒礙，是已知其言之善，而未嘗有所試也。<sup>86</sup>

Similar to modern-day students who study medicine, Tan Yunxian's education began with textual learning of medical books. Due to Confucian-scholar doctors' discourse arguing that studying medical books was the most fundamental and necessary medical education, textual learning became the basic step to study medicine in the Ming dynasty. At that time, *Classic of Difficulties* was one of the most recommended medical books to study by Confucian-scholar doctors such as Li Chan 李梴 (d. 1643).<sup>87</sup> The *Classic of Difficulties* consists of six topics, the theory of pulse diagnoses, the network of vessels (*jingluo* 經絡), the depots and palaces (*zangfu* 臟腑), the transportation holes (*xuwei* 穴位), and acupuncture. By studying the medical book, medical specialists could understand the function of human bodies and thus can comprehend the cause of illness.<sup>88</sup> As for *Rhymed Pulse Formulas*, multiple medical books have the same short title and there's no clear indication of exactly which book Tan Yunxian refers to. The most likely candidate may be Wang Shuhe's *Rhymed Pulse Formulas* (*Wang Shuhe maijue* 王叔和脈訣). *Wang Shuhe's Rhymed Pulse Formulas* explains different kinds

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<sup>86</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 35.

<sup>87</sup> Wang, "Mingdai de ruyi," 49-51.

<sup>88</sup> Wang, "Mingdai de ruyi," 51.

of pulse in the form of songs, which are thus easy to memorize. It was the most commonly used learning material in medical education from the Song to the mid-Ming dynasty.<sup>89</sup>

The teacher responsible for her education was not her grandfather, but her grandmother née Ru. Lorraine Wilcox proposes that one reason this occurred was due to the regulation of gender segregation, even within the same family. Another likely reason that Wilcox indicates is that the Tan family assumed that Tan Yunxian's future patients would also be women. To treat only female patients would avoid the risk of losing her chastity and save her reputation in society. In addition, her grandmother may have been more skilled in gynecology than her grandfather.<sup>90</sup>

How née Ru taught Tan Yunxian was different from a modern medical school, she did not give out lessons, but let Tan Yunxian study the books by herself first. Only when Tan Yunxian came to her and asked questions, would she explain the meanings of the text. According to Tan Yunxian's younger brother, Tan Yifeng's 談一鳳 (no life date known) postscript for *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*, her learning time lasted the whole day. He states, "[...] She was cherished by Grandmother Ru; they were always together whether drinking or eating, during activity or rest. All they talked about was medicine and herbs and anything that centered Lady Tan's ear was never forgotten" (為祖母茹太宜人所鍾愛，飲食動息必俱。所言莫非醫藥，孺人能入耳及不忘).<sup>91</sup> His text indicates that Tan Yunxian's long learning time was due to her strong passion and interest in medicine, and née Ru's fondness toward her.

As time went by, Tan Yunxian gradually understood and grasped the medical theories within the medical books, but did not have the chance to put her knowledge into practice yet. In other words, she was now at the phase of needing an internship to practice her skills. However, as a woman, she could not just step out of the inner chamber to look for people who are willing to be her patients like male medical specialists. Therefore, the second option she had was to treat her family members, but she perhaps did not want to take the risk of misdiagnoses her family when she was still not skilled enough. As a result, the only person that could be her first patient was herself:

When I was 15, my hair was put up in hairpins and I married, but I continuously suffered diseases of blood and *qi*. Whenever the doctor came, I would first diagnose myself in order to test what the doctor said. When the herbs arrived, I would also pick through them myself, deliberating whether or not they could be used.

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<sup>89</sup> Xie Bohui 謝柏暉, "Cong Wang Shuhe Maijue de zhengyi kan Ming Qing yixue zhishi de jiangou" 從《王叔和脈訣》的爭議看明清醫學知識的建構, *Keji yiliao yu shehui* 科技醫療與社會, no. 15 (October 2012): 68-73.

<sup>90</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 7.

<sup>91</sup> Tan Yifeng 談一鳳, "Nüyi Zayan ba" 女醫雜言跋, in *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*, trans. Lorraine Wilcox and Yue Lu (Portland: The Chinese Medicine Database, 2015), 147.

筭而于歸，連得血氣等疾，凡醫來必先自診，視以驗其言，藥至亦必手自揀擇，斟酌可用與否。<sup>92</sup>

During Tan Yunxian's teenage years, she was often sick and had to see a doctor. However, it was also due to her sickness that she had many chances to put her medical skills into practice. By making diagnoses and examining the medicine used on herself, then comparing her thoughts with the doctor who visited her, she was able to gain actual experiences in gynecological treatments.

After she gave birth and her children got sick, they then became her next patients to practice her medical skills:

Afterwards I gave birth to three girls and one boy. When [the children] were sick, I did not use other doctors' herbal medicine, rather directly seeking advice from my grandmother on modifying the prescriptions and that was all. This was when I tested the medicine a little, but I did not yet understand just how effective it was.

後生三女一子皆在病中，不以他醫用藥，但請教太宜人，手自調劑而已，是已有所試，而未知其驗也。<sup>93</sup>

In contrast to when treating herself, Tan Yunxian did not use other doctors' medicine to treat her children, but instead consulted her grandmother, and would also make the medicine herself. Such a decision may be due to the difficulties in treating children. In the Ming dynasty, Xiong Zongli 熊宗立 (1409-1482) recorded that there was an old saying among the medical specialists which stated, "It is better to treat ten men than to treat one woman. It is better to treat ten women than to treat one child" (寧醫十丈夫，莫醫一婦人；寧醫十婦人，不醫一小兒).<sup>94</sup> This saying indicated the difficulties medical specialists faced when treating children's illnesses.

One reason is that children are hard to communicate with. When medical specialists ask about their sickness, they cannot express it clearly. Another reason is due to their biological differences with adults. Children have more vulnerable and smaller bodies than adults, so it is harder for medical specialists to determine the proper amount of medicine they should take. Medical specialists often complained about their frustrations when treating children, and there

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<sup>92</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 36.

<sup>93</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 36.

<sup>94</sup> Qian Yi 錢乙 and Xiong Zongli 熊宗立, "Leizheng Qian shi xiaoer fangjue" 類證錢氏小兒方訣, in *Zhongguo yixue dacheng xuji* 中國醫學大成續集, vol. 38, ed. Cao Bingzhang 曹炳章 (Shanghai: Shanghai kexue jishu chubanshe, 2000), 15-17. Transcribed from Zhang Jiafeng 張嘉鳳, "Huangdi buneng cha qi youxia: Song Qing zhi jian xiao'er yi de ziwo renting yu shehui dingwei" 黃帝不能察其幼小：宋清之間小兒醫的自我認同與社會定位, *Xin shixue* 新史學 24, no. 1 (March 2013): 6. The passage was translated into English by the author of this thesis.

was a high rate of deadly medical errors that commonly happened to children.<sup>95</sup> Thus, Tan Yunxian may not have dared to entrust her children to others, but rather entrusted them to her grandmother.

Tan's decision of treating her children herself also reflects the authority women possessed when choosing the medical treatments for their family members. Angela Ki Che Leung and Charlotte Furth's studies have both showed that a man usually could not choose the medical specialist by himself, but had to argue or persuade his wife when they prefer different medical specialists. Also, when it came to treating women or children's illness, women often had greater authority in choosing a medical specialist than men.<sup>96</sup>

At this stage, Tan Yunxian felt that she had already tested her medical skills, but was not yet certain how effective and how adequate her medical skills had developed. She may still have felt uncertain of whether she was qualified and ready to work independently as a medical specialist. In a time in which there was no system of state examinations to evaluate medical students' skills and to distribute doctor licenses that ensured their abilities, Tan Yunxian, therefore, needed a chance to prove herself, and a trustworthy authority to give her legitimacy to establish her name in society, and to be trusted by her potential patients. Also, she had to give the patriarchal society a reason to accept her wish to start a medical career, so that she would not be criticized as violating the female social role, and not considered as having inappropriate behavior because of stepping out of the inner chambers.

In summation, Tan Yunxian's medical education was different from the men's medical education due to gender segregation. These differences also posed extra difficulties for her, because she would need to legitimate herself to receive a medical education. These also limited her progress when needing to practice her skills. But eventually, she managed to overcome all the problems and completed her education.

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<sup>95</sup> Zhang, "Huangdi buneng cha qi youxia," 3-34.

<sup>96</sup> Leung, "Qian jindai Zhongguo de nüxing yiliao congyezhe," 368; Furth, *A Flourishing Yin*, 245-257.

## Chapter 3

### Becoming a Female Doctor

While the only way for the modern-day medical students to legally begin their career is to pass a state examination and acquire a doctor's license, Ming dynasty medical specialists enjoyed fewer restrictions. In a society where the state lacked interest in regulating and standardizing medical training and knowledge, anyone could legally practice medical treatment and claim to be a medical specialist. Yet, when it came to becoming a female doctor, it was not as easy as it was for male medical specialists. The obstacles lay not only in issues of gender but also in one's social class. On the one hand, being the daughter of a scholar-official provided Tan Yunxian with a valuable chance to receive a sophisticated medical education, but on the other hand, thus saddled her with the primary expectation to fulfill her duty in the inner chambers, and to step outside of the household to treat patients only secondarily. Therefore, Tan had to come up with a good reason to legitimate her desire to pursue a medical career. A reason suitable to persuade others was necessary for her to become a female doctor, to avoid the impression that she transgressed a more serious social norm.

Tan Yunxian, as an authorial subject representing her existential subject in her preface, hides her desire of having a medical career under the various covers of filial piety, fate, and Confucian benevolence. However, it was also due to these covers that she was able to earn both legitimacy and qualification to become a female doctor. The most crucial event that contributed to the fulfillment of these strategies was the death of her grandmother née Ru. The following chapter takes a closer look into Tan's narration of this event. Then, an analysis is presented on how her narrative may derive from a writing tradition developed among medical specialists, particularly a common commercial narrative used in writing medical specialists' biographies. However, although her narration follows a fully developed model, as a woman, there is some modification of this narrative to fit her situation. Thus, in the last part of this chapter, Tan's narrative is compared with some male medical specialists' biographies to point out the differences between them, and finally the reasons for such differences are discussed.

#### 3.1 The 'Graduation'

Unlike modern-day medical students who receive a degree certificate when completing their studies, Tan Yunxian's 'graduation' begins with her grandmother's death. In her narrative, the death of her grandmother, née Ru, was at the same time tragic, dramatic, and miraculous:

Then, when my grandmother was passing on, she personally gave me all her books with formulas of proven effectiveness and the tools for herbal medicine treatment. She

said, “If you diligently memorize these, I can die content.” I bowed and accepted them. I was moved to tears and overwhelmed by grief. [After that] I suffered a disease that lingered for more than seven months. Because of this my mother, Venerable Lady Qian, secretly arranged funeral affairs for me, and I didn’t know about it. In my state of dizziness, I dreamt that my grandmother told me, “Your disease is not fatal; the formula is in a certain book in such and such a volume. Treat yourself according to this method and you will recover within a few days. You will have a long life of 73 years. Your practice will surpass my skill that has been used to aid people so they don’t suffer.” I awoke with a start and forced myself to get up to examine the formula for restoring my health; then I completely recovered. This was when I understood how effective the medicine was. Female family acquaintances who did not like having a male treat them came in a constant stream and they frequently obtained unusually good results.

及太宜人捐養，盡以素所經驗方書並製藥之具，親以授妾，曰：「謹識之，吾目瞑矣。」妾拜受感泣過哀，因病淹淹七逾月，母恭人錢，私為妾治後事，而妾不知也。昏迷中夢太宜人謂妾曰：「汝病不死，方在某書幾卷中，依法治之，不日可愈。汝壽七十有三，行當大吾術以濟人，宜毋患。」妾驚覺，強起，檢方調治，遂爾全瘳。是已，知其驗已。相知女流眷屬，不屑以男治者，絡繹而來，往往獲奇效。<sup>97</sup>

The incident first starts with the final transmission of née Ru’s medical knowledge and tools to Tan Yunxian. This is followed by Tan Yunxian’s serious sickness, caused by her enormous sadness after née Ru’s death. She was so sick for seven months, that even her stepmother née Qian, started to prepare her funeral. During this time, perhaps that Tan’s family members invited medical specialists to treat her, but they failed. Eventually, it was only until née Ru’s ghost appeared in Tan Yunxian’s dream and told her where to find the correct formula that she was able to cure herself after she woke up. Due to her ability to treat herself successfully, miraculously, and independently while others may have failed, Tan confirmed that her medical skills were truly effective and she was now qualified to work as a medical specialist. Also, née Ru’s prophecy of her fated future in which she would practice her medical skills to save others gave her legitimacy as a medical specialist. After she acquired legitimacy and qualification as a medical specialist, she began her medical career and established a reputation that attracted countless female patients.

Her ‘graduation’ was thus a mixture of dramatic sickness, related to née Ru’s death, an encounter with née Ru’s ghost, a prophecy indicating her exceptional fate, and a miraculous recovery with the help of née Ru. Why did Tan Yunxian consider these literary motifs as

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<sup>97</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 36-37.

necessities to earn legitimacy and qualification as a medical specialist in society? And are they related to each other?

Charlotte Furth, who has done detailed research on Tan Yunxian, suggests that Tan's narrative may be derived from a tradition similar to the process of becoming a female shaman in modern-day Taiwanese and Korean cultures:

A life-threatening illness, a miraculous recovery, and a message from the spirit world beyond the grave explaining the import of this crisis – all these were signs of a special destiny awaiting for her. By narrating such experiences, Tan showed how they shaped her own resolve, and equally important, how they helped win society's acceptance. Modern anthropologists, looking at contemporary Taiwan and Korea, have traced a similar pattern of life crisis leading to supernatural visitations and blessings that empowered women to assume the identity of ritual healer in their communities. Thus, although socially Tan Yunxian enjoyed high social rank (*ru ren* 孺人), she claimed the legitimacy – necessity, even – of her calling as a healer in a way that was probably familiar to women who became shamans.<sup>98</sup>

However, although Tan Yunxian's story may seem similar to modern-day female shamans, it would still too far out of context to argue that her narrative derived from female shamans in the Ming dynasty. The first problem is that there is too little research and records on the female shaman' tradition in the Ming dynasty to say that the process is similar to both Tan Yunxian's experience and those in modern-day Taiwan and Korea. Second, Tan Yunxian, being a lady who grew up with both scholar-official and medical backgrounds, was very unlikely to use a way similar to female shamans to earn legitimacy, because both backgrounds have a tradition against shamans.<sup>99</sup> Lastly, there are many male medical specialists' biographies that use similar descriptions and narratives to claim legitimacy in society. They are not only Tan Yunxian's contemporaries, but also include her predecessors; some of them are even well-known figures. These records indicate that there was a writing tradition used to claim legitimacy among medical specialists, and this is most likely where Tan Yunxian learned how to narrate her preface so that her medical career would be accepted by her readers.

### 3.2 The Writing Tradition of Medical Specialists' Biographies

In this section, the development of the writing tradition of medical specialists' biographies,

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<sup>98</sup> Furth, *A Flourishing Yin*, 288.

<sup>99</sup> Lin Fushi 林富士, *Wuzhe de shijie* 巫者的世界 (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2016), 48-69, and 378-386.



the possible sources of the narrative tradition, and how Tan Yunxian applied and adjusted this narrative tradition in her preface to fit her class is the main focus. Recently, there is little research on the writing tradition of medical specialists' biographies; thus, there is an inadequate collection of relevant research materials. Although there are several different types of writing traditions of medical specialists' biographies, only one specific type will be discussed, namely one in which the medical specialists gained medical skills, legitimacy, or qualifications through encounters with supernatural beings; I refer to this type of writing tradition as "strange encounter" (*yuqi* 遇奇). 'The strange' often refers to unknown or unidentified deities, ghosts, or other-worldly persons (*yiren* 異人 or *shenren* 神人). This type is the most relevant to the narrative strategies applied in Tan Yunxian's preface's description of her process of becoming a medical specialist.

The earliest example of such a writing tradition is the biography of the legendary medical specialist Bian Que 扁鵲 (407-310 BC),<sup>100</sup> written by the famous Han dynasty historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145 BC-c. 86 BC), included in his prominent work *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji* 史記).<sup>101</sup> According to Bian Que's biography, his real name was Qin Yueren 秦越人 and he came from the state of Qi. When he was young, he served as a guard of a hostel (*shezhang* 舍長). One time, a guest called Ser Changsang 長桑君 came to the hostel, but only Bian Que regarded him as an extraordinary person and treated him respectfully. Ser Changsang also knew that Bian Que was not an ordinary person either. Ser Changsang had visited the hostel for more than a decade, and one day asked Bian Que to sit with him. He gave Bian Que a secret medical formula and asked him not to tell others about it. Bian Que agreed. Ser Changsang instructed Bian Que to take the medicine for thirty days, and also gifted Bian Que his medical formula books. Afterward he disappeared. Bian Que then realized that Changsang jun was not a common human. He took the medicine for thirty days as instructed, and was then able to see through the human body and to recognize where some of the sickness was, somewhat like having an X-ray vision. He thus became a skilled medical specialist and gained fame in his time.<sup>102</sup>

The biography of Bian Que's structure can be divided into four units: (1) The person's name, and background information. (2) The person encounters an other-worldly person who has an unclear identity in reality or a dream. (3) The person being gifted medical skills, knowledge, formulae, or talent by the other-worldly person. (4) Acquires legitimacy, qualification, and reputation as a medical specialist in society. These four episodes become the most basic and common units of the writing tradition of "strange encounter" in later medical specialists' biographies. The formation of this writing tradition is still unclear. One possible reason may be that shamans and medical specialists were originally not separate

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<sup>100</sup> Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記, vol. 6 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 2785-2794.

<sup>101</sup> English title quoted from Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 1.

<sup>102</sup> Sima, *Shiji*, vol. 6, 2785-2794.

occupations, but one occupational profile referred to as priest (*wuxi* 巫覡), who was in charge of serving the deities. Women are *wu*, and men are *xi*; both words also have the meanings of ‘shamans’ or ‘sorcerer’. *Wuxi* were in charge of rituals, healings, divination, and communicating with the dead and deities. However, *wuxi* gradually split into two professions, shamans (*wu* 巫) and medical specialists (*yi* 醫). Shamans become more specialized in rituals, spells, and the connection with supernatural powers to heal patients, while medical specialists become more specialized in herbs, acupuncture, pulse diagnoses, and surgical skills.<sup>103</sup> However, since the process of becoming a shaman was usually not recorded, it is difficult to attribute the writing tradition as having it originated from shamanic tradition. Also, from the Han dynasty onward, the literati had a clear division between the representative figures of shamans and medical specialists respectively. Bian Que was never considered a shamanic figure, but is always an early representative of medical specialists.<sup>104</sup>

Another possibility is that this writing tradition developed within the larger narrative context of blessings from supernatural beings to explain outstanding abilities or talents. This kind of narrative does not only exist in medical specialists’ biographies but also in the biographies of elites who have brilliant literary talents, such as the famous story of Jiang Lang runs out of his talent (*Jiang Lang cai jin* 江郎才盡).<sup>105</sup> It tells a story of how Jiang Lang was gifted a magical five-color-brush in a dream by a supernatural being. Thus, he acquired a literary talent in writing prose and poetry. When he gets old, the brush was taken away from him; he thus lost all his literary talent and become an ordinary person. The structure of this story is very similar to that of “strange encounter”. However, the development and the relation between the narratives of a literati’s strange encounter and a medical specialist’s strange encounter still requires further research.

From the research materials reviewed, the writing tradition of “strange encounter” is not the most commonly used narrative in medical specialists’ biographies, but it was still seen and applied until the Ming dynasty. The structure also does not change much over time, but sometimes a part is added which indicates the person who encounters the supernatural being is a child prodigy, has a special talent, or is destined to save people. For example, in *The Complete Records of Medical Books* (*Yibu quanlu* 醫部全錄), the biography of the Ming dynasty medical specialist Zhou Yilong 周一龍 (no life date known) follows this narrative tradition:

Zhou Yilong, whose courtesy name is Wu Yun, was a government student. He was good at the civil examinations when he was a kid. One night, he dreamed of a deity who gave him secretive [medical] skills. Thus, he began to learn medicine. He saved

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<sup>103</sup> Lin, *Wuzhe*, 9-38, and 302-316.

<sup>104</sup> Lin, *Wuzhe*, 324-326.

<sup>105</sup> Zhong Rong 鍾嶸, *Shi pin* 詩品 (Beijing: Wenxue guji kanxing she, 1954), 11.

many lives and was good at predicting people's lives and deaths. He likes to help people by nature; he helped the poor and did not accept payment when prescribing medicine. The people in his hometown called him a 'kind doctor'.

周一龍，字五雲，邑庠生幼精舉業，一夕夢神授以秘術，遂習岐黃。多所救濟，善知人生死。性好施與，賑施貧乏，服劑不取其酬。邑中稱良醫云。<sup>106</sup>

Comparing Zhou Yilong's biography with Bian Que's, Zhou Yilong's biography includes an extra part in the beginning which points out that he was a child prodigy with a talent in the examinations, preceding the description of an encounter with a supernatural being. Tan Yunxian's preface also includes the same description of her being a child prodigy.

Some other cases have the same structure as Zhou Yilong's but are different in some details. For example, the story of the famous idiom *xuanhu jishi* 懸壺濟世 (medical specialists help the sick). This is such a case that does not fit into the structure entirely. The story is recorded in the *Book of the Later Han* (*Houhan shu* 後漢書), in the biography of Fei Zhangfang 費長房 (no life date). Fei was once the manager of a market (*shiyuan* 市掾). In the market, there was an old man who always sold medicine while hanging a gourd in front of the street. When the market closed, he would just jump into the gourd. However, the other people never saw him doing so, only Fei Zhangfang saw it. Fei Zhangfang was astonished by the old man, and thus visited him. The old man knew that Fei Zhangfang was interested in his magical skills, and thus told Fei Zhangfang to come back the next day. The next morning, Fei went to visit the old man again and wished to become the old man's disciple to learn his skills. However, he was worried about his family while he was away. The old man thus gifted him a bamboo stick to place at the back of his home. Since the bamboo stick somehow resembled Fei Zhangfang's figure, his family mistook him as already dead and buried the bamboo. Yet, Fei Zhangfang failed the old man's challenges for him and therefore could learn the old man's skills. Before he went back home, the old man gifted him a bamboo stick and a talisman (*fu* 符). Thus, he was able to heal all kinds of sickness, attack ghosts, and control the deity 'Lord of the Place' (*Shegong* 社公).<sup>107</sup> At the end of the story, he loses his talisman and is attacked by ghosts resulting in his death. Unlike Bian Que, Fei Zhangfang has to use the magical bamboo stick and talisman gifted by the old man to practice medical skills. Without the magical object, he loses all his power. In this biography, except for the difference that skills are gifted to him through objects, his biography basically follows the structure proposed above.

Sometimes, the supernatural being may not gift medical skills or talent, but only an order to the medical specialist that he or she should study or practice medical skills to save others.

<sup>106</sup> Chen, *Tushu jicheng*, 375-376. Translated into English by the author of this thesis.

<sup>107</sup> Fan Ye 范曄, ed., *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書, vol. 10 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 2743-2744.

For instance, the story of Shen Yingshan 沈應善 (no life date known) is one of the case. Shen was a medical specialist in the Tang dynasty. One night he dreamt of an other-worldly person who commanded him, “The Emperor of the Heaven orders you to save thousands of people’s lives” (上帝命汝活千萬人). After he woke up, he set the goal of studying medicine. He followed Han Yin 韓隱 (no life date known), a medical specialist who lived in modern-day Sichuan 四川, to learn medical skills. When he finished his studies, he wrote medical books, helped to cure a lot of people’s sicknesses, and gained a greater reputation.<sup>108</sup>

Tan Yunxian’s preface is also similar to Shen Yingshan’s case, in that her medical skills were not magically granted by her grandmother née Ru’s ghost. Née Ru’s appearance only serves as a means to point out that her fate will be different from others, and that she is destined to have a medical career. However, it does not necessarily mean that Tan Yunxian must have read Shen Yingshan’s biography and imitated its writing. Based on the sources of her medical formulas, it is most likely that she was familiar with of the narrative from the biographies of Zhang Yuansu 張元素 (1151-1234) and Liu Wansu 劉完素 (1100-1180). Tan may also have learned from her contemporary colleagues’ biographies. In the next part, the biographies of Zhang Yuansu, Liu Wansu, and the Ming dynasty hereditary doctor Qiao Dai’s 喬迨 (no life date known) biography will be examined closely. Their narratives will then be compared with Tan Yunxian’s preface to see how and why they are different.

### 3.3 Zhang Yuansu, Liu Wansu, and Tan Yunxian

According to a study by Lorrain Wilcox on the sources of Tan Yunxian’s medical formulas, half of her sources were from prominent medical specialists of the Jin and Yuan dynasties,<sup>109</sup> suggesting that she may have read their medical books and biographies. One of these sources was Li Dongyuan 李東垣 (1180-1251), the student of Zhang Yuansu and one of the historically most influential medical specialists during the Jin-Yuan transition. In Zhang Yuansu’s biography, the narrative of how he earned qualifications and legitimacy as a medical specialist was similar to Tan Yunxian’s writing. The biography was recorded in *The History of the Jin* (*Jin shi* 金史):

Zhang Yuansu, whose courtesy name was Jiegu, came from Yizhou. When he was eight, he took the prefectural examination of Confucian Apprentice. At the age of 27, he took the metropolitan examination for the preceded scholar degree in the Confucian classics, [but he] violated the taboo of writing down the emperor’s name [thus he] failed the exam. He therefore turned to studying medicine, [yet] his name wasn’t known [by others]. One night, he dreamed of a person using an axe to open up his

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<sup>108</sup> Chen, *Tushu jicheng*, 154.

<sup>109</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 19.

heart, putting a few books inside [his] chest. From then on he understood thoroughly the [medical] skills of this person himself.

張元素，字潔古，易州人。八歲試童子舉。二十七試經義進士，犯廟諱下第。乃去學醫，無所知名。夜夢有人用大斧長鑿鑿心開竅，納書數卷於其中，自是洞徹其術。<sup>110</sup>

Zhang Yuansu was originally aiming to embark on a bureaucratic career by taking the civil examinations. However, it was forbidden to use characters of the emperor's name in the civil examinations.<sup>111</sup> If one violates this rule, then he could no longer participate in the civil examination ever again. Unfortunately, Zhang Yuansu violated the taboo. He failed the examination and was banned from participating in the examinations for the rest of his life time. He thus, like many other literati who had failed to enter officialdom at that time, tried to take an alternative career in medicine. However, his talent was not enough for him to be a self-taught medical specialist. Until one night, he dreamed of an unknown person, probably a supernatural being, who cut open his chest and forcefully put the books inside his chest, and thus he automatically received and understood all the medical skills of this being.

Like Tan Yunxian, who proved her medical skills by curing herself after her encounter with her grandmother's ghost in her dream, Zhang Yuansu also proved his skills' efficacy by healing a person by himself after he had been gifted medical skills by a supernatural being in his dream. The person he healed was Liu Wansu, who was one of the "four great masters of the Jin-Yuan dynasties" (*Jin Yuan si dajia* 金元四大家). Zhang Yuansu's biography noted that, when Zhang Yuansu was given medical skills by the unknown person he met in his dream, Liu Wansu was sick for eight days, and could not ascertain the reason for his sickness. Zhang visited him and Liu refused to pay attention to him, but Zhang still made a diagnosis of Liu's sickness and found that Liu had taken the wrong medicine which had led to his sickness. He then prescribed a medicine that could cure Liu's illness effectively. Liu took Zhang's medicine and fully recovered. Since then, Zhang had established his reputation as a medical specialist.<sup>112</sup>

Like Zhang Yuansu, Liu Wansu's story of becoming a medical specialist also includes the presence of a supernatural being who granted him medical skills, thus providing him with the qualification and legitimacy of a medical specialist. Also, Tan might have read Liu's biography, because his medical recipe was also one of the sources of Tan Yunxian's formulas.<sup>113</sup> Liu Wansu's story was recorded three different versions: one is the biography

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<sup>110</sup> Tuo Tuo 脫脫, ed., *Jin shi* 金史, vol. 8 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 2812. Translated into English by the author of this thesis.

<sup>111</sup> Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 206.

<sup>112</sup> Tuo Tuo, *Jin shi*, vol. 8, 2811.

<sup>113</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 19.

from *The History of Jin*, the other two are prefaces in his medical books *Collection of Writings on the Causes of Illness, Principles of Qi, and the Saving of Life in the Basic Questions* (*Suwen bingji qiyi baoming ji* 素問病機氣宜保命集). Liu Wansu wrote one preface himself, while another preface was written by Zhu Quan 朱權 (1378-1448), who was the 17<sup>th</sup> son of the first Ming emperor Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328-1398).

All three versions describe how Liu Wansu encountered supernatural beings and had been gifted medical skills and knowledge, but with some differences in details. In the biography collected in *The History of Jin*, Liu Wansu was said to have been gifted a magical liquor by an other-worldly person called Chen. After he drank the liquor and got drunk, he suddenly mastered medicine like Chen. From this record, it appears as if Liu Wansu's medical skills were given by Chen, and it is not clear when this event occurred.<sup>114</sup>

However, his own preface gives more details on the start of his medical education, and his exact age when he met Chen:

When I was 25 years old, I set the goal of [studying] *The Inner Canon of the Yellow Emperor* (*Huangdi neijing* 內經), day and night without rest. When I was 60 years old, I met a heavenly person. He granted me delicious liquor with an amount around that of an acorn to drink. [After I drank it], my face was red like I was drunk. When I woke up, from my eyes reaching down to my mind and spirit had been greatly enlightened.

余二十有五，志在《內經》，日夜不輟。殆至六旬，得遇天人，授飲美酒，若椽斗許。面赤若醉。一醒之後，目至心靈，大有開悟。<sup>115</sup>

The preface notes that he started to study one of the medical classics, *The Inner Canon of the Yellow Emperor*, by himself when he was 25. Judging from the fact that he was lacking the guidance of a teacher, he was a self-taught medical specialist. The liquor which granted to him when he was 60 was not meant to give him medical skills directly, but to give him the ability to understand the medical classic he already studied. Also, although it is not clear why he set a goal in learning medicine since he only began his study in medicine in his twenties, it was very likely that he was also like Zhang Yuansu, who failed to enter officialdom for some reason and instead took up medicine as an alternative career.

Zhu Quan's preface of Liu Wansu basically corresponds with the biography in *The History of Jin* and Liu's preface, but he considers Liu Wansu's medical career as a fate sent by heaven. Due to the fact that in Liu's era, medical specialists' skills had degenerated and were not comparable to the legendary medical specialists in the ancient times anymore. Heaven

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<sup>114</sup> Tuo Tuo, *Jin shi*, vol. 8, 2812.

<sup>115</sup> Liu Wansu 劉完素, "Zi xu" 自序, in *Suwen bingji qiyi baoming ji* 素問病機氣宜保命集 (Beijing: Renmin weisheng chubanshe, 1963), 1. Translated into English by the author of this thesis.

decided to gift Liu medical skills to recover medical knowledge. In addition, in Zhu Quan's preface, Liu had encountered the other-worldly person who gifted him skills twice. In the first encounter, Liu received an order from heaven and thus practiced his medical skills to the greatest extent. He also decided to write medical books to teach those who learned medicine in later generations. At the second encounter, he was gifted the magical liquor and had been so greatly enlightened that he rewrote his medical books.<sup>116</sup>

Such narratives of medical specialists being gifted knowledge and skills by an unknown supernatural being or other-worldly person was not only seen in the records of Tan Yunxian's predecessors but also in Ming dynasty biographies of medical specialists. Tan Yunxian may therefore also have learned of the narrative tradition from some of her contemporaries, such as Qiao Dai's biography collected in *The Complete Records of Medical Books*:

Qiao Dai, who came from Shanghai, for generations his family all took a career in medicine. Dai also mastered his family's skills. One year, there was an outbreak of epidemic disease, he dreamed of a divine person pointing at the plants growing in the water and said to him, "Use this offering to you to make the people around this place live." In the morning, [he] looked for the plants and acquired them, using them to treat the epidemic disease. There was no person who was not cured. He made his name due to this event, and his skills also improved over time.

喬迨，上海人，家世業醫，迨亦精其術。歲疫，夢神人指示水中草云：「以是資爾活此方人。」旦，物色得之，以治疫，無不立起，由是顯名，技亦愈進。<sup>117</sup>

Qiao Dai, like Tan Yunxian, came from a hereditary-doctor family, and originally learned medical skills from his family. One year, during an outbreak of epidemic disease he received an order from a divine person to use a water plant to save the local people. After he found the plants and used them to treat people, the medicine was effective. He gained a reputation and his skills improved.

The three medical specialists' biographies discussed above, including Tan Yunxian's preface, all have the similarity of following the structure of the topos of "strange encounter", as proposed before. They also share a certain possibility of being familiar Tan Yunxian. Since Zhang Yuansu's and Liu Wansu's medical books are among the sources of Tan's formulas, it is therefore very likely that Tan knew who they were, and learned of the topos from their biographies. Qiao Dai, being Tan Yunxian's contemporary colleague and having a reputation for curing an epidemic disease in Shanghai, may have also been transmitted to Tan. However,

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<sup>116</sup> Zhu Quan 朱權, "Chong ke baoming ji xu" 重刻保命集序, in *Suwen bingji qi yi baoming ji* 素問病機氣宜保命集 (Beijing: Renmin weisheng chubanshe, 1963), 2-3.

<sup>117</sup> Chen, *Tushu jicheng*, 335. Translated into English by the author of this thesis.

there is less of a chance that Qiao's biography was read or known by Tan Yunxian due to the distance between Shanghai and Wuxi, an increase of medical specialists in the Ming dynasty, and unclear life dates. Yet, there are other biographies like Qiao Dai's recorded around Wuxi, Suzhou, and other areas around the Yangtze Delta region,<sup>118</sup> Tan Yunxian may have heard about them from others.

Additionally, all of the biographies have different details in accordance with their different situations, the difficulties in becoming a medical specialist or during their medical careers. Among all the factors which create these differences from Tan's autobiographical preface, the most important one is gender difference.

### 3.4 Gender and Becoming a Medical Specialist

If Tan's autobiographical preface's structure is compared with the basic structure of the topos of "strange encounter", there are some additional units added. The structure of her preface is as follows:

- (1) Her family background;
- (2) How she received permission to begin medical education;
- (3) Her medical education.

Then, the later part of the preface follows the three basic units of the topos of "strange encounter":

- (4) Her grandmother passes away, she becomes sick and goes into a coma. She encounters her grandmother's ghost in her dream.
- (5) Her grandmother tells her where to find the formula to cure herself, and points out her destiny of a medical career.
- (6) She acquires legitimacy, qualification, and a reputation as a medical specialist in society, so female patients come to her.
- (7) She writes her medical case book, *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*.
- (8) She asks her son to copy her book and publish it.

Units 2, 3, 7, 8 are the additional units she added in her preface. Among them, 3 and 7 are also common additional units to be added in male medical specialists' biographies. Zhang's biography and Liu's autobiographical preface all mention how in the beginning they taught themselves medicine. Liu's biography in *The History of Jin*, his autobiographical preface, and Zhu Quan's preface all mention how he wrote medical books to pass down his medical knowledge. However, units 2 and 8 are never seen in male medical specialists' biographies, due to gender differences.

Tan Yunxian had to add unit 2 into her autobiographical preface to legitimize her

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<sup>118</sup> Chen Daojin 陈道瑾, ed., *Jiangsu lidai yiren zhi* 江苏历代医人志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu kexue jishu chubanshe, 1985), 102, 187, and 369; Chen, *Tushu jicheng*, 239-468.



learning of medicine. As mentioned in Chapter 2, as a woman, she had to be granted permission to acquire the chance of receiving a medical education; otherwise, she could only learn needlework, practice poetry, study female virtues, and practice skills necessary for managing a scholar-official household, such as accounting and cooking. Therefore, in her autobiographical preface, she has to specifically write that it was her grandfather's order and not her own wish, thus avoiding trespassing or threatening the gender boundaries. Being in a passive position and complying with the elder's order to fulfill the duty of a granddaughter to obey, and not being the initiative character who asks for the chance herself, perfectly covers her ambition to a medical career and her medical learning to be accepted by society.

Zhang, Liu, and Qiao on the contrary do not need to justify their pursuit of medical learning. Although some of their biographies also provide reasons why they studied medicine, the purpose is more to introduce their backgrounds. None of them received permission from their parents or elders to study medicine, they naturally have the right to decide to study medicine. When Zhang Yuansu was not able to participate in the civil examinations anymore, it was his decision to choose medicine as an alternative career to make a living. Liu Wansu does not even explain why he set a goal in studying medicine in his autobiographical preface to *Collection of Writings on the Causes of Illness, Principles of Qi, and the Saving of Life in the Basic Questions*. His biography collected in *The History of Jin* even totally neglects his early medical education, only setting the focus on how he received his medical talents from a supernatural being. Only Zhu Quan added that his medical career was a destiny fated by Heaven's will, but this is to explain why Liu was able to achieve his influential accomplishments. Qiao Dai, who, like Tan Yunxian, came from a hereditary-doctor family, was naturally expected as a man to receive a medical education to inherit the family's medical career. No male medical specialists needed to receive permission to learn medicine like Tan Yunxian. Gender difference certainly played a crucial part in how Tan Yunxian adjusted the structure of her narrative.

Unit 8 was also added due to the gender issue. For male medical specialists, it is common that they publish medical books themselves. Sometimes the publication and further editions would be managed by their sons. Men, in addition to naturally having the right to study medicine, also have the right to publish their writings. However, being a woman, Tan Yunxian did not have the right to do so, she may not even have had the chance to receive permission from her elders, parents, or husband. Gender segregation in the Ming dynasty restricted women's writing from being circulated outside the household, otherwise, the women's reputation might be ruined, and chastity would be doubted. From the Tang dynasty onward, some female writers would even burn their work to avoid their writings being leaked outside the household, so their reputation would be secure.<sup>119</sup> Therefore, Tan Yunxian states, "Because I am female, I cannot go out in public so I asked my son [Yang] Lian to copy it and

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<sup>119</sup> Berg, *Women and the Literary World*, 33.

to have blocks carved for printing so that I can pass it on” (而妾女流不可以外，乃命子濂抄寫鋟梓以傳).<sup>120</sup> Even though she was already fifty years old when she published her book, she was still cautious about this restriction.

Although the units other than 3 and 8 follow the basic structure of the narrative pattern “strange encounter”, this does not mean that they were not adjusted due to gender restrictions. As a woman, being successfully granted permission to receive a medical education did not naturally mean that she also acquired the legitimacy to start a medical career. If Tan Yunxian only had a hereditary-doctor background and married into the same medical household, her medical career may have been justified more easily due to the fact that the family could also depend on her skills to make a living, such as the female medical specialists née Jiang and née Fang of the hereditary medical lineage of the Chang family, as mentioned in Chapter 1. However, for a lady who grew up in a scholar-official household and would very likely marry into another elite family, it would be considered improper for her to step out of the household and show her face in public to treat patients.<sup>121</sup> Her presence had to remain within the inner chamber, and other family members would be considered it enough that she only practices her medical skills for the purpose of taking care of her family members.<sup>122</sup> It is also because the family did not need to depend on her skills to make a living, and that her primary duty is being a care taker of her family members. Although in Chapter 1 it was argued that having both Confucian-scholar official and hereditary doctor backgrounds could serve as an assurance of her skills for the patients, her background was at the same time also a restriction on her path toward a medical career due to her gender.

Therefore, after making the argument to justify her medical training, she had to further make the second discourse to legitimize her behavior of pursuing a medical career. From units 4 to 6, she applies the basic structure of “strange encounter” into her narrative. In her narration, like the way she describes herself as passively receiving permission to begin her medical education, she continues to emphasize her passive role when legitimizing her medical career in her narrative. This time, she uses the strategy of hiding her desire of becoming a female doctor under the cover of destiny, indicating it is not because she had wanted this herself, but only because she was destined to do so. In her brother Tan Yifang’s postscript for *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*, he points out that Tan Yunxian certainly has a strong passion for studying medicine:

She was cherished by Grandmother Ru; they were always together whether drinking or eating, during activity or rest. All they talked about was medicine and herbs and anything that entered Lady Tan’s ear was never forgotten.

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<sup>120</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 37

<sup>121</sup> Yi, *Sangu liupo*, 142-143.

<sup>122</sup> Leung, “Qian jindai Zhongguo”, 372-373.

為祖母茹太宜人所鍾愛，飲食動息必俱。所言莫非醫藥，孺人能入耳即不忘。<sup>123</sup>

She was so deeply interested in medicine that what she talked about with her grandmother always centered on medicine, and her strong passion may have been her motive in pursuing a medical career. However, she has to downplay this in her narrative to avoid being criticized.

To remain in a passive role in her narrative, Tan needs someone to speak for herself; to order her to work as a medical specialist or to point it out as her destiny. In this case, a supernatural being, especially her elder, would be the most suitable one to play this role. One reason was the moral obligation of filial piety, as the younger family members had to obey their grandmother's order. Another reason was the belief that the deceased ancestors' or elders' orders to the living through dreams would be beneficial to the later generation's well-being.<sup>124</sup> Thus, her grandmother née Ru's ghost serves the role of a messenger to announce her fate in her narrative.

However, after she successfully acquires the legitimacy to have a medical career through her grandmother's announcement of having such a fate, the gender of her patients remains to women. The only male patient she recorded in her preface is her son Yang Liang. The risk of losing her reputation and chastity limits her, forcing her to specifically point out that only female patients came to her. Zhang, Liu, and Qiao on the contrary do not need to point out the gender of their patients, as they could treat both females and males without being criticized by others.

Yet, although there are narrative strategies Tan Yunxian applied in her preface, it does not mean that all the events were made up by her. Except for Tan's dream, herself being a child prodigy, her grandmother's death, and the disease she suffered for seven months, are all events which were also witnessed by her family members. These events did happen and were reconstructed by her; she narrated them in a way that would most benefit her circumstances.

While Tan Yunxian uses the narrative pattern of "strange encounter" to acquire the legitimacy to have a medical career, Zhang, Liu, and Qiao have others reasons to apply such a narrative. There are two possible purposes to apply this writing tradition in biographies of medical specialists. The first one is to explain their extraordinary achievements or talent. The second one is to advertise their medical skills and increase their reputation among the public, so more patients would entrust their health on them and they would also have greater chance to leave their names in history.

Both Zhang and Liu's biographies may have used this narrative tradition for the second purpose. According to Zhang and Liu's biographies, they very likely were self-taught medical specialists and therefore could not rely on their family's reputation, as hereditary-doctors could, or a teacher's fame like those who were students of famous medical specialists.

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<sup>123</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 147

<sup>124</sup> Fang Jingpei and Zhang Juwen, *The Interpretation of Dreams in Chinese Culture* (New York: Weatherhill, 2000), 45.

Therefore, in order to make their skills more reliable, and also to answer the question of why without guidance from a master or heritage of a medical household they could become the most influential medical specialists of their time, being gifted knowledge by supernatural beings was a reasonable explanation. As for Qiao Dai, his background of coming from a hereditary-doctor family already explained how he mastered medical skills, but it may not have been enough to explain why he suddenly had the idea of using a water plant as a remedy for an epidemic disease. In this case, being enlightened or told by a supernatural being is a good reason. It can also serve as an advertisement for Qiao Dai, for according to his biography he became famous only after his story of encountering a supernatural being and curing hundreds had begun to circulate.

All in all, in this chapter, I have argued that Tan Yunxian's narrative of her process of becoming a female doctor did not derive from the tradition of female shamans as Charlotte Furth proposes, but likely from the narrative pattern of medical specialists' biographies, particularly "strange encounter". Tan Yunxian likely learned of this narrative pattern from Zhang Yuansu and Liu Wansu's biographies, since their medical books are two the sources for her medical formulae. It is also possible that she had read some of her contemporary male colleagues' biographies and acknowledged these narratives. However, although the structure of Tan Yunxian's autobiographical preface is mostly similar to the male medical specialists' biographies, she introduced several new elements and incorporated additional units to make the writing tradition fit her case. The adjustments in her preface show how she had to surmount extra obstacles to become a medical specialist and to avoid being criticized by others. The restrictions which she had to work through were imposed on her mostly due to the simple reason that she was a woman, particularly the intensified gender segregation in the Ming dynasty. It is noteworthy that Tan tried to step out of these limitations to pursue a career, and how she developed strategies to work around these restrictions while still able to achieve her goals.

In short, gender did largely impact the narrative and structure of Tan Yunxian's autobiographical preface, and significantly influenced her process of becoming a medical specialist.

## Chapter 4

### Male Elites' Perspective toward Tan Yunxian

Tan Yunxian uses a narrative to legitimize her desire of becoming a female doctor, and additionally to avoid being criticized by elite men. The elite men's perspective toward Tan Yunxian as a female doctor and to her medical case book is also worthy of attention. From recent scholarship, four elite men commented on Tan Yunxian's *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*. They were Tan Yunxian's younger brother Tan Yifeng, her cousins Ru Luan and Zhu En 朱恩 (no life date known), and her grandnephew Tan Xiu. Ru Luan wrote a preface for *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*, while the others wrote postscripts for the book. There were said to be two more prefaces or postscripts by two elders, Shao Wenzhouang 邵文莊 (no life date known) and Ru Shaocan 茹少叅 (no life date known), but their writings are considered lost.<sup>125</sup> In the surviving comments on Tan Yunxian's medical case book, these men all recognize and admire Tan Yunxian's talent and achievements in medicine. Moreover, one striking factor of their comments is that most of them regard Tan Yunxian as equally outstanding as talented male figures, which is not commonly seen in Ming dynasty literati narratives on talented women.

#### 4.1 The Tragedy of Talented Literate Women

From the 16<sup>th</sup> century onward, the prosperity of commercial activity, the widespread publishing industry, and the increase of the urban population, created a perfect environment for the literary education of women in the mid-to-late Ming dynasty. The sharp increase of the number of literate women, the intensified demand for female education, combined with society's gender segregation, created new career opportunities for many literate women. Women came out of their inner chambers to become teachers, writers, poets, dramatists, editors, and female doctors. The stronger presence of women in society created tensions among elite men, since this phenomenon had an impact on Confucianism's social order and gender hierarchy. Also, when the Ming dynasty philosopher Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472-1529) recognized women as having the same potential as men to become sages,<sup>126</sup> his idea also potentially imposed a threat on the balance of the gender hierarchy. Although some talented women received recognition for their outstanding literary works, in the late Ming literati's eyes, they were still considered inferior and unfitted for positions other than courtesans and within a scholar-official family's household.<sup>127</sup>

To explain the unsettling existence of talented literate women in society, Daria Berg's

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<sup>125</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 145.

<sup>126</sup> Berg, *Women and the Literary World*, 44.

<sup>127</sup> Berg, *Women and the Literary World*, 64.

research finds that elite men developed two common narratives when portraying talented female figures in literary works.<sup>128</sup> One was the portrayal of the early death of these talented women before their marriage, so they would not have the chance to leave the inner chambers. Another was to remove them from the human realm to the supernatural world, and to deify or immortalize them. In other words, to make them become transcendents (*xian* 仙).<sup>129</sup> Once the women had been removed from the human realm and relocated to the supernatural world, they would not have the chance to shake the human realm's social order any more.

A typical example of these two kinds of portrayals in Tan Yunxian's time was the case of Tanyangzi 曇楊子 (1558-1580). Born two years after Tan Yunxian's death, Tanyangzi was the daughter of Wang Xijue 王錫爵 (1534-1611), who was appointed as senior grand secretary (*neige shoufu* 內閣首輔) in 1585. She is described as a child prodigy in her biography written by Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526-1590), who also had written a preface for *The Tan Family's Literature Collection* (*Tan shi wenxian lu* 談氏文獻錄).<sup>130</sup> As a child, she had shown a strong inclination to religious worship and practice, and converted her father to become her follower and had many famous male literati among her disciples. She was betrothed to Xu Jingshao 徐景韶 (no life date known) when she was 17 years old, but after the two families exchanged betrothal gifts, Xu Jingshao passed away. Tanyangzi wept over his death and decided to live as a widow. She was said to have burned all her writings and ascended to heaven and to have become an immortal, in broad daylight, witnessed by one hundred thousand people, at the age of 22.<sup>131</sup>

The fact that even Tanyangzi's father was a student of hers was shocking for the male elite, as it completely went against the orthodox Confucian family order. Her father Wang Xijue thus received criticism for such behavior. To save his reputation and justify his behavior, he worked with Wang Shizhen, also one of the followers of Tanyangzi, to write a biography of Tanyangzi together.<sup>132</sup> In this biography, their portrayal of Tanyangzi reduced her threat of gender imbalance by confining her existence to the inner chambers and cancelling her public role by her early death and transformation to a transcendent. When she first showed her talent, she was only a child in the inner chambers. When she reached adulthood and was about to have the chance to leave the household, her fiancé died, she, therefore, continued to stay in her home as a widow. Then, after only five years, she became a transcendent and gone to another world. Throughout her lifetime, her unorthodox behavior was limited to her private

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<sup>128</sup> Berg, *Women and the Literary World*, 46.

<sup>129</sup> Berg, *Women and the Literary World*, 55.

<sup>130</sup> Wang Shizhen 王世貞, "Tan shi wenxian lu xu" 談氏文獻錄敘, in *Yanzhou xugao* 弇州續稿, ed. *Wenyuange siku quanshu* 文淵閣四庫全書, vol. 1282 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2003), 707-708.

<sup>131</sup> Ann Waltner, "Telling the Story of Tanyangzi," in *Yu yan mi zhang: Zhongguo lishi wenhua zhong de "si" yu "qing"* 欲掩彌彰：中國歷史文化中的「私」與「情」, ed. Xiong Bingzhen 熊秉真 (Taipei: Hanxue yanjiu zhongxin, 2003), 215-218, and 224-225; Wang Shizhen 王世貞, "Tanyang dashi chuan" 曇陽大師傳, in *Yanzhou shanren xugao* 弇州山人續稿, vol. 8, ed. Shen Yunlong 沈雲龍 (Taipei, Wenhai chubanshe, 1970), 3789-3849.

<sup>132</sup> Waltner, "Telling the Story of Tanyangzi," 227.

household, thus she was not threatening to the society's gender hierarchy anymore.

Yet, not all the male literati wrote this kind of portrayals of talented literate women. Aside from their fear about talented literate women, some late Ming male literati on the contrary, considered the combination of beauty, tragedy, talent as a attractive literary motif.<sup>133</sup> The biographies of talented yet tragic young women were popular stories during the late Ming dynasty, such as those about the female poets Feng Xiaoqing 馮小青 (1595-1612), Ye Xiaoluan 葉小鸞 (1616-1632), and talented women turned into immortals, such as Tanyangzi, Tu Yaose 屠瑤瑟 (1575-1600), and Shen Tiansun 沈天孫 (1580-1600). All were said to have been female child prodigies who had brilliant literary talents comparable to those of men, and who suffered an early death for different reasons.<sup>134</sup>

However, most of the male literati's portrayals of Tan Yunxian do not follow the narrative tradition of the talented tragic woman that Daria Berg discovered. Among the four men who had either written prefaces or postscripts for Tan Yunxian's work, only Zhu En's postscript places her in the line of talented tragic women figures and argues that her achievements were easier to accomplish due to her gender. He states:

I have heard the talk of doctors; they say, "I prefer treating ten men to treating one woman." The reason for their feeling of hardship in treating women is not only due to the separation of inside and outside, it is also because of differences in their temperament. But when a female treats a female, she can estimate the patient's temperament because hers is the same. This is like the military strategy of anything can be overcome when one uses barbarians to attack barbarians. [...] Lady Tan has also suffered like her predecessors; this composition can be compared to the odes of Ban Ji, the calligraphy of Lady Wei, or with the poetry of Zhu Shuzhen. There will be a lot of different opinions regarding the merits and faults of her motivation [for writing this book]!

余聞醫家之說有曰：寧醫十男子，不醫一婦人。其所以苦於醫婦人者，非徒內外相隔，亦由性氣不同之故也。惟婦人醫婦人，則以己之性氣，度人之性氣；猶兵家所謂以夷攻夷，而無不克者矣…若孺人者，奚復有前所言之苦哉，然則是編之作較之班姬之賦，衛夫人之書，與朱淑真之詩；其用心得失，豈不大有可議者耶。

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Zhu En argues that the reason why it was especially difficult for male medical specialists to treat female patients was because men and women have different physical natures and

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<sup>133</sup> Berg, *Women and the Literary World*, 151.

<sup>134</sup> Berg, *Women and the Literary World*, 67-68, and 134.

<sup>135</sup> Zhu En 朱恩, "Du Nüyi Zayan" 讀女醫雜言, translated in *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*, trans. Lorraine Wilcox and Yue Lu (Portland: The Chinese Medicine Database, 2015), 142.

qualities. As a man, it is difficult to understand female bodies, but since Tan Yunxian herself is a woman, she can comprehend her female patients' bodies, feelings, and sicknesses more easily, and therefore she is able to cure many women's illnesses. Zhen En's argumentation was a common perspective among male medical specialists toward female patients at the time. Ming male medical specialists often found it difficult to treat female patients, as it was more difficult for men to understand the functions of the female body, which added to the challenge of making proper diagnoses and applying suitable medicines.<sup>136</sup>

Apart from the differences between the genders, the difficulties toward treating females were also due to the intensified gender segregation and the strong tendency to limit females' presence to the household. Since male medical specialists often could not see their female patients face to face to examine their sickness, they had to rely on female patients' male relatives or close maids to describe the sickness to them. Also, due to the protection of female patients' chastity and reputation, it was a common situation that women chose not to be treated by male medical specialists but instead preferred to see a female medical specialist.<sup>137</sup>

Perhaps due to Zhu En's perspective, Tan Yunxian's achievements were seen as having been accomplished due to her gender, and thus Zhu En placed her among the line of talented female figures that had made extraordinary contributions in different fields. The first name, Ban Ji 班姬, refers to Ban Zhao 班昭 (circa 45-117), who was a female poet, historian, and writer in the Eastern Han dynasty. She was praised for her contribution to the completion of the dynastic history, *Book of the Former Han* (*Hou Hanshu* 後漢書), and as the author of the female educational book *Lessons for Women* (*Nüjie* 女誡). She served as a respected palace teacher for the women living in the harem and died at the high age of 70 years.<sup>138</sup> The second name, Lady Wei 衛夫人, refers to 衛鑠 Wei Shuo (272-349), an excellent calligrapher in the Eastern Jin dynasty. She was the teacher of the famous male calligrapher Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303-361).<sup>139</sup> According to her son Li Chong's 李充 (no life date known) biography, her husband Li Ju 李矩 (no life date known) suffered an early death.<sup>140</sup> The last woman mentioned, Zhu Shuzhen 朱淑真 (1135-1180), was a female poet in the Southern Song dynasty. It was said that she had an unhappy marriage and possibly had an affair with a lover outside her marriage. In the end, she drowned herself due to the exposure of her affair.<sup>141</sup>

From the male literati's point of view, although these women were masters in their

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<sup>136</sup> Cai Zhengchun 蔡政純 and Shi Huikai 釋慧開, "Mingdai yiji zhong de nüxing zhenliao wenti" 明代醫籍中的女性診療問題, *Shengsi xue yanjiu* 生死學研究 3 (January 2006): 196-199.

<sup>137</sup> Cai and Shi, "Mingdai yiji," 178-180.

<sup>138</sup> Fan, *Hou hanshu*, vol. 10, 2784-2786.

<sup>139</sup> Lü Wenming 呂文明, "Cong guzhi dao jinyan: Wei furen zai Liangjin shufa chuancheng zhong de zhouxin diwei" 从古质到今妍: 卫夫人在两晋书法传承中的轴心地位, *Zhongguo shufa* 中國書法 352, no. 8 (April 2019): 118-125; Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠, *Fashu yaolu* 法書要錄, ed. *Jinyin Wenyuange siku quanshu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書, vol. 812 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshu guan, 1986), 111.

<sup>140</sup> Fang Xuanling 房玄齡, ed., *Jin shu* 晉書, vol. 8 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 2389.

<sup>141</sup> Huang Yanli 黃嫣梨, "Zhu Shuzhen shiji suoyin" 朱淑真事迹索隱, *Wen shi zhe* 文史哲, no. 6 (December 1992): 23-30.



respective literary or artistic fields, they were all in some way defective or suffered in marriage. Ban Ji and Lady Wei's husbands both suffered an early death, and they became widows and never remarried. It was said that Zhu Shuzhen had an unhappy marriage and was divorced. She remarried but was still depressed until her very last days.<sup>142</sup> Tan Yunxian may have suffered an unhappy marriage as these women as well. Even though there was no direct evidence that Tan Yunxian also suffered in her marriage, the absence of her husband's presence in her preface, as well as the fact that her husband and her husband's family members did not write a preface or postscript for her medical book, may hint that she did not have a good relationship with her husband or her husband's family.

The possible reason for this may have been that she did not fulfill her duty to continue her husband's bloodline, and the Yang family may not have entirely supported her medical career. Thus, Tan Yunxian not only suffered both the early death of her only son and grandson, but also as Zhu En would seem to suggest, faced a defective marriage like Ban Ji, Lady Wei, and Zhu Shuzhen. It was also due to their tragic and imperfect lives that their literary achievements could be explained and accepted by the male literati. Women who had talent had to pay a price, had to suffer or were deficient in different ways. Only by the fated imperfection in women's lives did men could still feel superior to them.

However, from Tan Yunxian's perspective, she must have felt no need to justify her being a talented woman in society, but only to justify the legitimacy of her studying medicine. Therefore, when she wrote her preface, at the age of 50, except for her medical education and career, her life was rather ordinary. Like most ladies from scholar-official households, Tan Yunxian was married into another scholar-official family, the Yang family, when she reached adulthood. Her husband was a seventh-rank official (*qipin guan* 七品官) and they had four children. For her, it was natural to carry her talent into normal marriage and ordinary household life. Living as a talented woman in society was by no means as problematic as some elite men thought it to be.

## 4.2 A Woman who is Comparable with Men

To examine closely male literati's different perspectives toward Tan Yunxian through their preface and postscripts written for *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*, of Ru Luan's preface and Tan Yifeng's and Tan Xiu's postscripts are worthy of closer examination. How these texts differ from the narrative tradition of talented tragic women is particularly noteworthy, as well as the reasons why their portrayals of Tan Yunxian do not follow this narrative tradition.

The first notable difference between Ru Luan, Tan Yifeng, and Tan Xiu's writing as compared with Zhu En's, is that, rather than placing Tan Yunxian within the line of talented

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<sup>142</sup> Huang, "Zhu Shuzhen shiji suoyin," 28-29.

but tragic women figures of the past, most of them consider Tan Yunxian as comparable to extraordinary male medical specialists. They also argue that only a few men could have accomplished her achievements, stressing how exceptional her contributions were, given the difficulties she faced. They characterize her as deserving of praise. For instance, Ru Luan, Tan Yunxian's cousin, writes in his preface:

Now, it is said to be extremely difficult for a man to be good at practicing medicine. Lady Tan Yunxian is proficient in book-learning, examining the pulse, and getting quick results when prescribing herbs; many girls and women rely on her to keep themselves healthy. She is capable of writing a book so that [her experience] won't be lost. Her heart-mind of saving people surpasses that of males.

夫醫在丈夫，稱良甚難。孺人精書，審脈投藥輒應；女婦多賴保全。又能為書，以圖不朽；活人之心，殆過男子。<sup>143</sup>

Here, Ru Luan indicates that becoming a good medical specialist is already difficult to achieve for a man, but Tan Yunxian, as a woman, was indeed skilled in medicine, and many women entrusted their health to her. He also stresses that she had a strong intention to save the living which even surpassed that of men. Twice he emphasizes that Tan Yunxian, regardless of her gender, possesses both excellent medical skills and a benevolent heart which are not only comparable but even greater than that of her male colleagues.

Tan Yifeng, one of the Tan Yunxian's younger brothers, also regards Tan Yunxian as superior to men and places emphasis on her outstanding contributions, which only a few people could accomplish:

Lady Tan is intelligent, alert, and perceptive, far beyond anyone in my brother's generation [including cousins] [...] The contributions of a good doctor and a good minister are equivalent. The words above [in Tan's case studies] can be used to rescue people from their difficulties. From former times until now, not many people can be counted as good ministers; how few can be called good doctors! And furthermore in later times! And even further as a woman!

孺人聰慧警敏，迥出吾兄弟輩於戲...良醫之功與良相等，右有是言以活人之難也。汭而上之稱良相者，代不數；稱良醫者，能幾何哉，而況於後世乎，況於婦人乎。

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<sup>143</sup> Ru Luan 茹鑾, "Ru xu" 茹序, in *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*, trans. Lorraine Wilcox and Yue Lu (Portland: The Chinese Medicine Database, 2015), 32.

In this text, he mentions that Tan Yunxian is the most brilliant person among her generation's brothers and male cousins, and praises Tan Yunxian even more than Ru Luan, even considering her contributions to be equivalent to those of a minister. His complements likely came from Fan Zhongyan's argument, as mentioned in Chapter 1. Fan argues that if one cannot become a minister, then the second-best option will be to become a good doctor since the goals of these two occupations are the same: to benefit society and help those in need.

Tan Xiu, Tan Yunxian's grandnephew and the publisher of the second edition of *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*, wrote a postscript for this edition in 1585. As a child, he may have personally remembered Tan Yunxian and with his own eyes seen her cure patients in an almost magical way, and therefore he admired her greatly. He portrays Tan Yunxian as a miraculously skillful medical specialist:

My paternal grand-aunt, Lady Tan Yunxian, was a female doctor who was famous in her town. She died of old age at 96. Over the course of her life, the people she saved cannot be counted. When I was losing my milk teeth, I saw her treating women with my own eyes; their diseases responded to her hand as if she simply cast them off. Can we not call her the female Bian Que?

祖姑楊孺人，以女醫名邑中，壽終九十有六。生平活人不可以數計。余在齠髻，目覩其療婦人病，應手如脫，不稱女中盧扁哉？<sup>145</sup>

In this text, he considers Tan Yunxian the female counter part to the legendary Chinese medical specialist Bian Que 扁鵲 (407 BC-310BC). Bian Que was said to be able to raise the dead and to be skilled in pediatrics, gynecology, and surgical skills, all of which Tan Yunxian also mastered.<sup>146</sup> In the Song dynasty, Bian Que was posthumously given the title of Marquis of Lingying 靈應侯 and later even the title of the King of Shenying 神應王 by Emperor Renzong of the Song 宋仁宗 (r.1022-1063). Emperor Renzong of the Song also established a temple for him to worship him as the deity of medicine.<sup>147</sup> To have considered Tan Yunxian to be comparable with such a legendary male figure suggests that Tan Xiu indeed had a high regard for her.

<sup>144</sup> Tan, "Nüyi Zayan ba," 147.

<sup>145</sup> Tan Xiu 談脩, "Zhong ke Nüyi Zayan ba" 重刻女醫雜言跋, in *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*, trans. Lorraine Wilcox and Yue Lu (Portland: The Chinese Medicine Database, 2015), 144.

<sup>146</sup> Sima, *Shiji*, vol. 6, 2785-2794.

<sup>147</sup> Tuo Tuo 脫脫, ed., *Song shi* 宋史, vol. 39 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 13520.

### 4.3 The Unacceptable Tragic Fate

Unlike Zhu En, Tan Yifeng, Ru Luan and Tan Xiu all place Tan Yunxian among the talented male figures. One possible reason may have been that Tan Yunxian lived in the mid-Ming dynasty, and the narrative tradition of talented tragic women that Daria Berg posits became more widespread in the late-Ming dynasty.<sup>148</sup> In the mid Ming, the portrayal of literate women may had not been fully developed and was not commonly being applied in talented women's biographies yet. The second reason may have been that Tan Yunxian was a female doctor. Most talented tragic women who attracted male literati's attention and were thus portrayed by them, were famous poets, courtesans, or religious women.<sup>149</sup> Records on female medical specialists were few, and often without much detail, and their stories are not as widespread and popular as those about female writers. Their biographies, therefore, do not have a particular narrative tradition development, so Ru Luan, Tan Yifeng, and Tan Xiu did not necessarily need to follow a certain narrative tradition when portraying Tan Yunxian in order to be accepted by the readers of *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*. The third reason may have had to do with Tan Yunxian's age when she published *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*. She was 50 years old when the first edition was published and hence was respected as an elder. The portrayal of a female figure that made her name as an old lady is different from the portrayal of a well-known young lady, and the focus would be mostly on her work, not her person. Not being a beautiful young woman who suffered an early death did not fit into the most popular narrative on talented but tragic women.

The last reason may have been due to personal circumstances. Taking Tan Xiu as an example, his postscript explains his motivation to publish the second edition of *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*. As discussed before, he held Tan Yunxian in such high regard that he considered her comparable with the legendary medical specialist Bian Que. However, his strong appreciation of her also led to his equally strong dissatisfaction attitude toward Tan Yunxian's son's and grandson's ill-fated lives. In his mind, Tan Yunxian, who saved so many people's lives, should have been rewarded with having children who enjoyed prosperous lives. The prosperity of her children would benefit Tan Yunxian when she became old, as this would ensure that her children could take care of her and even increase her reputation in society. Yet, on the contrary to expectations, her son Yang Liang 楊濂 died early and her grandson Yang Qiao 楊喬 (no life date known) was sentenced to death due to far collusion with criminals and covering up their crimes (*zhulianbi zui* 株連蔽罪). Tan Xiu not only felt it difficult to accept the tragedy of seeing her children die before her, but even started to question whether the records in history books were reliable or not. Although it is not stated clearly what books he read, these records perhaps contained stories of people acting morally and benefiting others,

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<sup>148</sup> Berg, *Women and the Literary World*, 46-47, and 75-77.

<sup>149</sup> Berg, *Women and the Literary World*, 75-77.

who then were rewarded by heaven with the prosperity of their descendants:

I have heard that the descendants of someone who saves a large group of people will prosper, but Lady Tan's son [Yang] Lian died early; then her grandson [Yang] Qiao was implicated in a criminal case; he was sentenced to death, his descendants were killed, and he was beheaded. How could what I heard from the historical records be so unreliable? This upset me for a long time and I couldn't let go of it.

第余聞人活人眾者其後必昌，孺人之子濂既早亡；孫喬復以株連蔽罪死，爰室祀遂斬焉。豈余聞諸史冊者，不足憑乎？為之搯腕者久矣。<sup>150</sup>

The tragedy was not only miserable for Tan Yunxian because she had to see her children die before her, but also because from the perspective of a patriarchal family, although Tan Yunxian still had three daughters, without a male descendant, she was considered to not have any direct descendant any more. This put an end to both her husband's and her own bloodline, meaning that if they did not adopt a son, no one would perform filial piety to them and take care of them when they became old. Also, after their death, they would not have rightful descendants to pay respect at their graves annually, thus their souls would not be in peace.

Tan Xiu's conflict toward Tan Yunxian's children's tragedy also led to his decision to publish the second edition of *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*, to give Tan Yunxian a reward that she could receive. He proposes:

I moistened my brush to re-copy the book and had the plates engraved. Even though her son and grandson cannot pay back what Lady Tan did to save people, she will still leave a noble name that will not decline in future generations.

余重濡翰而鐫勒之，則孺人所為活人者，不得食報於子孫，尚垂名於世世為不朽哉。<sup>151</sup>

By publishing the second edition of her book, Tan Xiu hoped that at least her name, contributions, and achievements would be remembered. His action of immortalizing her through the text was the only compensation he could do for Tan Yunxian. Also, perhaps only by doing so, he could finally resolve and remedy Tan Yunxian's tragedy.

However, this was not easy. According to Tan Xiu's postscript, the first edition of *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor* was already lost in the family archives when he decided to republish it. Around 1585, one day he was looking through the family's archives,

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<sup>150</sup> Tan, "Zhong ke Nüyi Zayan ba," 144.

<sup>151</sup> Tan, "Zhong ke Nüyi Zayan ba," 146.

he found a handwritten postscript for the *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor* by his grandfather, Tan Yifeng. The postscript is also the only remains of the first edition of Tan Yunxian's book in the Tan family. Later on, he had a hard time searching for the first edition until a visitor named Guo Hanjiang 郭寒江 (no life date known) heard about his project of publication, then came to provide him with a copy of the first edition. Thus, in 1585, he was able to publish the second edition of *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*.<sup>152</sup>

Overall, since Tan Xiu's postscript was not written to explain or justify Tan Yunxian's existence as a talented woman, but to resolve his personal conflict toward her tragic life, his narrative would naturally not follow the narrative tradition of talented tragic women which Daria Berg discovered. His thoughts on Tan Yunxian's case are also unusual. In the biographies of other talented tragic women written by male elites, none of them felt the same agony which Tan Xiu had toward Tan Yunxian's tragedy. Rather, they were fascinated with the portrayal of tragic women and even promoted it.<sup>153</sup> Tan Xiu's conflict may be due to the fact that he was close to Tan Yunxian and admired her, so he naturally wished her to have a happy life. Another reason may have been her hereditary literati-doctor background. Instead of considering Tan Yunxian one of the talented female writers or poets, in Tan Xiu's perspective, he may have identified Tan Yunxian more as one of the figures of the Confucian-scholar doctors, and so compared her with male Confucian-scholar doctors rather than talented female writers. He, therefore, believed that Tan Yunxian should be rewarded the same way as the moral historical male figures.

In summary, this chapter has explored four elite men's perspectives on Tan Yunxian's medical career and medical case book. These men all admired Tan Yunxian's talent and accomplishments in medicine in their prefaces and postscripts despite their different portrayals of Tan Yunxian. One portrays her in the time of the talented tragic female figures from Ban Ji to Lady Wei, to Zhu Shuzhen, while the others rather consider her comparable with legendary male medical specialists such as Bian Que.

Their attitudes are in fact not surprising, since their willingness to write a preface or postscript for *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor* already means that they support her a medical career. Their admiration of her could also be for advertising purposes if the book had been sold commercially. It also doesn't mean that there were no people who considered Tan Yunxian's medical career or the book's publication improper. Those who were Tan Yunxian's close relatives but did not write a preface or postscript for her medical book may have been less supportive of her, such as her husband and her son Yang Lian. Nevertheless, in the end, Tan Xiu succeeded in making Tan Yunxian immortal in history by publishing the second edition of *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*.

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<sup>152</sup> Tan, "Zhong ke Nüyi Zayan ba," 144-146.

<sup>153</sup> Berg, *Women and the Literary World*, 76.

## Chapter 5

### Publication

Regardless of where Tan Xiu's conflict toward Tan Yunxian's tragedy come from, his conflict eventually led to his decision of publishing Tan Yunxian's *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*. However, publishing and preserving female works in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Ming dynasty was not a common trend as it was from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onward. In this chapter, it will be discussed how Tan Yunxian published her work, and the difficulties she faced will be examined in the light of the last part of Tan Yunxian's autobiographical preface. The factors which influences the preservation of *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor* in the contexts of private publication (*jia ke* 家刻), female's publishing activities, and medical case books will also be explored.

Tan Yunxian's preface of *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor* ends with how she came to publish her medical case book. When Tan Yunxian reached the age of fifty, she suddenly realized that time was passing so fast that she had already past two-thirds of her lifetime, if what her grandmother had said was true, that she would live until 73 years old. (In fact, she lived until she was 96 years old) Tan Yunxian, therefore felt the need to leave the records of her medical treatments to help other medical specialists when treating female patients, before she passed away:

Many harvests [years] have passed by swiftly and now I am already fifty years old. This is two-thirds of the lifespan predicted by my Grandmother. I secretly lament that human life is like a sunbeam passing through a crack [life is brief]; I do not know how many days I have left. I diligently use ordinary days to refer to the things Grandmother taught me as well as what I have learned on my own and have compiled a number of cases. I named it *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*. I would like to use it to ask for advice from famous doctors. Because I am female, I cannot go out in public so I asked my son [Yang] Lian to copy it and to have blocks carved for printing so that I can pass it on. Perhaps my subjective opinions can help another doctor in certain cases. I hope the reader will not sneer at it.

The fifth year of Zhengde's reign, in the third month of spring of a geng wu year (1510) on the 16<sup>th</sup> day of the third month, narrated by Tan Yunxian who is married to Yang

倏忽數稔，今妾年已五十，屈指太宜人所命之期，三去期二矣。竊嘆人生駒過隙耳，余日知幾何哉。僅以平日見授于太宜人及所自傳者，撰次數條，名曰：《女

醫雜言》，將以請益大方家。而妾女流不可以外，乃命子濂抄寫鈔梓以傳，庶臆見、度說或可為醫家萬一之助云耳，觀其者毋謂讓可也。

正德五年歲，在庚午春三月既望歸楊談允賢述<sup>154</sup>

In her narrative, she first expresses her concern about not having too many days left in her life. Then directly states her desire of wanting to publish her grandmother's teaching and her own medical experiences into a book, called *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*, and she hopes that her book would help and benefit other medical specialists. Lastly, she explains that due to the reason that she is a woman, her handwriting cannot be circulated outside, she orders her son to transcribe her text and publish it for her.

As previously discussed, Tan Yunxian was always careful to avoid directly expressing her desires of having a medical career, instead hiding her interests under the cover of her elders' order and the duty to fulfill filial piety. However, this time, her narrative is more relaxed. She directly states that it is her idea to publish her book and order her son to help her do so. Charlotte Furth speculates that the shift of tone in her narrative is due to her age in this part of text. Having now become an elder in the family, she is more respected and her orders must be fulfilled by her children due to filial piety.<sup>155</sup>

Yet, there is still the potential risk that she may draw criticism. There are two problems she must deal with: First, women's publishing in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century was not common, let alone women's medical work,<sup>156</sup> and may have been considered an improper act. Secondly, the circulation of her handwriting outside of her household would damage her family, and her reputation and her chastity. From the Tang dynasty onward, it was even expected for women to burn their works to prevent their writings from being leaked out of the household and to protect their reputation.<sup>157</sup> If their works have survived and been preserved, it was often due to the efforts and support of the men around them.<sup>158</sup>

For the first problem, Tan Yunxian came up with a reason to have her work published: to help other medical specialists. Since her intention was not to gain profit out of her medical knowledge, but out of the concern of humanity, devotion, and benevolence, in correspondence with Confucianism morals, her publication could be accepted without criticism. She also uses a modest tone, humbly saying that her work may only offer a little help to others, and pleads not to be laughed at by her readers. As for the second problem, it would not have been a problem. At the age of fifty, the circulation of her handwriting outside of her household should not be as problematic as other young ladies, since she would not be considered

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<sup>154</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 37.

<sup>155</sup> Furth, *A Flourishing Yin*, 289.

<sup>156</sup> Wu, *Reproducing Women*, 77.

<sup>157</sup> Beata Grant and Wilt Idema, *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 164; Berg, *Women and the Literary World*, 33.

<sup>158</sup> Berg, *Women and the Literary World*, 33.



attractive enough to have affairs anymore. Yet, why would she still feel the need to mention this issue in her preface?

One possible reason may be that Tan Yunxian originally did not care about it herself, but her male relatives, perhaps her husband, father, or father-in-law, cared about it and thus reminded her to not circulate her handwriting outside. Another reason may be that it was a literary trope her readers expected her to write in her preface. Also, since it was not common for a woman to publish a medical work, she may have wanted to be as careful as possible and to avoid being criticized. Therefore, her solution was to have her son Yang Liang copy her text and to order him to publish her book, so that her handwriting would be kept inside the household, with only the content being circulated outside. As a result, in 1510, Yang Liang published the first edition of *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*, but both the publication information and the complete content was not preserved. Then, after 75 years, Tan Xiu, out of his conflict between Tan Yunxian's tragic outcome and classical historical books, decided to publish the second edition to commemorate and repay Tan Yunxian. In the spring of 1585, the second edition of *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor* was published in the form of a household publication, collected in *The Tan Family's Literature Collection*.

Besides Yang Liang's filial piety and Tan Xiu's efforts to commemorate Tan Yunxian, there are larger historical backgrounds that contributed to the publication of *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*. As a book, it possesses a combination of complex features, and is at the same time a household publication, a medical case book, and an example of women's writing in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This kind of publication is not by coincidence, at a time when household publications, medical books, and female publishing activities started to flourish and become an enormous phenomenon in Ming China. As a product of these three trends, it seems to indicate the beginning of a new age in printing and book culture in the Jiangnan area. Also, this new age of the printing served as the most fundamental basis which enabled the publishing of *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*.

## 5.1 Household Publications

Household publications, or so-called private publications, refers to books printed by families or individuals, such as family genealogy books, collections of family writings, family instructions (*jia xun* 家訓), purchased-land contracts, books to celebrate male family members' examination success or female members' chastity, etc.<sup>159</sup> These types of household publications were intended only for private use and non-commercial purposes. They would be circulated only within the family, be stored in the family archive, or held by the most important family leaders of a different lineage. One reason was that the contents of these

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<sup>159</sup> Joseph P. McDermott, "Private Non-Commercial Publishing in Ming China and Its Private Uses," in *Imprimer sans profit?: le livre non commercial dans la Chine impériale*, ed. Michela Bussotti and Jean-Pierre Drège (Genève: Librairie Droz S.A., 2015), 206, and 214.

household publications were deemed only meaningful and useful to family members. Another reason was that they included content that the family considered improper to be leaked outside the household, such as political criticisms, heterodox religious teachings, or private discussions that family members would like to keep secret.<sup>160</sup>

However, not all household publications were non-commercial; some also circulated in the market commercially, such as reference books for civil examinations, or manuals for daily life.<sup>161</sup> Likewise, not all non-commercial publications were restricted only within the family, but the opposite. In some cases when a publisher wanted to preserve a certain text, he would produce free of charge editions for famous collectors so that they might add the publisher's name into their book catalogue or reprint it. Another situation was when someone published family members', a friend's, or their own collected writing. Their goal would be to promote the texts that they considered worthy to be read by other people or to commemorate a family member. Yet, the real purpose could also be to put the publisher's name in print.<sup>162</sup> In other words, household publications could also be used to convert a family's cultural capital into book forms to earn reputation or profit.<sup>163</sup>

The earliest household publications can be dated back to the Song dynasty, but it is around the third quarter of the 15<sup>th</sup> century that the number strikingly increased<sup>164</sup> One major factor which contributed to the growth of private, non-commercial publications was lineage construction. In the 1520s to 1550s, Neo-Confucian rituals became orthodox which led to the administrative change of the registry of land. Besides being registered under the names of individuals, land could also be registered under households or ancestors, providing for the upward mobility of some family members. In 1536, the Jiajing Emperor 嘉靖 (r. 1521-1567) allowed even commoners to build ancestral halls and pay respect to their ancestors according to Neo-Confucian rituals. These two factors led to the significant increase of the number of household publications, ancestral halls, and lineage organization in the Jiangnan area, which were important ways to construct lineages in the ancestral dominated society from the Ming to the Qing dynasty.<sup>165</sup>

Other factors that contributed to the flourishing of household publications were the low costs and relatively simple techniques of woodblock printing and binding, which made it possible for family members to complete the whole process of book publishing all by

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<sup>160</sup> McDermott, "Private Non-Commercial Publishing," 213-214.

<sup>161</sup> Lianbin Dai, "Household Publications in the Society of Ming Hangzhou," in *Imprimer sans profit? : le livre non commercial dans la Chine impériale*, ed. Michela Bussotti and Jean-Pierre Drège (Paris: Librairie Droz S.A., 2015), 340.

<sup>162</sup> Joseph P. McDermott, "Noncommercial Private publishing in Late Imperial China," in *The Book World of East Asia and Europe 1450-1850*, ed. Joseph P. McDermott and Peter Burke (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2015), 134-135.

<sup>163</sup> Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 38.

<sup>164</sup> Dai, "Household Publications," 353, and 393-394.

<sup>165</sup> Dai, "Household Publications," 368-369.

themselves. It was said to be so easy that “even women and children could do it”,<sup>166</sup> requiring only three to four years of training. Thus, family members could handle the various skills of editors, scribes, cutters, printers, binders, and booksellers. The price of paper was also getting cheaper,<sup>167</sup> the only thing that would need to be done outside the household was the block-cutting which required the greatest skill, the longest training, and the highest costs. It was also due to these circumstances that commercial organizations were often lineage businesses, through which family could gain access to the necessary kinds of labor to establish its own publishing house.<sup>168</sup>

Interestingly, the dates of publication for the first and second editions of *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor* correspond to the two highest peaks of the printing of household publications. The first edition was published in 1510, the time of the first significant rise in the number of household publications around the early 16<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. The second edition was published in 1585, which was the second rise was from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century to the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>169</sup>

Even though there is no direct evidence that indicates *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor* was a household publication, judging by from its publishing details, this was very likely the case. Since most of the publication information of the first edition was lost, the following arguments are based on the second edition. First of all, according to *The Tan Family's Genealogy's* record, the second edition was included in *The Tan Family's Literary Collection*, which was one of the most common kinds of the publication produced by a lineage.<sup>170</sup> Secondly, since the second edition was published by Tan Yunxian's grandnephew Tan Xiu, the author-publisher relationship of the second edition is what Dai Lianbin defines as the “family membership” type. Family membership refers to a situation in which the publisher and author are in the same lineage, within four generations either in the patrilineal or matrilineal line.<sup>171</sup> It is one of the major author-publisher relationship types among both commercial and non-commercial household publications.<sup>172</sup> Third, Tan Xiu was also the scribe of the second edition of *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*,<sup>173</sup> indicating that the family may also have possessed other publishing skills. Lastly, previous research indicates that the publishing house of the second edition, Chun Jing Tang, belonged to the Tan family.<sup>174</sup> The argument in favor of this could be based on the original copy of the second

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<sup>166</sup> Cynthia Brokaw, “Empire of Texts,” in *The Book World of East Asia and Europe 1450-1850*, ed. Joseph P. McDermott and Peter Burke (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2015), 185.

<sup>167</sup> Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 35.

<sup>168</sup> Brokaw, “Empire of Texts,” 184-188.

<sup>169</sup> Dai, “Household Publications,” 393.

<sup>170</sup> Luo, “Mingdai nüyi Tan Yunxian,” 6, and 98. For instance, the only known survived content of *The Tan Family's Literature Collection* was the preface written by Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526-1590) and *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*.

<sup>171</sup> Dai, “Household Publications,” 359.

<sup>172</sup> Dai, “Household Publications,” 361, and 399-400.

<sup>173</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 146.

<sup>174</sup> Luo, “Mingdai nüyi Tan Yunxian,” 6; Zheng Jinsheng 鄭金生, “Mingdai nüyi Tan Yunxian ji qi yian Nüyi

edition published in 1585. However, due to the global pandemic, the library of The China Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences (*Zhongguo zhongyi yanjiu yuan tushuguan* 中国中医研究院图书馆) is currently inaccessible, and thus information about this edition from the real book is not obtainable at present. Yet, according to the reprinted edition published by Ancient Chinese Medical Book Publishing (*Zhongyi guji chubanshe* 中醫古籍出版社) in 2007 *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor's* original publishing house in 1585 is being referred as Chun Jing Tang of the Tan Family in Xi Shan (錫山談氏純敬堂).<sup>175</sup> The information confirms that Chun Jing Tang was a family publishing house and the second edition of *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor* a household publication.

While it is confirmed that *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor* was a household publication, but whether it was a commercial or non-commercial type of publication is still unknown. What can be more certain, is that was is not the type which only circulated within the household, but was intended to be distributed to the public, in order to exchange the family's cultural capital for reputation. This and its publicity were important facts that contributed to its preservation. Both the first and second edition were not preserved well within the Tan family, but outside of it. When Tan Xiu searched for the first edition, it was preserved in the house of Guo Hanjiang. The Tan family had only kept the postscript by Tan Yifeng. Also, the only surviving copy of the second edition at present was discovered in the study of Fan Xingzhun 范行准 (1906-1988), a Chinese medicine pharmacist and historian who lived in Zhejiang 浙江 province. He later donated the second edition to the library of The China Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences.<sup>176</sup>

It seems odd that a household publication was better preserved outside of the household in which it was published. Even though the preservation of household publications is still an understudied field, it is still possible to discuss this question if another factor is considered: the fact that *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor* was written by a woman. It was only after the late 16<sup>th</sup> century that literati began to notice the issue of the preservation of women's writings, and thus started to collect them. Before the late Ming dynasty, women's writings were often not well preserved.<sup>177</sup> Although the second edition of *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor* was published at a time when both literate men and women began to take notice of the issue of bad preservation of women's writings, they mostly focused on the maintenance of women's poetry works.<sup>178</sup>

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Zayan” 明代女医谈允贤及其医案《女医杂言》, *Zhonghua yishi zazhi* 中华医史杂志 29, no. 3 (July 1999): 154.

<sup>175</sup> Tan Yunxian 谈允贤, *Nüyi Zayan* 女医杂言 (Beijing: Zhongyi guji chubanshe, 2007), 3.

<sup>176</sup> Zheng, “Mingdai nüyi,” 154.

<sup>177</sup> Kang-i Sun Chang, “Ming and Qing Anthologies of Women's Poetry and Their Selection Strategies,” in *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*, ed. Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 147.

<sup>178</sup> Chang, “Ming and Qing Anthologies,” 148.

## 5.2 Women's Writing and Publishing Activities

Unlike the significant growth of household publications which began in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, women's writing and publishing culture was at the time rather inactive. The flourishing of women's publishing activities started decades after, from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and continued into the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It began with the mass import of silver from the Americas and Japan, creating a monetary economy in the Jiangnan region from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. The economic boom enriched families' wealth and thus gave extra resources for women to receive education, producing a crowd of literate women.<sup>179</sup>

At this time, due to the movement against rigid styles of writing and the promotion of the "literature of inspirational gusto" (*xingling wenxue* 性靈文學),<sup>180</sup> these educated women were most encouraged to write poetry. The promotion of 'literature of inspirational gusto' argued that good literature could only be created out of an individual's innocence, nature, and truthful self-expression, and among all the genres of writing, poetry was considered to be the best to express one's sincere voice. Therefore, the advocators suggested that since women were segregated from public and political pressures, they were more innocent and sentimental than men, and thus wrote better poems.<sup>181</sup>

The trend of encouraging women to write poetry also lay in the public's interest, as well as the profits it created. Women's poetry anthologies were so popular in the seventeenth century that book merchants actively searched for hidden poetry manuscripts by women.<sup>182</sup> This fascinated interest in women's poetry contributed to the preservation of women's work. The more popular the writing, the better chance it had to be printed in large quantities, be reprinted and circulated widely, as well as a higher chance it would survive.

Since the first edition of *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor* was published before this "golden age" of women's publishing, it is understandable why it was not well preserved. 1510 was neither a time when women's writings were recognized as valuable to read and collect, nor a time when readers were interested in them. However, it may also have been a better time for Tan Yunxian to develop the idea of writing a medical case book and put it into practice. The publication of women's writing flourished due to poetry and thus contributed to the preservation of their work, but it also marginalized and discouraged other types of writing.<sup>183</sup> Before there was a strong tendency of associating women's writing with poetry, educated women may have had fewer constraints in attempting other types of writing. For example, Tan Yunxian's contemporary Zou Saizhen 鄒賽貞 (fl. 1496), was a female writer also from a scholar-official family background. Her collected works include poems,

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<sup>179</sup> Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 30-32.

<sup>180</sup> Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 59.

<sup>181</sup> Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 59-62.

<sup>182</sup> Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 59-62.

<sup>183</sup> Wu, *Reproducing Women*, 20-21.

diaries, epitaphs, and funeral orations.<sup>184</sup> The 15<sup>th</sup>-century court lady Xia Yunying 夏雲英 (no life date known) wrote poems and Buddhist prose.<sup>185</sup> Even so, more studies and research would be required to confirm the assumption that female writers before the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century attempted more kinds of writing than those after the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

In short, it was the phenomenon of poetry being the dominant genre of women's writing in the Ming dynasty that influenced the preservation of *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*. Since women were not encouraged to write medical books and it was not popular among the readers, *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor* may not have been considered valuable enough to be preserved for later generations by most of its readers, even the Tan family. Besides the issue of poetry being the dominant genre of women's writing, the other factor which affected the preservation and circulation of *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor* was the publishing of medical case books.

### 5.3 Medical Books

The expansion of the publishing of medical books began earlier than household publications and women's writings, already in the Song dynasty. At that time, the study of medicine became part of the cultural capital of elite men, and the distribution of useful medical knowledge to the public also became part of the expression of Confucian benevolence.<sup>186</sup> The phenomenon was perhaps parallel with the development of the concept of literati doctors. The construction of the identity of literati doctors not only elevated the status of medical specialists but may also have added the practice of medicine to the moral acts practiced by Confucian scholars.

The second expansion of the publishing of medical books overlapped with household publications in the sixteenth century. Differing from the first expansion during the Song dynasty, the cause of the growth in the number of medical books was the increasing numbers of lower-level literati, such as the government student (*shengyuan* 生員) degree holders. The growth of the economy in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the lower cost of book publishing led to the spread of education. However, official positions did not increase along with the growing literate population. The intensified competition in the civil examinations lowered the chances to enter a bureaucratic office significantly, and those who were never lucky enough to be successful in the civil examinations needed to find alternative careers to make a living. Many turned to study medicine, as access to medical knowledge became easier due to the

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<sup>184</sup> Wang Hongmei 王紅梅, "16-18 shiji Zhongguo Jiangnan diqu de nüxing yu chuban wenhua: yi guixiu ji de kanke yu baocun wei zhongxin" 16-18 世紀中國江南地區的女性與出版文化：以閩秀集的刊刻與保存為中心 (PhD diss., Xianggang Zhongwen Daxue, 2019), 50.

<sup>185</sup> Kang-i Sun Chang and Haun Saussy, ed., *Women Writers of Traditional China: An Anthology of Poetry and Criticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 167.

<sup>186</sup> Wu, *Reproducing Women*, 57-58.

flourishing of the printing industry. Also, since practicing medicine was considered as one of the expressions of Confucian benevolence, it was a career that could still fulfill the ideology of Confucianism. When literati became medical specialists, they continued to produce more medical books as an activity to achieve Confucian moral values.<sup>187</sup> This led to a boom in the publishing of medical books in the Ming dynasty.

The medical publications included medical textbooks for beginners, study guides, books of prescriptions, and medical case books.<sup>188</sup> A medical case book refers to a collection of cases which records how the author, often the medical specialist himself, cured his patients' diseases. However, before the Ming dynasty, medical case books were not written by medical specialists themselves, but compiled by their descendants or others, and it was not a common genre of medical books. It was only from the Ming dynasty onward that they became popular on the book market.<sup>189</sup> The phenomenon of choosing to write a medical case book rather than other types of medical works was related to the decline of state control and management of the medical knowledge in the Ming dynasty.

The decentralization of medical culture created an environment that allow it for medical specialists to claim medical authority for themselves, rather than from canonical, classical medical works. They argued that illness would appear differently due to patients' individual conditions; therefore recovery would depend on medical specialists' skills in adjusting treatments due to the patients' differences.<sup>190</sup> Medical case books thus served as the most suitable type of genre to exemplify their discourse, as they recorded, in the form of collected cases, the detailed processes of medical treatments of individual patients in different conditions. As Charlotte Furth states, "Using narrative techniques of plot — human predicament, suspense and their resolution—the case history could capture this fleeting process and reveal the logic behind the reasoning that produced a diagnosis, and the combination of drugs that effect a cure."<sup>191</sup> Since a medical case book would reveal the author's specialized medical treatments on patients, it also served as an advertisement to advocate the author's preferred methods of treatment, such as ways of diagnosis, medical theories, and prescriptions. It was also interesting to read, as cases were written in the form of narratives. The author often portrays himself as a hero, saving the patient from quacks (*yongyi* 庸醫). The climax of a case would be the medical specialist's customized prescriptions and the successful recovery of the patient.<sup>192</sup>

*Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor* was published before the trend of publishing medical case books. The popularity of medical case books was started by the publication of *Medical Cases of Stone Mountain* (*Shi Shan yi'an* 石山醫案), around 1531, and *Categorized*

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<sup>187</sup> Wu, *Reproducing Women*, 58.

<sup>188</sup> Wu, *Reproducing Women*, 59.

<sup>189</sup> Furth, *A Flourishing Yin*, 225; Zheng, "Mingdai nüyi," 155.

<sup>190</sup> Furth, *A Flourishing Yin*, 226.

<sup>191</sup> Furth, *A Flourishing Yin*, 226.

<sup>192</sup> Furth, *A Flourishing Yin*, 226.

*Cases of Famous Doctors* (*Mingyi lei'an* 名醫類案), in 1549.<sup>193</sup> However, *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor* was published twenty years before *Medical Cases of Stone Mountain*. It is so far the earliest known individually authored medical case book in the Ming dynasty.<sup>194</sup> While it is remarkable that Tan Yunxian evidently was a pioneer of this trend, there were also disadvantages to this circumstance. One disadvantage was the negative impact on the book's circulation and preservation. Since it was a new kind of publication, only few book collectors and readers would have an interest to acquire a copy of it and carefully preserve it. This could be one of the reasons why the first edition was lost, and even the second edition copy survived only in one copy, the latter was issued during a period in which the publication of medical case books became common.

Being one of how being the first medical case books in the Ming dynasty evidently influenced the preservation and circulation of *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*. However, there are also other questions worthy of attention, such as, what inspired Tan Yunxian to write a medical case book? And where did she learn of the genre and how to narrate a case? While *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor* is the earliest medical case book published in the Ming dynasty, it is not the first one in the history of medical case books. The one medical case book published prior to *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor* is *The Medical Cases of Danxi* (*Danxi yi'an* 丹溪醫按), in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It is a collection of Zhu Zhenheng's 朱震亨 (1281-1385) selected medical cases.<sup>195</sup> The book was edited by Dai Yuanli 戴原禮 (1324-1405), who was an imperial doctor and also a student of Zhu Zhenheng's.<sup>196</sup> Tan Yunxian was likely to have read *The Medical Cases of Danxi*, because Zhu Zhenheng was her favorite source for medical prescriptions.<sup>197</sup>

As other indication that Tan Yunxian may have read *The Medical Cases of Danxi*, there are similarities of narrative style between *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor* and *The Medical Cases of Danxi*. Both books provide patients' personal information, the symptoms, the prescriptions used to heal the patients, and information on whether patients had recovered or not. Both books' medical cases do not point out where the consultation and the medical treatment take place. Therefore, it is also possible that Tan Yunxian's narrative style of her medical cases may have been learned from *The Medical Cases of Danxi*.

Yet, Tan Yunxian's respect toward Zhu Zhenheng may not have been the only reason why she felt necessary to publish a medical case book. As Tan Yunxian was trying to relocate the medical authority from the medical classics to her pursued expertise, it is one of the major motivations for medical specialists to publish medical case books. She might also have felt that the medical classics were incompetence and not adequate enough for the Ming dynasty

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<sup>193</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 16.

<sup>194</sup> Zheng, "Mingdai nüyi," 155.

<sup>195</sup> Zheng, "Mingdai nüyi," 155.

<sup>196</sup> Liu Shijue 刘时觉 and Xue Yiyun 薛轶燕, "Danxi yi'an de liuchuan he kaozheng" 《丹溪医按》的流传和考证, *Zhonghua yishi zashi* 中华医史杂志 35, no. 2 (April 2005): 80.

<sup>197</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 19.



medical specialists, especially when it came to treating women. As pointed out in Chapter 4, due to the reinforced gender segregation, male medical specialists felt it more difficult to treat women. Tan Yunxian may therefore have felt the need to publish a medical case book which primarily focused on how to treat women's diseases.

In sum, the reason as to why the first edition of the *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor* was lost, but the second edition survived, lies in the combination of a several contextual factors in the publishing field, such as household publication, women's writing, and medical case book. The most determining factor which influenced its preservation lies in the interest of the readers during its publication time. Although the first edition was published at a time when household publications were popular, it was also a time when both the interest in women's writing and medical case books were not yet general trends, leading to its loss. On the other hand, the second edition was published at a time when the three kinds of publication were being recognized, and its chances of survival may have increased.

Although overall *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor* did not gain the interest from Ming readers, it reflects the courage Tan Yunxian had to publish her book, and thus to attempt a new thing. Being a pioneer meant she could not know how exactly the readers would react to her book. It might have drawn more criticism than praise and fame for herself and her family, but she still chose to face the uncertainty, and was willing to try to achieve her goal.

## Chapter 6

### Tan Yunxian's Medical Cases

In the *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor* written by Tan Yunxian, there are a total of 31 medical cases. Each case records the patients' age, gender, sometimes their social class, the cause of sickness, and the prescriptions or medical treatments Tan Yunxian employed. The patients' ages range from six to 69 years, all of them females suffering from different diseases. As the intention of this book was to provide a record of Tan Yunxian's own experiences in treating women in order to help other medical specialists, the focus of her case narratives in her cases are the medical treatments and the medicines she prescribes. Thus, previous research on Tan Yunxian's medical cases, such as that by Charlotte Furth, Luo Shihang, and Lorraine Wilcox, primarily discuss these cases in the context of medical history. These studies center around the features of female doctors' treatment, the sources of Tan Yunxian's prescriptions, and how she adjusted the prescriptions in accordance with the individual patients' conditions.<sup>198</sup>

However, besides these issues, what other features do these medical cases have? And what other aspects can these cases reveal? In this chapter I argue that these medical cases can be analyzed and discussed from various perspectives such as gender history and micro history approaches, which focus on common people's mentality and daily life experiences.<sup>199</sup> Other than diseases, prescriptions, and medical treatments, the 31 cases also reflect the struggles women faced in their daily lives. Regardless of physical or mental issues, these daily struggles often were the causes of their sicknesses and were expressed in their bodies. Also, while all of them have different kinds of sicknesses, the causes are indeed very similar within one social group. The similarity of the causes of sicknesses is again interrelated with social class.

Gender also plays an important role in the patients' struggles and diseases. While some of the sicknesses presented affect both men and women, some are gynecological diseases that only affect women, such as pregnancy, miscarriage, or abortion. Sometimes the female patients' illnesses are not only caused by their female body, but are due to their gender roles as wives. Female patients often struggle with their relationships with their husbands or parents-in-law, exhaust themselves within household duties, or get too angry about their husbands wishes to take a concubine. These issues not only make female patients suffer from psychological pressures, but also lead to physical diseases.

This chapter discusses some cases which include the causes of sicknesses of the patient. These concern 22 out of the 31 cases. Case numbers were labeled by the translator, Lorraine

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<sup>198</sup> Furth, *A Flourishing Yin*, 285-300; Luo, "Mingdai nüyi Tan Yunxian," 34-78; Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 39-141.

<sup>199</sup> Andrew Port, "History from Below, the History of Everyday Life, and Microhistory," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavior Sciences*, ed. James D. Wright (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2015), 108-113.

Wilcox.<sup>200</sup> The seven patients among these 22 cases are lower class women (cases 1, 2, 3, 9, 16, 19, 29), seven patients are higher class women (cases 10, 11, 17, 18, 21, 25, 27); and eight concern patients from unclear social class (cases 4, 6, 12, 23, 24, 26, 28, 31), although some include clues indicating their social class. For instance, the patients of cases 6, 23, and 28 are possibly higher class women. The husband of the patient in case 6 is wealthy enough to think about acquiring a concubine. The husband of the patient in case 23 often spends money to sleep with female performers or prostitutes. Case 28 records a girl whose parents are affluent enough to let her eat sweets as much as she likes. Therefore, there are in total at least 10 cases which record women of a higher social class.

The factors used to determine a patient's social class are the patient's or her husband's professional profile, and if Tan Yunxian had indicated if a patient is from a wealthy family or not. If the patient or her husband's professional profile was a labor worker or a merchant, she would be classified in the lower social class. If Tan Yunxian had indicated the patient is from wealthy family background, then she would be classified into the higher social class. Yet, the classification of a patient's social class could be inaccurate due to the limited information about the patient's background.

This chapter will begin with the comparison of the causes of sicknesses between lower class women and higher class women, and then address a few interesting cases and remarks on the medical culture in the Ming dynasty.

## 6.1 Social Class and Sicknesses

In the seven cases which indicate that the patients are from a lower social class, the major cause of sicknesses is work-related fatigue. The work here does not refer to managing their household in the inner chambers, but their own professional duties. There are two housemaids, one boatwoman, one liquor brewer, one who helps in the family's kiln, one housewife and whose husband is a middle man, and one woman whose professional profile is unknown.

When comparing them with how hard Tan Yunxian had to work to legitimize her own career, it is striking to read that these women could have their own professions and be seen in the public. However, it was common that lower class women enjoyed more freedom in having a career and being visible in public, unlike higher class women in the Ming dynasty.<sup>201</sup> One reason is that the strict gender segregation imposed on Tan Yunxian was mostly practiced in the higher social class, among the women who were considered to be decent ladies.<sup>202</sup> Another reason is that these lower class women simply needed an income to support their families because either their husbands passed away, or their husbands' income alone could not

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<sup>200</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 39-141.

<sup>201</sup> Yi, *Sangu liupo*, 117.

<sup>202</sup> Yi, *Sangu liupo*, 105-106.

support the family.<sup>203</sup>

Yet, while these lower-class women enjoyed more freedom to take careers outside the household, they were considered to be indecent women in society. Also, they were often exhausted by their work, and their fatigue developed into severe physical sicknesses. Among the cases Tan Yunxian recorded, one housemaid suffered scrofula sores, with thirty swollen lumps on her neck;<sup>204</sup> another housemaid suffered from jaundice.<sup>205</sup> Both sicknesses were triggered and worsened by tiredness from work. Some of them even suffered these sicknesses for years before Tan Yunxian treated them. The boatwoman suffered numbness in both hands for six years, because she held the tiller (*duo* 舵) on a passenger boat (*kechuan* 客船) regardless of season and weather.<sup>206</sup> The woman who was helping in her husband's family kiln suffered from heavy uterine bleeding for three months which turned into vaginal bleeding for three years. The sickness began when she was too exhausted from carrying bricks and tiles in menstruation.<sup>207</sup>

Aside from being tired out by work, another factor which caused diseases in lower class women were the poor living conditions. One case records that a woman had serious pain, itching and leprosy (*lai* 癩) all over her body for a year (the disease is not exactly the same with the modern-day concept of leprosy, it also includes symptoms such as scabies, ringworm, mange, and hair loss). Her sickness was due to living in a shabby house which did not properly shelter her from wind or sun after giving birth.<sup>208</sup> In short, as can be seen from Tan Yunxian's medical case book's records, lower class women often struggled with hard labor and poor living conditions.

By contrast, since higher social class women did not need to make a living through physical labor themselves, and did not have to live in poor housing conditions, the causes of their sicknesses were often psychological, rather than physical. Among the ten cases of women from the higher social class, two women were too sorrowful about their close family members' deaths, four were too angry about their husbands taking a concubine or sleeping with prostitutes, and one did not adapt well in her husband's family.

Their struggles, however, were just as difficult to deal with as the lower class women. Many of them also suffered from diseases for several years, and it was often their severe sorrow and anger that damaged their bodies. For example, a woman suffered atrophy for a year, because first her daughter had passed away and she felt too much pain by it and cried very hard; then, within half a year, her husband encountered an accident and also died (*biangu* 變故). Her grief damaged her body and developed into atrophy for one year.<sup>209</sup> Similarly, a

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<sup>203</sup> Yi, *Sangu liupo*, 117-119.

<sup>204</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 95.

<sup>205</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 108.

<sup>206</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 45-47.

<sup>207</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 48-51.

<sup>208</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 70-73.

<sup>209</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 103-107.

69-year-old woman suffered from insomnia for two years after her husband's sudden death.<sup>210</sup> Tan Yunxian herself also fainted for seven months after her grandmother had passed away.

Sometimes, their sicknesses were due to both physical and psychological problems. A woman suffered three miscarriages; every time the fetus was already three to four months old. She had already successfully given birth to four daughters. Her husband thus became worried about not having a son and wanted to take a concubine. The woman discussed this matter with Tan Yunxian, but they could not come up with a plan to stop her husband. Eventually, her sorrow and anger in addition to the tiredness from running the household become too hard to endure, and this prevented the fetus from growing normally, and resulted in repeated miscarriage.<sup>211</sup>

While the seven adult women from a higher social class struggle with their excessive sorrow and anger, two girls from wealthy families have their own specific problems: they were spoiled by their parents and overindulged in food. Their parents' excessive love toward them had hurt and damaged their bodies. One girl suffered from diarrhea for a year and another girl could not digest food for two months which almost led to her death.<sup>212</sup> The wealthy woman in case 10 also suffered from diarrhea due to her desire to consume too much food.<sup>213</sup>

In summary, the causes of sicknesses among the female patients indeed have a strong relation with their different social classes. Due to their different living conditions, they also faced different challenges in their lives. The lower class women often struggled with hard labor, whereas the higher class women are overcome by their strong emotions and desires. This doesn't mean, however, that lower class women didn't suffer from any psychological problems. The lower frequency of lower class women struggling with psychological problems may be due to the Tan Yunxian's limited number of recorded cases. Also, they often had to work to make a living, so they didn't find the time to care about their emotions too much. Lastly, despite the different struggles they had due to their social class, there were also struggles these women shared regardless of their class, because these were related to their gender. The next section will discuss such cases.

## 6.2 Gender, Marriage and Sicknesses

The common causes of sickness among women, regardless of their social class, often were their marriages. This includes not having a good relationship with one's parents-in-laws after marriage, being too far away from one's own parents, a husband who was not a good person, and problems of pregnancy. For example, Case 1 describes a woman whose husband is a

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<sup>210</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 96-102.

<sup>211</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 131-133.

<sup>212</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 76-78, and 134-135.

<sup>213</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 73-76.

middle man and who frequently cheats others' money. The woman was thus very angry about her husband's bad behavior, and suffered from vomiting and coughing up blood for three years.<sup>214</sup> Case 31 records a woman who took an abortion medicine because she had already given birth ten times and was too afraid of having another child. However, she had lost too much lochia for half a year and was already close to death.<sup>215</sup>

Furthermore, many of these women had to face not only one, but multiple challenges at once after their marriage. Case 25 records a woman who was wealthy and honored, and who could spend and use her family's wealth to be profoundly comfortable; but after she married into her husband's family, she could not adapt well. Although her husband's family was also wealthy, her parents-in-law were strict and stingy. Since her parents lived too far away from her, and her husband was also too young to deal with such matters, her sorrow and worry developed into abdominal lumps for three years.<sup>216</sup> Case 12 describes a woman who was pregnant for six months and had malaria for three months. When Tan Yunxian inquired the patient about the cause of getting malaria, the patient attributed her malaria to her parents-in-law condemning her for occasionally eating a bowl of noodles with chicken. After she took Tan's prescriptions for three months, she had a miscarriage around the 9<sup>th</sup> month of her pregnancy. Her malaria came back again severely, so Tan Yunxian treated her again, and then she finally recovered.<sup>217</sup>

The cause of the struggles of these women lies in the marriage culture of the Ming dynasty. The common practice of arranged marriages meant that women hardly knew what kind of person their husbands or parents-in-laws were before marriage, so many suffered from not adapting well in the new family.<sup>218</sup> Living with a group of strangers was already challenging enough, women at the same time had to fulfill the other difficult duty of giving birth to a son. The risks of giving birth and the worry of not having a son also added enormous stress when it came to pregnancy. If a wife failed to have a son, she might have to face the misery of a husband taking a concubine to give birth to a son. Although childbirth was one of the duties of the wife, since the task required only fertility, it was easy for wealthy families to find a concubine or maid to fulfill the duty of the wife.<sup>219</sup> The misery felt by a wife when a husband took a concubine not only was due to the jealousy of having to share the husband with another woman, but also because concubines might even challenge her authority in the household.<sup>220</sup>

Yet, giving birth was also a difficult and dangerous matter. Its' difficulties not only lay in

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<sup>214</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 39-45.

<sup>215</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 138-141.

<sup>216</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 125-128.

<sup>217</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 78-84.

<sup>218</sup> Yi, *Sangu liupo*, 131.

<sup>219</sup> Paul R. Goldin and Debby Chih-Yen Huang, "Polygyny and its Discontents: A Key to Understanding Traditional Chinese Society," in *Sexuality in China: Histories of Power and Pleasure*, ed. Howard Chiang (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018), 27.

<sup>220</sup> Goldin and Huang, "Polygyny and its Discontents," 26.

the severe pain women have to endure when giving birth, but also in the possibility of having postpartum diseases with high mortality rates.<sup>221</sup> Furthermore, these challenges often began when women were still teenagers, since the most common age for women to be married off was after the beginning of their puberty.<sup>222</sup> Once married, they had no other choice but to live with these difficulties without a way out, as divorce was usually not an option for them. Thus, it is no wonder that many women endured severe mental suffering for years.

### 6.3 Mental Illnesses, Physical Sicknesses and Treatments

Aside from the common causes of sicknesses related to women's social class and gender issues, there are also a few cases of diseases resulting from personal reasons or the patients' personalities. Case 29 records a woman who worked as a liquor brewer who suffered anorexia for a month after she had lost a valuable silver ornament.<sup>223</sup> Case 4 is about a woman, who had miscarried six times because by disposition she easily got angry.<sup>224</sup> These patients, as well as the cases mentioned previously, suffered from sicknesses that occurred due to psychological problems, which in a modern understanding would require consultation with a psychotherapist. Although there was no specialization in psychotherapy in the Ming dynasty, there actually are records of medical specialists who treated patients' mental illnesses not with medicine, but by using carefully-planned talking and acting skills, dating as early as the Jin and Yuan dynasties. Nathan Sivin defined this treatment as "emotional counter-therapy" and it has similarities with modern-day psychotherapeutic treatments.<sup>225</sup>

"Emotion counter-therapy" was derived from one of the earliest Chinese medical classics, *The Inner Canon of the Yellow Emperor*. It states that, "Anger damages the liver, sadness wins over anger; happiness damages the heart, fear wins over happiness; longing damages the spleen, anger wins over longing; worry damages the lungs, happiness wins over worry; fear damages the kidney, longing wins over fear" (怒傷肝, 悲勝怒; 喜傷心, 恐勝喜; 思傷脾, 怒勝思; 憂傷肺, 喜勝憂; 恐傷腎, 思勝恐).<sup>226</sup> The passage first shows that medical specialists already recognized how strong emotions could damage people's physical health and cause sicknesses, even before the Jin and Yuan dynasties. It also explains why, when Tan Yunxian wrote down her medical cases, she considered that many patients' illnesses were triggered by strong emotions such as intense sadness or anger. Secondly, it provided a theory

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<sup>221</sup> Wu, *Reproducing Women*, 192.

<sup>222</sup> Patricia Ebrey, "Women, Marriage, and the Family in Chinese History," in *Heritage of China: Contemporary Perspectives on Chinese Civilization*, ed. Paul S. Ropp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 198.

<sup>223</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 135-137.

<sup>224</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 51-53.

<sup>225</sup> Nathan Sivin, "Emotion counter-therapy," in *Medicine, Philosophy, and Religion in Ancient China* (Hampshire: Variorum, 1995), 1-17. Transcribed from Chen Xiufen 陳秀芬, "Qing zhi guo ji fei yao ke yu: shilun Jin Yuan Ming Qing de 'yi qing sheng qing' liaofa" 情志過極, 非藥可愈: 試論金元明清的「以情勝情」療法, *Xin shixue* 新史學 25, no. 1 (March 2014): 5.

<sup>226</sup> Chen, "Qingzhi guo ji," 6-7.

for medical specialists to use to counter the emotions that triggered the illness. This theory was later further developed by the Jin-dynasty medical specialist Zhang Congzheng 張從正 (1156-1228).

Chen Xiufen's research found that Zhang Congzheng's therapy is similar to modern day 'talking cure' therapy, in which the language of the psychotherapist not only serves as a tool to communicate with the patient, but also as part of the treatment. Through speaking to the psychologist about their lives, patients are able to vent their emotions and recover from their sicknesses without taking any medicine.<sup>227</sup> However, what Zhang Congzheng developed was the use of dramatic language and actions to stimulate and awaken patients from their emotions, and not tracing patients' life experiences thoroughly like a modern-day psychotherapist would do.<sup>228</sup> For example, one of his medical cases recorded that a patient's father had been killed by a thief. When the patient heard about this, he could not help but cry heavily. After he stopped crying, he felt his heart in pain and a swelling grew under his heart for a month. He used all the medicines he could find but could not be cured. The patient then sought out Zhang Congzheng for help. Zhang Congzheng treated him by imitating a shaman healers' intentionally ridiculous behavior, with crazy words which made the patient laugh out loud to the extent that the patient even felt embarrassed. After the patient laughed for one or two days, the swelling under his heart miraculously disappeared.<sup>229</sup> The happiness provoked by Zhang Congzheng's dramatic acting and language had successfully broken through the accumulated sorrow in the patient's body.

Sometimes "emotional counter-therapy" also required the patient's family members to cooperate with the medical specialist. Another of Zhang Congzheng's cases noted down a woman who had insomnia for two years because she had too much worries, for which no medicine had been effective. Zhang Congzheng asked her husband to take a large amount of her money to drink liquor for a few days. The woman then became so angry about her husband's behavior that she perspired a lot. At night, she suddenly felt tired and slept for 8 to 9 days. After she woke up, she ate normally and recovered from her insomnia.<sup>230</sup> In this case, Zhang Congzheng used anger to defeat her worry, and her husband's acts played a crucial role in the treatment.

Zhang Congzheng was not the only medical specialist who performed 'emotional counter-therapy'. Yuan-dynasty medical specialist Zhu Zhenheng, Ming-dynasty medical specialists Wang Ji 汪機 (1463-1539), Zhang Jiebin 張介賓 (1563-1642), Wang Zhongyang 王中陽 (no life date known), and many others, are all recorded as practicing emotional counter-therapy on patients.<sup>231</sup> These records indicate that emotional

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<sup>227</sup> Chen, "Qingzhi guo ji," 13.

<sup>228</sup> Chen, "Qingzhi guo ji," 13-14.

<sup>229</sup> Zhang Congzheng 張從正, *Rumen shiqin* 儒門事親 (Beijing: Renmin weisheng chubanshe, 1996), 206.

Transcribed from Chen, "Qingzhi guo ji," 15.

<sup>230</sup> Zhang, *Rumen*, 207. Transcribed from Chen, "Qingzhi guo ji," 16.

<sup>231</sup> Chen, "Qingzhi guo ji," 19-29.



counter-therapy may have been well known among literate medical specialists. Tan Yunxian is also very likely to have been aware of this therapy, because Zhu Zhenheng's medical books were her favorite sources of medical prescriptions.<sup>232</sup>

Among Zhu Zhenheng's medical books, one book Tan Yunxian definitely read was *Danxi's Methods of Heart* (*Danxi xinfa* 丹溪心法). The prescription she used in case 1 was taken from this book.<sup>233</sup> The book includes a famous case of Zhu Zhenheng performing emotional counter-therapy on a patient. The case describes a woman who had a bad appetite for half a year because she had been separated from her husband for 5 years. Zhu Zhenheng suggested to her father to try to make the patient angry to cure her illness, but her father did not agree. Unexpectedly, Zhu Zhenheng slapped her face three times, and blamed her for overly thinking of her husband. The woman was furious at Zhu Zhenheng's action and cried out aloud. After she released all her anger, she suddenly recovered her appetite. Zhu Zhenheng then secretly told her father that even though her longing for her husband had been cured, she would have to feel happy in order to prevent any relapse of her sickness. Her father therefore deceived her, claiming that her husband had written a letter to inform her he would come back soon. After three months, her husband came back and she totally recovered from her sickness.<sup>234</sup> In this case, Zhu Zhenheng practices the theory of "angry wins over longing" on this patient, by using offensive words and violent actions. The case was rewritten and copied into many medical books in the Ming dynasty, such as *Categorized Cases from Famous Doctors* and *The Investigations on Medical Prescriptions* (*Yifang kao* 醫方考).<sup>235</sup>

However, emotional counter-therapy was not the primary option of treatment when it came to healing patients who suffered from mental illnesses. Medical specialists still preferred to prescribe herbal medicine first. Emotional counter-therapy was only performed under several conditions: first, the sickness had been diagnosed as having been triggered by severe emotions; second, the patient had not been able to recover from the sickness for a long period of time; third, the sickness was considered to untreatable using herbal medicine.<sup>236</sup> In other words, emotional counter-therapy was the last resort for medical specialists.

Chen Xiufen gives four reasons why emotional counter-therapy was the last resort when it came to treating sicknesses triggered by mental illness. The first reason is due to the fact that the herbal medicine tradition was established by literati doctors from the Song dynasty. When one studied medicine, whether self-taught or from a teacher, and regardless of being a literati doctor, or hereditary doctor, medical classics focusing on herbal medicine treatments were the major learning materials. Therefore, although there were many kinds of medical

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<sup>232</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 19.

<sup>233</sup> Tan, *Miscellaneous Records*, 42.

<sup>234</sup> Zhu Zhenheng 朱震亨, *Danxi xinfa* 丹溪心法, in *Danxi yiji* 丹溪醫集, ed. Zhejiang sheng zhongyiyao yanjiu yuan wenxian yanjiushi 浙江省中醫藥研究院文獻研究室 (Beijing: Remin weisheng chubanshe, 1995), 483. Transcribed from Chen, "Qingzhi guo ji," 20-21.

<sup>235</sup> Chen, "Qingzhi guo ji," 21.

<sup>236</sup> Chen, "Qingzhi guo ji," 34.

specialists, their major medical treatment method was herbal medicine prescriptions based on medical classics.<sup>237</sup> Also, medical specialists still considered physical sicknesses triggered by mental illnesses as caused by severe emotions influencing the proper flow of *qi* 氣 inside the body. Therefore, regardless of using herbal medicine or emotional counter-therapy, the goal was to guide the *qi* to properly flow smoothly again inside the body. Since there was already medicine to adjust the *qi* to flow properly again, medical specialists thought it was not necessary to use emotional counter-therapy in the first place.<sup>238</sup>

Another reason was due to the problem of the relationship of trust between the patient and the medical specialist in the Ming dynasty. Patients sometimes would not be comfortable to talk about their private, personal issues openly to a medical specialist they were not familiar with.<sup>239</sup> Also, since it was difficult to determine if a medical specialist was trustworthy or not, the medical specialist commonly only had one chance to visit the patient. If the patient tried the treatment and it was not effective, the patient would turn to seek another medical specialist.<sup>240</sup> Thus, there was no chance for the medical specialist to build a trust relationship with the patient through frequent meetings as a modern-day psychotherapist would.

Also, the dramatic actions and expressions medical specialist used when practicing the emotional counter-therapy were sometimes offensive to the patient and could even bring danger to the medical specialist. The legendary medical specialist Hua Tuo 華陀 (c. 140-208) once used emotional counter-therapy to treat his patient. He intentionally enraged the patient, but the patient became so angry at him that he sent a man to kill Hua Tuo.<sup>241</sup> For medical specialists, if they successfully healed the patients by practicing emotional counter-therapy, but lost their lives, then it was not worth it for them to practice the therapy instead of herbal medicine.

Furthermore, sometimes the therapy required the patient's family members' cooperation, but not all patients' families would agree on practicing the therapy. In the case of Zhu Zhenheng, as mentioned before, the patient's father did not approve of his suggestions to make the patient mad. Although in the end Zhu Zhenheng ignored the father and slapped the patient himself, it was more common that medical specialists needed to respect the family members' opinion to avoid conflict and to make the therapy effective.<sup>242</sup>

The last reason is due to the difficulties of properly practicing emotional counter-therapy. Zhang Congzheng and Zhu Zhenheng both emphasized that the therapy could only be practiced by medical specialists who had extraordinary talent and excellent skills, because the therapy required the medical specialist to make an accurate diagnosis and carefully plan

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<sup>237</sup> Chen, "Qingzhi guo ji," 37-38.

<sup>238</sup> Chen, "Qingzhi guo ji," 38-40.

<sup>239</sup> Chen, "Qingzhi guo ji," 42.

<sup>240</sup> Chen, "Qingzhi guo ji," 41-42.

<sup>241</sup> Fan, *Hou Hanshu*, vol. 10, 2736.

<sup>242</sup> Chen, "Qingzhi guo ji," 43.

action and speaking at the same time. If the medical specialist was not observant enough, not skilled enough at dramatic talking skills, and not quick-witted enough at thinking how to act, then the therapy would not be effective.<sup>243</sup> The difficulty of practicing the therapy perhaps also lay in the fact that since there was no systematic training for emotional counter-therapy in the Ming dynasty, medical specialists often lacked the chance to learn the therapy effectively.

All in all, it can be concluded that Tan Yunxian was well aware that many of her patients' sicknesses were triggered by mental causes, and that these sicknesses could be treated with emotional counter-therapy. Yet, due to the reason that her patients' sicknesses could still be cured by medicine, it was not necessary for her to use the emotional counter-therapy, because this therapy was considered to be the last resort. Also, as a hereditary-literati doctor and female doctor, her medical training was largely based on the herbal medicine tradition, so prescriptions would be her major treatment method. Lastly, due to the theory that the fundamental problem of illness lay in the improper flow of *qi* in the body, physical sicknesses as well as mental illnesses triggered by severe emotions, thus considered to be treatable by herbal medicine. Therefore, contrary to the modern-day point of view, it was not really considered better and necessary for patients who had psychological problems to receive emotional counter-therapy instead of taking medicine.

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<sup>243</sup> Chen, "Qingzhi guo ji," 42.

## Conclusion

This thesis, first of all, has shown that Tan Yunxian's cases also have the potential and value to be analyzed under different topics other than medical history, such as women's education, women's writing and publishing activities, literary tropes and traditions, publication history, gender history, etc. Its value lies in the fact that Tan Yunxian lived in a time period before women's involvement in literacy, education. This time period is also the field, which recent researches are lacking and yet to be explored. The value of Tan Yunxian's case therefore lies in the fact that she can provide a glimpse into the lives of the women living in her contemporary period.

Secondly, this thesis also demonstrates how Tan Yunxian applied various strategies to earn the qualification and legitimacy to become a female doctor by analyzing the narrative in her preface. The central concept of her strategy is to hide her desires of having a career under the cover of filial piety and Confucian benevolence. She argues that it was not her idea to challenge the assumed gender and social roles, but others; her grandfather who ordered her to learn medicine, and her grandmother who said her fate was to become a female doctor. This gave her have no choice but to do what was controversial at that time. If she did not obey their orders, then she will violate the imperative of not being a filial child. She also implies that her controversial behavior is also for the good of society and people, which is to help those people who are sick and in need of help. It was not simply a selfish action to fulfill her own ambitions. Aside from Tan Yunxian, other female writers in her contemporary may have applied the same strategies when writing their prefaces for their books, but further research is still required for this topic.

When exploring what could have inspired Tan Yunxian when writing her preface for *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*, it was found that there was the possibility that the writing tradition of medical specialists' biographies was a key influence. The thesis exemplified that Tan Yunxian potentially learned of the structure of her preface from Zhang Yuansu and other male medical specialists' biographies. However, more studies are still required to demonstrate that there is indeed a writing tradition of medical specialists' biographies and how it developed and evolved. In order to do so, more research materials must be collected, compared, and analyzed.

The last goal of this thesis was to make a new approach to the study of Tan Yunxian's medical cases in *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor*. Contrary to previous studies which focused on the medical treatments and theory in her cases, this thesis intends to shift the focus on to the stories of the patients themselves. These stories reflect the relations between their daily struggles, lives, desires, emotions, and sicknesses. Lower class women were more often inflicted with physical sicknesses due to their daily hard labor, while the higher class women often struggled with psychological sicknesses. They also all suffered

common problems despite their difference in social class, such as marriage and miscarriages. This approach indicates that medical cases, regardless of the cases in *Miscellaneous Records of a Female Doctor* or other medical case books, can also be examined under the context of micro history. They have the potential to serve as materials to offer a window into the daily lives of men and women in the Ming-Qing dynasties. Yet, these cases also have limitations when being used as research materials of micro history. The first problem is that being medical cases, the contents narrating the patients' lives are not in vivid detail, but are simple and short. The second problem is that some of the background information and the identities of these patients are lacking and therefore may add difficulties in being analyzed and discussed.

Overall, the thesis made a new approach on the study of Tan Yunxian by discussing her case under various contexts. By doing so, the thesis discovered more research potential regarding Tan Yunxian's case and her medical case book. This potential also points out some understudied fields yet to be explored by researchers, such as the writing tradition of medical specialists' biographies, women writers' prefaces, and the new perspective to study medical cases. Also, Luo Shihang's new discovery of the Tan family's genealogy book is also yet to be fully explored. Yet, aside from the research values and potentials Tan Yunxian's case have, her life alone, of how she was able to come across multiple obstacles to have a medical career is inspiring enough for all the women who experienced the limitations of the social norms imposed on them when chasing their dreams and desires.

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## **Declaration**

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I also give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available via the University's digital research repository.

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