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**Aspects of Gender in *The Unofficial
History of the Scholars***



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List of Acronyms

RW *Rulin waishi* 儒林外史 (2 vols., Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1984).

1. Introduction

The present study focuses on *Rulin waishi* 儒林外史 (The Unofficial History of the Scholars), a well-known Qing novel, from the perspective of gender. It attempts to contribute to the discussion about Chinese masculinity by identifying the representation of the scholars' masculinity in *Rulin waishi*. It also tries to offer a better understanding of the novel's position regarding femininity and women. In this project, “the novel”, “this novel”, “the text”, “the narrative”, or “the book” all refer to *Rulin waishi*.

Rulin waishi provides a rich source to explore Chinese masculinity in late imperial China. Men are the subject of the novel. Thus, the discussion of gender in this novel would not be complete without an analysis of male characters, especially scholars. The subject of masculinity in the novel, however, has not been examined by researchers. It is mainly because the study of Chinese masculinity is still a relatively new academic field. Few scholars have devoted research to this area. *Rulin waishi*, however, provides a case study of educated men's perception and display of manhood. It shows a world dominated by scholars and their active and exclusive interactions with other scholars.

Louise Edwards states that *Honglou meng* 红楼梦 (The Red Chamber Dream) is “equally as insightful on men and masculinity as it is on the position of women in Qing China”.¹ We could also say that *Rulin waishi* is equally insightful on women and femininity as it is on men in the Qing dynasty. Although *Rulin waishi* is primarily a novel about men, scholars, as its title suggests, it nevertheless shows several female characters, and its value should not be neglected. Therefore, we shall also cast light on women in *Rulin waishi* to reveal insights about femininity in the Qing era.

There are few researchers such as Paul S. Ropp and Zuyan Zhou who discuss female characters in the novel as for English-language scholarship.² Paul S. Ropp devotes a whole chapter in his work and argues that *Rulin waishi* represents a positive image of women and shows “feminist” thought, such as the attack on widow suicide and concubinage.³ For Chinese scholarship, there are two master's theses and several articles focusing on female figures, and they mostly discuss Shen Qiongzhi 沈琼枝 and

¹ Louise P. Edwards, *Men and Women in Qing China: Gender in The Red Chamber Dream* (Leiden; New York: E. J. Brill, 1994), p. 141.

² See Paul S. Ropp, *Dissent in Early Modern China: Ju-lin wai-shih and Ch'ing Social Criticism* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1981) and Zuyan Zhou, “Yin-yang Bipolar Complementarity: A key to Wu Jingzi's Gender Conception in The Scholars,” *Journal of the Chinese Language Teachers Association* 29:1 (1994), pp. 1-25.

³ Ropp, *Dissent in Early Modern China*, p. 151.

Miss Lu (Lu xiaojie 鲁小姐).⁴ The present project focuses on Mrs. Wang (Wang taitai 王太太) and Pinniāng 聘娘 who are seldom discussed and also interprets Miss Lu in a new way. It aims to somehow challenge the mainstream reading of *Rulin waishi* as a feminist work and thus help us better understand the novel's position towards women.

Rulin waishi was written by Wu Jingzi 吴敬梓 (1701-1754), a poet and a classicist. Wu Jingzi was from a prestigious and wealthy family. His ancestors were successful in the civil service examinations and officialdom. By contrast, he only achieved the degree of government student in the examinations and thus did not get any official post. He lived a reckless life in his youth, squandering his fortune and then moved to Nanjing 南京 and lived an impoverished life there. He excelled at composing poetry and devoted himself to studying the Confucian classics, particularly *Shijing* 诗经 (The Classics of Poetry), to which he composed a commentary.⁵ It is believed that *Rulin waishi* is a project that Wu Jingzi wrote about himself and dealt with his own failure.⁶ This way of reading is useful to examine the gender perceptions in the novel because Wu Jingzi's Confucian educational background and his life course influence his outlook on gender and, thus, the representation of gender and sexuality in the novel.

The novel was written between 1733 and 1748. Although it contains stories explicitly set from the end of the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) to the late Ming, it is widely recognized by researchers that Wu Jingzi wrote about his own contemporary time. That means the historical context of the 18th century would be an essential factor in understanding the display of gender roles in the novel.

There is an ongoing debate among researchers, especially in China, about this novel's editions. They doubt if the novel has 50, 55, or 56 chapters.⁷ I would not discuss

⁴ See Lian Chaofeng 连超锋, “*Rulin waishi* zhong liangwei nüxing renwu de mingyun zaoji he hu zhuan——tan Shen Qiongzhi he Wang san guniang” 《儒林外史》中两位女性人物的命运遭际和互转——谈沈琼枝和王三姑娘, *Anyang shifan xueyuan xuebao* 安阳师范学院学报 2018.1, pp. 70-72; Ma Yuping 马玉琤, “Nüxing wenren de caiming jiaoli yu gongming qingjie—yi *Rulin waishi* wei ge'an yan ji MingQing liangdai nüxing wenren” 女性文人的才名焦虑与功名情结——以《儒林外史》为个案延及明清两代女性文人, *Nanjing shida xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 南京师大学报(社会科学版) 2012.6, pp. 140-146; Xu Zhangjing 徐章婧, “*Rulin waishi* zhong sanwei yu keju youguan de nüxing xingxiang fenxi” 儒林外史中三位与科举有关的女性形象分析, *Hanzi wenhua* 汉字文化 2018.13, pp. 34-35.

⁵ For a detailed information about Wu Jingzi's life, see Timothy C. Wong, *Wu Ching-tzu* (Boston: Twayne, 1978), pp. 15-39.

⁶ Wong, *Wu Ching-tzu*, p. 16; Martin W. Huang, *Literati and Self-Re/Presentation. Autobiographical Sensibility in the Eighteenth-Century Chinese Novel* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 45-74.

⁷ For a recent discussion of this issue, see Li Pengfei 李鹏飞, “*Rulin waishi* di wushiliu hui wei Wu Jingzi suo zuo xin zheng” 《儒林外史》第五十六回为吴敬梓所作新证 [A New Proof of Wu Jingzi Being the Author of Chapter 56 of The Scholars], *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiu* 中国文化研究 Spring 2017, pp. 26-41; Geng Chuanyou 耿传友, “*Rulin waishi* yuanmao zaitan: jian da Li Pengfei xiansheng” 《儒林外史》原貌再探—兼答李鹏飞先生 [Reconsideration of the Original Appearance of The Scholars – At the Same Time an Answer to Mr. Li Pengfei], *Jianghuai luntan* 江淮论坛 2019.2, pp. 159-167.

it for it is beyond the project's focus. The present study's primary source is *Rulin waishi huijiao huiping ben* 儒林外史会校会评本 (The Unofficial History of the Scholars, A Collated and Commentary Edition).⁸ It includes 56 chapters with commentaries that show how Qing commentators who are relatively close to Wu Jingzi's time and position read this novel. These commentaries often inform us of hidden clues or related events and characters of the novel. They help understand the gender relations depicted in the text.

Four important secondary sources are particularly important because they inspired the current project's approach. Firstly, Louise Edwards's book entitled *Men and Women in Qing China: Gender in The Red Chamber Dream*⁹ is the model for my analysis of women in *Rulin waishi*. Against the recent feminist reading of *Honglou meng* as a work that celebrates female moral and intellectual superiority, Edwards reveals *Honglou meng*'s damaging depictions of women. I was fascinated by her approach, so I followed her way to read *Rulin waishi*. Secondly, Susan Mann's book, *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century*,¹⁰ provides a historical background of women's position and life in the 18th century. It offers me a clear idea of how a woman ought to behave according to gender norms. Thirdly, Kam Louie and Louise Edwards' article¹¹ about *wen* masculinity gives me a theoretical framework to construct the scholar's masculinity in *Rulin waishi*. Fourthly, Martin W. Huang's book, *Negotiating Masculinities in Late Imperial China*,¹² has a chapter about masculinity in *Sanguo yanyi* 三国演义 (The Three Kingdoms) and *Shuihu zhuan* 水浒传 (The Water Margin).¹³ It is a good example to analyze masculinity in novels.

Therefore, to understand the position of men and women and their interactions depicted in the novel, I locate the novel in the context of the eighteenth century, take into account the author's life experience and the clues commentators point out. Besides, I also do a close reading of the text and continuously compare the portrayal of women

⁸ The following edition and abbreviated reference will be used: Wu Jingzi 吴敬梓, *Rulin waishi huijiao huiping ben* 儒林外史会校会评本 (The Unofficial History of the Scholars, A Collated and Commentary Edition), ed. Li Hanqiu 李汉秋 (2 vols., Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1984 = RW), and quotations in this novel will be referenced by the format chapter.page; Wu Ching-Tzu, *The Scholars*, trans. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang (3rd ed., Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1973 = The Scholars). I sometimes made small modifications to make them more accurate in quotations, which I would point out. I have made the translations of official titles more accurate and adjusted the names' transcription to Hanyu Pinyin.

⁹ Edwards, *Men and Women in Qing China*.

¹⁰ Susan Mann, *Precious Records. Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

¹¹ Louise Edwards and Kam Louie, "Chinese Masculinity: Theorising *Wen* and *Wu*," *East Asian History* 8 (1994), pp. 135-148.

¹² Martin W. Huang, *Negotiating Masculinities in Late Imperial China* (University of Hawaii Press, 2006).

¹³ For this chapter, see Huang, *Negotiating Masculinities in Late Imperial China*, pp. 89-112.

and men with Confucian gender norms.

The present study focuses on four questions: What are the female and male characters' images in the novel? What aspects of a woman are praised or criticized in the novel? What aspects of a man are praised or criticized in the novel? What is the ideal femininity and masculinity celebrated by this novel?

This thesis mainly breaks into two parts. The first part, chapter two, three, and four, deals with the representation of masculinity, particularly that of the scholars' demonstration of masculinity. The second part, chapter five, six, and seven, comprises readings of selected female figures and reveals the novel's conservative view about women. In the part of the conclusion, I will summarize the main points found in the above two parts.

2. The Masculinity Ideal

Rulin waishi provides a case study of scholars' perception and display of manhood. It shows a culture in late imperial China, where, to borrow Susan Mann's words, "homosocial bonding" reached "the state of a very high art."¹⁴ Despite its value to examine Chinese masculinity in late imperial China, the novel has not yet attracted researchers' attention. It is mainly because Chinese masculinity is still a relatively new academic field. Twenty years ago, Susan Mann claimed that gender studies of Chinese history were primarily confined to women's studies.¹⁵ Her observation is still correct today. Only since the new millennium, have few China researchers in English scholarship such as Kam Louie, Song Geng, and Martin Huang devoted themselves to studying masculinity in late imperial China.¹⁶ This chapter and the following two chapters attempt to contribute to this field by identifying the representation of masculinity depicted in *Rulin waishi*.

As Kam Louie and Louise Edwards argue, Chinese masculinity comprises two attributes, *wen* 文 (literary talents, scholarship, refinement) and *wu* 武 (martial arts, strength).¹⁷ According to their theory, men embodying either of the two qualities are regarded as manly, and those who possess both are great. Moreover, *wen* masculinity is superior to that of *wu*.¹⁸ Although there are *wu* masculine heroes like Xiao Yunxian 萧云仙, the fourth Mr. Feng (Feng Siye 凤四爷) or Regional commander Tang (Tang zongzhen 汤总镇, Tang Zou 汤奏), scholars are the focus of this novel. We could thus concentrate on *wen* masculinity represented in the text.

There are several celebrated literati presented as the embodiment of model manhood. Wang Mian 王冕, Yu Yude 余育德, Zhuang Shaoguang 庄绍光, Du Shaoqing 杜少卿, Chi Hengshan 迟衡山 are those exemplary scholars. Through an examination of their shared or individual virtues, the ideal masculinity approved by the novel would come clear.

¹⁴ Susan Mann, "The Male Bond in Chinese History and Culture," *The American Historical Review* 105, 5 (2000), p. 1606.

¹⁵ Mann, "The Male Bond in Chinese History and Culture," p. 1602

¹⁶ Kam Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Geng Song, *The Fragile Scholar: Power and Masculinity in Chinese Culture* (Vol. 1.; Hong Kong University Press, 2004); Martin W. Huang, *Negotiating Masculinities in Late Imperial China* (University of Hawaii Press, 2006).

¹⁷ Edwards and Louie, "Chinese Masculinity," pp. 139.

¹⁸ Edwards and Louie, "Chinese Masculinity," pp. 140, 144, 145.

Those model men share one critical attribute. That is, they are not career-oriented. In other words, they do not strive for worldly success. It is their true virtues and true learning that constitute their masculinity. It could be expressed in the following formula:

$$\text{Masculinity} = \text{True virtues} + \text{True learning}$$

At the same time, the novel painstakingly tries to prove that moral virtues and literary talents surpass achievements in an official career, which was the noblest route to success for an educated man at that time. It can be presented in the following formula:

$$\text{Masculinity} \neq \text{Worldly success}$$

As Timothy C. Wong notes, the novel is meant by Wu Jingzi to defend his life of withdrawal by condemning those keep active.¹⁹ In this sense, because of his inability to achieve success in the examinations and public office, Wu Jingzi promotes an ideal manhood without the embodiment of practical gains to justify his own position. That is why he upholds Confucian self-cultivation and integrity of morality as well as intellect to the highest degree, for he has these virtues. The author's efforts to prove his argument could be seen everywhere in the whole novel.

2.1 True Virtues

Adding Virtues to Chinese Masculinity

When Louise Edwards and Kam Louie theorize Chinese masculinity, they emphasize the talent dimension, which they divide into *wen* 文 “literary talent” and *wu* 武 “martial talent”.²⁰ The *de* 德 “morality” dimension is not mentioned. As the four-character (*chengyu* 成语) expressions, “the completeness of morality and talent” (*de cai jian bei* 德才兼备) and “having talent but lacking morality” (*you cai wu de* 有才无德) suggest, morality is a critical aspect to judge a man. *Rulin waishi* demonstrates that morality is a crucial factor in defining one's masculinity. Therefore, I would suggest extending Kam Louie's and Louise Edwards's conception of Chinese masculinity by including morality as a key component.

The morality dimension plays a significant role in the discourse of masculinity in *Rulin waishi*. In the novel, a man is judged firstly and mainly by his moral virtues. An unscrupulous man lacks his foundation as a real man no matter how talented he is.

¹⁹ Wong, *Wu Ching-Tzu*, p. 26.

²⁰ Edwards and Louie, “Chinese Masculinity: Theorizing *Wen* and *Wu*,” pp. 135-148.

It is well expressed by Du Shaoqing's housekeeper Lou Huanwen 娄焕文's death will:

「...我死之后，你父子两人事事学你令先尊的德行。德行若好，就没有饭吃也不妨...你只学你令先尊，将来断不吃苦...」 (RW 32.446)

“...after I'm dead you and your son must imitate your noble father in everything. If you have virtue, it doesn't matter even if you go hungry... Imitate your worthy father, and you won't go wrong...” (cf. *The Scholars*, pp. 358-359).

Lou Huanwen stresses that virtues are fundamental for a man to stand in the world. Another old man, Kuang Chaoren's 匡超人 father shows the same concern in his death will: “...But fame and fortune are external things after all; it is morality that really counts...” (cf. *The Scholars*, p. 191) (「... 功名到底是身外之物，德行是要紧的...」 (RW 17.239).

The novel promotes a type of manhood of which real virtues weigh more than wealth and status. Perhaps the most telling case is Bao Wenqing 鲍文卿, who is a humble actor. His profession makes him much despised by others and regarded as lacking masculinity tremendously. Nevertheless, Prefect Xiang (Xiang taishou 向太守) praises him that even highly educated men like Hanlin Academicians could not equal him, for he does many good deeds (RW 26.355). Bao Wenqing's moral integrity is also celebrated by traditional critics (RW 25.348). His virtues enhance his masculinity and make him a great man who even surpasses the most successful scholars with high *wen* masculinity.

Dr. Yu's case also reveals that in the world of *Rulin waishi*, masculinity is, first of all, about virtues. Dr. Yu is given the name *zhenru* 真儒 “a true Confucian scholar”, that indicates his highest status, or his embodiment of highest masculinity among all male characters in the novel. The commentator of the Woxian caotang edition 卧闲草堂版 (*Woping* 卧评)²¹ notes that he is the most worthy man in the novel (RW 36.501). Martin W. Huang also states that he is “one of the few characters shielded from satire”.²²

Dr. Yu's image as an ideal man is mainly defined by his superior morality, which surpasses that of any other man in the novel. It is indicated by his name, Yude 育德, which comes from *Yi Jing* 易经 (The Book of Changes): “The gentleman cultivates virtue by decisive action.” (君子以果行育德; RW 36.490)²³. His high virtue

²¹ It's the earliest edition of *Rulin waishi* that exists today. *Woping* is the most influential commentary on *Rulin waishi* that China scholars doing research on *Rulin waishi* often refer to.

²² Huang, *Literati and Self-Re/Presentation*, p. 64.

²³ This phrase is from Hexagram 4, named *meng* 蒙, in *Yi Jing*. See Huang Shouqi 黄寿祺, and Zhang Shanwen 张善文, *Zhouyi yizhu* 周易译注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2004), p. 47.

constitutes his image of *junzi* 君子 “the exemplary man”. The core of a *junzi*’s moral virtues is *ren* 仁 “humanity”, the concern for others’ well-being.²⁴ As will be discussed later, he is depicted as continually helping others out of trouble, not for fame or other rewards. Besides, he can maintain his morality and intellect in a widely corrupted administrative system. Also, he is in perfect harmony with his circumstances. He adapts himself well to changes in his life. What is more, as Stephen J. Roddy points out, unlike Du Shaoqing and Zhuang Shaoguang, Dr. Yu is perhaps the only person who is not confined by his subjectivity and intellectual arrogance. He can tolerate competing views.²⁵

The text emphasizes that Dr. Yu’s masculinity lies in his virtues rather than other attributes. Although he learns poetry when he is young, and he passes the metropolitan examination, his literary talents are just simply mentioned. Interestingly, he is not portrayed as possessing high scholarship although he is entitled “a true Confucian scholar”. By contrast, Zhuang Shaoguang is known by his expertise in *Yi Jing*; Du Shaoqing excels at studying *Shijing* 诗经 (The Classic of Poetry) and his talent in composing poetry; Chi Hengshan is an expert of *Li Ji* 礼记 (The Classic of Rites). Therefore, we could see that Dr. Yu stands out among other scholars mainly by his moral excellence that impresses other intellectuals so much that they are willing to serve and follow him.

Rejection of Officialdom

Critics have widely acknowledged that one of the novel’s central themes is detachment from *gong ming fu gui* 功名富贵, “success, fame, riches, and rank” which is symbolized by officialdom. Distance from officialdom is perhaps the highest virtue of a man claimed in the novel. By rejecting political power, individual scholars demonstrate that they have more power. It firstly means that they can access the power structure. When opportunities of entry to officialdom come, they actively reject them. In this way, they show other men that they are superior to the state. In other words, they have the right and freedom to decide to offer their service or not. Moreover, by a rejection of service to the state, a scholar becomes more manly in other’s eyes. It is well expressed by one friend of Dr. Yu that “by refusing to take office and returning home, you will demonstrate your superiority even more clearly.” (辞了官爵回来, 更见得老师的高处; RW 36.494; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 400). An intellectual living as a hermit is widely admired, as Martin W. Huang points out.²⁶ By contrast, those striving for an official

²⁴ Song, *The Fragile Scholar*, p. 92.

²⁵ Roddy, *Literati Identity and Its Fictional Representations in Late Imperial China*, pp. 91-108

²⁶ Huang, *Literati and Self-Re/Presentation*, p. 70.

career are repeatedly condemned as unscrupulous opportunists in the novel.

The novel celebrates men who reject the opportunity to access worldly success. Du Shaoqing is recommended to attend a prestigious examination for talents, but he pretends to be ill to decline the opportunity (RW 33.456-464). As Martin W. Huang describes, “to be recommended as a candidate was prestigious enough, and to decline such a recommendation was even more so.”²⁷ Indeed, his rejection is regarded by other scholars as heroic and wins him widespread fame in the literati circle. For instance, Filial Guo’s (Guo xiaozhi 郭孝子) first thought about Du Shaoqing is “the open-handed gentleman from Tianchang who was recommended for office but declined” (天长不应征辟的豪杰; RW 37.514; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 416) when hearing someone mention Du Shaoqing’s name.

Zhuang Shaoguang gets recommended and attends an audience with the emperor, but he rejects any official post. He thus enjoys more respect and admiration of his contemporaries. The salt merchants praise him by saying: “Though His Majesty wished to make you a minister, you declined all official rank...What nobility of mind this shows!” (皇上要重用台翁，台翁不肯做官，真乃好品行; RW 35.484; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 391). Even the emperor bestows him an island to support his lifestyle of a hermit.

By comparing Wang Mian’s image in history and the novel, Stephen J. Roddy finds that Wang Mian, a historical figure who aspired to serve the state but got frustrated, is deliberately transformed into a recluse who refuses any involvement in public life by Wu Jingzi.²⁸ In the novel, Wang Mian painstakingly avoids any contact with officials and the newly established Ming empire by escaping to a mountain. The last sentence of Wang Mian’s episode is revealing: “Actually, he never served as an official for a single day.” (究竟王冕何曾做过一日官? ; RW 1.16; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 14). It underscores Wang Mian’s detachment from the official world. He is portrayed as a model man, a masculine ideal. His hermit image is the critical component of his manliness.

Although Dr. Yu holds office, he maintains a character like that of a recluse. Du Shaoqing compares him to the famous recluses in history: “...For loftiness of character he can be compared with Bo Yi and Liuxia Hui, or at least with Tao Yuanming...”²⁹ (「...他襟怀冲淡，上而伯夷、柳下惠，下而陶靖节一流人物...」; RW 36.497;

²⁷ Huang, *Literati and Self-Re/Presentation*, p. 62.

²⁸ Stephen J. Roddy, *Literati Identity and Its Fictional Representations in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 113-118.

²⁹ Bo Yi lived at the end of the Shang Dynasty (16th to 12th century B.C.). and Liuxia Hui during the Spring and Autumn period (770-480 B.C.). Tao Yuanming was a great poet of the Tsin Dynasty (317-402). They were men of integrity, who cared nothing for fame and wealth, hence later generations revered them as sages. The above descriptions are from *The Scholars*’s footnote in p. 403.

cf. *The Scholars*, p. 403).

Taibo 泰伯 whom the dazzling Taibo temple sacrifice celebrates as a sage, rejects the highest political power, the throne. The legend says, Taibo, as the eldest son of a king of the Zhou dynasty (1122-265 B.C.), yielded the throne to a younger brother and withdrew to the Jiangnan 江南 region and civilized people there.³⁰ As Timothy C. Wong points out, Taibo embodies the virtue of “yielding” (*rang* 让).³¹

The men above are celebrated by their virtue of detachment from officialdom. The reason behind their detachment is that the corrupted official bureaucracy frustrates scholars to offer meaningful service. The unjust political system is firstly described in the prologue. The ideal man Wang Mian claims that the bureaucracy, particularly the recruitment mechanism, would corrupt scholars: “These rules are not good. Future candidates, knowing that there is an easy way to high position, will look down on real scholarship and correct behavior as well as the wisdom to serve the state or to stay at home.”³² (「这个法却定的不好。将来读书人既有此一条荣身之路，把那文行出处都看得轻了。」; RW 1.14; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 13). One telling example of the hopeless bureaucracy is in Zhuang Shaoguang’s episode. Zhuang’s decline of officialdom, on the one hand, is because he has determined to reject before he goes to the court; on the other hand, it is because the corrupted Grand Secretary (大学士太保公)³³ dissuades the emperor who intends to put Zhuang in a vital position (RW 35.481-482). Besides, the dysfunctional government is shown to us on Zhuang’s way to the capital and back home. We see that an old couple that died of poverty (RW 35.482-483), and bandits are attacking travelers on the road (RW 34.474). These problems related to people’s livelihood, however, are not concerned by the government. By contrast, an official exhausts a great deal of military force to arrest a scholar named Lu Xinhou 卢信候 who just collects a forbidden book (RW 35.486-487). Also, Xiao Yunxian and Regional commander Tang succeed in military campaigns and devote to public welfare, but both get demoted. Therefore, it is meaningless to involve in office. The literati’s reluctance to offer public service is viewed as a noble way to maintain one’s moral integrity, as is revealed by the narrator’s remark at the end of chapter thirty-four: “Zhuang Shaoguang treasures his integrity and refuses the high official post.” (儒者爱身，遇高官而不受; RW 34.475).

³⁰ Wong, *Wu Ching-Tzu*, pp. 29-30.

³¹ Wong, *Wu Ching-Tzu*, p. 30.

³² The original translation of *wen xing chu chu* 文行出处 in *The Scholars*, p. 13 is “real scholarship and correct behaviour”. It ignores the meaning of *chu chu* 出处 which could refer to “to serve the state or to stay at home”. So I modified the translation.

³³ It is a high-ranking official post in the central government. For more information, see Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985, Reprint, Taipei: Sinological Materials Center, 1988), term 5962, pp. 466-467.

The masculine ideal of rejection to serve the state in the novel is, to a degree, against the conventional Confucian manhood. Geng Song argues, “the Confucian prescriptions for a real man include... above all, loyalty and contribution to the sovereign and state”³⁴ and “for Chinese men, manhood is the ability to honor their family name and achieve fame in serving the state.”³⁵ However, the novel’s opinion about the connection between manliness and practical gain is not clear-cut. As Martin W. Huang insightfully observes, “attitudes manifested in the novel toward examination success and public fame are more ambivalent as well as more complex than usually assumed.”³⁶ On the one hand, some successors in the examinations, such as Zhou Jin 周进 and Fan Jin 范进, are largely satirized. On the other hand, Du Shaoqing’s and Yu Huaxuan’s 虞华轩 ancestors are honored by their outstanding achievements in the examinations and their high official positions. Moreover, there is a paradox that to enhance one’s masculinity by rejecting officialdom, one has to display the potential to access it. It means they have already possessed the political power, and their very act of rejection, to a large extent, improves their political status.

Although lofty scholars in the novel share a distaste for officialdom, they are nevertheless influential in the political sphere. Few of them even have close contact with the emperor, the most powerful man in the empire. For instance, Wang Mian is visited by the emperor respectfully. Although he remains as a recluse, he nevertheless continues to be desired by the imperial court. Taibo is another example. He was once so close to the throne, and his contribution to the Jiangnan region made him worshiped by people as a sage king. Also, Zhuang Shaoguang’s audience with the emperor is described in detail, and the emperor’s appreciation of his talents largely reinforces his masculinity. Due to this reason, all high-ranking officials go to pay their respects to him (RW 35.481), and over twenty salt merchants employed by the state in the Huai River 淮河 area pay visits to him (RW 35.484). These influential men’s admiration increases his reputation and status.

Besides, participation in the Taibo Temple ceremony promotes the literati’s political influence. In a word, their masculinity is, to a large extent, proved by their political power, which is in line with Geng Song’s observation that masculinity is defined by a man’s relations with the political system.³⁷ It is somehow paradox to the novel’s promotion of rejection of political power. Moreover, through Dr. Yu’s case, the novel shows that officialdom would not inevitably corrupt a person. It is not that polluting, and one can keep his integrity within the political system. The novel’s

³⁴ Song, *The Fragile Scholar*, p. 171.

³⁵ Song, *The Fragile Scholar*, p. 172.

³⁶ Huang, *Literati and Self-Re/Presentation*, p. 56.

³⁷ Song, *The Fragile Scholar*, p. 172.

ambiguous position to officialdom is partly due to the author's "profound sense of guilt caused by failure" in Martin W. Huang's words.³⁸ Wu Jingzi only attained the lowly degree of government student (*shengyuan* 生员) and he got no official post.

Generosity

In *Rulin waishi*, generosity with money plays a significant role in the construction of manliness. The author carefully distinguishes generous men and mean men and depicts them in a different light. Moreover, as men, traditional critics often sensitively notice this issue. It proves that generosity is a crucial point that men primarily consider.

The novel greatly celebrates generous men. Du Shaoqing's manliness is mostly demonstrated by generously helping others with money. His gallant deeds (*haoju* 豪举) enable him to enjoy widespread fame as a "hero" (*haojie* 豪杰). Whenever someone claims to fulfill his filial duty, Du Shaoqing would never fail to supply him with large sums of money. His "excessive obsession with his self-image", as Martin W. Huang points out, leads to his "excessive generosity".³⁹ To display his indifference to wealth and thus to strengthen his manhood, he shows no concern for his accounts, and he willingly lets himself be cheated by unscrupulous men out of his wealth. His leadership in the literati circle is also, to some extent, attributed to his generosity. We see that scholars often gather in his house and enjoy feasts and leisurely conversations.

The novel's structure is often compared to that of *Shui hu zhuan* 水浒传 (The Water Margin). For instance, Stephen J. Roddy points out that the two novels share the discontinuous plot, linked biographies and lack of dominant characters.⁴⁰ Interestingly, Du Shaoqing's masculine image, to some degree, resembles that of Song Jiang 宋江, the leader of the Liangshan 梁山 bandits. Particularly, they share the heroic gesture of giving away large amounts of money to help others in need, which establishes their outstanding reputation among other men. Song Jiang is characterized to "uphold honor and belittle wealth" (*zhangyi shu cai* 仗义疏财).⁴¹ He enjoys a nickname of "the Opportune Rain" (*jishiyu* 及时雨), which celebrates his manly quality of helping others out of trouble without counting the cost. It is noteworthy to cite the description of him here:

平生只好结识江湖上好汉，但有人来投奔他的，若高若低，无有不纳，便留在

³⁸ Huang, *Literati and Self-Re/Presentation*, p. 56.

³⁹ Huang, *Literati and Self-Re/Presentation*, p. 57.

⁴⁰ Roddy, *Literati Identity and Its Fictional Representations in Late Imperial China*, p. 87

⁴¹ Shi Nai'an 施耐庵 and Luo Guanzhong 罗贯中, *Shuihu zhuan* 水浒传 (3 vols., Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1985), chapter 18, p. 229. The translation of this phrase is from Song, *The Fragile Scholar*, p. 164.

庄上馆谷，终日追陪，并无厌倦；若要起身，尽力资助，端的是挥霍，视金似土。人问他求钱物，亦不推托；……. 矜人之急，扶人之困，以此 山东、河北闻名，都称他做及时雨，却把他比做天上下的及时雨一般，能救万物。⁴²

What he likes best in the world is to make friends with heroes of the rivers and lakes. No one is turned away who comes to him for help, be they great or small. He provides his guests with food and lodging in the family manor, tirelessly keeps them company, and gives them traveling expenses when they want to leave. He scatters his wealth like water and if anyone asks him for money he never says no... He deems it a pleasure to offer people relief and arrange their affairs. This behavior has made him famous throughout Shandong and Hebei and people call him “the Opportune Rain,” comparing him to the rain which heaven bestows just when it is needed, to the benefit of all earthly things.⁴³

From the above descriptions about Song Jiang, we could see that Du Shaoqing is very similar to Song Jiang in the sense that they support men in need with considerable amount of money.

Dr. Yu is depicted as constantly helping others with money as well. However, unlike Du Shaoqing, Dr. Yu is not excessive, and he does so not for making a name, although his reputation is mostly based on this manly act. Thus, his conduct is more masculine than Du Shaoqing's. The text emphasizes a different kind of generosity between Dr. Yu and Du Shaoqing. It shows that whenever doing good acts, Dr. Yu never intends to promote his reputation. It is his moral sincerity that makes him distinguished. His sincerity is well described by Du Shaoqing's remark on his giving away money to his snobbish servant: “But it wasn't because he wanted a reputation for charity that the old man gave him silver twice. That's what's so rare.” (cf. *The Scholars*, p. 415) (「...老人家两次赏他银子，并不是有心要人说好，所以难得。」; RW 37.513). When a wronged scholar is redeemed by Dr. Yu and shows his gratitude to Dr. Yu, Dr. Yu says it is nothing but his duty and lets that scholar hurriedly go home (RW 36.501). The commentator Tianmu Shanqiao 天目山樵 (Zhang Wenhui 张文虎, 1808-1885)⁴⁴ remarks that “Dr. Yu does good deeds as if he does not do them because he has no intention to have his virtues seen by others” (行所无事，非欲见德; RW 36.500).

Compared to Du Shaoqing's recklessness, Dr. Yu's generosity is moderate.

⁴² Shi Nai'an and Luo Guanzhong, *Shui hu zhuan* 水浒传, chapter 18, p. 229.

⁴³ The translation is by Song, *The Fragile Scholar*, p. 162.

⁴⁴ Zhang Wenhui was a distinguished scholar and a big fan of *Rulin waishi*. His commentary of *Rulin waishi* is very influential. Tianmu Shanqiao is his literary name. In *Rulin waishi huijiao huiping ben*, his commentary is referred as *Tian yi ping* 天一评 and *Tian er ping* 天二评 since he wrote the commentary twice.

When a man attempts to drown himself due to lacking money to bury his father, Dr. Yu saves him and finances him. Dr. Yu explains:

「...我这里有十二两银子，也是人送我的，不能一总给你，我还要留着做几个月盘缠。我而今送你四两银子，你拿去和邻居亲戚们说说，自然大家相帮...」
(RW 36.492)

“...I have twelve taels here, which have been given me. I cannot let you have them all, because I need money to live on during the next few months. But I’ll give you four taels, and when you show it to your neighbours and relatives and tell them your trouble, I am sure they will help you...” (cf. *The Scholars*, pp. 398-399)

As the commentator Tianmu Shanqiao notices, “if Du Shaoqing meets this situation, he must give away all the money and not care about the impact later” (若杜少卿当此，必倾囊以付，不暇后顾矣; RW 36.493). Also, Dr. Yu helps Du Shaoqing in poverty by offering an essay for the latter to compose. He pays Du eighty out of one hundred taels of silver which the client offers and gives the left twenty taels of silver to his nephew (RW 36.499). That means instead of giving Du the whole amount of money, Dr. Yu smartly separates the money to help more people in need.

Giving away money to help people enhances one’s masculinity tremendously. It is a manly gesture that other men would emulate. For instance, when Yu Youda 余有达 holds the post of the assistant instructor of the prefectural college at Huizhou (徽州府学训导)⁴⁵, he lets his brother Yu Youzhong 余有重 send one tael of silver as a gift to Wang Yuhui 王玉辉. When Wang Yuhui expresses his gratitude, Yu Youzhong says very directly: “...Dr. Yu used to present scores of taels to deserving scholars in Nanking, and my brother would like to learn from him” (「...余博士在南京几十两的拿着送与名士用，家兄也想学他。」; RW 48.648; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 529).

There are more cases of generous men celebrated in the novel. Ma Chunshang’s image as a worthy man is, to a large extent, built on his generous conduct. A *yamen* runner finds a work-box of Wang Hui 王惠 who is a fugitive, which Qu gongsun 蘧公孙 owns. The runner uses this excuse to cheat money by threatening Ma Chunshang 马纯上 that Qu Xianfu would have big trouble if this issue is informed to the court. Ma Chunshang devotes all the money he has which amounts to over ninety taels of silver to buy the work-box, and thus solves the problem. When he meets Qu Xianfu, he does not ask for the return of the money. Ma’s generosity to help friends out is celebrated by the commentator Tianmu Shanqiao and the commentator of the Qi sheng tang edition (1874)⁴⁶ (RW 13.195). The narrator also names the title of this episode as “Ma

⁴⁵ For more information, see Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, term 2761, p. 256.

⁴⁶ In RW, this commentary is referred to as *Qi ping* 齐评.

Chunshang puts his money at the service of a friend” (马纯上仗义疏财; RW 13.184; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 144).

By contrast, mean men are satirized, and their manhood is in doubt. For instance, although Ma Chunshang donates large sums of money for Qu Xianfu’s affair, Qu Xianfu, however, only gives Ma two taels of silver as a present when Ma leaves (RW 14.202). The novel also stresses Du Shaoqing’s cousin, Du Shenqing’s 杜慎卿, lack of generosity, as Mr. Lou, Du Shaoqing’s housekeeper, remarks: “...Du Shenqing is not a generous person although he has talents...” (「...慎卿虽有才情, 也不是甚么厚道人...」; RW 32.446). Du Shenqing’s mean image is best illustrated by the scene when Bao Tingxi 鲍廷玺 tries to borrow money from him. As is observed by the commentator of the Qi sheng tang edition and the commentator Tianmu Shanqiao, Du Shenqing makes an excellent argument to direct Bao’s target to Du Shaoqing (RW 31.420-421). When leaving Du Shenqing’s house after providing service there for several months, Bao even has to borrow several taels of silver from Du Shenqing for traveling. It is sharply observed by the commentator Tianmu Shanqiao as Du Shenqing’s mean character (RW 31.422).

The Yan brothers, National university student Yan (Yan jiansheng 严监生, Yan Zhihe 严致和) and Tribute student Yan (Yan gongsheng 严贡生, Yan Zhizhong 严致中) are satirized due to their mean personality. However, they differ vastly. National university student Yan is mean to himself. When he is dying, he keeps stretching out two fingers and cannot die peacefully until seeing one of the two wicks in the lamp is put out (RW 6.85). By contrast, Tribute student Yan is mean to others. One scene about his lack of generosity is revealing and also amusing:

直到太阳偏西, 不见一个吹手来; 二相公戴著新方巾、披著红、簪著花, 前前后后的走著著急, 问吹手怎的不来? 大老爹在厅上嚷成一片声, 叫四斗子快传吹打的! 四斗子道: 「今日是个好日子, 八钱银子一班叫吹手还叫不动; 老爹给了他二钱四分银子, 又还扣他二分戥头, 又叫张府里押著他来, 他不知今日应承了几家? 他这个时候怎得来? 」大老爹发怒道: 「放狗屁! 快替我去! 来迟了, 连你一顿嘴巴! 」四斗子咕嘟著嘴, 一路絮聒了出去, 说道: 「从早上到此刻, 一碗饭也不给人吃, 偏偏有这些臭排场! 」 (RW 6.90)

Right up to sunset, not a single musician had arrived. In his new square cap and red sash, garlanded with flowers, the bridegroom was pacing anxiously up and down, demanding to know what had happened to them.

Yan shouted to Si Dou from the hall, “Hurry up and get those trumpeters!

“Today’s an auspicious day,” said Si Dou. “Lots of people are getting married. Even if

you gave the musicians eighty cents of silver they wouldn't come. But you only gave them twenty-four cents, then deducted another two cents, expecting the Zhang family to force them to come. The musicians are very busy in other families—how can I get them here?"

"You dog!" roared Tribute Student Yan. "Hurry up and fetch them here! If they're late, you'll get a box on the ears."

Si Dou scowled and slunk off, grumbling. "He hasn't given us a single bowl of rice since morning, yet he throws his damned weight about." (cf. *The Scholars*, pp. 68-69)

We could see that Tribute student Yan is not willing to pay musicians fair money for their service, and he does not give his servant Si Douzi (四斗子) enough food. Mr. Hu (Hu sangongzi 胡三公子) is another mean man depicted in the novel. He borrows someone's garden to hold the feast but does not pay for the rent. The owner says that Mr. Hu even takes the rice leftover back home (RW 18.256-257). Another case noted by the commentator Tianmu Shanqiao is a scholar named Ji Weixiao 季苇萧. Ji gives just fifty cents of silver to his uncle, Bao Tingxi, to travel from Yangzhou 扬州 to Nanjing, and at the same time, he asks Bao to carry a letter to a friend.

These ungenerous men lack masculinity a great deal. Of course, to be generous, a man should have money at first. The novel, however, claims that a generous man does not mean that he ought to be wealthy. It is more about one's willingness to practice this noble and manly act. For instance, Du Shenqing and Qu Xianfu are perhaps wealthier than Ma Chunshang. However, it is the latter who offers a large sum of money to help his friend.

Filial Piety

The Confucian tradition values filial piety very much. As the Chinese proverb expresses, "among all good virtues, filial piety is the first." (百善孝为先). In *Xiao jing* 孝经 (The Classic of Filiality), it says, "filial piety is the foundation of morality..." ("夫孝，德之本也，...").⁴⁷ It is the core of Confucian ritual obligations. Therefore, it is a crucial standard to define a man's masculinity. As Geng Song notes, "the Confucian prescriptions for a real man include filial piety to his parents, obligations to family (among them the most important one is the ability to carry on the family line) ..."⁴⁸

Wu Jingzi exhausts lots of ink to celebrate filial sons. Wang Mian's filial image

⁴⁷ Wang Shoukuan 汪受宽, *Xiaojing yizhu* 孝经译注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2004), p. 2.

⁴⁸ Song, *The Fragile Scholar*, p. 171.

is stressed in the novel. Even as a little boy, he would use a lotus leaf to wrap the meat Old Qin (秦老) treats him and takes it to his mother (RW1.3). The commentator Tianmu Shanqiao expresses that he is so moved by this scene to cry (RW1.3). We are also told that when Wang Mian grows up into a young man, he often drives a buffalo cart to travel around with his mother (RW1.5).

Besides, the novel devotes the first part of chapter sixteen to depict Kuang Chaoren's 匡超人 filial conduct in detail. He looks after his paralyzed father very well. He provides his father with various meat. When his father has difficulty to make a bowel movement, Kuang figures out a way to make his father comfortable (RW16.226). When his father gets bored, he pleases his father by telling stories and jokes. When a fire burns his house, he firstly takes his father out (RW 16.230). His filial piety finally contributes a lot to his success in the examinations. Hearing about Kuang Chaoren's virtue, a district magistrate is moved a great deal and thus promotes Kuang Chaoren to win the first place in the county examination (RW 16.233). The district magistrate even kneels to the examiner of the prefectural examination to ask for the advancement of Kuang by explaining Kuang's filial deeds. The examiner responds: "Moral character counts more than literary attainments in a scholar...If a man shows high moral qualities, literary accomplishments are secondary..." (「『士先器识而后辞章』，果然内行克敦，文辞都是末艺...」；RW 16.233; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 187). It reveals his recognition of Kuang's filial conduct.

Filial Guo (Guo xiaozi 郭孝子) is perhaps the most extreme case of a filial son. He spends his whole life traveling through the whole country to seek his lost father, Wang Hui. His sincere filial conduct is firstly reinforced by his father's problematic image. Wang Hui once rebels against the throne and later abandons his family and runs away. For fear of trouble, he never recognizes Filial Guo when the latter finally finds him in a temple. Wang Hui is, in Shang Wei's words, "legally guilty, socially unfit, and morally problematic".⁴⁹ The text stresses Wang Hui's rejection of Filial Guo. Guo kneels and cries loudly to beg his father's recognition, but Wang Hui eventually gets angry and pulls Guo out of the door. Even though his father does not recognize him, Filial Guo still fulfills his obligations by supplying his father with fuel and food until the latter dies. As Shang Wei observes, "the father's rejection of the son leads the latter to the extreme action, demonstrating his (Filial Guo's) moral will at its strongest."⁵⁰ Filial Guo's determination and his sacrifice are also shown through his adventurous journey, which the novel depicts in detail. During his journey, he nearly loses his life. Tigers attack him twice, but fortunately, he is not harmed, although some depictions of

⁴⁹ Wei Shang, "Ritual, Ritual Manuals, and the Crisis of the Confucian World: An Interpretation of *Rulin waishi*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 58.2 (1998), p. 392.

⁵⁰ Shang, "Ritual, Ritual Manuals, and the Crisis of the Confucian World," p. 392.

this episode are quite ironic. Moved by Filial Guo's virtue, Du Shaoqing, Dr. Yu, Zhuang Shaoguang, and other people finance Filial Guo's journey. Filial Guo's extreme filial piety is appreciated by the commentator Tianmu Shanqiao. Tianmu Shanqiao even claims that Filial Guo is the first person in the novel, for Filial Guo's story is introduced right after the Taibo ceremony, and Taibo is a filial son as well (RW 37.515).

Filial sons are everywhere in the novel. Du Shaoqing also embodies a strong sense of filial piety. For instance, he attends his housekeeper, Mr. Lou, very well when the latter falls ill. Du Shaoqing's filial piety is revealed by his servants' discourse about his treatment to Mr. Lou:

王胡子又问那小厮道：「少爷可曾起来？」那小厮道：「少爷起来多时了，在娄太爷房里看着弄药。」王胡子道：「我家这位少爷也出奇！一个娄老爹，不过是太老爷的门客罢了，他既害了病，不过送他几两银子，打发他回去。为甚么养在家里当做祖宗看待，还要一早一晚自己伏侍。」那小厮道：「王叔，你还说这话哩，娄太爷吃的粥和菜，我们煨了，他儿子孙子看过还不算，少爷还要自己看过了，才送与娄太爷吃。人参铔子自放在奶奶房里，奶奶自己煨人参药是不消说，一早一晚，少爷不得亲自送人参，就是奶奶亲自送人参与他吃。你要说这样话，只好惹少爷一顿骂。」 (RW 31.429-430)

"Is the young master up?" the steward asked the other servant.

"He's been up a long time. He's in Mr. Lou's room, watching them prepare the medicine."

"Our master is an extraordinary man," declared Whiskers Wang. "Mr. Lou is only one of the prefect's employees! When he fell ill, our master should have given him a few taels of silver and sent him home—why keep him here and treat him as one of the family, waiting on him hand and foot?"

"How can you say that, Mr. Wang!" protested the servant. "When we prepare gruel or dishes for Mr. Lou, it's not enough for his sons and grandsons to inspect them—our master has to see them too before they can be given Mr. Lou! The ginseng pot is kept in the mistress's room, and of course she prepares the ginseng and other medicines herself. Every morning and evening, if our master can't take in the ginseng himself, it's the mistress who takes it in to the patient. If the master hears you talking like that, he'll give you a good dressing down!" (cf. *The Scholars*, p. 344-345)

The servants' conversation reveals that although Mr. Lou is only Du Shaoqing's servant, Du Shaoqing treats him like a senior family member of his father's kind. Du regularly prepares medicine for Mr. Lou and cares about Mr. Lou's food and treatment. Besides, Du never fails to support those petitioners for filial concern. These filial men discussed

above are celebrated as great men with great virtues. Their Confucian filial conduct demonstrates their masculinity.

Devotion to Social Welfare

Careerists are only concerned about personal gains, but great men like Du Shaoqing, Zhuang Shaoguang, Dr. Yu, and Chi Hengshan contribute money, time, and intelligence to public affairs, particularly the grand sacrificial ceremony in the Taibo Temple. Their masculinity is greatly enhanced by their devotion to this social event.

Chi Hengshen, an expert in ritual studies, is the first person to put forward the idea to build the Taibo temple and to hold a big ceremony with ancient tradition. As is said by him, the state does not pay attention to ritual, which is considered by him as high scholarship and crucial to maintaining social order (RW 33.459). His goal is that “in this way people will practise ceremony and music, and that should help to produce some genuine scholars who will be able to serve the government well.” (「...借此大家习学礼乐，成就出些人才，也可以助一助政教...」; RW 33.460; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 370). During the sacrifice, everyone involved practices the ritual with great sincerity.

The literati's reputation increases tremendously due to participation in this ceremony. Many characters in the latter part of the novel show their admiration for the literati involved. For example, in chapter 48, during Zheng Zhifu 郑质夫 and Wang Yuhui's conversation, Zheng expresses his longing for participating in the ceremony: “I'm sorry I came to Nanking so late... When Dr. Yu was in Nanking, there were many famous scholars here. The whole country knows of that sacrifice at Taibo's Temple...” (「小侄也恨的来迟了！当年南京有虞博士在这里，名坛鼎盛，那泰伯祠大祭的事，天下皆闻。...」; RW 48.655; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 534). When The ninth Mr. Xu (Xu jiugongzi 徐九公子) and Chen Munan 陈木楠 discuss ancient vessels, Chen mentions Dr. Yu and Chi Hengshan who take part in the Taibo ceremony, and the ninth Mr. Xu praises that they are worthy scholars and gentlemen (RW 53.710).

The literati's masculinity demonstrated in the Taibo ceremony is not just admired but also emulated by other men. Zhuang Zhuojiang 庄濯江, a capable and wealthy merchant, exhausts around four thousand taels of silver to build a temple (RW 41.562) and intends to invite famous scholars to make a big ceremony for his temple so that he would enhance his reputation.

Apart from this big public event, these positive men are generous to help others in need in their daily practice. They continuously provide money or social network for

people with noble concerns. For instance, Dr. Yu, Zhuang Shaoguang, Du Shaoqing, and Wu Shu support Filial Guo to seek his father (RW 37.513-38.519). Their contribution to social affairs builds up their masculinity.

Honesty

Honesty is depicted as a crucial part of masculinity in the novel. Positive cases and negative ones form a sharp comparison to remind readers of what a man should be. Although in a widely corrupted political system, Dr. Yu does not lose his honesty when someone once suggests Dr. Yu to ask an official to recommend Dr. Yu to the emperor, and that Dr. Yu can decline it to demonstrate his superiority, Dr. Yu criticizes this unsincere thought (RW 36.494). Moreover, when two scholars advise Dr. Yu to celebrate his false birthday in February and then his real one in August to gather money from students of the Directorate of Education in Nanjing (Nanjing guozijian), Dr. Yu treats it as a joke (RW 36.498).

There are many cases of dishonest men in the novel. For instance, Tribute student Yan tries to cheat others' money with all methods. There are several cases of his dishonest and amusing misconduct. For instance, his newly born pig wanders into a neighbor's yard, and he insists that the neighbor should take it and pay for it. However, after the pig grows big, and one day it wanders into his house, he keeps it and asks the neighbor to pay if the latter wants it back (RW 5.70). Another case is that a commoner signs a contract to borrow Yan's money but does not take the money. After half a year, the commoner wants the contract back, but Yan insists that the former should pay the interest (RW 5.71). Besides, when a boatman eats Yan's cookies sneakily, Yan insists that his cookies are expensive medicines that are made of ginseng and gentian (RW 6.92-93). Then Yan successfully avoids paying the boatman. Also, Yan tries to seize Concubine Zhao's (Zhao xinniang 赵新娘) property. As a scholar and gentry, his deeds are unbearable, which is well expressed by the district magistrate: "A man who is a tribute student ranks among the scholars, ... yet instead of doing good deeds, he cheats poor people like this. Disgraceful!" (「一个做贡生的人，忝列衣冠，不在乡里间做些好事，只管如此骗人，其实可恶！」; RW 5.71; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 54).

Kuang Chaoren also lacks authenticity. To get profits, Kuang composes fake official documents to deal with criminal cases together with Pan San (潘三) (RW 19.265). To gain money, Kuang replaces an illiterate man to sit the examinations (RW 19.266-268). To gain status, he illegally marries a second wife from a prestigious family (RW 19.276).

Masquerade is a popular way for unscrupulous men to profit themselves. Perhaps one of the most terrible cases is Niu Pu 牛浦, a clerk of a candle shop. To get an advantage, Niu Pu assumes the identity of a deceased poet named Niu Buyi 牛布衣, so that he could associate with officials and wealthy merchants. Later on, Niu Pu marries a second wife from a relatively wealthy family. His episode shows that he cheats everyone on his journey to access wealth and status. A physician named Zhang Junmin 张俊民 is another case. When he is young, Zhang pretends to be a knight-errant and carries a bag of a pig's head, which is lied by him to be his enemy's head. In this way, he cheats the Lou brothers' (娄公子) five hundred taels of silver (RW 12.180-181). Wan Li 万里, a government student, masquerades as a secretary of the imperial patent office to associate with officials and merchants for worldly gains (RW 49.670-676). These men's masculinity is significantly harmed by their dishonesty.

2.2 True Learning

Apart from real virtues, authentic learning plays a vital role in the literati masculinity. True learning, first of all, means it is not fake. Niu Pu's case is the opposite example. He is just a clerk of a small store, but he assumes the identity of Niu Buyi and pretends to master poetry, but he does not know poetry at all.

Secondly, true learning means broad knowledge instead of limited knowledge of the examinations, which is largely satirized. In the novel, Fan Jin who passes the metropolitan examination and holds the post of commissioner of education in Shandong 山东 is satirized that he does not know Su Shi 苏轼 (1037-1101), a famous scholar of the Song dynasty (RW 7.102). Another case is Kuang Chaoren. He succeeds at the civil service examinations and finally gets the position of tutor at the National University (*taixue* 太学)⁵¹. Besides, he has edited numerous exam essays. Amusingly, he even does not know that the term “*xianru* 先儒” refers to the deceased scholar, as Niu Buyi points out to him, and he is so proud that examination candidates worship him on the desk and call him *xianru* (RW 20.280).

The positive scholars indeed master various areas of knowledge. Wang Mian, the ideal man, is said to master astronomy, geography, and the classics in his twenties (RW 1.5). Zhuang Shaoguang knows how to tell fortune with the knowledge of *Yi Jing* 易经 (The Book of Changes) (RW 35.481). He also excels at composing poetic exposition. Moreover, he possesses a good knowledge of political policies. He submits ten policies about educating the people to the emperor, who appreciates his good

⁵¹ For more information, see Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, term 6168, p. 478.

proposals and eventually bestows an island for him to study his scholarship (RW 35.482). Dr. Yu learns poetry and prose when he is around eighteen from a teacher who is said to be the most talented man in this area (RW 36.491). Besides, Dr. Yu masters geomancy and learns how to tell fortunes as well as select sites.

Regarding authentic learning, devotion and attainment in classical scholarship are vital. As Stephen J. Roddy notes, there are few men actively engaging in classical learning, such as Du Shaoqing, Chi Hengshan, and Zhuang Shaoguang.⁵² As Stephen J. Roddy further points out, each of them is noted for their specialization in a single classic— “Du, to the *Shijing*, the Classic of Poetry; Chi, to ancient ritual as codified in *Liji* [礼记 (The Classic of Rites)]; and Zhuang, to *Yijing*, the Book of Changes.”⁵³ Other scholars worship these three characters, to some degree, by their high achievement in classical scholarship.

Real learning stands for its own sake, not for practical gains. Two exemplary men embody this virtue. The first one is Wang Mian, who is celebrated by his different attitude towards learning. He already possesses a broad and in-depth knowledge of the classics, astronomy, and geography in his twenties, but “he did not look for an official post, and did not even have any friends. All day he studied behind closed doors” (既不求官爵，又不交纳朋友，终日闭户读书; RW 1.5; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 5). Zhuang Shaoguang is also said to “closet himself at home to write and was very particular as to what friends he made” (闭户著书，不肯妄交一人; RW 34.470; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 379).

Wen Masculinity Superior to Wu Masculinity

As Kam Louie and Louise Edwards argue, *wen* masculinity is superior to *wu* masculinity.⁵⁴ *Rulin waishi* contains some examples to support their argument. In chapter 46, Regional commander Tang, the martial hero who achieves victory in military campaigns, pays visits to celebrated literati such as Dr. Yu, Zhuang Shaoguang, and Du Shaoqing. It is a clear sign that *wu* masculinity is inferior to *wen* masculinity. Later, when Regional Commander Tang and Xiao Yunxian, the military heroes, assemble with Dr. Yu’s literary circle in a feast, they have a conversation about Xiao Yunxian’s military attainment:

庄征君道：「萧老先生博雅，真不数北魏崔浩。」...杜少卿道：「宰相须用读书人，将帅亦须用读书人。若非萧老先生有识，安能立此大功？」武正字道：

⁵² Roddy, *Literati Identity and Its Fictional Representations in Late Imperial China*, pp. 88-89.

⁵³ Roddy, *Literati Identity and Its Fictional Representations in Late Imperial China*, p. 89.

⁵⁴ Edwards and Louie, “Chinese Masculinity: Theorizing *Wen* and *Wu*,” pp. 145-146.

「我最可笑的，边庭上都督不知有水草，部里书办核算时偏生知道。这不知是司官的学问？若说是司官的学问，怪不的朝廷重文轻武；若说是书办的考核，可见这大部的则例是移动不得的了。」说罢，一齐大笑起来。(RW 46.622)

“Captain Xiao is even a match for Cui Hao⁵⁵ of Northern Wei,” said Zhuang Shaoguang.

...

“Prime ministers and generals should be scholars,” said Du. “If not for his learning, how could Captain Xiao have achieved so much?”

“What I find most amusing,” said Wu Shu, “is the fact that the commanders at the frontier didn’t know there was grass or water, but the clerks in the capital knew all right when they estimated costs. Now was it the ministers in the capital who knew all that, or was it their clerks? If the ministers are so learned, no wonder the court thinks more highly of civil than military officers; on the other hand, if it is the clerks who do the checking, that shows how essential the filing system is.”

At this there was general laughter. (cf. *The Scholars*, pp. 507-508)

In their conversation, they emphasize the significant role of literary intelligence in achieving military success. It once again shows the superiority of *wen* masculinity.

A Hierarchy of Wen Masculinity

The novel shows a hierarchy in *wen* masculinity. The highest level is the classical scholarship. Literary composition, such as poetry, is the second. Examination essays also called *shiwén* 时文, “the prose of our time”, is regarded as low. Chi Hengshan’s complaint implicitly expresses the hierarchy:

「而今读书的朋友，只不过讲个举业，若会做两句诗赋，就算雅极的了。放着经史上礼、乐、兵、农的事，全然不问！」(RW 33.459)

“Scholars nowadays think only of the examinations...To write a couple of lines of poetry is considered the height of accomplishment, while the sciences of ceremony, music, military affairs and agriculture which are contained in the classics and history are completely ignored! ...”⁵⁶ (cf. *The Scholars*, p. 369)

It is clear that Chi puts classical learning in the first place, and then the literary

⁵⁵ Cui Hao 崔浩 (38-450) was a famous scholar and military strategist of the fifth century.

⁵⁶ This translation has been modified, for the original translation does not translate the words *jingshi* 经史.

compositions. Examination learning is the last.

Academic accomplishment is most prestigious. Although the novel is about Confucian scholars, few scholars, such as Du Shaoqing, Zhuang Shaoguang, and Chi Hengshan, engage themselves in the Confucian classics, as mentioned before. These three characters enjoy great admiration of the literary circle by their classical scholarship. Chi Hengshan is admired continuously by other scholars of his talent in ancient ritual practice since he mainly designs the Taibo Temple ceremony. In chapter 34, Du Shaoqing gives his creative reading of the *Classic of Poetry* and wins other scholars' praise. Even Zhuang Shaoguang enjoys reading Du Shaoqing's *Commentary on the Classic of Poetry* with his wife (RW 35.486).

It suggests that literary compositions, including prose and poetry, are cultured and refined. Zhuang Shaoguang has a fine reputation of literary talent since he could compose a poetic exposition of seven thousand characters when he was barely twelve (RW 34.470). Even Dr. Yu learned how to compose prose and poetry in his youth from an outstanding scholar (RW 36.491). Among all scholars in the novel, Du Shaoqing is known for his talent in writing poetry. He is said to be “the foremost of poets” (*shi tan jijiu* 诗坛祭酒; RW 41.565) in Nanjing. His literary talent is acknowledged by Dr. Yu. A scholar named Chu Xin 储信 once tells Dr. Yu that Du has no talent at all for Du fails in the examinations. Dr. Yu opposes this opinion by saying that Du's literary talent is well-known, and Dr. Yu himself benefits from the fine poetry and prose Du composes:

储信道：「这也罢了，倒是老师下次有甚么有钱的诗文，不要寻他做。他是个不应考的人，做出来的东西，好也有限，恐怕坏了老师的名。…」虞博士正色道：「这倒不然。他的才名，是人人知道的，做出来的诗文，人无有不服。每常人在我这里托他做诗，我还沾他的光。…」 (RW 36.500).

Chu Xin said, “But next time you are commissioned to write something, sir, don't give it to him. He doesn't sit the examinations, so he couldn't possibly write anything good. I'm afraid he may damage your reputation. ...”

“I disagree with you,” said Dr. Yu gravely. “Mr. Du is known for his brilliance, and his poems are generally admired. Each time I ask him to write something for me, he reflects credit on me...” (cf. *The Scholars*, p. 405)

Like Du Shaoqing, his cousin, Du Shenqing, is distinguished for his gift in poetry as well. Du Shenqing wins the first place in an official poetry examination among students from twenty-seven counties and offers refined criticism on a poem written by a scholar (RW 29.398-399).

During late imperial China, the noblest path to success for a man was to secure

a post in the government through the civil service examinations, which was both sanctioned by Confucianism and rewarded by wealth and fame. The novel, however, places examination learning in a low place. As Stephen J. Roddy observes, the novel criticizes that *bagu* essays “foster narrowness and crudity”.⁵⁷ Examination learning’s low status is, to a large extent, exemplified by Mr. Lu, Ma Chunshang, and other careerists’ high praise of it, which is described in a comic tone. For instance, Ma Chunshang claims that even Confucius was involved in the civil service examinations:

「...举业二字是从古及今人人必要做的。就如孔子生在春秋时候，那时用‘言扬行举’做官，故孔子只讲得个‘言寡尤，行寡悔，禄在其中’，这便是孔子的举业。...」 (RW 13.189)

“...Right from ancient times all the best men have gone in for the civil service. Confucius, for instance, lived during the Spring and Autumn Period when men were selected as officials on the strength of their activities and sayings. That is why Confucius said: ‘Make few false statements and do little you may regret, then all will be well.’ That was the civil service of Confucius’ time...” (cf. *The Scholars*, p. 149)

In the literati circle in Nanjing, Dr. Yu, Du Shaoqing, and Zhuang Shaoguang share similar tastes about scholarships. They disdain *bagu* essays but prefer poetry and classical learning. When Dr. Yu and Wu Shu 武书, a distinguished scholar, discuss literature, Wu Shu tells Dr. Yu that he is good at writing poetry and prose but not *bagu* essays. Dr. Yu expresses that he is not interested in *bagu* essays but enjoys reading literary compositions:

武书道：「...门生觉得自己时文到底不在行。」虞博士道：「我也不耐烦做时文。」武书道：「所以门生不拿时文来请教。平日考的诗赋，还有所作的《古文易解》，以及各样的杂说，写齐了来请教老师。」虞博士道：「足见年兄才名，令人心服。若有诗赋古文更好了，容日细细捧读。...」 (RW 36.496)

Wu Shu says: “...However, I am all too conscious that my essays are unsatisfactory.”

“I have no patience with writing *bagu* essays either,” replied Dr. Yu.

“That is why I have brought no essays today, sir. When I have recopied my poems, I will bring them to you with my Notes on Old Texts and other miscellaneous writings for your criticism.”

⁵⁷ Roddy, *Literati Identity and Its Fictional Representations in Late Imperial China*, p. 98. *Bagu* essay, also called eight-legged essay, is a form of prose required in the civil service examinations in Ming-Qing China. It has rigid format and style with fixed rhetorical steps and words in total. It is widely considered as uncreative and too restricted. For more information, see Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985, Reprint, Taipei: Sinological Materials Center, 1988), term 4370, p. 359.

“You must have remarkable gifts. By all means let me see your poems and compositions in the old style, and I will read them carefully... (This translation is modified)” (cf. *The Scholars*, p. 402)

The low position of examination essays is, to a more or less degree, connected to Wu Jingzi’s own failure in the examination system. Throughout his life, he only attained the degree of government student.

3. Competing Discourse of Masculinity

3.1 Masculinity and Sexuality

Junzi and Sexuality

In *Shuihu zhuan* 水浒传 (The Water Margin), the rude and uncultivated outlaws hold a misogynist attitude towards women. By contrast, admirable scholars in *Rulin waishi*, such as Du Shaoqing, Zhuang Shaoguang, and Dr. Yu, enjoy an ideal conjugal life and show an egalitarian attitude towards their wives. Nevertheless, they reject female charm. This attitude towards women and sexuality defines the virtuous scholars' masculinity.

As Geng Song notes, the conventional perception about sexual desire in the Confucian culture is that it is indecent and shameful.⁵⁸ According to Song, the quality of a *junzi* 君子 (the exemplary man) in the Confucian discourse emphasizes self-restraint and self-discipline.⁵⁹ It, in particular, demands restraint of personal desires, especially sexual desires.⁶⁰ Although Wang Mian, the model man in this novel, is depicted to have no romantic attachments, as Kam Louie notices,⁶¹ the novel celebrates harmonious and companionate marriage.

A *junzi*'s image in terms of sexuality appears in Du Shaoqing's remarks about the *Classic of Poetry* in chapter 34. When he comments the poem entitled *Nü yue jiming* 女曰鸡鸣 (The Wife Says the Cock Crows), Du Shaoqing points out a *junzi*'s characteristic:

「...你看这夫妇两个，绝无一点心想到功名富贵上去，弹琴饮酒，知命乐天。这便是三代以上修身齐家之君子...」 (RW 34.469)

“...Look at this couple, though. They haven't the slightest desire for official rank. They play the lyre and drink, completely contented with their lot. This is how true gentlemen of the first three dynasties regulated themselves and their families...” (cf. *The Scholars*, p. 378)

In his opinion, a *junzi* enjoys a harmonious and companionate conjugal life with his wife. He also approves a couple wandering and enjoying the sightseeing in his

⁵⁸ Song, *The Fragile Scholar*, p. 180.

⁵⁹ Song, *The Fragile Scholar*, p. 92.

⁶⁰ Song, *The Fragile Scholar*, p. 93.

⁶¹ Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*, p. 46.

interpretation of the poetry *Zhen wei* 溱洧 (Zhen and the Wei). Besides, Du distains concubinage. To take a concubine is acceptable, according to Du, only when a man's wife could not produce a son. His argument implies that a *junzi* would not take a concubine for sexual pleasure. In other words, a *junzi* enjoys a happy domestic life with his wife, but he is not tempted by other women. For instance, Du Shaoqing, Zhuang Shaoguang, Dr. Yu are depicted to have a harmonious family life with their wives, but there are no descriptions of their contact with other women.

Du Shaoqing and Zhuang Shaoguang enjoy a companionate marriage, the concept of which “developed from the ideal of the soulmate (*zhiji* 知己),” a rare friendship based on intellectual and spiritual appreciation.⁶² Zhuang Shaoguang reads poetry and enjoys wine together with his wife (RW 35.486). They have pleasant conversations. Du Shaoqing and his wife drink and go sightseeing in Yao yuan 姚园, a semi-public park. He is also said by conservative people like Mr. Gao (Gao laoxiansheng 高老先生), a Hanlin reader, to often drink with his wife in restaurants (RW 34.467). It is considered by Mr. Gao quite scandalous.

While conventional people see that Du Shaoqing's bold gesture to stroll with his wife and drink together outside is immoral, Dr. Yu praises that it shows Du Shaoqing's romantic and elegant character (风流文雅; RW 36.500). Moreover, Dr. Yu directly expresses that vulgar people could not appreciate it (RW 36.500). Therefore, Dr. Yu's sanction of Du Shaoqing's bold behavior implicitly represents an appreciation of Zhuang Shaoguang's companionate relationship with his wife as well. The commentator Tianmu Shanqiao also expresses his admiration for the romantic domestic life of the two couples above (RW 35.485).

Du Shaoqing, Zhuang Shaoguang, and Dr. Yu all share an egalitarian attitude towards their wives. This practice is unconventional in a time when women were considered inferior. There are several cases of their discussion with their wife about household issues. For instance, Dr. Yu and his wife discuss their financial accounts (RW 36.491). Zhuang Shaoguang and his wife discuss why he goes to attend the audience with the emperor.

There is a tendency that the more masculine a man is, the more moderate a man is to his wife. While the association of Dr. Yu and his wife is depicted moderate; that of Du Shaoqing and his wife is more open and livelier.

⁶² Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses: Orthodoxy, Authenticity, and Engendered Meanings in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction*, Cambridge (Massachusetts); London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), p. 91.

Caizi and Sexuality

Ji Weixiao 季苇萧 is a young, handsome, and talented scholar who is the first on the list to pass the prefectural examination. He is witty to cheat Du Shenqing to meet Lai Xiashi 来霞士, an old, fat, and ugly Daoist, who is said by Ji Weixiao to be a handsome young man. Ji Weixiao is depicted as a *caizi* 才子, “a talented scholar”, who is excited about female beauty and lacks restraint of sexual desires. Ji Weixiao’s image is related to the discourse of “scholar-beauty” (*caizi jiaren* 才子佳人) romance of the early to middle Qing period (ca.1650-1750).⁶³ Keith McMahon describes it as a love story about “a young man and woman who represent the best in intelligence, looks, and moral character”.⁶⁴

His view and practice of marriage contradict that of *junzi*.

Ji Weixiao’s question to Du Shaoqing reveals Ji’s position to women and sexuality:

「少卿兄，你真是绝世风流！据我说，镇日同一个三十多岁的老嫂子看花饮酒，也觉得扫兴。据你的才名，又住在这样的好地方，何不娶一个标致如君，又有才情的，才子佳人，及时行乐？」 (RW 34.469)

“Shaoqing!... You are really the greatest romantic of all time! I’d feel bored in your place looking at flowers and drinking with a wife over thirty. With your talents and reputation, and living as you do in such a fine place as this, you ought to take a beautiful concubine who also possesses literary gifts. Then a brilliant scholar and a beautiful girl could enjoy themselves together.” (cf. *The Scholars*, p. 378)

He directly expresses that a *caizi* would embrace female charm and enjoy sexual pleasure. He implies that it is a symbol of a scholar’s manliness.

He repeatedly promotes scholar-beauty romances. For example, regarding Du Shenqing’s plan to take a concubine, he remarks: “A brilliant scholar and a beautiful girl!... We should enjoy ourselves while we are young...” (「才子佳人，正宜及时行乐。...」；RW 30.407; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 326). He acts as he believes. His second marriage is described in detail. He marries his first wife from a *yamen* clerk’s family when he is a government student. Later, after he gets a job and money from his patron, he takes a second wife and marries into another household. At the wedding of his second marriage, there is a couplet: “May soft breeze and brilliant moon remain

⁶³ Roland Altenburger, “Is It Clothes that Make the Man? Cross-Dressing, Gender, and Sex in Pre-Twentieth Century Zhu Yingtai Lore,” *Asian Folklore Studies* 64 (2005), p. 172.

⁶⁴ Keith McMahon, “The Classic Beauty-Scholar Romance and the Superiority of the Talented Woman,” in *Body, Subject and Power in China*, ed. Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlow. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 229-230. He summarizes very well the features of “scholar-beauty” romance.

unchanged; For a brilliant scholar is matched with a beautiful girl!” (清风明月常如此，才子佳人信有之; RW 28.380; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 305). It indicates his celebration of scholar-beauty romances. When he is asked why he does this illegal deed, he claims proudly: “To romantics like myself, as long as an ideal couple can meet, one wife more or less makes no difference!” (「...我们风流人物，只要才子佳人会合，一房两房何足为奇！」; RW 28.382; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 307). The novel implicitly opposes his lack of self-restraint in sexuality. Besides, the commentator of the Qi sheng tang edition and the commentator Tianmu Shanqiao both regard Ji Weixiao’s belief in scholar-beauty romances as vulgar (RW 34.496).

Misogynist Attitude towards Women

Unlike a *junzi* who enjoys an egalitarian relationship with his wife or a *caizi* who indulges himself in sexual pleasure, Du Shenqing keeps a misogynist attitude towards women, and he shows some kind of homosexual orientation. In his definition, the true masculinity refuses female sexuality but embraces mutual appreciation between males.

When asked why he takes a concubine, Du Shenqing shows his hostile attitude towards women and says that it is merely to continue the family line:

「...我太祖高皇帝云：『我若不是妇人生，天下妇人都杀尽！』妇人那有一个好的？小弟性情，是和妇人隔着三间屋就闻见他的臭气。」 (RW 30.407-408)

“As our first emperor said: ‘If not for the fact that I was born of a woman, I would kill all the women in the world!’ Have you ever met a woman you could respect? I assure you, they affect me so painfully, I can smell a woman three rooms away!” (cf. *The Scholars*, pp. 326-327)

Instead of interest in women, Du Shenqing directly expresses his desire to have a male as an intimate companion:

「...难道人情只有男女么？朋友之情，更胜于男女。... 假使天下有这样一个人，又与我同生同死，小弟也不得这样多愁善病。只为缘慳分浅，遇不着一个知己，所以对月伤怀，临风洒泪！...这事要相遇于心腹之间，相感于形骸之外，方是天下第一等人。」 (RW 30.409)

“And is love confined to that between men and women? No, the love of friends is stronger! ... If I could live and die with such a man, I would not be grieving and pining away like this! But I have not been lucky enough to find a true friend, and that is why I so often give way to melancholy!... No, they alone deserve unqualified praise who require a spiritual affinity and a friendship transcending the flesh. Their friends must

be some of the greatest men of the time!” (cf. *The Scholars*, p. 328)

What he stresses in the above statement is that his ideal companion is a man, a soul mate, and this relationship has nothing to do with sexuality. The spiritual encounter goes beyond sexual desires. For him, this total rejection of women and sexual pleasure distinguishes himself from common men. It demonstrates his restraint of sexual desires and thus proves his masculinity.

Martin W. Huang points out that there are two strategies for men to construct masculinity: The first is to build masculinity through the feminine; the second is to define masculinity against the feminine.⁶⁵ Perhaps, because his refined look and delicate manners closely resemble women, Du Shenqing consciously differentiates himself from women, and to reach this goal, he adopts an overwhelming misogynist attitude towards heterosexuality and chooses to indicate his homosexual orientation. In his case, we see how a man defends his manliness by condemning women. In other words, the feminine becomes the “other” to define the masculine. Ironically, what he practices contradicts what he says since he hurries up to take a concubine.

Young Men Tempted by Women

The novel characterizes several men tempted by women. It indicates that those men lack masculinity tremendously. For instance, Zhuang Feixiong 庄非熊, a young man, is depicted to “shoot glances right and left at the girls on the boat (This translation is modified)” (眼张失落, 在船上两边看女人; RW 41.560; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 451). Later, he follows Shen Qiongzhi 沈琼枝 when she goes out (RW 41.563). Also, in chapter 51, a young man, a buyer of raw silk, is attracted by a young woman who later sleeps with him and steals his money (RW 51.682). Besides, before going to sit the examinations, Regional commander Tang’s sons, Tang You 汤由 and Tang Shi 汤实, entertain themselves with prostitutes (RW 42.575). Later, Tang Shi goes to a prostitute’s household and is bullied by some ruffians. Besides, the text devotes chapters 53 and 54 to tell a story that a scholar Chen Munan indulges himself in a courtesan named Pinniāng and gets lots of debts because of it. These young men lack restraint in sexuality and thus lack masculinity.

Wealthy Merchants and Concubinage

The wealthy merchants' excessive practice of concubinage defines their manliness.

⁶⁵ Huang, *Negotiating Masculinities in Late Imperial China*, pp. 2 and 32.

Song Weifu 宋为富, a wealthy salt merchant, cheats Shen Qiongzhi to become a concubine. When Shen Qiongzhi argues about the issue, Song Weifu claims:

「我们总商人，一年至少也娶七八个妾，都像这般淘气起来，这日子还过得？他走了来，不怕他飞到那里去！」 (RW 40.555)

“We merchants employed by the state take seven or eight concubines a year... If they were all so pernicky, a fine time I’d have of it! Anyway, now that she’s walked in, she can’t fly out (This translation is modified).” (cf. *The Scholars*, p. 447).

Song Weifu indicates that his masculinity is based on wealth, which allows him to take as many concubines as he likes, although there might be some exaggeration in his words. Indeed, the novel shows that Wan Xuezhai 万雪斋, another wealthy salt merchant, takes three hundred taels of silver to seek a hibernating toad to treat his seventh concubine (RW 23.315).

3.2 Masculinity and Official Careers

There is a discourse of masculinity about *junzi* 君子 (the exemplary man) and *xiaoren* 小人 (the inferior man) in the novel. As Kam Louie points out, *Lunyu* 论语 (The Analects) has one statement which describes the different interests of *junzi* and *xiaoren*: “The *junzi* understands the importance of morality (*yi* [义]) and *xiaoren* understands the importance of profitability (*li* [利])”⁶⁶ (君子喻于义，小人喻于利).⁶⁷ Kam Louie notes that a *junzi* is “recognizably manly and socially admired.”⁶⁸ According to him, *Rulin waishi* provides a striking illustration of the discourse about *junzi* and *xiaoren*. Wang Mian is the ideal man, a *junzi*, while the scholars and officials who pursue profit and utility are “despicable fakes” and thus *xiaoren*.⁶⁹

In *Rulin waishi*, lofty scholars, the *junzi*, maintain and display ideal masculinity, as we have discussed in chapter two. Simply put, they reject officialdom and possess moral integrity and authentic scholarship. By contrast, careerists, as *xiaoren* lustful for wealth and status, insist on another type of masculinity.

⁶⁶ Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*, p. 45. The Chinese characters are added by me.

⁶⁷ Jin Liangnian 金良年, *Lunyu yizhu* 论语译注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2004), chapter 4, *Li ren* 里仁, p. 36.

⁶⁸ Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*, p. 61.

⁶⁹ Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*, p. 45.

Careerists' View about Masculinity

Song Geng notes, “the relationship between different masculinities in a society is also a reflection of power relations”.⁷⁰ Likewise, Michael Kimmel points out, “The hegemonic definition of manhood is a man in power, a man with power, and a man of power.”⁷¹ In other words, masculinity is associated with worldly gains. Careerists in the novel hold that only men successful in the examinations and officialdom are manly.

The typical careerist only cares about his job and profits. Mr. Lu (Lu bianxiu 鲁编修), a Hanlin complier, is one example. When asked why he asks for a leave from his official post, he answers:

「...做穷翰林的人，只望着几回差事。现今肥美的差都被别人钻谋去了，白白坐在京里，赔钱度日。...」(RW 10.141)

“All we poor academicians have to look forward to is a few commissions,” said Mr. Lu. “Since all the lucrative jobs had been taken by others, I was sitting there in the capital with nothing to do, spending my own money....” (cf. *The Scholars*, p. 111)

From his words, we see that as a high official and a man with high learning, he sees official posts only as avenues to generate profits, and he has no concern about social welfare.

Moreover, Mr. Lu is practical to life and keeps no moral principles. Concerning Wang Hui's surrender to Prince Ning 宁王 and Wang Hui's participation in the rebellion against the emperor, Mr. Lu advocates Wang Hui's behavior by saying: “No troops, no food, why not surrender?” (无兵无粮，因甚不降; RW 10.145; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 115).

Mr. Lu also believes that examination learning, which directs to an official career, is the highest scholarship. This is indicated by his following statement:

「八股文章若做的好，随你做甚么东西，要诗就诗，要赋就赋，都是一鞭一条痕，一掴一掌血。若是八股文章欠讲究，任你做出甚么来，都是野狐禅、邪魔外道！」(RW 11.155)

“If you write *bagu* essays well, then whatever literary form you use—and this applies even to lyrics or descriptive poems—you will express yourself forcefully and exactly. If, however, you cannot write *bagu* essays well, then all your writing will be

⁷⁰ Song, *The Fragile Scholar*, p. 5.

⁷¹ Michael S. Kimmel, “Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity,” in *Privilege: A Reader*, ed. Michael S. Kimmel and Abby L. Ferber (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003), p. 61.

unorthodox and third-rate.” (cf. *The Scholars*, p. 123)

From his words, according to Mr. Lu, men embodying real learning are those who pass the examinations. So only people who get high degrees in the examinations could be regarded as mastering real talent. Because of his practical outlook, he despises the competence of composing poetry, which has little to do with official careers, and he considers it a way to make fake names (RW 10.142). For instance, when Mr. Lu asks the Lou brothers whether there are influential people in their hometown, the Lou brothers point out Yang Zhizhong 杨执中 and show Yang Zhizhong’s poem to Mr. Lu, Mr. Lu remarks: “...If this fellow is learned why hasn’t he passed the examinations? What use is this poem? ...” (「...他若果有学问, 为甚么不中了去? 只做这两句诗当得甚么? ...」; RW 10.142; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 112)

He even trains his daughter Miss Lu (Lu xiaojie 鲁小姐) to study *bagu* essays even though Miss Lu, as a woman, could not sit the examinations and holds official posts. He is very frustrated by his son-in-law’s, Qu gongsun 蘧公孙, inability to gain success in the examinations. He later gets seriously ill because of this worry and eventually dies of the joy of his promotion as a Hanlin reader.

Another careerist is Mr. Gao (Gao laoxiansheng 高老先生), a Hanlin reader. In a feast, a group of scholars, including Qu gongsun, Ji Weixiao, Ma Chunshang, and Chi Hengshan, are talking about other scholars. When they praise Du Shaoqing’s masculine gesture of generosity with money, Mr. Gao rebukes Du Shaoqing in public. Mr. Gao’s argument is revealing. It is worthwhile to quote it here:

「...诸公莫怪学生说, 这少卿是他杜家第一个败类! 混穿混吃, 和尚、道士、工匠、花子都拉着相与, 却不肯相与一个正经人。不到十年内, 把六七万银子弄的精光。天长县站不住, 搬在南京城里, 日日携着乃眷上酒馆吃酒, 手里拿着一个铜盏子, 就像讨饭的一般。不想他家竟出了这样子弟! 学生在家里, 往常教子侄们读书, 就以他为戒。每人读书的桌子上写一纸条贴着, 上面写道: 『不可学天长杜仪。』」 (RW 34.466-467)

“... if you’ll allow me to say so, this Shaoqing is the first complete wastrel his family has produced! [He fritters] away his time and mixing with Buddhist monks, Taoist priests, artisans and beggars. Not a single respectable friend does he have! In less than ten years he ran through sixty to seventy thousand taels of silver. Then, with Tianchang too hot to hold him, he moved to Nanjing, where he takes his wife to the taverns to drink every day, and parades with a copper bowl like a beggar! Who could have thought his family would produce such a ne’er-do-well! When I teach my sons and nephews at home, I hold him up as an awful example. Pasted on each boy’s desk is the warning: ‘Don’t imitate Du Shaoqing of Tianchang!’” (cf. *The Scholars*, pp. 375-376)

In Mr. Gao's opinion, a successful man should be rich through a career in office or other occupations. Du Shaoqing's gallant behavior, his association with people of lowly status, and his romantic relationship with his wife are all Mr. Gao's targets. A failure as an official, according to Mr. Gao, is one who devotes himself to the people's good but ignores to please his superior. It is a typical careerist's attitude towards masculinity.

The careerists, like Mr. Lu and Mr. Gao, are depicted as *xiaoren*. They master high learning and hold high official posts. They only concern about material gains and self-interest. Social welfare is beyond their consideration. Their view of masculinity is against the masculine ideal which is demonstrated in chapter two.

4. Scholars' Anxiety about Masculinity

Since success through the examinations was more difficult to achieve in the Qing period, most scholars were marginalized due to their failure in this avenue and lived in poverty. As Martin W. Huang points out, “masculinity is almost always fraught with anxiety over the perceived lack of what is considered masculine.”⁷² The novel shows that scholars are intensely anxious about their manliness since masculinity is viewed by society as closely associated with wealth and power. There is a short episode which shows that Du Shaoqing, as a government student, is much annoyed by men with higher examination degrees than him and by officials who are successful in careers. His interaction with a district magistrate named Magistrate Wang (Wang zhixian 王知县) demonstrates his anxiety very well:

王胡子又拿一个帖子进来，禀道：「北门汪盐商家明日酬生日，请县主老爷，请少爷去做陪客。说定要求少爷到席的。」杜少卿道：「你回他我家里有客，不得到席。这人也可笑得紧，你要做这热闹事，不会请县里暴发的举人、进士陪？我那得工夫替人家陪官！」(RW 31.427-428)

Then Whiskers Wang brought in another visiting card.

“Mr. Wang, the salt merchant at the North Gate, is celebrating his birthday tomorrow,” he announced. “He has asked the magistrate as guest of honour, and invites you too, sir. He begs you to be sure to go.”

“Tell him I have guests and cannot go,” replied Du. “How ridiculous the fellow is! If he wants a good party, why doesn’t he invite those newly-rich scholars who have passed the provincial and metropolitan examinations? What time do I have to keep officials company for him?”

(cf. *The Scholars*, p. 343)

Du Shaoqing’s answer reveals that he feels inferior to high examination degree holders and officials. These successful men challenge his manliness. That is why he is unwilling to attend the feast.

When Mr. Zang (Zang sanye 臧三爷, Zang Liaozhai 臧蓼斋) asks Du Shaoqing to pay a visit to Magistrate Wang, Du declines and defends himself with the reason that he is superior to this official who should call on him. Du’s defense reveals

⁷² Huang, *Negotiating Masculinities in Late Imperial China*, p. 8.

his anxiety about his lowly examination degree and his inability to achieve an official career. Mr. Zang and Du Shaoqing's conversation is worthy of quoting here:

臧三爷道：「且坐着，我和你说话。县里王父母是我的老师，他在我跟前说了几次，仰慕你的大才，我几时同你去会会他。」杜少卿道：「像这拜知县做老师的事，只好让三哥你们做。不要说先曾祖、先祖，就先君在日，这样知县不知见过多少。他果然仰慕我，他为甚么不先来拜我，倒叫我拜他？况且倒运做秀才，见了本处知县就要称他老师，王家这一宗灰堆里的进士，他拜我做老师我还不要，我会他怎的？所以北门汪家今日请我去陪他，我也不去。」(RW 31.430).

“Wait a little,” said Zang. “I have something to say to you. District magistrate Wang here is my patron, and he’s told me many times how much he admires your talent. When are you coming with me to see him?”

“I must leave it to you, Third Brother, to call on magistrates and pay your respects as a student,” replied Du. “Why, in my father’s time—to say nothing of my grandfather’s and great-grandfather’s—heaven knows how many magistrates came here! If he really respects me, why doesn’t he call on me first? Why should I call on him? I’m sorry I passed the district examination, since it means I have to address the local magistrate as my patron! As for this Magistrate Wang, who crawled out of some dust-heap to pass the metropolitan examination—I wouldn’t even want him as my student! Why should I meet him? So when the salt merchant who lives at the North Gate invited me to a feast today to meet the magistrate, I refused to go.” (cf. *The Scholars*, pp. 345-346)

In Du’s argument, his ancestors were successful, held a high status, and enjoyed admiration among scholars. Although he could not achieve what his ancestors gained, he is proud of his position and keeps his dignity. He would not like to be humiliated by Magistrate Wang, who succeeds in the examinations and official careers. His anxiety over his manliness is tremendous.

Finally, Du Shaoqing gets the opportunity to recover his masculine image. Although he refuses to see Magistrate Wang, Du Shaoqing helps the latter in need. When Magistrate Wang is dismissed from his official post due to corruption and has no place to live, Du Shaoqing invites the magistrate to live in his garden. In this way, Du Shaoqing could be able to show his superiority to the official whose status dropped sharply. Du’s words reveal his reason to help the magistrate:

「...至于这王公，他既知道仰慕我，就是一点造化了。我前日若去拜他，便是奉承本县知县，而今他官已坏了，又没有房子住，我就该照应他。...」(RW 32.442)

“...As for this Mr. Wang, it’s lucky for him he knew enough to respect me. To have called on him the other day would have been making up to the local magistrate; but now that he’s been removed from office and has nowhere to live, it’s my duty to help him...” (cf. *The Scholars*, p. 355)

It could be read as Du Shaoqing’s revenge to Magistrate Wang. Du’s mercy to allow the latter to live at his house is a kind of humiliation to the latter. Before, Magistrate Wang is in a higher social position and thus more manly than Du. Now it is the opposite.

4.1 Outside Challenges

Officials Challenging Scholars

There are two extreme cases of impoverished scholars rising to high officials in the novel that demonstrate the political power’s position in one’s masculinity. Zhou Jin 周进 and Fan Jin are despised by others when they repeatedly fail in the examinations. Their fate dramatically reverses as they become officials. They gain great prestige and respect from the community.

Mr. Hu’s case is revealing. He is an average scholar. Since he lacks political power, he is cheated by others, although his deceased father was a minister. However, after he associates with Zhao Xuezhai 赵雪斋, an influential poet, who is related to powerful officials, his life becomes easier. Although there might be some exaggeration in Jing Lanjiang’s words in which he boasts his kind’s influence, it nevertheless shows scholars and poets need to enhance their status with the help of political authorities.

Merchants Challenging Scholars

Merchants’ economic power challenges scholars’ masculinity. By the seventeenth century and to the Qing period, the profound socioeconomic changes reorganized urban society.⁷³ With the prosperous urban economy, merchants emerged as a new powerful class in society. They challenged the old class of scholars. Martin Huang points out, “by the eighteenth century the alternative of being a *wenren* 文人, a scholar, was further challenged by the gradual blurring of distinctions among the social classes, especially those between literati and merchants.”⁷⁴ The novel devotes many efforts to criticizing

⁷³ Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses*, p. 4.

⁷⁴ Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*, p. 60. Huang, *Literati and Self-Re/Presentation*, p. 31.

wealthy salt merchant's extravagant behavior. Salt merchants are depicted in an extremely negative color in the novel. Their wealth and influence threaten impoverished scholars' identity tremendously.

In chapter 28, there is a short episode about scholars making fun of wealthy salt merchants' ungenerosity with money. One scholar Jin Yuli 金寓刘 excelling at calligraphy, demands 220 taels of silver for a couplet of 22 characters he writes for a salt merchant. The merchant is offended by Jin's unreasonable claim, goes directly to Jin's house, gives the demanded money, and tears up the couplet in front of Jin (RW 28.381). It shows the scholar's jealousy and anxiety about merchants' capital power.

Chapter 47 shows that Salt Merchant Fang (Fang yanshang 方盐商, sixth Mr. Fang 方六老爷) holds a dazzling ceremony to enshrine his deceased widowed mother. All local officials, gentry, and scholars join the ceremony. By contrast, no one pays respect to Yu Youda's 余有达, an ordinary scholar, two aunts and Yu Huaxuan's 虞华轩, an ordinary scholar, great-aunt, who are also chaste widows and get the imperial reward to be enshrined. This annoys Yu Youda and Yu Huaxuan a good deal. This case clearly shows how much wealthy merchants' economic power challenges the scholar's masculinity.

When Shen Qiongzhi is cheated by a wealthy salt merchant Song Weifu into concubinage, Shen Danian 沈大年, Shen's father, a tribute student (*gongsheng* 贡生), protests at the *yamen*, the district magistrate's first thought of the case reveals salt merchants' power of wealth:

“As a tribute student of Changzhou, Shen Danian ranks as one of the gentry...He would never willingly let his daughter become a concubine. These salt merchants think they can get away with anything!” (cf. *The Scholars*, p. 448)

「沈大年既是常州贡生，也是衣冠中人物，怎么肯把女儿与人做妾？盐商豪横，一至于此！」 (RW 40.556)

However, the district magistrate does not do the justice, and Song Weifu later wins the case by bribing the district magistrate. Justice stands on the wealthy merchant's side. Moreover, many literati are subordinate to merchants by the latter's wealth, which is demonstrated by Du Shaoqing's statement: “Those rich and powerful salt merchants live in such luxury that scholars often cower before them” (「盐商富贵奢华，多少士大夫见了就销魂夺魄。...」; RW 41.566; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 457).

Rich men not only confront scholars directly but also emulate literati identity to raise their masculinity. A rich salt merchant Wan Xuezhai 万雪斋 wears a scholar's cap to refine his identity (RW 23.315). Besides, the identity of scholars is

commercialized. It is said that a government student's degree in Shaoxing 绍兴 costs one thousand taels of silver (RW 19.266). This means that wealthy men like merchants could assume a scholar's identity just by paying enough money.

Commoners Challenging Scholars

Not only officials and merchants challenge scholars' status and masculinity, but also commoners do. Geng Song insightfully notes that "there existed an internalized link between being masculine and being Confucian".⁷⁵ The novel shows that scholars' manhood is so admirable and desirable that even ordinary people try to emulate the scholar's image, challenging the literati's unique manliness.

There are several cases of commoners wearing a scholar's cap to improve their image. Zhi Jianfeng 支剑峰 is a merchant of the Salt Gabelle, and he associates with poets of Hangzhou 杭州. One night after their gathering in the West Lake, he is caught sight of wearing a scholar's cap by the comptroller of a *yamen* and gets arrested (RW 18.258). In chapter twenty-two, Wang Yi'an 王义安, a pander for the brothel in Feng Family Lane (Fengjia xiang 丰家巷) wears a scholar's cap and is beaten harshly by two scholars (RW 22.307-308).

Niu Pu tries to learn poetry to improve his image. As he says: "Tradesmen like us can't dream of passing the examinations...All I want is to read a few poems to acquire a little refinement." (「我们经纪人家，那里还想甚么应考上进！只是念两句诗，破破俗罢了。」；RW 21.286-287; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 232). Later, he gets bold and disguises himself as Niu Buyi, to enter the upper class.

Jin Dongya 金东崖, an ordinary scholar and a *yamen* clerk, composes a book entitled *Commentaries on the Four Books* (*Sishu jiangzhang* 四书讲章) and often sends his book to other scholars for criticism. When he gives his work to Du Shenqing, Du despises him for his lowly status to undertake the noble scholarship:

杜慎卿鼻子里冷笑了一声，向大小厮说道：「一个当书办的人，都跑了回来讲究《四书》，圣贤可是这样人讲的！」(RW 30.412)

Du snorted and said to the boy: "A *yamen* clerk! And he leaves his post to take up the interpretation of the classics! Is it for fellows like this to write commentaries on the works of the sages?" (cf. *The Scholars*, p. 331)

Jin Dongya not only promotes his scholarly image but also tries to purchase examination titles for his son. He spends five hundred taels of silver on hiring Kuang

⁷⁵ Song, *The Fragile Scholar*, p. 90.

Chaoren to replace his illiterate son to sit the examinations. In this way, his son eventually gets the status of government student (RW 19.266-268).

4.2 Inside Challenges

Competition among Scholars

As Kam Louie observes, “while the *wu* masculinity reinforces ideologies of ‘brotherhood’ and loyalty to other men,” the *wen* masculinity stresses competitiveness among intellectuals.⁷⁶ Louie further mentions that this relationship between scholars is well described by Cao Pi 曹丕 (187-226)⁷⁷ that “intellectuals despise each other” (*wenren xiang qing* 文人相轻).⁷⁸ Through this rivalry among intellectuals, scholars protect their positions and defend their masculinity.

The novel shows the competition in the *bagu* essay editing business, in which scholars collect and comment model examination essays for examination candidates to learn. A scholar named Wei Tishan 卫体善 has been editing examination essays for twenty years. When Kuang Chaoren asks Wei’s opinion about Ma Chunshang’s edited essays, Wei mocks Ma Chunshang that the latter’s works ruin examination candidates:

「正是他把个选事坏了！他在嘉兴蘧坦庵太守家走动，终日讲的是些杂学。听见他杂览倒是好的，于文章的理法，他全然不知，一味乱闹，好墨卷也被他批坏了。所以我看见他的选本，叫子弟把他的批语涂掉了读。」 (RW 18.254)

“Precisely! That kind of man is ruining the editing business. He has been staying in Prefect Qu’s home at Jiaxing, where they talk of nothing but heterodox studies; and although I understand he has a flair for frivolous writing, he has not the faintest conception of the rules of essays. The result is that he creates extraordinary confusion, and even good essays are spoilt by his abominable commentaries! Whenever I see students reading his selections, I tell them to delete his notes.” (cf. *The Scholars*, pp. 204-205)

The commentator of the Qi sheng tang edition remarks that Wei Tishan is incredibly jealous of Ma Chunshang (妒心大作; RW 18.254). Wei’s jealousy reveals his anxiety about the competition with his colleagues.

⁷⁶ Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*, p. 61.

⁷⁷ He was the first emperor of Cao Wei 曹魏 (220-266) in the Three Kingdoms period.

⁷⁸ Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*, p. 61.

Later, Kuang Chaoren also involves in this editing business. When asked his view of the quality of Ma Chunshang's work, like Wei Tishan, Kuang Chaoren defends his position by criticizing Ma Chunshang:

「...这马纯兄理法有余，才气不足；所以他的选本也不甚行。选本总以行为主，若是不行，书店就要赔本，惟有小弟的选本，外国都有的！」(RW 20.280)

“But although he understands the rules, he lacks genius and therefore his books don't sell too well. And the circulation is most important, you know; for if a book doesn't sell, the bookshops lose money. My selections, however, are read even in foreign countries.” (cf. *The Scholars*, p. 227).

Through the above cases, we see that scholars protect their image and masculinity by despising their colleagues. It reveals their anxiety and fear about their manhood challenged by the inside competitors which refers to men with similar status, that is the literary groups.

Through *Rulin waishi*, we get a glimpse of the scholars' worries about their manliness. Their unique masculinity is mainly constituted by their competence in classical scholarship or poetry, examination degrees, or the scholar's cap. However, officials, merchants, and commoners challenge scholars' masculinity by status, wealth, or by emulation of scholars' learning or dress. There is also a competition inside the scholars' circle.

5. Pinniang: The Danger of Female Sexuality

Romances between courtesans and scholars are a common theme in classical Chinese literary works. *Rulin waishi* also includes an episode of this kind and depicts a late Ming courtesan, Pinniang 聘娘, in detail. Late Ming courtesans are often fashioned as a symbol of elite culture and passion.⁷⁹ This chapter will reveal that Pinniang is given another image. Depicted as a self-profit seeker, she manipulates culture and passion to lure a scholar, Chen Munan 陈木楠, to upward social mobility. For this reason, she is blamed as an evil temptation to lead her lover to go astray. The episode reinforces the conventional idea of condemning a courtesan or a prostitute who tries to return to family and to raise her status. It also reveals men's anxiety about female sexuality.

It may be helpful to have a summary of Pinniang's story. Pinniang is a cultured courtesan in the late Ming time. She can read poetry and play draughts. She aspires to become the principal wife of an official to advance her social status. She associates with Chen Munan, a relative of the duke's family. Chen lies to her that he would become a prefect and marry her. Half a year later, Chen exhausts all his money and leaves. After being humiliated by her boss, Pinniang becomes a nun.

Although Mrs. Dong (Dong laotai 董老太), Chen Munan's landlady, seems to be a minor character in the novel, for she is depicted with limited words, her remarks play an essential role in understanding Pinniang's story. After knowing Chen Munan tends to indulge himself in romance with a courtesan, Mrs. Dong warns him:

「...自古道：船载的金银，填不满烟花债。他们这样人家，是甚么有良心的！把银子用完，他就屁股也不朝你了。我今年七十多岁，看经念佛，观音菩萨听着，我怎肯眼睁睁的看着你上当不说！」(RW 54.724-725)

"...But don't you know the proverb? A whole boatload of gold and silver won't be enough for a courtesan. Women like that don't have any heart, I tell you. When your money is spent, they'll turn their backs on you. I'm over seventy now, and I read the Buddhist scriptures. As Guanyin is my witness, how can I watch and say nothing when I see you cheated like this?" (cf. *The Scholars*, pp. 584-585).

As an over seventy-year-old woman with long life experience, she serves as an

⁷⁹ Wai-ye Li, "The Late Ming Courtesan: Invention of a Cultural Ideal," in *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*, ed. Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 46 and p. 72.

authority. Her warning for a young man who is going astray cannot be dismissed that lightly. Her words reveal the conventional assumption for courtesans: Courtesans have no genuine emotions for men because what matters for them is only men's money. Their business is to seduce men and to cheat men out of their money. Mrs. Dong's statement occurs at the beginning of Chen and Pinni-ang's affair, and all her words come true in the end. Her message is the key to make sense of Pinni-ang's story, which will be demonstrated later.

5.1 Chen Munan and People of Welcome Pavilion

Chen Munan's Image

Chen Munan indulges in sexual pleasure, cheats Pinni-ang that he would soon get an official post and cheats other people's money. However, his image nevertheless is relatively positive compared to the people of Welcome Pavilion (Laibinlou 来宾楼), a brothel. The tone of Pinni-ang's episode suggests that Chen Munan's biggest mistake is his inability to see through the trap set by Pinni-ang and other people of Welcome Pavilion.

Chen Munan is portrayed as naive and single-minded to believe Pinni-ang's appreciation for his poetry. After half a year's wandering at Welcome Pavilion, he has already got lots of debts. When asked by Monk Chen (Chen heshang 陈和尚, Chen Siruan 陈思阮), a fortune-teller, about his current situation, Chen Munan answers: "Pinni-ang of Welcome Pavilion here appreciates my poems, so I often call to see her." (「因这里来宾楼的聘娘爱我的诗做的好, 我常在他那里。」; RW 54.730; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 589).

When Pinni-ang gets ill, he is depicted to be sincerely worried and give great care to her. When seeing Pinni-ang's pale face, he asks: "Where does it hurt? What do you need to get better? When You had this trouble before, how did you cure it?" (「你到底是那里疼痛? 要怎样才得好? 往日发了这病, 却是甚么样医?」; RW 54.723; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 583). After knowing that ginseng could cure her illness, he says: "I've silver here, I'll leave you fifty taels to buy ginseng for her. I shall buy some of the best ginseng, too, and bring it here myself." (「我这里有银子, 且拿五十两放在你这里, 换了人参来用着。再拣好的换了, 我自己带来给你。」; RW 54.723; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 583). When Pinni-ang says ginseng is not enough, and she also needs gentian, Chen remarks: "That's easy... I'll bring you some gentian tomorrow too." (「这也容易。我明日换些黄连来给你就是了。」; RW 54.723; cf.

The Scholars, p. 583). Moreover, he acts what he promises. After he arrives home, he “orders his attendants to buy ginseng and gentian hastily.” (叫长随赶着去换人参、换黄连; RW 54.724). His words and action show his genuine efforts to get his lover’s health back.

The novel depicts Chen as a passionate lover. He even tries to bid farewell to Pinni-ang but gets refusal from her boss. Although Pinni-ang’s reaction is not described in the novel, her absence could be read as a deliberate effort to avoid seeing him, for she always stays at Welcome Pavilion. It could be read as praise for Chen Munan’s passion for his lover and, at the same time, the criticism of Pinni-ang’s cold blood and false affection.

In conversation with the ninth Mr. Xu (徐九公子), the duke’s son, Chen shows a refined style. He quotes a Tang poem to appreciate the warmth of the duke’s palace. It wins the commentator of the *Qi sheng tang* edition’s praises for his refined speech as a poet (RW 53.709). He also conveys his admiration for the ceremony of the Taibo Temple held by Dr. Yu. His criticism of the newly rich people’s scandalous habit to invite actors to entertain themselves in the feast is acknowledged by the ninth Mr. Xu, who has quite a positive image in the novel (RW 53.710).

Chen is also characterized as a helpful man. Upon seeing Monk Chen lying on the ground after his fighting against Ding Yanzhi 丁言志, another fortune-teller, Chen Munan hastily pulls Monk Chen up. Besides, Chen Munan helps to resolve the dispute by giving a fair judgment (RW 54.729-730), which also shows Chen’s broad knowledge about contemporary literati.

Wicked People of Welcome Pavilion

The text displays that people of Welcome Pavilion all aim to take advantage of Chen Munan. Pinni-ang aspires to become the principal wife of Chen to advance her social status. It is highlighted in her story. She consciously and actively selects companies. When she first appears in the novel, she is described to “prefer officials to all other men.” (心里最喜欢相与官; RW 53.717; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 573). She also directly asks Chen Munan when he would become an official, and then Chen lies that he would get a post of prefect one year later and would take her with him. Although she claims to him: “I’m not intended to gain from your potential to become an official, but simply love you” (「...也不是贪图你做官, 就是爱你的人物。」; RW 53.716), she immediately dreams at night that as the wife of Chen, she is invited to go to Hangzhou 杭州 where Chen gets a post as a prefect. As Ropp notes, her dream reveals her strong

desire to be the wife of an official.⁸⁰

Qian po 虔婆, Pinniang's boss, is depicted to be only interested in gaining money from customers. In the final part of the story, we see that she urges Pinniang to give the tips the latter gets from customers. Besides, during the welcome meal to Chen Munan, Qian po keeps talking about her fancy of the duke's palace, revealing her desire for wealth. The commentator of the Qi sheng tang edition remarks, "her words never stray from the topic of the duke's palace, displaying the prostitution's fickleness and snobbery." (句句不离国公府, 写尽烟花势利; RW 53.714)

Jin Xiuyi 金修义, Pinniang's uncle, wishes her to get access to the noble ninth Mr. Xu through associating with Chen Munan. He, therefore, keeps running after Chen and urges Chen to see Pinniang.

The contradictory reactions of the people of Welcome Pavilion to Chen reveal their fickleness and snobbery. As long as Chen appears to be wealthy, he is flattered and pleased by every one of Welcome Pavilion, such as Qian po, Pinniang, and Jin Xiuyi. After he falls into poverty, no one receives him at Welcome Pavilion. The most revealing case is Qian po's treatment to Chen Munan. When Chen comes to Welcome Pavilion for the first time, she receives him eagerly. The description of this scene is worthy to note here:

看见陈木楠人物体面, 慌忙说道: 「请姐夫到里边坐! 」 (RW 53.711)

"When she saw how distinguished Chen looked, she hastily said to him: 'Please come in, my brother-in-law!' (This translation is adapted)" (cf. *The Scholars*, p. 575)

By contrast, when the impoverished Chen comes to bid farewell for the last time, she treats him coldly:

「四老爷, 请坐下罢了。」 (RW 54.731)

"Have a seat, Mr. Chen." (cf. *The Scholars*, p. 589)

From Qian po's two ways of addressing Chen and the two different places she offers Chen to sit, the real concern of Qian po is uncovered. What matters for her is only profits.

The contradictory interactions of people within Welcome Pavilion reveal their hidden conflicts. At first, the story leaves us the impression that Pinniang is in a privileged position. Her chess teacher, her fellows, the fortune teller, and particularly Qian po, her boss, all please her, putting her in a high status. When they together drink

⁸⁰ Ropp, *Dissent in Early Modern China*, p. 283, note 62.

wine with Chen, Pinniāng argues with Qian po twice, but Qian po always shows a humble attitude by admitting: “You are right.” (「姑娘说的是」; RW 53.713, 715). Besides, when Pinniāng is sick, Qian po declares that “Pinniāng has been spoiled since she was a little child (This translation is adapted)” (「自小娇养惯了...」; RW 54.722; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 583), and later she claims that she brews ginseng soup to cure Pinniāng. Indeed, we see Qian po invite a nun and a fortune-teller to help to better Pinniāng’s health.

The text, however, shows that Qian po’s obedience and care to Pinniāng are just for show in front of the respectable patron Pinniāng attracts. When Pinniāng loses powerful patrons’ support, Qian po and Pinniāng’s relation is merely about the calculation of material gains. Qian po does not flatter Pinniāng anymore. Instead, she tries to take as much money as possible from Pinniāng by letting the latter receive all potential customers. However, Pinniāng is only interested in serving officials with the hope that they might marry her and help her out of the dishonorable job. The text shows us that when Qian po and Pinniāng share gains from associating with Chen Munan, they cooperate, as we see it when Pinniāng gets ill and also when they both gain nothing from the impoverished Chen. However, when Qian po’s authority is challenged by Pinniāng who loses patron’s support, “with a cuff, she knocked Pinniāng over (This translation is adapted)” (一个嘴巴把聘娘打倒在地; RW 54.734; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 592). Therefore, we can see that Qian and Pinniāng’s relationship is only about profits, which is portrayed negatively.

Pinniāng’s Fake Persona

Pinniāng is portrayed not as weak as she appears to be in illness. She is tough when interacting with her boss. She confronts her boss twice in the story. The first time is during the meal. When Qian po claims that Pinniāng could not match the beauty of the duke’s palace, Pinniāng argues against Qian po to maintain her dignity and pride. The second time is more direct and violent. When Qian po tries to exploit her, with the strong belief and confidence that she would become a lady someday, she scolds Qian po in a disobedient way: “... You should be glad I don’t scold you; but instead you come here to nag at me!” (「...我不说你罢了, 你还要来嘴喳喳!」; RW 54.734; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 592). It offends Qian po a good deal and generates her revenge by humiliating Pinniāng. Instead of leading to Pinniāng’s obedience, it evokes Pinniāng’s violent revolt: “After sobbing and cursing Qian po, she screamed for a knife to cut her own throat or a rope to hang herself. Soon all her hair had come down (This translation is adapted).” (向虔婆大哭大骂, 要寻刀刎颈, 要寻绳子上吊, 髻都滚掉了。; RW

54.734; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 592). Finally, Pinniāng wins to get liberated. Her strong character is also shown through her reaction to Ding Yanzhi, an impoverished fortune-teller. She humiliates Ding by laughing at his poverty.

Pinniāng's strength in front of Ding Yanzhi and her boss constructs a sharp contrast with her weakness in front of Chen Munan. Her strength makes us attempted to doubt the sincerity of her weakness, which is mostly displayed by her sickness. When she is ill, her fragile appearance of a pale face with tears in eyes reminds us of Lin Daiyu 林黛玉 in *Honglou meng*, whose traits are the most feminine, "full of sorrow and sickness".⁸¹ The stereotype of female passivity constructs feminine charms. With the help of her pretended weakness, Pinniāng successfully attracts Chen to take care of her by buying expensive medicine.

In the end, Pinniāng's artificial cultural interest is uncovered. When Ding Yanzhi visits her to discuss poetry, she declares to Ding:

「我们本院的规矩，诗句是不白看的，先要拿出花钱来再看。」(RW 54.733)

"The rule of our house is not to read poems without first receiving a fee. I'll read your poem, sir, when I've seen your money." (cf. *The Scholars*, p. 591)

When Ding struggles to collect twenty copper coins, she laughs loudly and says:

「你这个钱，只好送给仪征丰家巷的捞毛的，不要玷污了我的桌子。快些收了回去买烧饼吃罢！」(RW 54.733)

"You'd better give your money to the pimp at Feng Family Lane in Yizheng!... Don't dirty my table with it! Take it back at once to buy a few mouthfuls of sesame seed cake! (This translation is modified)" (cf. *The Scholars*, p. 592)

Pinniāng's two statements reveal that her discussion of poetry with men is based on large sums of money, and she is not interested in poetry for its own sake. It is good to read Pinniāng's words above together with her argument to Qian po:

「...我将来从了良，不怕不做太太！你放这样呆子上我的楼来，...」
(RW 54.733)

"... I shall marry and be a lady. How can you let a fool like that (Ding Yanzhi, a poor fortune-teller) come upstairs..." (cf. *The Scholars*, p. 592)

This scene reveals a lot. As Zuyan Zhou notes, her refusal to discuss poetry with the impoverished client indicates she lacks sincere interest in poetry.⁸² It contradicts

⁸¹ Li, "The Late Ming Courtesan: Invention of a Cultural Ideal," p. 62.

⁸² Zuyan Zhou, "Yin-yang Bipolar Complementarity," p. 15.

Pinniāng's image constructed by Qian po, who states that Pinniāng has long admired Chen Munan's poetry and is longing to meet him. Through this scene, Ding Yanzhi's statement that "I have long heard of your fondness for poetry, madam..." (「久仰姑娘最喜看诗...」; RW 54.733; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 591) and his assumption that "she must be a cultured prostitute if she admires talent! ..." (「青楼中的人也晓得爱才，这就雅极了。」; RW 54.730; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 589) are all proved to be too naive. Pinniāng's cultured image is, therefore, just a mask to lure prospective patrons, as Zuyan Zhou observes.⁸³

Wai-ye Li notes that the late Ming courtesan is often represented as a cultural ideal.⁸⁴ However, in *Rulin waishi*, Pinniāng, as a famous courtesan in the late Ming period, is depicted to cultivate cultures just for personal gains. She practices draughts under the instruction of the best draughts player in Nanjing. She also sings Li Bai's 李白 (701-762) poem the best in the pleasure quarter, and she reads poetry. However, all her cultivated skills are to entertain prospective patrons and finally to raise her status.

Pinniāng's Fake Passion

There is a strong indication that Pinniāng's episode happens in the Wanli 万历 era (1573-1620) as Stephen J. Roddy argues,⁸⁵ partly because the date, twenty-third of the Wanli era (1595) appears explicitly in chapter 55 when the episode is over (RW 55.739). The particular attention we pay to the Wanli era here is that the concept of "passion", or "sentiment" (*qing* 情) occupied a special significance in literary works at that time.⁸⁶ According to Allan H. Barr, "romances between scholar and courtesan were the subject of particular literary attention in the Wanli period."⁸⁷

However, the cult of sentiment does not occupy an important place in Pinniāng's story. Wai-ye Li points out that the late Ming courtesan is often "perceived as the embodiment of *qing*".⁸⁸ Pinniāng as a late Ming courtesan, however, is portrayed to be indifferent and false. It could be read as the Qing scholars' different attitudes towards courtesans, for Wu Jingzi, who wrote Pinniāng's story, lived in the Qing period. The text reveals and implicitly criticizes that a courtesan's passion for a scholar is not genuine, and it is just her performance to achieve personal interests. In Pinniāng's relationship with Chen Munan, there is no mutual understanding and appreciation

⁸³ Zuyan Zhou, "Yin-yang Bipolar Complementarity," pp. 14-15.

⁸⁴ Li, "The Late Ming Courtesan: Invention of a Cultural Ideal," pp. 46-47.

⁸⁵ Roddy, *Literati Identity and Its Fictional Representations in Late Imperial China*, p. 124.

⁸⁶ Allan H. Barr, "The Wanli Context of the 'Courtesan's Jewel Box' Story," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 57.1 (1997), p. 110.

⁸⁷ Barr, "The Wanli Context of the 'Courtesan's Jewel Box' Story," p. 123.

⁸⁸ Li, "The Late Ming Courtesan: Invention of a Cultural Ideal," p. 72.

shown to us. Their relation is portrayed to be only Pinniāng's calculation to enter a high social class.

Pinniāng's fake affection is under the light of courtesans' image as a whole, which is depicted at the beginning of chapter 53: "Though the prostitutes had many lovers, they liked to receive a few scholars to raise the tone of their house" (那些妓女们相与的孤老多了, 却也要几个名士来住, 觉得破破俗; RW 53.705; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 572)⁸⁹. Their particular interest in cultivating relationships with scholars is to improve their lowly image, which is despised as the narrative's tone suggests. It indicates their insincere relationship with men. The commentator of the Qi sheng tang edition notices Pinniāng's pretended affection on Chen by his remarks: "Upon learning that Chen would become a prefect, Pinniāng dreams of the tour to Hangzhou. Why does she treat Chen as coldly as a passer-by later on? She believes she would be the wife of a prefect." (聘娘一闻知府之信, 即梦作杭州之游, 何后文于陈四先生漠如路人? 彼固以为我应作知府夫人耳; RW 53.717).

There are no descriptions of Pinniāng's sincere concern about Chen Munan. In the beginning, she claims that she admires Chen: "I do not intend to gain from your potential to become an official, but simply loves you" (「...也不是贪图你做官, 就是爱你的人物。」; RW 53.716). However, there is not a single word of her thought of Chen, her half a year's lover, who has left Nanjing. We only see that after Chen's departure, she continues her business and bargains with Ding Yanzhi. It could be read as she does not care about Chen's situation at all, and it implicitly criticizes her unauthentic sentiment.

She is also portrayed as a faithless lover. Although a courtesan's business is naturally for material gains, expectations on them to be loyal to men are prevailing in traditional Chinese narratives. For instance, in stories such as "Huo Xiaoyu zhuan" 霍小玉传 (Huo Xiaoyu zhuan)⁹⁰ and "Du Shiniang Sinks the Jewel Box in Anger" 杜十娘怒沉百宝箱⁹¹, courtesans' loyalty to men is praised while men's faithlessness is condemned. However, *Rulin waishi* shows that it is Pinniāng who abandons her lover when the latter gets impoverished, just as what Li Wa 李娃 does in the well-known Tang tale "Li Wa Zhuan" 李娃传 (Li Wa zhuan)⁹², although not so dramatically. Mrs. Dong's warning indicates: "Women like that don't have any heart, I tell you. When

⁸⁹ *Mingshi* 名士 refers to self-styled scholars.

⁹⁰ Jiang Fang 蒋防, "Huo Xiaoyu zhuan" 霍小玉, in *Taiping guangji* 太平广记, ed. Li Fang 李昉 [et al.] (10 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), pp. 4006-4011.

⁹¹ Feng Menglong 冯梦龙, *Jingshi tongyan* 警世通言, (vol.11-12., Taipei: Heluo tushu chubanshe, 1980), pp. 481-496.

⁹² Bai Xingjian 白行简, "Li Wa zhuan" 李娃传, in *Taiping guangji* 太平广记, ed. Li Fang 李昉 [et al.] (10 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), pp. 3985-3991.

your money is spent, they'll turn their backs on you.” (「...他们这样人家，是甚么有良心的！把银子用完，他就屁股也不朝你了。...」；RW 54. 725；cf. *The Scholars*, p. 585). Indeed, in the story, Chen tries to see Pinni-ang for the last time, but Pinni-ang is said to go out for a party. It could be read as Pinni-ang's unwillingness to see Chen for she is described to be always at Welcome Pavilion both when Chen's economic situation is good and when later Ding Yanzhi visits her. Pinni-ang's betrayal of Chen Munan is indicated when she expresses directly to her boss that the very reason that she refuses to receive Ding Yanzhi is that the latter is too poor. It means if Ding or other men could afford more money, she would entertain them. In other words, the standard of her reaction to men is money. Romantic love or loyalty to her lover is not what she considers. Thus, the novel reveals that Wu Jingzi lacks empathy for Pinni-ang's situation.

5.2 Female Sexuality's Disruptive Power

Destroying a Man

As “Yingying zhuan” 莺莺传 (Yingying zhuan), the notable Tang tale, describes, “it is a general rule that those women endowed by Heaven with great beauty invariably either destroy themselves or destroy someone else...”⁹³ (「大凡天之所命尤物也，不妖其身，必妖于人。...」). The dominant discourse on female sexuality in traditional China is that it is destructive and would cause chaos if men are indulged in it. As the four-character expression, “pretty women are like floods” (*hongyan huo shui* 红颜祸水), suggests, female sexuality is a source of disasters which could “topple the country and topple the city” (*qing guo qing cheng* 倾国倾城). Geng Song notes that Chinese official historiography “had repeatedly fashioned the discourse on the chaos caused by indulgence in female sexuality. Women are dangerous because they pull men away from their public and social responsibilities...”⁹⁴

Courtesans symbolize female sexuality. It is a motif that courtesans destroy promising young men by squandering their fortune and distract them from their responsibilities, either preparation for examinations or family obligations. That a courtesan ruins a man is most vividly depicted in the well-known Tang tale, “Li Wa

⁹³ Yuan Zhen 元稹, “Yingying zhuan” 莺莺传, in *Taiping guangji* 太平广记, ed. Li Fang 李昉 [et al.] (10 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), p. 4016. This translation is cited from Kam Louie, *Theorizing Chinese Masculinity*, p. 63.

⁹⁴ Song, *The Fragile Scholar*, p. 175.

zhuang” in which a young man nearly loses his life because Li Wa, a courtesan, betrays him. Li Wa is finally praised by saving her poor lover’s life and supporting his study. It could be interpreted that she is implicitly criticized by her abandoning and ruining her lover before.

Although *Rulin waishi* claims by its title to be an unofficial history, it nevertheless continues the official conception of female charm and repeats the motif of wicked courtesans. Pinniang is portrayed as an evil temptation, which leads to Chen Munan’s financial and moral decay.

In the novel, Pinniang leads Chen into deadly traps, especially by exploiting Chen’s fortune. There are many descriptions about how Chen is lured to squander his money in association with Pinniang. To prepare his first meeting with Pinniang, he borrows two hundred taels of silver from his patron, the ninth Mr. Xu, buys brocade and makes several costumes as gifts to Pinniang. With Pinniang’s painstaking arrangement, Chen plays Chinese draughts with Zou Tailai 邹泰来, the best draughts player in Nanjing, Pinniang’s draughts teacher. For this entertainment, Chen pays Zou Tailai an ingot of silver. After his first day in Welcome Pavilion, Chen borrows another two hundred taels of silver from his patron. As soon as he gets the money, Jin Xiuyi is waiting for him at his house and urges him to Welcome Pavilion. When he arrives there, Pinniang is pale and in tears. Jin Xiuyi and Qian po both explain to Chen that Pinniang’s heart disease occurs again because she longs for Chen, who does not come for two days. Their collective efforts successfully convince Chen of his value for Pinniang and evoke Chen’s empathy. When Chen inquires how to cure Pinniang, Jin Xiuyi, Qian po, and Pinniang all declare that only ginseng and gentian, the expensive medicine would be useful. Then Chen not only gives fifty taels of silver to them but also buys medicine himself and brings them to Pinniang. In light of Qian po, Jin Xiuyi, and Pinniang’s intentions about the association with Chen, as discussed before, Pinniang’s illness is more like a drama to cheat Chen’s money.

After half a year’s wandering in Welcome Pavilion, Chen’s fortune declines sharply. Before interacting with Pinniang, he wears a fox fur jacket and is equipped with two attendants in new clothes. Half a year later, he wanders on the street without attendants. The owner of a ginseng shop goes after him to collect the debt he owes. Mrs. Dong, his landlady, declares that he does not pay her the rent. With these debts behind, he secretly flees away from Nanjing. The text indicates that it is all due to Pinniang, Qian po, and Jin Xiuyi’s collective trap to exploit Chen’s money.

Pinniang is also implicitly attributed to Chen’s neglect of his obligations. Because of his obsession with sexual pleasure, Chen is distracted from scholarship, to

which he ought to devote himself. It is indicated by the third Mr. Xu's (Xu sangongzi 徐三公子) statement. After a long time of not seeing Chen Munan, the third Mr. Xu says, "... I am sure you have become a fine scholar during my absence." (「...几年来学问更加渊博了。」 RW 54.722; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 582). Besides, Chen is supposed to serve his respectable patron, the third Mr. Xu, a prefect in Fujian 福建, who offers him a job, and he promises to provide his service after two or three months (RW 54.722). However, only half a year later, when Chen runs out of money does he plan to go. The overtone is that Chen's sexual desire harms his loyalty to his patrons. It also suggests that Chen Munan neglects the proper association with other scholars, thus loosening the male bonds due to his attachment to Pinniangu. It is supported by monk Chen's argument that Chen Munan is not available to discuss poetry with him when Chen is with Pinniangu (RW 54.730).

Chen Munan's moral degeneration tends to be attributed to Pinniangu's seduction. Chen's obsession in sexual pleasure, squandering money, and dishonesty of not paying his debts are not harshly criticized, but Pinniangu's sexual charm and her business of a courtesan. In the episode, there is no sign that Chen Munan gets punishment. In the end, he leaves Nanjing and goes to Fujian to visit his wealthy patrons, leaving his debts unpaid. His financial problem and dishonesty are attributed by Mrs. Dong, whose rent is owed by Chen, to the fault of Pinniangu. Her remark is worthy to note here: "Ever since he lost his head over that witch at Welcome Pavilion, he's swindled everyone and got up to his neck in debt." (「...他自从来宾楼张家的妖精缠昏了头, 那一处不脱空? 背着一身债...」; RW 54.732; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 591). Here, the commentator of the Qi sheng tang edition points out: "(Chen Munan) still could be counted as clever as to free himself from this trap" (火坑里能跳出自身还算乖的; RW 54.732). Chen Munan is thus to some extent, praised to finally free himself from sexual indulgence despite that he deceives people's money. The commentator of the Qi sheng tang edition also blames Pinniangu of her wicked power to corrupt Chen Munan. His commentary at the end of chapter 53 says: "Enjoying the plum blossom at Vista Garden (in the duke's palace) is like being in paradise, how could Welcome Pavilion match it? But the fourth Mr. Chen (Chen Munan) is simply indulgent in the latter. It proves how greatly female beauty harms men." (瞻园赏梅, 飘飘乎如在天上, 来宾楼乌足及之? 而陈四先生偏迷溺其中, 则色之陷人者大矣; RW 53.717).

Even Chen Munan's lie of redeeming Pinniangu and taking her to the official post he would get is suggested as a result of Pinniangu's pressure. Upon Chen goes to Pinniangu's bedroom for the first time and sits down, Pinniangu immediately asks him: "Since you're related to the duke's family, when will you become an official?" (「四老爷, 你既同国公府里是亲戚, 你几时才做官?」; RW 53.715; cf. *The Scholars*,

p. 579). Her question implies her high expectation for him. To maintain his entertainment and to save his face, he lies.

Unnatural Desire

To become the principal wife of an official, thus to upward social mobility for Pinniāng is presented by the text as unnatural. It is in line with the dominant perception of prostitutes and courtesans in traditional China. As Zheng Ruishan 郑睿衫 points out, prostitutes and courtesans were kept away from family, and they were viewed as unrealistic, evil, and seeking unnatural aims when they want to enter marriage.⁹⁵

Pinniāng's humble status as a courtesan does not allow her to even have a single thought to become the wife of an official. Her aspiration becomes empty partly because Chen Munan is not trustful. However, even if Chen becomes an official, there is little hope that he would marry her. In traditional Chinese society where the marriage was matched between equal families, an official would rarely marry a courtesan as a wife. Besides, as Allan H. Barr notes, "for even an elite courtesan..., it was very difficult to attain the same degree of security and stability in marriage as a woman taken as a principal wife would expect."⁹⁶ That means even if Chen Munan marries her, her status would still be insecure. In this novel, we see that when some scholars like Kuang Chaoren, or Niu Pu get an official post, they violate laws to marry a second wife from a well-off family, although they have already had a wife.

Her dream, which is depicted in detail, also implies that her aspiration is not justified. As Paul S. Ropp notes, her dream reveals not only her hope but also her insecurity,⁹⁷ which, to some extent, implies the unrealistic nature of her hope. In her dream, excited and well dressed in a chaplet and official robes as Chen's wife, she is sitting inside a large sedan chair escorted by a group of attendants to Hangzhou to enjoy Chen's honor and wealth. Then, she is suddenly seized by an abbess to be a disciple. The abbess's dragging her right from riches and status to religious renunciation suggests that she ought to detach herself from worldly desires. As this dream's ending foreshadows, she indeed ends to be a nun.

Her disease suggests that her desire is irrational. As Zhang Maoxue notes, her

⁹⁵ Zheng Ruishan 郑睿衫, "Rulin waishi renlun guan yanjiu" 《儒林外史》人伦观研究 (Master's thesis, Guoli Taiwan shifan daxue 国立台湾师范大学, 2019), p. 115. I used this master's thesis for its insight in analyzing *Rulin waishi's* female issues.

⁹⁶ Barr, "The Wanli Context of the 'Courtesan's Jewel Box' Story," p. 122.

⁹⁷ Ropp, *Dissent in Early Modern China*, p. 283, note 62.

desire makes her ill.⁹⁸ After her aspiration to become Chen Munan's wife is evoked, she suffers heartburn. It makes her frightened and not able to sleep (RW 54.723). This might indicate that her ambition is too big, too unrealistic, and too strong. Also, it could be read that she is so anxious that her body could not hold it. Thus, the disorder of her mind causes the illness of her body. Besides, the blind fortune-teller advises her to "dedicate herself to one of the bodhisattvas" (却要记一个佛名; RW 54.723; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 585) if she wants to recover from her illness. Although it could be read as a typical trick played by the fortune-teller, it could also be viewed that she should return to religion and distance herself from her harmful desires.

The dramatic contrast of her wish and reality reveals the irrationality of her aim. Throughout the story, we are repeatedly told that how eager she is to be the wife of an official and how painstaking efforts she makes to achieve this goal. However, it becomes an illusion in the end, which means that a lowly woman like her should not aim to be an official's wife.

Her end is consciously depicted as a punishment of her obsession with status. As courtesan in Welcome Pavilion, she has a relatively free and wealthy life. Zhang Maoxue comes to this conclusion by comparing her situation with prostitutes like Shun guniang 顺姑娘 and Xi guniang 细姑娘, as well as the young wife on the boat who makes a living by luring men with her sexuality.⁹⁹ Unlike Pinniangu, these women have a lowlier status and live a more insecure life. While Chen Munan easily runs away, it is Pinniangu who is humiliated by her boss. Her obsession in status makes her forget the hierarchy in her profession. It evokes her to challenge the authority of her boss, who then gives her a harsh blow. It could be read as a punishment for her unreasonable desire.

She avoids becoming a nun with all efforts at first. In her dream, a nun tries to discourage her aim, but she orders her attendants to seize the nun. Also, in reality, when the abbess Ben Hui 本慧 comes to see her when she is ill, she avoids contacting Ben Hui. To become a nun is also suggested as a bad ending for her by the narrator's comment: "Unexpectedly, a beautiful lady becomes a nun." (窈窕佳人竟作禅关之客; RW 53.717). Zhang Maoxue points out, becoming a nun is mostly a tragedy for her, although it could be interpreted as she finally takes her destiny in her own hands and gets liberation.¹⁰⁰ In reality, nuns were not in a safe position. In the novel, we see that a nun named Xin Yuan 心远 is raped and kidnapped by Quan Wuyong 权勿用 (RW

⁹⁸ Zhang Maoxue 张懋学, "Rulin waishi zhong de Pinniangu xingxiang" 《儒林外史》中的聘娘形象, *Puyang zhiye jishu xueyuan xuebao* 濮阳职业技术学院学报 28.3 (2015), p. 109.

⁹⁹ Zhang Maoxue, "Rulin waishi zhong de Pinniangu xingxiang," pp. 108-109.

¹⁰⁰ Zhang Maoxue, "Rulin waishi zhong de Pinniangu xingxiang," p. 110.

13.185). Besides, in Pinniang's story, we are told that abbess Ben Hui's twenty-year-old disciple dies, although their nunnery has an ironic name, Long Life Nunnery (Yan shou an 延寿庵) (RW 54.724). These depictions of nuns in the novel foreshadow Pinniang's terrible situation as a nun.

In chapter 54, besides Pinniang, we see a man who turns to religious renunciation as well. While Pinniang seeks refuge in religion to free from humiliation in her occupation, the fortune-teller Chen Siruan becomes a monk just to get rid of his wife and to enjoy a carefree life. It is so easy for Chen Siruan to transform his identity. After he shaves his head, he becomes a monk. By contrast, to become a nun, Pinniang threatens her boss by trying to kill herself. Moreover, Chen Siruan is celebrated by the commentator Tianmu Shanqiao for his determination and liberation (RW 54.727) and praised by the commentator of the Qi sheng tang edition for his enlightenment (RW 54.734). Yet, Pinniang is satirized by the commentator Tianmu Shanqiao that "if she composes a poem about shaving her head" (可有剃发诗? ; RW 54.734).

The above discussion demonstrates that Pinniang is portrayed as a fickle and snobbish woman who uses sexual strategies to attract men and thus to pursue her unnatural aspiration to raise her status. By contrast, Chen Munan is depicted as a naive victim. The episode contains the conception that men's immorality and lack of discipline are due to women's seduction, and it expresses the conventional anxiety about female sexuality. As the commentator of the Qi sheng tang edition remarks at the end of the episode, although it does not provide many details about Chen Munan's attachment to Pinniang, the text already makes readers alerted about the disruptive power of women (RW 54.734). Pinniang's story thus serves as a warning for men of the danger of female sexuality. It suggests the novel's unsympathetic portrayal of Pinniang. Besides, it exhibits a deep suspicion of romantic sentiment and implicitly contains an orientation of misogyny.

6. Miss Lu: A Domesticated Learned Woman

Miss Lu, a young, highly learned woman, is one of the female characters frequently discussed by researchers on *Rulin waishi*. In this chapter, I will demonstrate that her highly developed talent in *bagu* essay writings is depicted as problematic when she tries to access the power structure. Still, it gains legitimacy when serving to fulfill her domestic responsibilities. Her case shows how a powerful writing woman is domesticated.

It might be helpful to have a summary of Miss Lu's story. Miss Lu is the daughter of a Hanlin compiler named Mr. Lu (Lu bianxiu 鲁编修). She excels at composing *bagu* essays. Her capacity in this area is beyond that of men. In her opinion, *bagu* essays are the highest learning, and she despises poetry, which is considered the proper education for a woman like her. Her father arranges a seemingly talented man, Qu Gongsun 蘧公孙, to marry her at their It is quite unconventional in the time when mostly women married into their husbands household. It was usually a sign of men's inferior status compared to that of their wives.

After knowing her husband's inability to compose a *bagu* essay and thus to attain examination success, she is much frustrated. Later, when her grandfather-in-law dies, she moves to her husband's family and manages household affairs excellently. Finally, she devotes herself to tutoring her four-year-old son to prepare for the examinations.

6.1 A Woman's Unnatural Education and Aspiration

A Woman's Outstanding Knowledge in Men's Education

From the beginning of her story, the author highlights Miss Lu's unusual education and talent as a woman and her unusual attitudes towards the exam learning and poetry learning. She has a masculine educational background, which is depicted as unnatural. As a little girl, she is raised by her father as a boy to receive men's education, to compose *bagu* essays, the required skill to sit the civil service examinations. Her education on *bagu* essays is as the passage following:

五六岁上请先生开蒙，就读的是《四书》、《五经》。十一、二岁就讲书、读文章。先把一部王守溪的稿子读的滚瓜烂熟。教他做「破题」、「破承」、「起讲」、「题比」、「中比」成篇。送先生的束修，那先生督课，同男子一样。这小姐资性又高、记心又好，到此时王、唐、瞿、薛以及诸大家之文，历科程墨，各省宗师考卷，肚里记得三千余篇。(RW 11.155)

When she was five or six he had engaged a tutor to teach her the *Four Books* and the *Five Classics*, 1 so that by the time she was twelve she could expound the classics and read essays, having thoroughly mastered the works of Wang Shouxi. She had also learned to write the *bagu* essays with their divisions into eight paragraphs: “broaching the theme,” “advancing the theme,” “embarking on the subject,” “the first strand,” “the central strand,” and so forth. Her tutor was paid as highly as if he were teaching a boy, and he supervised her studies just as strictly. She was an intelligent girl with a good memory. By this time she had read all the works of Wang Shouxi, Tang Shunzhi, Qu Jingchun, Xue Yingqi and other famous essayists as well as the examination compositions from the chief provincial examinations, and could recite over three thousand essays. (cf. *The Scholars*, pp. 122-123)

The above descriptions show Miss Lu’s diligent and keen efforts in examination learning. Besides, her sincere devotion to *bagu* learning is stressed by the author: “Her dressing-table and embroidery-stand were stacked with essays, and every day she annotated and punctuated a few.” (晓妆台畔、刺绣床前，摆满了一部一部的文章。每日丹黄烂然，蝇头细批; RW 11.155; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 123). By contrast, she despises poetry very much, which is described in the book as the following phrases:

人家送来的诗词歌赋，正眼儿也不看他。家里虽有几本甚么《千家诗》、《解学士诗》、东坡小妹诗话之类，倒把与伴读的侍女采苹、双红们看，闲暇也教他诌几句诗，以为笑话。(RW 11.155-156)

As for the poems, odes, elegies and songs that were sent her, she did not even glance at them, giving the various anthologies of poetry in the house to her maids to read, and occasionally asking them to compose a few verses for fun. (cf. *The Scholars*, p. 123)

In her unique case, she is satirized to have no interest in poetry, the proper learning for women. Intellectual activities were gendered at that time. It was expected that young girls in elite families learn poetry,¹⁰¹ and it was men’s business to prepare for the examinations.

Miss Lu develops exceptional and high skills in writing *bagu* essays, which is

¹⁰¹ Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China's long eighteenth century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 77.

implied as meaningless and absurd. That is why the author says, “she was not one of the usual run of accomplished young ladies” (且他这个才女，又比寻常的才女不同; RW 11.155; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 122)¹⁰². Her *bagu* essays are excellent for they are “logical, concise, and elegant” (理真法老，花团锦簇; RW 11.155; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 123). However, her outstanding knowledge of examination learning leads her nowhere since women were not allowed to sit the civil service examinations and serve in office. This is demonstrated by her father’s remarks: “had she been a boy, she would have sailed through all the examinations!” (假若是个儿子，几十个进士、状元都中来了! ; RW 11.155; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 123). It indicates that with equal education and talent, a man can gain great power and honor, but a woman like Miss Lu would achieve nothing. In other words, her extraordinary talent is useless and unnatural.

Her unusual education causes her confused gender role. In her educational background, she is closely connected to the masculine world in terms of her upbringing and her capacity. Besides, Miss Lu’s mentality is described by Zuyan Zhou to be “almost identical with the orthodox male outlook”.¹⁰³ She also links Miss Lu’s thoughts to her father’s.¹⁰⁴ Profoundly influenced by her father’s view, Miss Lu believes that the highest scholarship is *bagu* essays and that the worthiest people are those who get high degrees in examinations and hold high official positions. In her marriage, there is a gender reversal. She is active in pushing her husband to pursue an official career. Moreover, it is she who instructs her son diligently to prepare for the examinations. In conclusion, the depiction of her unnatural education and talent reinforces the perception of separation between men and women in the educational field.

Miss Lu’s Obsession in Officialdom

Deeply impacted by her special education, she is indulgent in officialdom. After getting married, she aims to become the wife of an official, as the commentator Tianmu Shanqiao points out (RW 11.156). That is why she wishes her husband to start an official career. Her obsession with officialdom is highlighted. She laments to her foster mother about her incapable husband:

「我只道他举业已成，不日就是举人、进士。谁想如此光景，岂不误我终身！」...「...自古及今，几曾看见不会中进士的人可以叫做个名士的？」...
「『好男不吃分家饭，好女不穿嫁时衣。』依孩儿的意思，总是自挣的功名好。」

¹⁰² *Cainü* 才女 refers to talented women, particularly with literary talent, or learned women. See, Luo Zhufeng 罗竹风, ed., *Hanyu dacidian* 汉语大词典 (3 vols., Shanghai: Hanyu dacidian chubanshe, 1986), vol. 1, p. 127.

¹⁰³ Zuyan Zhou, “Yin-yang Bipolar Complementarity,” p. 7.

¹⁰⁴ Zuyan Zhou, “Yin-yang Bipolar Complementarity,” p. 7.

靠着祖父，只算做不成器！」 (RW 11.156-157)

“I thought he had already completed his studies and would soon pass the metropolitan examinations... Who could have imagined this? My whole life is ruined!” ... “... Do you know of anyone, past or present, who is entitled to be called a brilliant young scholar without having passed the examinations?” ... “good sons don’t live on their inheritance; good daughters don’t wear clothes from their own homes after they marry. I believe in a man making his own way. Only a good-for-nothing would let his grandfather support him!” (cf. *The Scholars*, p. 124).

From her statements, we can see that she has high expectations for her husband to achieve success in the examinations, and she is intensely frustrated by her husband’s inability to fulfill her wish. It calms Miss Lu down only when her foster mother convinces Miss Lu:

「当真姑爷不得中，你将来生出小公子来，自小依你的教训，不要学他父亲，家里放着你恁个好先生，怕教不出个状元来就替你争口气？你这封诰是稳的。」 (RW 11.157)

“Even if the young master can’t pass, ...you will have a son who can learn from you from the beginning instead of following his father’s example. With a good teacher like you right in the family he will surely turn out to be a Number One Palace Graduate. He will reflect such credit on you that you can be sure of receiving a title.” (cf. *The Scholars*, pp. 124-125)

Indeed, Miss Lu follows her foster mother’s suggestion and dedicates herself to her little son’s education:

鲁小姐头胎生的个小儿子已有四岁了，小姐每日拘着他在房里讲《四书》，读文章...课子到三四更鼓。或一天遇着那小儿子书背不熟，小姐就要督责他念到天亮。(RW 13. 187; 191)

Miss Lu’s eldest son was four; and every day she taught the child to read the *Four Books* and *bagu* essays... Miss Lu gave their son lessons every evening till midnight; and if the boy did not know his lesson properly, his mother would keep him at it till morning (This translation is adjusted). (cf. *The Scholars*, pp. 147 and 151)

Miss Lu’s diligent involvement in her little son’s education reveals her endeavor for officialdom and her lust for status. Since the novel primarily criticizes those who aspire to wealth and status, Miss Lu is thus the target of attack.

Chaos in the Family

Miss Lu's aim is implied to be illegitimate since her desire for power causes chaos in the family. Chaos occurs from Miss Lu's side just at the beginning of her marriage with Qu Gongsun. The wedding held in Miss Lu's household forms a sharp comparison to that on Qu Gongsun's side, which is hosted in the Lou Residence (Lou fu 娄府). The latter is orderly and in a refined style, yet the former is surrounded with funny and shabby accidents that embarrass Miss Lu's family, especially her father, a great deal, although we readers are greatly amused. This contrast could be read as a satire of Mr. Lu as well as Miss Lu, who lacks proper virtues.

Miss Lu's obsession in the examinations and career success causes disharmony in her marriage. She and Qu Gongsun's marriage is supposed to be perfect. It is said that "now Miss Lu and Master Qu appeared an ideal couple, perfectly matched as regards family status, appearance and accomplishments" (门户又相称, 才貌又相当, 真个是「才子佳人, 一双两好」; RW 11.156; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 123). When seeing Miss Lu crying and sighing, her foster mother exclaims: "Why, miss! You have just had the luck to marry a good husband: whatever is the matter with you?" (「小姐, 你才恭喜招赘了这样好姑爷, 有何心事, 做出这等模样?」; RW 11.156; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 124). It indicates that in her foster mother's eyes, Qu Gongsun is a good husband. Miss Lu's mother holds the same opinion, which is demonstrated by her words: "Don't be such a foolish girl. I think your husband is already very accomplished" (「我儿, 你不要恁般呆气。我看新姑爷人物已是十分了...」; RW 11.157; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 124). It implies that Miss Lu's dissatisfaction with her husband is not justified.

While Miss Lu's learning empowers her, it generates significant pressure on her husband. As Susan Mann argues, "...the learned woman, in the act of writing, enters at once the domain of *wen*, literary high culture."¹⁰⁵ Because literary ability had been exclusively mastered by men in Chinese society, highly cultured women could cause men's anxiety. As Susan Mann suggests, "perhaps most learned men facing learned women were simply scared: threatened by the power of mature women's writing..."¹⁰⁶ If a woman who could write fine poetry threatens men, a woman like Miss Lu, who has outstanding skills in writing *bagu* essays might scare men a lot because she challenges men's exclusive authority in exam learning which leads to the power structure. Thus, Qu Gongsun faces tremendous pressure from Miss Lu for his authority is challenged by Miss Lu's incredible competence in men's learning of which he is not capable.

¹⁰⁵ Mann, *Precious Records*, p. 119.

¹⁰⁶ Mann, *Precious Records*, p. 101.

Disorder later extends to the relationship between the father-in-law, Mr. Lu and the son-in-law Qu Gongsun, which is indirectly resulted from Miss Lu. Hearing Miss Lu's complaints on Qu Gongsun, Mr. Lu attempts to test Qu's capacity in *bagu* essays. It turns out that Qu is not only hardly able to finish the essay, but also his essay is filled with phrases and words borrowed from poetry (RW 11.157-158). Like Miss Lu, Mr. Lu is much disappointed since Mr. Lu is the same deeply concerned about success in the examinations and official careers. Furthermore, the phrase “Mrs. Lu, however, doted on her son-in-law as if he were her own flesh and blood” (却全亏夫人疼爱这女婿, 如同心头一块肉; RW 11.158; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 124) indirectly gives us a clue that the relationship between Mr. Lu and Qu Gongsun must be cold. Later on, the conflict between the two men reaches its peak. Much angry with his son-in-law's neglect of examination learning, Mr. Lu proposes to take a concubine to bear a son who could inherit his reputation as a *jinshi* 进士 “metropolitan graduate” and a high official. It reveals Mr. Lu's considerable dissatisfaction with his son-in-law's capacity. Facing Mr. Lu's incredible pressure, Qu Gongsun feels ashamed of his own failure, which is supported by the phrase “there was nothing the young man could do” (公孙也无奈何; RW 11.165; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 124). Besides, Mr. Lu gets seriously ill due to his anxiety with Qu Gongsun's incompetence, and his proposition to take a concubine harms his relationship with his wife as well.

Mr. Lu's death is the biggest chaos in Miss Lu's family. He abruptly dies due to the joy of getting a promotion to be a Hanlin reader. It implies that his indulgence in officialdom finally destroys himself. It further indicates Mr. Lu's the improper expectations on Qu Gongsun, and that Mr. Lu's mistreatment to the latter is not justified. Although continuously ignoring examination studies and seeking fake names, Qu Gongsun fulfills the ritual of filial piety, which is one of the greatest virtues celebrated in this novel. He is said to be very respectful to Mr. Lu and serves him well. When Mr. Lu calls on him, he “hurries home” (慌回去; RW 11.165). Upon hearing that Mr. Lu gets the promotion, he “hurries home to congratulate his father-in-law” (慌忙先去道喜; RW 12.179; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 142). When Mr. Lu gets ill, Qu Gongsun “tended his father-in-law for more than ten days, during which time he had no proper rest” (一连陪伴了十多日, 并不得闲; RW 11.166; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 132). When Mr. Lu dies, Qu Gongsun was “pale and haggard with sorrow” and “performed his duties like a good son-in-law” (哀毁骨立, 极尽半子之谊; RW 12.180; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 142). Qu Gongsun is also filial to his grandfather Prefect Qu (Qu Taishou 蘧太守), who raises the former after Qu Gongsun's father dies. When Prefect Qu is ill, Qu Gongsun goes home to take care of him. After Prefect Qu dies, Qu Gongsun observes the mourning ritual for three years, which some social climbers in this novel attempt to avoid (RW 13.187). Furthermore, Mr. Lu's death indicates the author's harsh criticism of Mr. Lu as

well as Miss Lu, who are equally indulgent in status and wealth, as will be elaborated later. Besides, Mr. Lu's death of promotion in careers implies Miss Lu's wrong expectation on Qu Gongsun and her unwise investment in tutoring her son.

6.2 Competing Criticisms on a Learned Woman

Criticism on Miss Lu's Indulgence of Officialdom

In the above part, in which Miss Lu intends to seek worldly success, she is painted in a negative light. As Louise Edwards observes, “women are regarded as being noble in their oppression when powerless and inactive while simultaneously considered to be dangerous and evil when powerful”.¹⁰⁷ That she is meant to be criticized is supported by more evidence. One theme of this novel is criticism of people, both men and women, who deliberately seek *gong ming fu gui* 功名富贵, “success, fame, riches, and rank”. The opening paragraph of the whole novel directly attacks people who seek practical gains. The commentator of the Qi sheng tang edition remarked that the central theme of the novel is people who exhaust their energy and emotions to seek fame (RW 1.1). The commentator of the Woxian caotang edition also suggests that *gong ming fu gui* is the focus of the novel, and other characters later are all related to it. (RW 1.16)

Miss Lu is attacked because her father is condemned for his obsession with officialdom. Therefore, the novel's attitude towards Miss Lu is similar to that of Mr. Lu. Besides, critics closely link Miss Lu and Mr. Lu together. The commentator of the Woxian caotang edition remarks that Miss Lu's vulgar image serves to reinforce her father's vulgarness (RW 11.167). Also, Zuyan Zhou argues that Miss Lu functions as her father's shadow.¹⁰⁸ Mr. Lu is portrayed in the novel to concern nothing but success in the examinations and careers, and his sudden death from the joy of getting promotion in his official post symbolizes the harshest criticism of his personality. So, Miss Lu's indulgence in officialdom is implicitly opposed through his father's case.

Wives who push their husbands to involve in officialdom are opposed in the novel. This is revealed by Du Shaoqing's comments on one poem called “The Wife Says the Cock Crows” (女曰鸡鸣) in *Shijing* 诗经 (The Classics of Poetry). Du Shaoqing remarks: “The wives again, who want to become great ladies but can't, find fault with everything and quarrel the whole time with their husbands (This translation

¹⁰⁷ Edwards, *Men and Women in Qing China*, p. 71.

¹⁰⁸ Zuyan Zhou, “Yin-yang Bipolar Complementarity,” p. 7.

is adjusted) ” (妻子想做夫人，想不到手，便事事不遂心，吵闹起来; RW 34.469; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 378). Miss Lu is the example of this kind of uneasy wife who pushes her husband to pursue an official career. In contrast, Du Shaoqing's wife and Zhuang Shaoguang's wife are celebrated, for they follow their husbands' will to reject officialdom.

Xu Zhangjing 徐章靖 notes that Wang Mian's mother is the model woman in the prologue, which embraces the primary teaching of the novel and that other female characters could be examined by comparison with Wang Mian's mother.¹⁰⁹ By comparing Miss Lu and Wang Mian's mother, Xu Zhangjing finds out that the former tutors her four-year-old son to prepare for the examinations to enter officialdom while the latter strongly advises her son not to become an official.¹¹⁰ Miss Lu is, therefore, criticized for her aspiration for status and wealth.

Miss Lu is condemned by commentators as well. Regarding her education in *bagu* essays, the commentator Tianmu Shanqiao remarks that she is exceptionally vulgar (其俗入骨; RW 11.155). The commentator of the Woxian caotang edition has the same opinion about Miss Lu by saying “if a woman excels in the examinations, this woman's vulgarness can be assumed” (夫以一女子而精于举业，则此女子之俗可知; RW 11.167). Also, when Miss Lu laments on her husband's lack of ambition in an official career, the commentator Tianmu Shanqiao comments that Miss Lu is a vulgar person (俗物; RW 11.156).

Even modern critics maintain that Miss Lu is the victim of her learning. Liang Xiaoyong 梁效永 holds that Miss Lu is poisoned and harmed by *bagu* essays.¹¹¹ Wei Juanli 魏娟莉 argues that Miss Lu loses a life that a woman is supposed to have due to the harm of the examination learning.¹¹²

Celebration of Miss Lu's Womanly Virtues

Chaos stops, and harmony comes when Miss Lu devotes herself to wifely duties. When Qu Gongsun's grandfather is deadly ill, Qu Gongsun asks Miss Lu to come to Jiaying 嘉兴 to see his grandfather. Miss Lu's mother is unwilling to let her only daughter leave, but Miss Lu insists on going to serve the ill grandfather-in-law. There, she shows her

¹⁰⁹ Xu Zhangjing 徐章靖, “*Rulin waishi zhong sanwei yu keju youguan de nüxing xingxiang fenxi*” 儒林外史中三位与科举有关的女性形象分析, *Hanzi wenhua* 汉字文化 13 (2018), p. 34.

¹¹⁰ Xu Zhangjing, “*Rulin waishi zhong sanwei yu keju youguan de nüxing xingxiang fenxi*,” p. 35.

¹¹¹ Liang Xiaoyong 梁效永, “*Rulin waishi nüxing xingxiang yanjiu*” 《儒林外史》女性形象研究 (A study on female images of *The Scholars*), (Master's thesis, Guangxi shifan daxue 广西师范大学, 2011), p. 14. I used this master's thesis for its insight in analyzing *Rulin waishi*'s female issues.

¹¹² Wei Juanli, “*Shi tan Rulin waishi zhong ‘keju gongming’ bianyuan de nüxing xingxiang*,” p. 237.

virtues as a competent wife:

鲁小姐上侍孀姑，下理家政，井井有条，亲戚无不称羨。(RW 13.187).

She looked after her mother-in-law and managed household affairs so well that all the relatives praised her (This translation is adjusted). (cf. *The Scholars*, p. 147)

She also obeys her husband well. When Qu Gongsun tells her to invite Ma Chunshang at home, she happily accepts it and treats Ma with a good meal (RW 13.188-189). Besides, she serves her husband well. It is said that when they together instruct their son late at night, she “sends her husband to bed first in the study” (倒先打发公孙到书房里去睡; RW 13.191).

Following her foster mother's suggestion, she stops forcing her husband to fulfill her ambition and instead turns her attention to her son. When her son is just four-year-old, she educates him on the *Four Books* and *bagu* essays every day. Her diligence and sincerity are emphasized. It is said:

...课子到三四更鼓。或一天遇着那小儿子书背不熟，小姐就要督责他念到天亮” (RW 13.191)

Miss Lu gave their son lessons every evening till midnight; and if the boy did not know his lesson properly, his mother would keep him at it till morning (This translation is adjusted). (cf. *The Scholars*, p. 151)

The above scene makes Wei Juanli link Miss Lu to Li Wan 李纨, a widowed mother, in *Honglou meng*, who dedicated herself to teaching her son.¹¹³ Zhang Tiantian 张甜甜 describes that Miss Lu is a model mother.¹¹⁴

Miss Lu's image of a talented mother instructing her son fits the exemplary women's virtue in history. The celebration of mothers educating sons has a long history in China. Mencius's mother, Mother Meng (*Meng mu* 孟母), is a good example. To offer Mencius a good education, Mencius' mother moved houses three times to find the right place for Mencius to study, and she cut off her weaving for Mencius' neglect of learning. Indeed, thanks to her efforts, Mencius became one of the most influential Confucian thinkers. Her story is included in the *Biographies of Exemplary Women* (*Lienü zhuan* 烈女传) by Liu Xiang 刘向 (77-6 B.C.). Besides, Mencius' mother is the only mother model in the *Three Character Classic* (*San zi jing* 三字经), which became

¹¹³ Wei Juanli, “Shi tan *Rulin waishi* zhong ‘keju gongming’ bianyuan de nüxing xingxiang.” p. 238. For a basic description of Li Wan, see Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 and Gao E 高鹗, *Honglou meng* 红楼梦 (2 vols., Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1988), vol. 1, Chapter 4, p. 57.

¹¹⁴ Zhang Tiantian 张甜甜, “*Rulin waishi* zhong de nüxing qun xiang” 《儒林外史》中的女性群像, *Henan jiaoyu xueyuan xuebao* (*zhexue shehui kexueban*) 河南教育学院学报 (哲学社会科学版) 29. 5 (2010), p. 44.

popular textbook for children in late imperial China.

Miss Lu's image of a talented mother created by Wu Jingzi also fits the expectation of his contemporaries. Many scholars in the high Qing era (1683-1839) argued that learned women could prepare their sons for the examinations and instruct their sons moral values.¹¹⁵ The *Draft History of Qing* (Qing shi gao 清史稿), gave credits to exemplary women for educating their sons to become officials.¹¹⁶ Besides, mothers instructing sons were a popular motif in material culture in late imperial China. In the Qianlong 乾隆 era (1711-1799), there are painted saucers showing mothers tutoring their sons.¹¹⁷

In the second part of her story, Miss Lu is portrayed as a model daughter-in-law, a model wife, and a model mother, as demonstrated before. Her womanly virtues, in the end, bring harmony to her household and perhaps partly influences her husband to study for the examinations. She and Qu Gongsun's harmonious family life is well demonstrated by the scene when she and her husband together tutor their little son (RW 13.187).

The author as well as the commentator's attitudes towards Miss Lu's *bagu* learning change dramatically in the second part of the episode. They celebrate her virtues as a model wife and give credit to her education. When Miss Lu insists on attending to her grandfather-in-law while her mother advises her not to go, the author attributes her virtue to her special education which leads her “enlightened about the great righteousness” (明于大义; RW 13.187). The commentator Tianmu Shanqiao argues that “this is because of her excellent *bagu* writing skills” (此熟精八股之功; RW 13.187). When she manages domestic affairs orderly, the commentator Tianmu Shanqiao gives credits to her *bagu* skills again (RW 13.187). Here, her education and talent in *bagu* essays are justified and applauded by their function to fulfill womanly responsibilities.

Miss Lu's episode, in the end, turns to be the celebration of a model wife who is educated, obedient, and competent in domestic affairs. Although closely connected to the masculine world, as Zheng Ruishan 郑睿衫 points out, she does not transgress gender and social norms.¹¹⁸ Instead, she obeys them well,¹¹⁹ and she fulfills wifely

¹¹⁵ Mann, *Precious Records*, p. 78.

¹¹⁶ Zhao Erxun 赵尔巽 et al., eds., *Qingshi gao* 清史稿 (48 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), pp. 14017-14198.

¹¹⁷ For pictures of the saucers, see Mann, *Precious Records*, p. 106.

¹¹⁸ Zheng Ruishan, “*Rulin waishi* renlun guan yanjiu,” p. 127.

¹¹⁹ Cui Jing 崔静, “Qian xi *Rulin waishi* zhong siwei nüxing xingxiang de beiai xing” 浅析《儒林外史》中四位女性形象的悲哀性, *Mingzuo xinshang* 名作欣赏 35 (2015), p. 91.

duties excellently. ¹²⁰ Miss Lu's episode supports Susan Mann's observation: Threatened by powerful writing women, the Qing scholars tried to domesticate the learned woman, to “reduce her to recognizable domestic shapes: mother, wife, daughter”¹²¹ and brought her under control. ¹²² In Miss Lu's case, we see that Miss Lu, a powerful learned woman, is finally domesticated. It reveals that Miss Lu's excellent manly intelligence is legitimate only when it serves Confucian orders, that is, women's duty within the household.

¹²⁰ Zhang Tiantian, “*Rulin waishi zhong de nüxing qun xiang*,” p. 44.

¹²¹ Mann, *Precious Records*, p. 119.

¹²² Mann, *Precious Records*, p. 76.

7. Mrs. Wang: A Family-destroying Shrew

Mrs. Wang (Wang taitai 王太太), a young, tough woman, is one of the few female characters depicted in great detail in the novel. Her power does not come from the ability to manage a household like Wang Xifeng 王熙凤 in *Honglou meng*, or from a glorious, robust family background. It comes mainly from her strong personality, that is, her rebellion against the Confucian womanly codes in the patriarchal society. As Wei Juanli notes, Mrs. Wang is a typical shrew (*pofu* 泼妇) who were viewed as evil.¹²³ She is constructed as an extremely problematic woman by the author and has long been condemned by commentators. As Maram Epstein brilliantly observes, rather than random characters, shrews of traditional Chinese literary works “play an important narrative role in invoking the moral logic of orthodox discourse”.¹²⁴ This chapter will reveal that her image fits the motif of the family-destroying shrew and that she causes chaos in the household and leads to a good man's corruption. It indicates that Wu Jingzi holds a more conservative opinion about women.

It might be helpful to have a summary of Mrs. Wang's Story. Mrs. Wang is a young woman who always wants to become the wife of an official. She married twice and ended as a widow. Then she is cheated by a matchmaker into marrying a manager of actors, Bao Tingxi 鲍廷玺, who is said by the matchmaker to hold a degree of *jüren* 举人, “provincial graduate” and thus would someday become an official. After knowing the truth, she gets ill. She always scolds her husband, is cruel to servants, lazy, and lives a luxurious life. The young couple's fortune soon declines, and they are driven out of the household. Her husband finally changes from a naïve man into an unscrupulous moneygrubber and cheats his patron Du Shaoqing's money.

7.1 A Shrew's Violation of Confucian Womanly Norms

Miss Wang: The Ideal Wife of Bao Tingxi

To better examine Mrs. Wang's image, it is worthwhile to look at an often neglected woman, Bao Tingxi's first wife, who has no specific name mentioned in the novel. Here we call her Miss Wang, because her family name is Wang. Miss Wang and Mrs. Wang

¹²³ Wei Juanli, “Shi tan *Rulin waishi* zhong ‘keju gongming’ bianyuan de nüxing xingxiang,” p. 236.

¹²⁴ Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses*, p. 38.

form a sharp contrast. Although the novel has few words about Miss Wang, we could still feel the author's praise for her virtues.

Miss Wang comes from an upright and potentially well-off family. Her father is a housekeeper of Prefect Xiang 向太守, a relatively positive figure. Three generations of Miss Wang's ancestors have served well for Prefect Xiang's family, and Prefect Xiang frees her father from his original slave status and buys her brother a small official post (RW 25.349). Miss Wang is seventeen, the same age as Bao Tingxi, which indicates a good match. She is said by the matchmaker Prefect Xiang to be “very obedient and smart” (甚是乖巧; RW 25.349). Besides, Prefect Xiang's wife favors her and cares about her hair and foot-binding well inside the household. It could be read as an implication of her womanly virtue as a domestic wife.

Her and Bao Tingxi's marriage is depicted in a happy tone. Bao Tingxi's family costs nothing for the wedding since Prefect Xiang pays all expenses. The wedding is well arranged, and their marriage is well recognized by Prefect Xiang and his wife as well as other clerks in the *yamen*. Their marriage is happy. It says that after Bao Tingxi marries Miss Wang, he “lives in paradise” (只如在云端里过日子; RW 26.353). Later, she gets pregnant, but she is too weak to give birth and dies. Both Bao Tingxi and his father cry hard for the loss of her (RW 26.355), which indicates their appreciation of her virtues.

The above descriptions show that she was an ideal wife for Bao Tingxi. She fits Confucian womanly codes. She is obedient and lives in harmony with her husband. By contrast, Mrs. Wang enters Bao Tingxi's life as an evil woman.

The Shadow of Mrs. Wang's and Bao Tingxi's Marriage

Bao Tingxi's second marriage with Mrs. Wang is a trap set by Bao Tingxi's adoptive mother named Mrs. Bao (Bao laotai 鲍老太), Bao Tingxi's brother-in-law called Son-in-law Gui (Gui Guye 归姑爷), and matchmakers. They arrange this marriage for material gains. The matchmaker Jin Cifu 金次福 suggests Mrs. Bao that Mrs. Wang is a wealthy widow with large sums of dowry, and the marriage could bring an immense fortune to Mrs. Bao. Mrs. Bao is intrigued by this deal. Besides, when Son-in-law Gui comes to ask for information about Mrs. Wang's background, the professional matchmaker Shen Tianfu 沈天孚 tells him directly and in detail how tough Mrs. Wang is. Nevertheless, Son-in-law Gui insists on making this match since he is only interested in Mrs. Wang's property. Moreover, to earn money from their clients, Shen Tianfu and his wife Big foot Shen (Shen dajiao 沈大脚), a professional matchmaker as well, do

this business with a huge lie. They indeed get four trinkets by cheating the Bao family. So, we could see that what these people consider that this marriage is not about the happiness of the couple but to gain wealth.

The marriage is also described as a trick to make the adopted son Bao Tingxi suffer. Bao Tingxi gets good treatment and respect when Bao Wenqing 鲍文卿, an actor, Bao Tingxi's adoptive father, is alive. However, after Bao Wenqing dies, Bao Tingxi suffers a lot because he is seen as an obstacle in the household. For instance, after hearing of Mrs. Wang's extreme toughness, Son-in-law Gui thinks "if she's a shrew, so much the worse for my precious brother-in-law!" (「若说女人会撒泼, 我那怕磨死倪家这小孩子!」; RW 26.360-361; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 291). When Son-in-law Gui discusses this issue with Mrs. Bao, who has no affection for Bao Tingxi, Mrs. Bao also says: "He's [Bao Tingxi] got so above himself that he needs a scold to keep him in his place" (「现今这小厮傲头傲脑, 也要娶个辣燥些的媳妇来制着他才好。」; RW 27.367; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 295). Both Mrs. Bao and Son-in-law Gui want to make Bao Tingxi suffer by this match.

Mrs. Wang's Lack of Womanly Virtues

(1) Improper Upbringing

When considering marriage, the Chinese take family background seriously. They care about the family's financial situation and also the family's upbringing. Mrs. Wang does not come from an upright family. Her father is a petty *yamen* clerk. After her father dies, she lives with her unrestrained brother, who indulges himself in drinking and gambling. Finally, her brother sells their father's official post and sells her as a concubine. Her problematic upbringing implies her lack of good manners.

There is nothing in the text that suggests Mrs. Wang is educated. Her lack of literacy symbolizes her lack of morality. As Jennifer Holmgren has pointed out, "education and morality were inseparable concepts in traditional or orthodox Confucian thinking... moral virtue and education are rarely mentioned separately."¹²⁵ Her vulgar behavior reinforces her uncultivated image. The text depicts her as close to the barbarism of men.

She has an awful temper, which is reinforced by two professional matchmakers' statements. After knowing that Son-in-law Gui regards Mrs. Wang as Bao Tingxi's potential spouse, Shen Tianfu replies: "The woman is quite impossible for a man to

¹²⁵ Jennifer Holmgren, "Myth, Fantasy or Scholarship: Images of the Status of Women in Traditional China," *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 6 (1981), p. 154.

marry! Any man who marries her will be taking a fury into his house (This translation is revised).” (「这个堂客是娶不得的! 若要娶进门, 就要一把天火! 」; RW 26.359; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 290). After hearing that her husband wants to make a match of Mrs. Wang and Bao Tingxi, Big foot Shen, shakes her head and exclaims: “That woman is hard to please!” (「这位奶奶可是好惹的! 」; RW 26.361; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 292). The two comments above express clearly that Mrs. Wang is not the proper woman to marry.

The novel shows that Mrs. Wang frequently yells and shouts at others, which a cultivated woman with Confucian virtues would not do. We see in the novel that she often abuses and beats her family and servants. It is said that since she becomes the wife of Wang Sanpang 王三胖, a pawnshop's manager, “she cursed the stupid elder son and his wife three or four times a day, and kept beating the servants and slave girls every few hours.” (「把大呆的儿子、媳妇, 一天要骂三场; 家人、婆娘, 两天要打八顿。」; RW 26.360; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 291). After she marries Bao Tingxi, they hardly have a peaceful conversation. She always shouts and complains at Bao Tingxi. When Bao Tingxi discusses with her to entertain his oldest brother, Ni Tingzhu 倪廷珠, a wealthy secretary of a provincial governor, with a nice meal, she sneers, “Bah! You blockhead!” (「呸! 你这死不见识面的货! 」; RW 27.374; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 301). As the commentator Tianmu Shanqiao suggests, this shouting could demonstrate the daily situation Mrs. Wang and Bao Tingxi have (RW 27.374). Also, after being driven out of Mrs. Bao's household, when they get impoverished, she “often stays at home, crying and scolding” (只是坐在家里哭泣咒骂, 非只一日; RW 27.371).

Apart from the above examples, her actions are not refined. When she is searched by Wang Sanpang's son and the servants for valuables, she hides the valuables in a chamber-pot in advance, so they get nothing. Although it could be read as her intelligence, it is still quite vulgar. The way she punishes Big foot Shen for the latter's dishonesty is barely cultivated, for she smears excrement on Big foot Shen's face (RW 27.370).

(2) *Masculinity and Stupidity*

Her connection to the masculine world indicates her, as a woman, is more masculine than feminine. It is said by Big foot Shen that she drinks a lot (RW 26.361). Besides, she is notorious for her toughness by her nickname Spitfire Hu (Hu qi lazi 胡七喇子). It is worthy to note that the term *lazi* 喇子 often refers to undisciplined men such as local ruffians and bullies.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ See Wu Jingzi 吴敬梓, *Rulin waishi* 儒林外史 (Beijing: Zuoqia chubanshe 作家出版社, 1955), p. 264, note 5.

Her uncultivated image is connected to her stupidity, which is most vividly and playfully depicted by her belief of Big foot Shen's overly exaggerated words about Bao Tingxi. As readers, we know what Big foot Shen talks about is funny and has nothing to do with Bao Tingxi. But just after testing Shen's descriptions by scaring Shen, Mrs. Wang acknowledges the match by saying: "All right. You can tell the Pao family that I'm willing. I'll be waiting to hear from you." (「果然如此, 好了, 你到那人家说去, 我等你回信。」 RW 26.363; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 294). Her stupidity is mentioned by the commentator of the Qi sheng tang edition that even Mrs. Bao manages to get accurate information about Mrs. Wang (RW 26.363).

(3) *An Unchaste Woman*

Before she marries Bao Tingxi, Mrs. Wang has experienced two marriages, which is a signifier of her lack of chastity. As the Neo-Confucian scholar Cheng Yi 程颐 (1033-1107) expressed, "to starve to death is a minor thing; to lose one's chastity is a great matter."¹²⁷ According to neo-Confucian norms, a woman should only marry once and keep loyal to her husband even if he died.¹²⁸ This moral code is expressed well by the four-character phrase *cong yi er zhong* 从一而终 "with one person all the way till the end".¹²⁹ Thus, a woman who remarries is considered immoral.

In her first marriage, Mrs. Wang is sold by her brother to be a concubine. But later, she is driven out of the household by her husband's wife. In her second marriage, she marries to Wang Sanpang but becomes a widow one year later. When she sues Wang Sanpang's son in the court because of conflicts in property, the district magistrate says: "You've already married twice: why should you remain a widow?" (「你也是嫁过两个丈夫的了, 还守甚么节? 」; RW 26.360; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 291). This indicates that her remarriage is viewed as scandalous and disgraceful. As Xu Weiping 徐卫萍 observes, this satirizes that she, as a woman, could not preserve the virtue of chastity.¹³⁰

(4) *Indulgence in Status and Wealth*

Mrs. Wang wishes to become the wife of an official, which means status and wealth. She is undoubtedly criticized, for those who deliberately seek worldly gains are despised in the novel, as I demonstrated in the preceding chapter. Her ideal spouse is

¹²⁷ Paul Ropp, "Passionate Women: Female Suicide in Late Imperial China-Introduction," *Nan Nü* 3.1 (2001), p. 3.

¹²⁸ Bettine Birge, "Chu Hsi and Women's Educaion," in *Neo-Confucian Education: The Formative Stage*, ed. Wm.Theodore de Bary and John W. Chaffee (Taipei: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 338-341.

¹²⁹ This translation is borrowed from Song, see Song, *The Fragile Scholar*, p. 176.

¹³⁰ Xu Weiping 徐卫萍, "Qian xi *Rulin waishi* zhong Wang taitai xingxiang fenxi" 《儒林外史》中王太太形象分析, *Yangzhou jiaoyu xueyuan xuebao* 扬州教育学院学报 27.1 (2009), p. 19.

said by Big foot Shen to be: “He (Mrs. Wang’s ideal spouse) has to be rich, handsome, and an official; and there mustn’t be any mother-in-law, father-in-law, brothers-in-law or sisters-in-law (This translation is revised).” (「他又要是个官，又要有钱，又要人物齐整，又要上无公婆，下无小叔、姑子。」; RW 26.360; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 292). Big foot Shen’s statement indicates that Mrs. Wang’s requirement is unrealistic, and Mrs. Wang does not deserve what she aims.

The novel consciously constructs how she indulges herself in the name of “madam” or “mistress” (*taitai* 太太), which only the wife of an elite man could be called. It is not just a title but shows a woman’s high status. In her first marriage, she insists on being called “mistress”, although she is only a concubine. In her second marriage, she becomes the wife of an official candidate Wang Sanpang (RW 26.360). That is why she is addressed by “Mrs. Wang”. Later, she marries Bao Tingxi, who is usually treated by others as a lowly actor, but she still lets her maids and Bao Tingxi call her mistress. This violates social codes, which is supported by Mrs. Bao’s words: “I’m the mistress here! She’s not even the young mistress. Call her the young wife.” (「在我这里叫甚么太太！连奶奶也叫不的，只好叫个相公娘罢了！」; RW 27.368-369; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 297). After Bao Tingxi is visited by his brother Ni Tingzhu, a secretary of a high official, Bao Tingxi’s neighbors begin to call Bao Tingxi “Mr. Ni” (倪六老爷; RW 27.375)¹³¹ and Mrs. Wang mistress. We see the author keeps using the term “Mrs. Wang” to address her throughout her story even after she marries Bao Tingxi. This could be read as a satire of her obsession in status.

(5) *A Corrupted Woman*

Her honesty is doubtful. When Big foot Shen tells her Bao Tingxi’s background, Mrs. Wang, for fear of Shen’s unreliability, exaggerates her authority. She tells Shen:

「沈妈，你料想也知道，我是见过大事的，不比别人。想着一初到王府上，才满了月，就替大女儿送亲，送到孙乡绅家。那孙乡绅家三间大敞厅，点了百十枝大蜡烛，摆着糖斗、糖仙，吃一看二眼观三的席，戏子细吹细打，把我迎了进去。孙家老太太戴着凤冠，穿着霞帔，把我奉在上席正中间，脸朝下坐了。我头上戴着黄豆大珍珠的拖挂，把脸都遮满了，一边一个丫头拿手替我分开了，才露出嘴来吃他的蜜饯茶。唱了一夜戏，吃了一夜酒。第二日回家，跟了去的四个家人婆娘，把我白绫织金裙子上弄了一点灰，我要把他一个个都处死了。他四个一齐走进来跪在房里，把头在地板上磕的扑通扑通的响，我还不开恩饶他哩。」 (RW 26.363)

¹³¹ Bao Tingxi’s original surname is Ni and was the sixth son in the Ni family. He has taken Bao as his surname since he was adopted by the Bao family. People begin to call him Mr. Ni after seeing his connection to his powerful brother.

“You must know, my good woman that I've moved in the best circles. I'm not just anybody. A month after I married Mr. Wang, his elder daughter's wedding took place. She married a country gentleman named Sun, whose family had three large halls. They had lit a hundred candles and set out peck measures and fairies made of sugar, and they gave a magnificent feast and entertainment. The musicians played softly as I was welcomed in by old Mrs. Sun, who had on a phoenix head-dress and a gown of patterned brocade. They gave me the seat of honour at the highest table. I was wearing a veil of pearls as big as peas which covered my face completely, and I had one maid on each side of me who parted the pearls before I could sip their sweetened tea. The feast went on all night, with one opera after another. The next day when I went home, the four servants with me made a spot on the white silk skirt embroidered with gold that I was wearing, and I wanted to have them all put to death. Even when the four of them came to my room and knelt down to thump their heads on the ground, I wouldn't let them off.” (cf. *The Scholars*, pp. 293-294).

In Mrs. Wang's words, we could see that she boasts the banquet, the respect she receives, the jewels she wears, and her punishment of the servants who just makes a bit of dirt on her fine dress. The commentator Tianmu Shanqiao remarks that “Mrs. Wang's ability to tell lies, in this case, equals that of Kuang Chaoren and Niu Pu. Isn't she like a man among women?” (王太太一番说谎，正可与匡超人、牛蒲郎鼎足而三，岂非女中丈夫；RW 26.364). It shows that Mrs. Wang is greatly dishonest.

She also lies about her age to make herself more attractive in the marriage market. According to the professional matchmaker Shen Tianfu, she is over twenty-five, but she insists on telling others that she is just twenty-one. The commentator Tianmu Shanqiao points out that she is ten years older than Bao Tingxi (RW 26.360), which indicates a bad match at that time.

(6) *Poor Management of the Household*

She is not able to keep harmony with her family members. She treats her husband's son and the servants harshly. It is described in the novel that “she cursed the stupid elder son and his wife three or four times a day, and kept beating the servants and slave girls every few hours.” (「把大呆的儿子、媳妇，一天要骂三场；家人、婆娘，两天要打八顿。」；RW 26.360; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 291). Besides, she is idle and does not do any housework. As Susan Mann summarized, “idleness in a woman signaled wantonness” according to Confucian views, and a woman's virtue is shown by their diligent and productive manual labor, especially spinning and weaving.¹³²

Her superfluous lifestyle is criticized in the novel. It manifests her flawed

¹³² Mann, *Precious Records*, p. 14.

morality for frugality is a critical Confucian virtue.¹³³ Her extravagant life is revealed to us through Big foot Shen's descriptions:

「...他每日睡到日中才起来，横草不拿，竖草不拈，每日要吃八分银子药。他又不吃大荤，头一日要鸭子，第二日要鱼，第三日要茭儿菜鲜笋做汤，闲着没事，还要橘饼、圆眼、莲米搭嘴；酒量又大，每晚要炸麻雀、盐水虾，吃三斤百花酒。上床睡下，两个丫头轮流着捶腿，捶到四更鼓尽才歇。...」 (RW 26.361)

“...She never gets up before noon or lifts a finger in the house. Every day she takes eight silver cents' worth of medicine; and she won't eat meat, but insists on duck one day, fish the next, and soup made of water-cress and fresh bamboo shoots on the third; while in between she must have orange comfits, dragons' eyes and lotus seeds to nibble at. She's a big drinker too. Every evening she drinks three catties of sweet wine with fried sparrows and sea-shrimps. When she goes to bed, those two maids of hers have to take it in turn to massage her legs till nearly midnight before she will sleep...” (cf. *The Scholars*, p. 292).

The above sentences show that Mrs. Wang requires various delicate food and good service of the servants, and she does not manage the household. Another detail of Mrs. Wang's idle life is revealed to us when Big foot Shen visits Mrs. Wang. Shen has already had breakfast, yet Mrs. Wang has just got up, and Mrs. Wang “spent the time it would take for three meals to finish binding her feet, then combed her hair, washed her face and put on her clothes so slowly that the sun was nearly sinking before she was dressed.” (两只脚足足裹了有三顿饭时才裹完了，又慢慢梳头、洗脸、穿衣服，直弄到日头趑西才清白; RW 26.362; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 293). It amusingly shows her unproductivity.

The novel indicates that Mrs. Wang takes medicine not just for the sake of health but also for luxurious pleasure. As the commentator of the Woxian caotang edition observes, it is satirized that when she is poor, she is healthy and does not need any medicine (RW 27.377). For instance, when she and Bao Tingxi are driven out of Mrs. Bao's household and run out of money, her disease is lighter. Yet, “when the twenty taels silver was nearly gone, Mrs. Wang had to give up taking ginseng and amber; whereupon she grew well enough (This translation is revised)” (把这二十两银子吃的将光，太太的人参、琥珀药也没得吃了，病也不大发了， RW 27.371; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 299). After Ni Tingzhu gives them money, then “she began to feel unwell again. Every few days she would send for the doctor and take eight cents' worth of medicine. So the seventy taels gradually melted away” (太太身子里又有些啾啾唧唧的起来，隔几日要请个医生，要吃八分银子的药; RW 27.375; cf. *The Scholars*, p.

¹³³ Bettine Birge, “Chu His and Women's education,” p. 344.

302). Therefore, it seems that her need for medicine is more likely to be a superfluous enjoyment than a necessity. It could also be read as that her inappropriate connection to wealth, which we will discuss later.

7.2 A Shrew's Destructive Force

An Unbalanced Family Structure

In an ideal family, according to the Confucian expectation, the husband leads, and the wife follows. As one of the “Three Obediences”¹³⁴ says, when married, a woman should follow her husband. Mrs. Wang, however, controls domestic issues, and Bao Tingxi follows her orders. When Bao Tingxi discusses with her how to treat Ni Tingzhu, she replies with shouting and provides a more suitable solution. Bao then replies: “You are right, my dear.” (「太太说的是。」; RW 27.374; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 301), and follows her suggestion. This case might generally represent their daily interactions. In another situation, when Bao tells her that he does not get money on his visit to Ni Tingzhu due to the latter's death, he again receives a severe scolding (又被太太臭骂了一顿 RW 28.384). It could be read as that he does not finish the task his boss Mrs. Wang assigns and thus gets a negative feedback. Besides, in this case, and as shown before, she shouts at Bao quite often. It is a clear sign that she dominates the household. Another episode is that when they go home after visiting Du Shaoqing, she sits inside a sedan chair while Bao walks, carrying a lantern (RW 33.453). As Zuyan Zhou observes, this scene vividly shows Mrs. Wang's superior position in their family.¹³⁵

As Yenna Wu points out, “any form of inversion of the marital hierarchy was regarded as a serious dysfunction that required correction”.¹³⁶ Mrs. Wang's domination within the household, on the one hand, makes her and Bao Tingxi's marriage filled with conflicts and arguments, which we have shown above; it, on the other hand, leads to her husband's suffering. As Paul S. Ropp mentions, in early modern China, “the worst imaginable fate for a man was to have a strong-willed wife”.¹³⁷ It is demonstrated by Bao Tingxi's conversation with Ni Tingzhu when they meet after years of separation. Bao Tingxi describes his present life by saying, “then I married this woman” (「又娶

¹³⁴ It means that at home a woman follows her father; when married, she follows her husband; when he dies, she follows her son.

¹³⁵ Zuyan Zhou, “Yin-yang Bipolar Complementarity,” p. 18.

¹³⁶ Yenna Wu, *The Chinese Virago: A Literary Theme* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, Council on East Asian Studies, 1995), p. 29.

¹³⁷ Ropp, *Dissent in Early Modern China*, p. 122.

了这个女人」；RW 27.373). It implies Bao Tingxi's dissatisfaction and perhaps a kind of shame of marrying a woman like Mrs. Wang. Moreover, because of her, Bao Tingxi is driven out of the Bao family and loses his livelihood to do acting business.

The relationship between Mrs. Wang and her husband is satirized based on the Confucian perception of a couple. They represent a combination of a weak husband and a strong wife, which was considered improper and unbalanced by Chinese tradition. This disorder of male and female power would cause family decline.

Destroying the Household

The novel shows that Mrs. Wang, who inverts the Confucian feminine ideal, always brings chaos to the household. In her first marriage, she is sold by her brother to be a concubine, but "...she wasn't at ease with her status as a concubine..." (「...他做小不安本分...」；RW 26.360) for she aspires to be the wife. The wife of the household then slaps her face and drives her out of the household. In her second marriage, she marries as a wife, but she overuses her authority, for she bullies her husband's son as well as the servants harshly. Later on, they take revenge by searching her room and her body for valuables. Then she sues the son and gets separated from the household.

She brings disaster to her third marriage as well, both for Mrs. Bao's household as well as her and Bao Tingxi's separated household. As the commentator of the Woxian caotang edition remarks, she marries into the Bao household, causing many unpleasant affairs (娶进门来许多疙瘩事；RW 26.364). Chaos appears right from the moment of the wedding. She kneels with anger instead of respect to her mother-in-law, Mrs. Bao, who she has not expected. On the third day after the wedding, as Nanjing's custom regulates, a bride should cook fish to bring good fortune to the family. On that day, the Bao family invites many female guests who are looking forward to seeing her. She, however, does not care about the custom, and later when a guest, the wife of Qian Mazi (Qian Mazi laopo 钱麻子老婆), comes to speak to her: "Now that you're the daughter-in-law here, you must do what's expected of you." (「你而今到他家做媳妇，这些规矩是要还他的。」；RW 27.369; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 297). Yet, she puts the fish in the boiling water randomly and makes that guest's fine clothes dirty. Then she angrily goes back to her room again, ignoring the guests she should entertain. In a word, she neglects the ritual practices that a bride should observe.

Her immoderate lifestyle causes a decline in Bao Tingxi's fortune. As shown before, Mrs. Wang takes expensive medicine partly to enjoy a luxurious life. It is three times connected to the financial problems of their family. Firstly, she has suffered

madness for two years since she marries Bao Tingxi, and gradually sells all her savings and two maids to buy medicine. She is then perceived as an economic burden for Mrs. Bao's household, which is said by Son-in-law Gui: "If things go on like this, our house and capital won't be enough to buy her ginseng and amber! What shall we do then?" (「将来我们这房子和本钱，还不够他吃人参、琥珀，吃光了，这个如何来得？」 RW 27.370; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 298). It is the first time relating her to the household's financial decline. As a consequence, she and Bao are chased out of the household with a compensation of twenty taels of silver. But they cannot make a living. Soon they are about to run out of money and thus could not afford her expensive medicine. It is said that "when the twenty taels silver was nearly gone, Mrs. Wang had to give up taking ginseng and amber (This translation is revised)" (把这二十两银子吃的将光，太太的人参、琥珀药也没得吃了; RW 27.371; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 299). It is the second time linking her costly medicine to the decline of their wealth. After Ni Tingzhu gives them money, their economic situation gets better, but her expenses soon exhaust most of the money. The novel describes:

鲍廷玺请了两日酒，又替太太赎了些头面、衣服。太太身子里又有些啾啾唧唧的起来，隔几日要请个医生，要吃八分银子的药。那几十两银子渐渐要完了。(RW 27.375)

Bao Tingxi invited guests for two days, and redeemed some of his wife's clothes and trinkets which had been pawned. As for her, she began to feel unwell again. Every few days she would send for the doctor and take eight cents' worth of medicine. So the seventy taels gradually melted away. (cf. *The Scholars*, p. 302).

It is the third time that her medicine results in their fortune's decline. We could see that the narrative's tone implies that her excessive lifestyle causes the financial difficulty of the household.

Destroying a Good Man

Commentators agree that her obsession with wealth and status leads to Bao Tingxi's moral decay. They believe that Mrs. Wang corrupts Bao from an innocent man into an evildoer. At the end of chapter twenty-six, the narrator comments that "an upright son (Bao Tingxi) gets a bad marriage" (忠厚子弟，成就了恶姻缘; RW 26.363). The commentator Tianmu Shanqiao also remarks: "since Bao Tingxi's second marriage, he has been burdened by Mrs. Wang throughout his life." (迨至廷玺再娶，终身受累; RW 26.365), and he furthermore says that Bao Tingxi still behaves appropriately before, but unfortunately gets worse in his later life because of marrying Mrs. Wang

(RW 27.367).

We can first examine Bao Tingxi's situation before he meets Mrs. Wang. Bao Tingxi is from an impoverished but upright family. Her biological father is an impoverished government student. He is later adopted by Bao Wenqing, an actor but an upright man. Since he comes to Bao Wenqing's family, Bao Wenqing treats him very well. Bao Wenqing takes him to associate with upright people like prefect Xiang. In a word, Bao Tingxi is still honest when he marries Miss Wang, his first wife.

Bao Tingxi's moral degeneration appears in the novel only after Mrs. Wang enters his life. Zuyan Zhou argues, Mrs. Wang's influence mostly attributes to Bao Tingxi's moral decline.¹³⁸ There are several places in the novel mentioning his loss of innocence and honesty. Chapter thirty-two depicts Bao Tingxi's corruption in detail. To squeeze Du Shaoqing's money, he bribes Wang Huzi 王胡子, Du Shaoqing's greedy housemaster, and lies to Du Shaoqing that he has no money to support his mother (RW 32.444). Yet, he has no mother to serve at all at that moment since he has already lived with Mrs. Wang in a separate house. Besides, the commentator Tianmu Shanqiao suggests that he helps Zang Liaozhai 臧蓼斋, an untrustworthy scholar, to cheat Du Shaoqing's money (RW 32.439). In terms of this case, the commentator Tianmu Shanqiao remarks that Bao Tingxi becomes extremely corrupted at this moment and that Bao Tingxi has nothing like Bao Wenqing, his adoptive father, at all (RW 32.439). Besides, in a feast held by Du Shaoqing, Bao Tingxi entertains the guests by “making all manner of quips and jokes” (口内说笑打诨; RW 33.453; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 364). Commentators are quite sensitive about it. The commentator Tianmu Shanqiao notes that this is the lowly actor's indecent business, which Bao Wenqing would not do (RW 333.453). Tianmu Shanqiao adds further that Bao Wenqing is an actor inherited from his ancestors. Yet, Bao Tingxi is a manager of actors, not an actor, yet Bao Tingxi behaves in such a vulgar way (RW 33.453).

As shown above, commentators often compare Bao Tingxi with his adoptive father, Bao Wenqing, a model man. It is useful to take a look at Bao Wenqing's character, so we could see Bao Tingxi's corruption better. Prefect Xiang praises that Bao Wenqing conducts many noble deeds, although Bao Wenqing takes an indecent profession, and many highly educated men like those who pass the metropolitan examination could not equal Bao Wenqing (RW 26.355). Bao Wenqing's moral conduct is elaborated in the novel. He does not take a man's bribe of five hundred taels of silver to ask his friend, prefect Xiang, to do an illegal business (RW 25.384). Also, he treats Bao Tingxi's father, an impoverished scholar, with great respect (RW 25.342-344).

¹³⁸ Zuyan Zhou, “Yin-yang Bipolar Complementarity,” p. 18.

Furthermore, he hides an examination candidate's cheating behavior to avoid destroying the latter's career (RW 26.354). He is greatly praised by commentators. For instance, the commentator Tianmu Shanqiao remarks, "Good Wenqing" (好文卿) twice (RW 25.342, 348). The commentator of the Qi sheng tang edition also comments: "this kind of person is scarce." (此之人真不多得; RW 25.348). So, by comparison with Bao Wenqing, Bao Tingxi's moral decline is severe and evident, which means Mrs. Wang's influence is terrible.

Destroying the Self

Her obsession with status destroys herself as well. It causes her ill. After the wedding, upon knowing that Bao Tingxi is not a provincial graduate but a very lowly manager of actors, she loses consciousness and falls down, like Zhou Jin, Fan Jin, and Fan Jin's mother, as the commentator Tianmu Shanqiao notes (RW 27.370). Zhou Jin loses his mind when he enters the examination cells in the provincial capital's examination school after a lifetime of failure in the examinations (RW 2.32). Fan Jin becomes mad upon hearing that he passes the provincial examination after repeated failures. Fan Jin's mother gets mad and soon dies when she suddenly becomes wealthy after her whole life of poverty. These examples suggest that aspiration for status and wealth would destroy people's physical and mental health.

Besides, they are all said to have phlegm blocked inside. Phlegm could be read as a symbol of obsession with wealth and status. Fan Jin's mother's heart is blocked by phlegm and "overcome with joy she fell senseless to the ground" (不觉欢喜, 痰迷心窍, 昏绝于地; RW 4.54; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 40). Another case is Miss Lu's father, Mr. Lu. He gets ill of phlegm because his son-in-law does not care about an official career, and later "his phlegm overwhelmed him" (痰病大发; RW 12.180; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 142). He soon dies after getting the promotion from a Hanlin compiler to a reader. When it comes to Mrs. Wang's situation, the doctor explains: "This is the result of phlegm in her full stomach, and her constitution is weak." (「这是一肚子的痰, 正气又虚」; RW 27.370). It is a large satire of Mrs. Wang since Zhou Jin is said to have spit out one mouthful of phlegm and then get well (RW 3.35), while Fan Jin gives out several mouthfuls of phlegm and then recovers consciousness (RW 3.46). In this sense, Mrs. Wang is more harshly criticized. Moreover, the term *zhengqi* 正气 could refer to "correct or orthodox matter". The doctor's diagnose means that Mrs. Wang contains more heterodox matter.

Her disease is called *shi xin feng* 失心疯, "madness". The term *xin* 心 could be perceived as mind. So, her illness could be interpreted as her mental disorder, which is

caused by her aspiration to marry an official. Another female character, similarly seeking to become the wife of an official, is Pinniang, who suffers “heartburn” (*xin kou teng* 心口疼) (RW 54.722-724). Mrs. Wang's and Pinniang's immoderate desires disrupt their health.

Mrs. Wang's Contrast to Miss Lu

Mrs. Wang's illiteracy and indecent behavior form a sharp contrast with Miss Lu, who is highly educated, although mostly in *bagu* writings. Even though as ambitious wives, they face the same reality that their husbands could not fulfill their wishes to get an official position, they respond vastly differently, and the results vary. Miss Lu's virtues are shown directly in the novel, which is contrary to the uncultivated and immoderate Mrs. Wang.

Despite the fact that they both get disappointed by their husbands after their wedding, Miss Lu behaves in a more obedient, refined way. Several days after the wedding, Miss Lu writes a topic to test her husband's competence in exam essays. Much to her dismay, her husband despises it as a nasty thing. She cries and tries to persuade his husband to study for the examination (RW 11. 156-157). Later, her foster mother suggests her to bear a son and teach him to fulfill her ambition. She admits the solution and gives up fighting. Therefore, she does not cause significant conflicts with her husband, as Zheng Ruishan observes.¹³⁹ By contrast, on the fourth day after the marriage, when Mrs. Wang gets to know Bao Tingxi is not an official candidate, she at first “nearly choked with rage. Falling backward with a scream, she clenched her teeth and lost consciousness.” (怒气攻心，大叫一声，望后便倒，牙关咬紧，不省人事; RW 27.369-370; cf. *The Scholars*, p. 297). And after she became conscious, she “screamed, rolled on the ground and tore her hair. Then, wailing loudly, she tried to climb on the wooden roof of the bed, and began to sing snatches of opera” (大哭大喊，满地乱滚，滚散头发。一会又要扒到床顶上去，大声哭着，唱起曲子来; RW 27.370; cf. *The Scholars*, pp. 297-298). Later on, we see that she continues to confront her husband. So compared to Miss Lu, it is evident that Mrs. Wang lacks womanly virtues.

Miss Lu fulfills a wife's ritual duties very well, compared with Mrs. Wang's neglect, as elaborated before. When Qu Gongsun's grandfather is deadly ill, Miss Lu is asked to come to Jiaxing 嘉兴 to see her grandfather-in-law. Miss Lu goes there, serves her mother-in-law well, and manages the household excellently. All Qu

¹³⁹ Zheng Ruishan, “*Rulin waishi* renlun guan yanjiu,” p. 114.

Gongsun' relatives' envy is to have such a capable daughter-in-law.¹⁴⁰ Soon after her marriage, she bears a son, which implies her high morality as well. When her son is four-year-old, she teaches him the *Four Books* and *bagu* essays every day (RW 13.187). When Qu Gongsun tells her to invite Ma Chunshang at home, she happily accepts and treats Ma with a good meal (RW 13.188-189). Miss Lu acts as a model mother and wife. Her case contrasts sharply with Mrs. Wang, who violates lots of Confucian womanly codes, as demonstrated before.

Mrs. Wang is constructed as a shrew who transgresses social norms that a virtuous wife and a worthy woman should follow. She is perhaps the most disruptive woman in *Rulin waishi*, since she brings disaster to the man, the family, and herself. It carries the Confucian message that men should take the lead and maintain order. It thus reinforces the rightful patriarchy. Through Mrs. Wang's case, we can see that *Rulin waishi* holds a more conservative attitude towards women.

¹⁴⁰ Edwards, *Men and Women in Qing China*, p. 80.

8. Conclusions

The relationship between the fictional world and social reality is often complicated. It is not sure that the gender conceptions underlying this novel reflect the real situation in social history in eighteenth-century China. As Maram Epstein argues, fiction “may shed more light on the historical imaginary than on historical practices.”¹⁴¹ Besides, Wu Jingzi may exaggerate real life to a certain degree to convince his argument. My analysis shows that the novel nevertheless reflects gender ideologies of its time rather than challenges them.

Through the examination of virtues of several celebrated literati such as Wang Mian, Yu Yude, Zhuang Shaoguang, and Du Shaoqing, the ideal manhood showed in the novel comprises real virtues and authentic learning. True virtues include a rejection of officialdom, generosity with money, filial piety, devotion to public affairs, and honesty. Real learning means authentic learning, broad knowledge, classical scholarship as well as literary talent, and studies for its own sake. Regarding learning, a hierarchy exists within *wen* masculinity. The highest level is Confucian classical scholarship; the second level is literary compositions, especially poetry, and examination essays are the last.

The ideal masculinity supported by the novel goes against the traditional, orthodox Confucian masculinity. The latter advocates that officialdom is the glorious path to fulfill a learned man's masculinity. It is mainly due to Wu Jingzi's own failure in the civil service examinations and official careers. The novel, nevertheless, shows a competing view that there is an alternative way of making official careers beneficial both to the individual scholar and to the community as a whole, particularly through Dr. Yu's case. Dr. Yu, a masculine ideal, holds office but keeps his moral integrity.

Regarding the relation of masculinity and sexuality, the novel reveals that a masculine man is not tempted by female charm but can enjoy a harmonious and companionate conjugal life with his wife, as Du Shaoqing and Zhuang Shaoguang do. Besides, scholars show great anxiety about their masculinity since they are in a marginal position in society. Their manliness is challenged by officials, merchants, and even commoners, as well as their colleagues.

The novel holds a conventional opinion on women, although it criticizes

¹⁴¹ Epstein, *Competing Discourses*, p. 2.

suicided widows and concubinage, and it shows an egalitarian husband-wife relationship. It praises Confucian womanly virtues, such as following and serving the husband, managing the household, and keeping chastity.

For Pinniāng's story, unlike late Ming courtesans who were often fashioned as a symbol of elite culture and passion, Pinniāng is characterized as a self-seeker. She manipulates culture and passion for luring men and thus to upward social mobility. She is blamed as an evil temptation to lead men to go astray. The episode reinforces the conventional idea of condemning a courtesan or a prostitute who tries to return to family and to raise her status. It also reveals men's anxiety about female sexuality.

Miss Lu's highly developed manly talent in *bagu* essays is depicted as problematic when she tries to access the power structure. However, it gains legitimacy when serving to fulfill her domestic responsibilities. Her case shows how a powerful writing woman is domesticated.

Regarding Mrs. Wang, my conclusion is that she is depicted as a family-destroying shrew, who lacks Confucian womanly virtues and obsesses in status and wealth. Her domination of her husband reverses the proper hierarchy in a household. Moreover, she corrupts her husband and harms their family as well as herself. Therefore, it carries the Confucian message that men should take the lead and maintain order. It reinforces the rightful patriarchy. Through Mrs. Wang's case, we can see that *Rulin waishi* holds a conservative attitude towards women.

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