



Divorce and the Divorced Woman in Early Medieval China (First Through Six Century)

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**Divorce and the Divorced Woman in Early Medieval China
(First through Sixth Century)**

A dissertation presented

by

Qiaomei Tang

to

The Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

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in the subject of

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Abstract

This dissertation consists of two parts: a cultural study of divorce in early medieval China and a literary study of the divorced woman as represented in various early medieval Chinese writings, including literary and historical writings, legal, ritual and medical texts, and tomb epitaphs.

A comparison between the rites, norms and regulations prescribed for women in ritual classics, and women's lived experiences as recounted in historical writings, shows a greater discrepancy between norm and practice in the early medieval period than in later periods. Normative prescriptions were generally not followed by women of this period, and women enjoyed a more relaxed social and familial environment than their late imperial counterparts. The gap between norm and practice was extended into many areas of familial and social life, including marriage and divorce. An examination of actual divorce cases reveals that neither the Seven Conditions (*qichu* 七出) nor the Three Prohibitions (*sanbuqu* 三不去) were strictly adhered to when divorce took place. Divorce happened to people from all levels of society, and

could be initiated by both men and women for reasons outside of the Seven Conditions and the Three Prohibitions. Divorce was not regarded as a social taboo in early medieval China.

The unstable social and political environment that characterizes the early medieval period gave rise to some ritual deviations and anomalies, among which was the two-principal-wives (*liangdi* 兩嫡) phenomenon. Debates and discussions on this marital predicament anchored on the issue of divorce, that is, how should the marital status of the two wives be defined? A thorny case of a sixth-century *liangdi* dilemma reveals that during the long divide between north and south, the contestation between wives for the principal wife status mirrored the contention for cultural supremacy and political legitimacy between northern and southern elite.

Generally speaking, divorced women were not stigmatized in early medieval China, and remarriage was an acceptable recourse for them. Historians appeared to be indifferent to her plight, and tended to write of the divorced woman only to help tell the story of the man who divorced her. In contrast, in poetic writings, the divorced woman was not viewed only in relation to her ex-husband. She was instead a disconnected, isolated figure, and her emotions took center stage. This comparison reveals that the image of the divorced woman in early medieval China reflects both the mindset of the men who formulate her in writing, as well as the constraints imposed by each writing genre.

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Introduction

Xu Zhaopei 徐昭佩 (?-549) was notorious for mocking her one-eyed husband Xiao Yi 蕭繹 (508-554, r. 552-554), the then Prince of Xiangdong 湘東王.¹ Most notably, she would poke fun at him by presenting herself to him with only one side of her face made up. In the *History of the Southern Dynasties* (*Nan shi* 南史), compiled in the early seventh century, Xu Zhaopei is portrayed as a homely, jealous, alcoholic and licentious woman.² Her husband, Xiao Yi, reportedly saw her only once every two or three years. When Xiao called on her, she would not only ridicule his blind eye, but also drink so much that she threw up on him. She is said to have been so extremely jealous (*kudu* 酷妒) that she injured her husband's concubines if they showed any signs of pregnancy. She herself, however, reportedly had affairs with a monk and officials, and conspired to meet her lover in a Buddhist nunnery. One lover, a handsome official serving under Xiao Yi, remarked, "although Madame Xu has passed her prime, she is still amorous."³ Xiao Yi was well aware of her escapades. He publicized her sexual misconduct in statements written on the walls of government offices.⁴ After their son died on the battlefield, Xiao Yi

¹ Historical dates without designations all refer to CE (Common Era) if not otherwise specified as BCE (Before the Common Era).

Note: all translations of official titles are based on Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1985).

² Li Yanshou 李延壽 (fl. mid 7th c.), *Nan shi* 南史 (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1981), 12.341.

³ Li, *Nan shi* 12.341. Because of this remark, "Madame Xu" (*xuniang* 徐娘) became a synonym for charming middle-aged women, especially the sexually promiscuous ones.

⁴ Li, *Nan shi* 54.1345. Xiao Yi was impressed by the military ability of his oldest son Xiao Fangdeng 蕭方等 (528-549), born of Xu Zhaopei. Pleased, Xiao Yi went to see Xu Zhaopei and said: "If I had another

forced his wife to commit suicide, after thirty-three years of marriage.⁵ He had her body delivered back to her clan, and severed all ties with her by declaring a divorce (*chuqi* 出妻).⁶

Why was a wife, seemingly so unbearable, not divorced sooner? If Xiao Yi were to follow the classical prescriptions on divorce, he could have divorced Xu Zhaopei long ago. According to the grounds of divorce listed in ritual texts, Xu Zhaopei violated at least two of the Seven Conditions called *qichu* 七出: licentiousness (*yinpi* 淫僻) and jealousy (*jidu* 嫉妒). The other five are disobeying one's parents-in-law (*bushun fumu* 不順父母), being unable to bear a son (*wuzi* 無子), suffering from leprosy (*aji* 惡疾), being gossipy (*duo koushe* 多口舌), and stealing (*qiedao* 竊盜).⁷ Yet, Xu Zhaopei was not divorced until after more than thirty years of marriage. On what grounds could a wife be divorced then?

son like this one, what is there for me to worry about 若更有一子如此, 吾復何憂?” Xu Zhaopei responded to Xiao Yi's comments with silence and withdrew in tears. Infuriated, Xiao Yi wrote about her immoral conduct and posted it on the walls of provincial government offices 忿之, 因疏其穢行, 榜于大閤. After Xu died, Xiao Yi recorded her licentious conduct in his writing *The Master of the Gold Tower* (*Jinlou zi* 金樓子).

⁵ The *Nan shi* states that Xiao Yi's decision to kill Xu Zhaopei also had to do with his suspicion that Xu murdered one of his favorite concubines.

⁶ This is an unusual case of *chuqi*. Normally the wife was alive when she was divorced and dismissed from the husband's house, but here it is the dead body of his wife that Xiao Yi returned to her parents. *Chuqi* is sometimes called *dagui* 大歸. It means that the wife returns to her parents without ever being able to come back to the husband. *Dagui* also means death. In the case of Xu and Xiao, *chuqi* contains both layers of meaning.

⁷ Wang Su 王肅 (195-256), comm., *Kongzi jiayu* 孔子家語 (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1991), 26.64.

The *Kongzi jiayu* is a collection of lore concerning the life and teachings of Confucius, and is intended as a complement to the selective collection of his sayings entitled *The Analects* (*Lun yu* 論語). Wang Su, the most famous third-century compiler and commentator of the *Kongzi jiayu*, believes that “*Lun yu* and *Chia*

This sixth-century tale of adultery, betrayal and vengeance reveals the discrepancy between orthodox prescriptions on divorce and the actual practice of it in early medieval China. In fact, this discrepancy between orthodox ideals of womanhood and social reality can be observed in all areas of female ethics and marriage life. Of the Seven Conditions, the charge of jealousy is particularly interesting: jealousy was presented as a serious problem prevalent in the early medieval Chinese society; yet extant records show that jealous wives were rarely divorced. The discussion on jealousy in the final chapter of this dissertation epitomizes the general message that this research seeks to convey: competing ideas about womanhood existed in early medieval societies, from orthodox ideals promulgated by the state and leading scholars, to the perceptions and behaviors of the general public, and finally to women's own attitudes and behaviors. This dissertation thus aims to explore both the complex issue of divorce and the differing representations of the divorced woman in the first through the seventh century, a period marked by political division and social unrest.

yü [i.e. the *Kongzi jiayu*] together should form the sum total of traditions claiming to originate from the school which Confucius headed during his life." Although the title of the book already appeared in the "Treatise on Writings" (*Yiwen zhi* 藝文志), the bibliographical section of the *Book of the Han* (*Han shu* 漢書), compiled in the first century, the authenticity of the extant Wang Su's version, which is considered by many to have nothing to do with the title recorded in the "Yiwen zhi," has been a matter of debate for centuries. The recently excavated Western Han bamboo strips strongly suggest that the *Kongzi jiayu* could not have been forged entirely by Wang Su. This view is shared by a Dutch scholar Robert Paul Kramers, who published a partial translation of the book with an introduction and critical notes, see Robert Paul Kramers, *K'ung Tzŭ Chia Yü: The School Sayings of Confucius* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1950). For a brief introduction to the content, the date of composition and authenticity, the textual history, the editions, and major studies and translations of the *Kongzi jiayu*, see also Kramers's entry in Loewe, *Early Chinese Texts*, 258-62. The *Kongzi jiayu* is likely a Han text, and according to Mark Csikszentmihalyi, "probably postdates the *Shuiyuan*" 說苑 compiled by Liu Xiang 劉向 (77-6 BCE), see Martin Kern, ed., *Text and Ritual in Early China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 245.

Let me first say a few words about the conception of this project. While I was reading early medieval Chinese poems, I realized that the divorced woman is very much underrepresented in poetry. Even within the sub-genre of poems on yearning women/wives (*sifu* 思婦), the divorced wife (*chuqi* or *chufu* 出婦) is a rare figure, and only features in a handful of poems composed by the Jian'an 建安 (196-220) authors at the beginning of the early medieval period.⁸ In her contemplation on the relation between woman and fiction, Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) once said: “[s]he pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history.”⁹ Only certain types of women appear in Chinese poetry, however. As for the divorced woman in early medieval China, she is featured in official histories from time to time; but male poets like to write about yearning women, not divorced women. Why? Does it have to do with the genres in which she is represented? Or does it have to do with the characteristics of the divorced woman herself? To answer these questions, I set out to compare depictions of the divorced woman in various kinds of writings such as belletristic literature, dynastic histories, legal and ritual texts, and tomb epitaphs, and examine how she is cast by each, and interpret what that image might reveal about her and the men of letters who depict her.

⁸ *Sifu*, the yearning women, in Mei Jialing's 梅家玲 definition, includes equally wives who were left behind by their traveling husbands (who were often soldiers or officials), resentful women (*yuanfu* 怨婦) whose love was not requited, and women abandoned by their lovers (*qifu* 棄婦), especially palace ladies. See Mei Jialing, “Han Jin shige zhong sifu wenben de xingcheng ji xiangguan wenti” 漢晉詩歌中思婦文本的形成及相關問題, in *Nüxing zhuyi yu Zhongguo wenxue* 女性主義與中國文學 (Taipei: Liren shuju, 1997), 44.

⁹ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929).

Research into her representation in historical writings reveals that there is something unsettling about the divorced woman. She could really stand up for herself. She would protect herself against unjust divorce and even ruin the reputation of her husband. No social stigma was attached to divorced women in this period. A divorced woman was officially unbound from the man and had a fair chance of getting remarried.¹⁰ She could even initiate the divorce to climb the social ladder, or simply to find a better marriage companion.

The demeanor and circumstances of the divorce woman did not cater to a male poet's sentimental fantasy about a deserted woman. He might find her too troubling to be included in his works that lament the longing woman. She was thus considered a troubling figure for male poets. Not only is she not a favorite subject in male-authored writings, but she also is not a research topic favored by modern scholars, either. The following literature review will demonstrate that the current project on the divorced woman in early medieval China is a necessary addition to the existing scholarship on pre-modern Chinese woman.

¹⁰ Patricia Ebrey says “[t]he social roles of wife/daughter/mother-in-law are de-eroticized roles. When they are stripped away from a woman, that leaves her, in a sense, just a woman, an eroticized category... Eroticized women are powerful, dangerous, and have to be controlled.” See Patricia Ebrey, “Engendering Song History,” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 24 (1994): 342. This speaks to the situation of divorce as well. When a woman is divorced, she is no longer a wife, a mother, or a mother-in-law. She is once again just a woman who is returned to the eroticized category of women. She is ready to be courted and married off again.

I. Literature Review

Since the 1970s, scholars from various academic disciplines have been paying increasing attention to women in pre-modern China.¹¹ However, scholarly interest is disproportionately geared toward the late imperial period, especially the Ming 明 (1368-1644) and Qing 清 (1644-1912) dynasties. Numerous articles and books have been produced to illuminate various aspects of women's lives in late imperial Chinese societies. A fair amount of articles and books are devoted to the Han, the Tang and the Song dynasties, and a few to the Yuan dynasty.¹² In comparison, the overall output of scholarly works on women in the long period between the Han 漢 (206 BCE-220 CE) and the Tang 唐 (618-907) is scarce. It is not an understatement to say that women in early medieval China are understudied. Among the works on early medieval women, writings on the specific issue of divorce and the divorced women are almost non-existent. Moreover, there is a lack of interdisciplinary approach to the study of women, as existing studies on pre-modern Chinese women tend to be confined to segregated academic

¹¹ There are a handful of articles and books published before 1980s on women in pre-modern China, such as Albert Richard O'Hara, *The Position of Woman in Early China, According to the Lieh Nü Chuan, "The Biographies of Eminent Chinese Women"* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1945).

¹² Patricia Ebrey and Beverly Bossler are two of the most important historians working on women in Song and Yuan China. Patricia Ebrey's book *The Inner Quarters* covers a wide range of issues related to marriage and women's life in Song China. In the fourteenth chapter entitled "Adultery, Incest, and Divorce," Ebrey briefly discusses divorce in Song society. See *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Song Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 255-9. For Beverly Bossler's newly published book, see *Concubines, and the Cult of Female Fidelity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013). Deng Xiaonan 鄧小南 and others have edited a volume that is dedicated to women in Tang and Song societies, see Deng Xiaonan et al., eds., *Tang Song nüxing yu shehui* 唐宋女性與社會 (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu, 2003).

disciplines such as history, literature, religion or law. Below is a review of the existing scholarship on women in early medieval China.

In the field of history, Beatrice Spade (1940-2012) was probably one of the first scholars in North America who took an interest in women in the Six Dynasties 六朝 (220-589). She published one article on women's education in the Southern Dynasties 南朝 (420-589).¹³ Jennifer Holmgren wrote her doctoral thesis on women's biographies in the *History of the Wei* (*Wei shu* 魏書), and contributed a series of articles on women in the Northern Dynasties 北朝 (386-581).¹⁴ Jen-der Lee 李貞德 is the most active historian of women's life in the early medieval period: she has written a doctoral dissertation on women and marriage in the Six Dynasties, and also contributed a dozen articles on women in the early medieval medical, legal and institutional discourses.¹⁵ Ping Yao, aware of "the limitations of 'Standard Histories' and didactic texts," uses epitaphs as a source for studying women. In her recently published article on

¹³ Beatrice Spade, "The Education of Women in China during the Southern Dynasties," *Journal of Asian History* 13.1 (1979): 15-41.

¹⁴ Some of the articles are included in a collected volume of her scholarship on marriage practices and kinship structures in the northern China. See Jennifer Holmgren, *Marriage, Kinship and Power in Northern China* (Aldershot, U.K., and Brookfield, Vt.: Ashgate, 1995). In this collection of articles, Holmgren examines "the role of marriage in many different periods of Chinese history, even though the emphasis is usually on the society of the North, especially the North under the rule of outsiders like the Khitans or the Mongols, as well as the Northern Wei themselves." See T. H. Barrett, review of *Marriage, Kinship and Power in Northern China*, by Jennifer Holmgren, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, 7.1 (1997): 176.

¹⁵ Jen-der Lee, "Women and Marriage in China during the period of disunion" (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1992). In the third chapter, Lee presents the average life of a woman in the Six Dynasties period with discussions of women's familial, social, and economic activities and scholarly learning. This chapter was turned into a journal article entitled "The Life of Women in the Six Dynasties," and published in 1993. Curiously, the life of women that Lee discusses does not include divorce. Jen-der Lee, "The Life of Women in the Six Dynasties," *Journal of Women and Gender Studies* 4 (1993): 47-80.

the portraits of women in early medieval funerary writings, she surveyed “roughly eleven hundred epitaphs from the Han to the Sui period.”¹⁶ Similarly, Nanxiu Qian examined the famous writer Yu Xin’s 庾信 (513-581) epitaphs dedicated to the Xianbei 鮮卑 noble women.¹⁷ As for more specific topics on women in early medieval China, Robert Joe Cutter and William Gordon Crowell examined the lives of palace ladies and their roles in the political arena of the Three Kingdoms 三國 (220-280).¹⁸ Carolyn Ford produced a study reconstructing a fifth-century text that ridicules jealous women.¹⁹

Worth mentioning is Yu-shih Chen’s unconventional reading of Ban Zhao’s 班昭 (ca. 48-ca. 118) *Admonitions for My Daughters* (*Nü jie* 女誡), which has been conventionally taken as advocating Confucian teachings on women.²⁰ Chen argues that the *Nü jie* was not a Confucian

¹⁶ Ping Yao, “Women in Portraits: An Overview of Epitaphs from Early and Medieval China.” In Clara Wing-chung Ho, ed., *Overt and Covert Treasures: Essays on the Sources for Chinese Women’s History* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2012), 157-83. Ping Yao’s approach is pioneered by Jen-der Lee in her article “The Life of Women in the Six Dynasties.” Lee includes a discussion of epitaphs of “nearly two hundred and seventy women.”

¹⁷ Nanxiu Qian, “Cultural and Ritual Empowerment of Women in the Northern Courts: Yu Xin’s Epitaphic Writings,” *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China* 5.4 (2011): 511–536.

¹⁸ Robert Joe Cutter and William Gordon Crowell, tr., *Empresses and Consorts: Selections from Chen Shou’s Records of the Three States with Pei Songzhi’s Commentary* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1999). Robert Joe Cutter, “The Death of Empress Zhen: Fiction and Historiography in Early Medieval China.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 112 (1992): 577-83.

¹⁹ Carolyn Ford, “The Afterlife of a Lost Book—*Du ji* (*The Record of Jealous Women*) Fifth Century [sic].” In Daria Berg, ed., *Reading China: Fiction, History and the Dynamics of Discourse. Essays in Honour of Professor Glen Dudbridge* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007), 170-99.

²⁰ Yu-Shih Chen, “The Historical Template of Pan Chao’s ‘Nü Chieh’,” *T’oung Pao*, Second Series 82.4/5 (1996): 229-257. Ban Zhao’s *Nü jie* was first translated into English by Nancy Swann, see Nancy L. Swann, *Pan Chao: Foremost Woman Scholar of China* (1932; reprint, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, 2001).

text, and that instead it was inspired by a Taoist way of thinking, and that was meant to be a survivor's handbook in a perilous environment such as the imperial court or prestigious families. Chen's observation and argument are in agreement with my own understanding of the *Nü jie*, as I find that Ban Zhao's advocating for widow chastity, for example, might have been more of a strategy to respond to the pressure to remarry than of an advocate for widow chastity *per se*. Ban Zhao herself was not necessarily an advocate of Confucian ethics on women.

Another body of scholarship that pertains to my current dissertation is the study of the "notable women" (*lienü* 列女) tradition. Comparison between the writings of *lienü* in the *Old History of the Tang* (*Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書) and the *New History of the Tang* (*Xin Tang shu* 新唐書) is the topic of a number of articles.²¹ Bret Hinsch has investigated the textual history, the fictional aspects and the authorship of the *Biographies of Notable Women* (*Lienü zhuan* 列女傳) that has been attributed to Liu Xiang 劉向 (77-6 BCE).²² There is a new translation of Liu Xiang's *Lienü zhuan* that has recently been produced.²³

²¹ Anderson Chiu, "Changing Virtues? The Lienü of the Old and the New History of the Tang." *East Asia Forum* 4 (1995): 28-62. Richard Davis, "Chaste and Filial Women in Chinese Historical Writings of the Eleventh Century." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 12.2 (2001): 204-18. Davis argues that Chinese historians in the eleventh century "seem to have adopted a distinctive perspective on women," and that it is "most apparent when one compares the accounts of 'Notable Women' (i.e. *lienü*) included in the *Xin Tang shu* with those written for a similar chapter of the *Jiu Tang shu* a century previously."

²² Bret Hinsch, "The Textual History of Liu Xiang's *Lienüzhuan*," *Monumenta Serica* 52 (2004): 95-112; "Cross-Genre Influence on the Fictional Aspects of Lienü Narratives," *Journal of Oriental Studies* 41.1 (2006): 41-66; and "The Composition of *Lienüzhuan*: Was Liu Xiang the Author or Editor?" *Asia Major (third series)* 20.1 (2007): 1-23.

²³ Anne Behnke Kinney, *Exemplary Women of Early China: The Lienü zhuan of Liu Xiang* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

In the past decade, Mainland China and Taiwan have seen a few studies on women in the early medieval period. Mai-Umiao Chun 曾美雲 discusses women's education in her doctoral dissertation, which is focused on the issue of jealousy and the difference in women's education between the north and the south.²⁴ Ya-ju Cheng 鄭雅如 has been researching women's role as mother and how the mother-child bond could challenge and threaten the patrilineal family system.²⁵ Zhang Chengzong's 張承宗 recent book is a general introduction of women's life in the Six Dynasties, which includes marriage customs, fashions, and social activities.²⁶ Recently, a big project on the general history of Chinese women has been completed in Mainland China. Pertaining to the current dissertation is the volume on the Six Dynasties co-authored by the aforementioned Zhang Chengzong.²⁷

Literary scholarship on women in pre-modern Chinese poetry has been dominated by a long tradition of reading love poems, or more generally, poems related to women as embodying political allegories. Kang Zhengguo's 康正果 *Fengsao yu yanqing* 風騷與艷情 is an analysis of the complex relations between love and politics and between women and male literati in pre-

²⁴ Mai-Umiao Chun 曾美雲, "Liuchao nüjiao wenti: yi caixing, nanbei, dujiao wei zhongxin 六朝女教問題：以才性、南北、妒教為中心" (Ph.D. Diss., National Taiwan University, 2001).

²⁵ Ya-ju Cheng 鄭雅如, *Qinggan yu Zhidu: Wei Jin Shidai de Muzi Guanxi* 情感与制度：魏晋时代的母子关系 (Taipei: Taiwan daxue wenshi congkan 114, 2001). A revised edition is included in Wang Mingsun 王明荪 et al., eds., *Gudai lishi wenxue yanjiu jikan* 古代歷史文化研究輯刊 (Taipei: Huamulan wenhua chubanshe, 2009).

²⁶ Zhang Chengzong 張承宗, *Liuchao funü* 六朝婦女 (Nanjing: Nanjing chubanshe, 2012).

²⁷ Zhang Chengzong and Chen Qun 陳群, *Zhongguo funü tongshi Wei Jin nanbeichao juan* 中國婦女通史魏晉南北朝卷 (Hangzhou: Hangzhou chubanshe, 2010).

modern Chinese poetic writings.²⁸ Paul Rouzer's *Articulated Ladies* takes upon the issue of this tradition of interpretation, and "endeavors to show how gender and desire are represented in elite, male-authored literary texts during an early phase of Chinese culture (200 B.C.E.-1000 C.E.)" by arguing that women are mainly deployed as facilitators and conduits in male-to-male relationship.²⁹ Xiaofei Tian, however, tries to break away from this mode of interpretation. In her book on the literary culture of the Liang dynasty (502-557), Tian presents a picture of elite women's good education and their high literary accomplishments in the Liang dynasty and emphasizes the real presence of women in the literary scene as authors and readers. In her reading of Xu Ling's 徐陵 (507-583) preface to the *New Songs from a Jade Terrace* (*Yutai xinyong* 玉臺新詠), a poetry anthology that Xu professed to have compiled for a female readership,³⁰ Tian argues against Paul Rauzer's allegorical reading of the poems. She maintains that some of the poems "strenuously resist[s] such an allegorical interpretation" and confirms the editorial purpose of this anthology.³¹

Some well-known women from the early medieval period have received moderate scholarly attention. For example, Hans Frankel discusses the controversial attribution of three

²⁸ Kang Zhengguo 康正果, *Feng sao yu yanqing: Zhongguo gudian shici de nüxing yanjiu* 風騷與言情：中國古典詩詞的女性研究 (Zhengzhou: Henan renmin, 1988).

²⁹ Paul Rouzer, *Articulated Ladies: Gender and the Male Community in Early Chinese Texts* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1.

³⁰ For an annotated translation of *Yutai xinyong*, see Ann Birrell, *New Songs from a Jade Terrace: An Anthology of Early Chinese Love Poetry, Translated with Annotations and an Introduction* (London; Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1982).

³¹ Xiaofei Tian, *Beacon Fire and Shooting Star: the Literary Culture of the Liang (502-557)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 192.

poems to the third-century woman Cai Yan 蔡琰 (ca. 178 - post 206).³² Xie Daoyun 謝道韞 (ca. 334-post 402), an Eastern Jin 東晉 (317-420) female poet, has been the topic of a number of studies in both Chinese and English.³³ Anne Birrell has written about women in the Southern Dynasties love poetry, and Xiaofei Tian has written on women in the Nineteen Old Poems (*gushi shijiushou* 古詩十九首), the southern Music Bureau (*yuefu* 樂府) poetry and the Southern Dynasties court poetry.³⁴ These studies inform my understanding of women in early medieval Chinese poetry, although they do not directly bear on the theme of the divorced woman.³⁵

As far as research on abandoned women goes, Chinese academia in the past decades has produced a number of M.A. theses on poems on abandoned women (*qifu shi* 棄婦詩) in ancient, early medieval and medieval Chinese poetry: Chen Yuanding's 陳遠丁 *Shijing qifu shi yanjiu* 詩

³² Hans H. Frankel, "Cai Yan and the Poems Attributed to Her," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 5.1/2 (1983): 133-56. For an introduction of Cai Yan and studies on her and her poems, see David R. Knechtges and Taiping Chang, eds., *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide* (Vol. 1) (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), 52-60.

³³ For the list of studies on Xie Daoyun, see David R. Knechtges and Taiping Chang, eds., *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide* (Vol. 3 & 4) (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2014), 1574-7.

³⁴ Anne M. Birrell, "The Dusty Mirror: Courtly Portraits of Woman in Southern Dynasties Love Poetry." In Robert E. Hegel and Richard C. Hessney, eds., *Expressions of Self in Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 33-69; "In the Voice of Women: Chinese Love Poetry in the Early Middle Ages," in Lesley Smith and Jane H.M. Taylor, eds., *Women, the Book, and the Godly: Selected Proceedings of the St. Hilda's Conference, 1993* (Woodbridge, U.K., and Rochester, N.Y.: D.S. Brewer. II, 1995), 49-59.

Xiaofei Tian, "Woman in the Tower: 'Nineteen Old Poems' and the Poetics of Un/concealment," *Early Medieval China* 15 (2009): 3-21; "Configuring the Feminine: Gender and Literary Transvestitism in the Southern Dynasties Poetry," (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1998).

³⁵ Xiaofei Tian's discussion of the theme of the "wanderer's wife" in her dissertation, however, is useful for me to think about the fashioning of the image of the divorced woman in Chinese poetry.

經棄婦詩研究 of 2001, Wang Yaqin's 王亞琴 *Han Wei liuchao wenren qifu shiwen yanjiu* 漢魏六朝文人棄婦詩文研究 of 2002 and Deng Duojun's 鄧多軍 *Tangdai qifu shi yanjiu* 唐代棄婦詩研究 of 2010. English scholarship on this specific topic is scarce. David T. Roy has a journal article on the theme of the neglected wife in Cao Zhi's 曹植 (192-232) poetry.³⁶ Ann-Marie Hsiung's study on the images of women in early medieval Chinese poetry touches briefly on the theme of the neglected woman.³⁷

Mei Jialing 梅家玲 discusses the formation of the poetic sub-genre on yearning/longing women (*sifu*) from a literary historical perspective, and argues that it was during the late Han and Jin 晉 (265-420) periods that this subgenre was developed and matured, and that the formation of this subgenre had a lot to do with the popular act of the Cao-Wei 曹魏 (220-265) and Jin literary men writing imitation (*nizuo* 擬作) or persona (*daiyan* 代言) poems about longing women.³⁸ Mei categorizes the yearning women as those who were left behind by their husbands who were usually away fighting on the battlefields, seeking or holding official posts, or traveling for business. Since it was quite possible that these longing wives would turn into resentful women (*yuanfu* 怨婦) due to the long separation, or abandoned women (*qifu* 棄婦) due to the change of

³⁶ David T. Roy, "The Theme of the Neglected Wife in the Poetry of Ts'ao Chih." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 19.1 (Nov., 1959): 25-31.

³⁷ Ann-Marie Hsiung, "The Images of Women in Early Chinese Poetry: the Book of Songs, Han Ballads and Palace Style Verse of the Liang Dynasty." *Chinese Culture* 35:4 (December 1994): 81-90.

³⁸ "Persona poems" (*daiyan shi* 代言詩), is Stephen Owen's term. See Owen's discussion of author and speaker in early medieval Chinese poetry, Stephen Owen, *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2006).

the heart of their absent husbands, Mei includes both resentful and abandoned women in her discussion of the longing women. Mei, however, does not discuss the actually divorced wives (*chuqi/chufu*) even though the poets she discusses had written on this topic.³⁹

Several anthologies on writings by and about women in imperial China, a biographical dictionary for women, and a bibliography on women and gender in pre-modern China have been compiled in the last decades. Kang-i Sun Chang and Haun Saussy co-edited a volume called *Women Writers of Traditional China*.⁴⁰ It contains poems from about 130 poets from the Han dynasty through the early twentieth century. It also contains poetic criticism by and about women writers. Wilt Idema and Beata Grant's *The Red Brush* has been so far the most inclusive collection of a wide range of writings by and about women from imperial China.⁴¹ The first section of this anthology is dedicated to pre-Song 宋 (960-1279) female writers of various social statuses. Lily Xiao Hong Lee and A.D. Stefanowska co-edited a biographical dictionary of Chinese Women from antiquity through Sui 隋 (581-618).⁴² "Gender and Sexuality in Pre-modern China: Bibliography of Materials in Western Languages," compiled and constantly updated by Paul R. Goldin, provides a handy guide for reviewing scholarly works on pre-modern Chinese women. Goldin's bibliography, last updated on December 21, 2014, is truly long,

³⁹ Mei, "Han Jin shige zhong sifu wenben de xingcheng ji xiangguan wenti," 44-55.

⁴⁰ Kang-I Sun Chang and Haun Saussy, eds., *Women Writers of Traditional China: An Anthology of Poetry and Criticism* (Stanford Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999).

⁴¹ Wilt L. Idema and Beata Grant, *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁴² Lily Xiao Hong Lee and A.D. Stefanowska, eds., *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Women: Antiquity through Sui, 1600 B.C.E.-618 C.E.* (Armonk, N.Y. : M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2007).

totaling 85 pages and about 1200 entries. It is a fairly comprehensive list of scholarly writings in Western languages on pre-modern Chinese women.⁴³ The freshly published reference book on ancient and early medieval literature, edited by David Knechtges and Taiping Chang, also contains entries of female figures.⁴⁴

Such is the state of the field of women studies in early medieval China. The lack of scholarship dedicated to the divorced woman in the early medieval period is obvious. This deficiency is partly due to the limited amount of extant textual materials from this period. The lack of an extant legal code like that from the Tang dynasty is another obstacle for any serious study of the legal aspects of divorce in the early medieval period. Thus, my dissertation's temporal and topical focus on the divorced woman from the first through the seventh century will fill a void in scholarship on women in an important period of Chinese history, when women played a prominent role in family and social life.

Different from the historical or literary studies of women in early medieval China (from which I benefited tremendously in my research), this dissertation takes a more interdisciplinary approach to the issue of divorce and the representation of the divorced woman. By placing my research emphasis on the question how the divorced woman was shaped by various genres of writings, I examine not only how the specific conventions and purposes within a form of writing

⁴³ For a bibliography of studies in Western languages on Chinese women that covers both pre-modern and modern China, see Robin D. S. Yates, *Women in China from Earliest Times to the Present: A Bibliography of Studies in Western Languages* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009).

⁴⁴ David R. Knechtges and Taiping Chang, eds., *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010-2014).

could affect the fashioning of the image of the divorced woman, but also how the process of fashioning reveals the mindset of her various creators. It is the representations of the divorced woman, and what the differing representations of her can tell us about the men behind these representations, that is at the heart of my research.

II. Chapter Outline

Chapter 1, “Orthodox Prescriptions for Women and Women’s Lived Experiences in Early Medieval China,” begins the dissertation by comparing the prescriptions on marriage and divorce in classical texts and the recorded experiences of women in the early medieval times. The comparison shows significant discrepancies between the orthodox ideals of womanhood and the represented historical realities. Women in this period generally enjoyed a freer and more relaxed social and familial environment than their counterparts in late imperial China. Against this backdrop, the issue of divorce in early medieval China is discussed in detail in Chapter 2, “Divorce in Early Medieval China.”

Divorce took place amongst people of all social standings, and could be initiated by both husbands and wives. The classical texts prescribed Seven Conditions under which a man could divorce his wife, although in reality men could divorce their wives for almost any reason that suited them, such as career advancement, political pragmatism or financial improvement. Sometimes it seems almost bizarre to a modern reader that a husband would repudiate his wife for what she had done. Sometimes there did not even have to be a reason for the husband to

divorce his wife. However, under the Three Prohibitions (*san bu qu* 三不去) a wife could be spared from divorce.⁴⁵

The tumultuous social and political environment that characterized early medieval China gave rise to a special phenomenon called “two-principal-wives” (*liangdi* 兩嫡). The *liangdi* phenomenon exposes the ambiguous definition of divorce. Moreover, physical separation of husband and wife caused by geo-political reasons seems to have justified female-initiated divorce. Such a justification can be seen as a new addition to the traditional grounds for divorce in classical texts. And it is only in the *liangdi* debates that we see for the first time male scholars and officials voice and theorize the legitimacy of female-initiated divorce, even though in reality female-initiated divorce had existed long before this period.

The political and social unrest of the period also gave rise to several types of forced divorce. When women were caught in a *liangdi* situation, one of the wives was likely to be forced to accept a divorce. When a woman’s husband was chosen to marry a princess, she could be forced to a divorce too. Sometimes married women were forced into divorce so that they could be remarried off to soldiers, and women born into military families could be forced into divorce if they married men outside the army.

⁴⁵ The Three Prohibitions state that a woman cannot be divorced if she had no family to return to when her husband was remarried (*you suoqu wu suogui* 有所取無所歸); if she had served three years of mourning for her parent-in-law (*yu gong jing sannian zhi sang* 與共更三年之喪), and if the husband had been poor and humble in the past, a fate shared with him by his wife, and became rich and noble now (*xian pinjian hou fugui* 先貧賤後富貴).

Although the classical texts do not prescribe conditions under which women could divorce their husbands, it was acceptable for them to initiate divorce in order to have a better material life or to find a more compatible marriage companion. However, a woman who initiated a divorce might suffer a negative portrayal in historical writings.

Chapter 3, “The Historical and Poetic Representations of the Divorced Woman,” compares and contrasts the representations of the divorced woman in historical and poetic writings. When we examine literature that depicts divorce or the divorced woman, we realize that the reasons for a man to divorce his wife seem to show a pattern, and the number of the reasons for divorce is much fewer than in recorded historical reality. The reasons are either that the woman is incapable of bearing sons or that the husband has grown tired of her and become fond of another woman. Sometimes a wife is abandoned for no clear reason.

Another difference between historical and literary representations of the divorced woman lies in the responses from the wives. In historical accounts, wives sometimes would not passively accept the fate of being dismissed. They fought. For example, a late second-century woman staged a public denouncement of her husband who attempted to divorce her and marry a younger woman from a more powerful family. Such an act from an abandoned wife is hard to come by in poetic writings. The most common image of a female divorcée in poetry is that of a melancholy, sorrow-stricken and helpless woman who waits for her husband to return to her. The only exception may be Liu Lanzhi 劉蘭芝, the female protagonist in the long narrative poem “Southeast Fly the Peacocks” (*Kongque dongnan fei* 孔雀東南飛), who inspired her husband to die with her.

The differences observed in historical and literary representations of the divorced woman call our attention to the question of why poetry only paints a certain image of the divorced woman. Were only certain elements in the event of divorce allowed in the domain of poetry? How did the process of screening sentiments take place?

Official histories recount stories of divorce in different situations with different meanings intended, but they all seem to point to one message, that is, all other social relationships weighed more than the relationship between a husband and a wife, even though in the patrilineal system, the relationship between husband and wife was theoretically of paramount importance. Wives could be dismissed and replaced whenever they posed a threat to their husband's relation with his parents, brothers, friends, and so forth. When the man allegedly divorced his wife after she dropped some dust on his mother's bed, a modern reader cannot help but feel shocked. But the husband had to be first of all a filial son. If his wife upset his mother and yet he took no action, the reputation of him being a filial son would be jeopardized. It seems that conjugal relation could be readily sacrificed when it threatened the maintenance of the husband's other social relations.

If the reasons that a man came up with to divorce his wife were so readily endorsed by historians when recording the events in dynastic histories, why then would this same group of men of letters write so emphatically in the voice of an abandoned woman in poetry?⁴⁶ Could poetry offer a counter-voice to history? Is it that history was incapable of rendering the

⁴⁶ I view historians and literary men as belonging to the same social spectrum, that is, the elite class. A traditional Chinese man would easily have possessed both identities.

complexity of human emotions and psychology? One must make sense of the tension between endorsing men to divorce their wives in histories and pitying the expelled wives in poetry and the implication of such a tension.

Chapter 4, “The Jealous Wife,” introduces the perception and representation of the emotion of jealousy—one of the Seven Conditions for divorcing a woman as listed in classical texts—in early medieval China. Through an examination of jealousy in classical scholarship and medical texts, I will demonstrate that sexual jealousy was portrayed primarily as a female emotion, but the attitude toward jealous women was differentiated among different groups of people. The historical representation of jealous women shows that they are unsparingly criticized. In poetry, jealousy is likewise treated as a negative emotion that requires denial, and women are sometimes given a voice to defend the charge of jealousy against them. Yet, from certain historical sources we also learn that jealousy was actually encouraged in young women by their parents and friends as a useful strategy in marriage. Competing discourses on jealousy will be presented. The chapter ends with the discussion of a story in which sexual jealousy acquired a nickname, ironically, after an extremely jealous *man* of the Tang dynasty. In this chapter, we will see once again how the orthodox ideals of marriage and womanhood fail to correspond to the recorded social realities, since jealousy was rarely used as a reason to divorce women, even though it was among the Seven Conditions for divorce.

The divorced woman’s treatment by men of letters demonstrates the unorthodox, ill-fitting position she held in a patrilineal society, as well as it reveals her as a figure uniquely unattached and even empowered in some ways. Belonging to no one and free to re-marry, the unbranded woman was sometimes empowered by her detachment from the male-dominated

world, and became a difficult figure for both society and the writers who reflected the norms to recognize. My research into this problematic figure gives insight into the perceived role of women and the men who helped shape her image in early medieval China.

Chapter 1 Orthodox Prescriptions for Women and Women's Lived Experiences in Early Medieval China

This chapter discusses the orthodox prescriptions of the ideal womanhood and the lived experiences of women in early medieval China. The period of history under consideration runs roughly from the first century to the end of the sixth century, often known as the “early medieval” period in sinological usage. The purpose of this chapter is twofold: to demonstrate a gap between orthodox ideals of womanhood and the lived reality of women during the first six centuries as represented in historical sources. In this way the chapter will serve as a backdrop for the subsequent discussions about divorce in the Six Dynasties period.

The chapter is thematically divided into two sections. The first section is a brief introduction of marriage rites, norms and regulations in pre-Han and Han orthodox ritual texts. Knowledge about marriage rites and norms is mainly mulled from two ritual texts: the *Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial* (*Yili* 儀禮) and the *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記).⁴⁷ Information on

⁴⁷ The *Yili* is a collection of ritual prescriptions of the pre-Qin 秦 (221-207 BCE) societies. Because the rites and ceremonies recorded in the *Yili* pertain mainly to the *shi* 士 class, the lower nobility, the *Yili* is sometimes known as *Shi li* 士禮. The *Yili* would have been lost after the burning of books ordered by the First Emperor of Qin 秦始皇 (259-210 BCE, r. 220-210 BCE) in 213, had it not been for the early Han classicist Gaotang Sheng 高堂生 who memorized and transmitted seventeen chapters of the *Yili*. The Eastern Han classic scholar Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200) was the first to rearrange the chapters and write a commentary to it. His commentary is entitled *Yili zhu* 儀禮註, which was further commented on by the Tang classic scholar Jia Gongyan 賈公彥 (fl. mid. 7th c.). The 1815 edition of the *Yili zhu shu* 儀禮註疏, which was produced during the Southern Song 南宋 (1127-1279) dynasty and combined Zheng Xuan's commentary and Jia Gongyan's sub-commentary, is the edition consulted in this dissertation.

There is only one English translation of the *Yili*, viz. John Steele, trans, *The I-li, or, Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial* (London: Probsthain & Co., 1917). In the introduction, Steele discusses the dating and the transmission history of the *Yili*, as well as the commentaries to it. For an introduction to the content, the

marriage regulations is mainly gathered from the *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhouli* 周禮).⁴⁸ During the last years of the Eastern Han 東漢 (25-220), these three texts were canonized as the Three Ritual Classics (*san li* 三禮).⁴⁹

origin and authenticity, the commentaries and editions, and major studies and translation of the *Yili*, see also William G. Boltz, “I li,” in Michael Loewe, ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California, 1993), 234-43. For a more detailed description of the content of the *Yili*, see Michael Nylan, *The Five “Confucian” Classics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 178-81.

The *Liji* is a collection of ritual texts which are believed to have been written down by Confucius’ (551-479 BCE) disciples and their later students during the late Warring States 戰國 (475-221 BCE) period, and were edited in the Western Han 西漢 (206 BCE-9 CE), first by Liu Xiang, then by Dai De 戴德 (fl. 48-33 BCE), and finally by Dai’s nephew Dai Sheng 戴聖 (fl. 74-49 BCE). Dai Sheng’s compilation, entitled *Book of Rites by Dai the Lesser* (*Xiao Dai Liji* 小戴禮記) is the version that has been commonly used since the end of the Eastern Han. Zheng Xuan wrote a commentary to the *Xiao Dai Liji*, and the famous Tang scholar Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574-648) wrote a much longer sub-commentary to Zheng Xuan’s, entitled *The Correct Meaning of the Book of Rites* (*Liji zhengyi* 禮記正義).

There is one English translation of the *Liji*, by James Legge (1815-1897), first published in 1885. For a modernized edition of Legge’s translation, see James Legge, trans., *Li Chi: Book of Rites*, edited by Ch’u Chai and Winberg Chai (New Hyde Park, N.Y.: University Books, 1967). For an introduction to the date of compilation, the content, the editions and the major studies of the *Liji*, see Jeffrey K. Riegel, “Li chi,” in Loewe, *Early Chinese Texts*, 293-7. For a more detailed description of the content of the *Liji*, see Nylan, *The Five “Confucian” Classics*, 185-8.

Unless otherwise noted, all editions of the Classics are based on Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764-1849), ed., *Chongkan Song ben shisanjing zhushu* 重刊宋本十三經註疏 (1815; reprint, Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1965).

⁴⁸ The *Zhouli*, originally known as the *Offices of the Zhou* (*Zhou guan* 周官), is a detailed description of an idealized vision of governmental structures and functions of the Western Zhou 西周 (1046-771 BCE) state. The *Zhouli* is not mentioned in transmitted texts prior to the Western Han, and the authenticity of the work has been a matter of debate. It is believed by some to have been formed during the Warring States period, and to have reemerged in the mid second-century BCE. Thanks to the famous usurper Wang Mang 王莽 (45 BCE-23 CE) and his supporter Liu Xin 劉歆 (46 BCE-23 CE), the *Zhouli* made its way to the Han imperial library and began to receive scholarly attention.

The earliest known commentary to the *Zhouli* was produced by Zheng Xuan. The most important study of the *Zhouli* in English is Bernhard Karlgren’s article “The Early History of the *Chou li* and *Tso chuan* Texts,” *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 3 (1931): 1-59. No English translation of the

Topics covered in the first section of this chapter include the Six Rites (*liu li* 六禮) which is the six steps for a proper marriage, the familial and marital obligations expected of a married woman, sex segregation, gender inequality, widowhood, divorce, distinction between a principal wife (*di qi* 嫡妻) and a concubine (*qie* 妾), marriage ages, and state's intervention in marriage disputes and other related issues.

The second section of this chapter provides a chronological survey of women's lived experiences in early medieval China. By lived experience I do not refer to the first-hand immediate records of the actual lives lived by women, but to their experiences as represented in various writings. The term is used to form a contrast with the idealization of women in orthodox writings.

Topics examined in this survey roughly correspond to those considered in the first section. A comparison between the image of women conjured up from orthodox writings and that emerging from historical representations indicates that orthodox prescriptions for women were generally not followed in this long period of history. However, efforts to make women

Zhouli is available. There is one French translation by Édouard Biot, *Le Tcheou-li ou Tites des Tcheou*, 3 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1851; reprint, Taipei: Ch'eng-wen, 1975).

For an introduction to the content, origin, authenticity, commentaries, editions, and major studies of the *Zhouli*, see Boltz, "Chou li," in Loewe, *Early Chinese Texts*, 24-32. See also Nylan, *The Five "Confucian" Classics*, 182-5.

⁴⁹ For a comparative study of the content of the Three Ritual Classics, see Nylan, *The Five "Confucian" Classics*, 173-8. The main difference between these three texts, as Nylan puts it, is that "each of the individual *Rites* is arguably incomplete: the *Yili* because it provides liturgies only for the lowest-ranking knights or officials (the *shi*) and not for rulers, nobles, or the common people; the *Zhouli* because it mainly enumerates the official posts required in an ideal bureaucracy, without explicating the relation between the ritual and the sociopolitical systems; and the *Liji* because it deals with ritual theory to the near exclusion of liturgical practice." Nylan, *The Five "Confucian" Classics*, 174.

conform to orthodox teachings were frequently made by scholars and the state. It is fair to say that women in early medieval China enjoyed more social freedom than their counterparts in later imperial periods when much more consistent efforts were made to bring reality to conform to ideals (at least for elite families).

Sources used for the survey include official and private compilations of dynastic and local histories, masters' treatises (*zi shu* 子書), literary, legal and ritual writings, anecdotal collections, and family instructions. Due to the nature of most of the sources as well as the period under consideration, the women discussed are often members of the elite society. Textual records of those from lower social strata are scanty. Therefore, the image of women is overwhelmingly that of the elite women, not the commoners.

I. Marriage Rites, Norms and Regulations in Ritual Classics

This section provides a terse overview of the prescriptions for marriage rites and norms recorded in orthodox ritual texts. These rites and norms were meant to be carried out among later generations with modifications under different historical circumstances. Three texts are frequently consulted in this overview: “The Marriage of an Ordinary Officer” (*Shi hunli* 士昏禮) from the *Yili*, “The Meaning of the Marriage Ceremony” (*Hun yi* 昏義) from the *Liji*, and “Explanations on Human Nature” (*Benming jie* 本命解) from the *School Sayings of Confucius* (*Kongzi jiayu* 孔子家語).⁵⁰

The “*Shi hunli*” contains by far the most detailed account of the marriage rites and etiquettes for the social group *shi* 士, the lowest-ranking aristocrats. It records the preliminary marriage rituals known as the Six Rites, the wedding ceremony, the ritual exchanged between the bride and her parents-in-law the morning after her wedding (or the offerings she presents to them—should they be dead at the time of her wedding—in the ancestral shrine three months after she is married), the pre-marriage education of three months that she receives in order to be prepared to perform the sacrificial duties at her new home, and the speeches to be delivered at each occasion. The “*Shi hunli*” presents itself as a kind of instructional manual for a proper

⁵⁰ For a discussion of the *Kongzi jiayu*, see Note 7 in the Introduction.

The “*Benming*” chapter in the *Book of Rites by Dai the Senior* (*Da Dai Liji* 大戴禮記) overlaps greatly with the “*Benming jie*” chapter in the *Kongzi jiayu*.

marriage of the *shi*. Michael Nylan, clearly basing her translation on Steele's, provides a recapitulation of the array of marriage rites as detailed in the "Shi hunli".⁵¹

"In its second section, the *Yili* recounts the steps in the betrothal and marriage of an ordinary officer. Part 1 includes the exchange of betrothal presents, the announcements of the betrothal and the wedding, the divinations required to ascertain dates for the festivities, the feasting of ushers and visitors, the preparations of the wedding feast early on the morning of the ceremony, the groom's reception of the bride in front of the ancestors at his ancestral shrine, the joint entry of the bride and groom into the main house, the ritual feasting accompanying the marriage, followed by the preparations for the conjugal act and the final watch on the wedding night by the bridesmaids. Part 2 of this section rehearses the activities of the day following the wedding ceremony, when the bride first visits her father- and mother-in-law, offering them gifts of food. After the parents-in-law taste the food she has prepared, the bride moves to eat their leftovers (to signify her acceptance of their authority), an act the father-in-law refuses to allow. Instead, because the other sauce had been soiled by his fingers, he sets down fresh sauce for the bride. The bride then proceeds to taste the food left by her new mother-in-law, after which most of the feasts is removed to another chamber to be eaten by members of her wedding party. Next, in return for the bride's courtesy, the new parents-in-law personally serve first the bride and then those in her wedding party. The supplementary notes at the end of the section on marriage discuss the proper age for marriage; the provision for unblemished offerings; the pinning of girls with a hairpin to publicize their betrothals; the reasons for a three-month interim before the bride may begin to offer sacrifices in her new home as a full-fledged member of the household; and the proper forms of address for various participants during the marriage preliminaries and ceremony."⁵²

The "Hun yi" is mostly concerned with expounding the reasons behind specific marriage rites and the significance of the marriage ritual within the entire ritual system, and in so doing offers only an abbreviated description of certain rites and ceremonies of which the "Shi hunli" gives a much more elaborate account. Moreover, the "Hun yi" is predominantly concerned with

⁵¹ For a complete English translation of the "Shi hunli," see Steele, *The I-li, or, Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial*, 18-41.

⁵² Nylan, *The Five "Confucian" Classics*, 178-9.

the rites and duties that a woman should perform in order to create a harmonious family environment.

Unlike the “Shi hunli,” the “Benming jie” does not include prescriptions on marriage rites at all. But it is in this text that the Seven Conditions (*qichu* 七出) for divorcing a wife,⁵³ and the Three Prohibitions (*san buqu* 三不去) due to which a wife could be exempt from divorce, are stated.⁵⁴ It also speaks of the principle of the Three Followings (*sancong* 三從) that a woman should observe throughout her life,⁵⁵ the improper forms of conduct that she should refrain from

⁵³ The Seven Conditions under which a man might divorce his wife are as follows: if she is 1) disobedient to her parents-in-law (*bushun fumu* 不順父母); 2) unable to bear a son (*wuzi* 無子); 3) licentious (*yinpi* 淫僻); 4) jealous (*jidu* 嫉妒); 5) having incurable diseases (*eji* 惡疾); 6) gossipy (*duo koushe* 多口舌), or 7) a thief (*qiedao* 竊盜). Wang, *Kongzi jiayu*, 26.64. Gao Ming 高明, ed., *Da Dai Liji* 大戴禮記 (Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu yinshuguan, 1984), 80.510.

In He Xiu’s 何休 (129-182) commentary to the *Gongyang’s Tradition of the Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan* 春秋公羊傳), he also comments on the Seven Conditions. However, He’s ordering of the Seven Conditions—*wuzi* 無子, *yinyi* 淫佚, *bushi gujiu* 不事姑舅, *koushe* 口舌, *daoqie* 盜竊, *duji* 妒忌 and *eji* 惡疾—is different from that in the *Da Dai Liji* and the *Kongzi jiayu*; see *Yili zhushu*, 2.49b.

The statute on the Seven Conditions in the Tang ordinances reflects the order of the Seven Conditions in He Xiu’s commentary, see Niida Noboru 仁井田陞 (1904-1966), *Tangling shiyi*, translated by Li Jin 栗勁 (1924-1996) (Changchun: Changchun chubanshe, 1989), 9.162.

⁵⁴ A wife can be spared from divorce if one of the three prohibitions applies: if she has no family to return to after her husband is remarried (*you suoqu wu suogui* 有所取無所歸); if she has served three years of mourning for her parent-in-law (*yu gong jing sannian zhi sang* 與共更三年之喪), or if the husband had been poor and humble in the past, a fate shared by his wife, and has become rich and noble later (*xian pinjian hou fugui* 先貧賤後富貴). See Wang, *Kongzi jiayu*, 26.64.

⁵⁵ Zixia’s 子夏 (507 BCE-?) commentary to the “Mourning Attires” (*sangfu* 喪服) of the *Yili*: “A woman must observe the principle of the Three Followings and must not do as she pleases. Therefore before she is married she should follow her father. After she is married, she should follow her husbands. Once her husband is dead, she should follow her sons. Thus one can say that fathers are heaven for sons, and husbands are heaven for wives 婦人有三從之義，無專用之道。故未嫁從父，既嫁從夫，夫死從子。故父者子之天也，夫者妻之天也。” See *Yili zhushu*, 11.347b. See also Wang, *Kongzi jiayu*, 26.63.

performing, and the importance of her fidelity to her husband and her resolution to not remarry. It also warns men of the five types of women whom one shall not marry (*wu buqu* 五不取). All of these points are absent in the “Shi hunli” and the “Hun yi.”⁵⁶ Therefore, it is in this regard that the “Benming jie” complements the “Shi hunli” and the “Hun yi” in prescribing marriage rites and norms.

Marriage Rites and Norms

The preliminary of the marriage ceremony consists of the Six Rites, which include proposing for a marriage (*nacai* 納采), asking for the girl’s name (*wenming* 問名),⁵⁷ divining for an auspicious match (*naji* 納吉), presenting betrothal gifts (*nazheng* 納徵), requesting a wedding date (*qingqi* 請期), and the bridegroom personally fetching the bride (*qinying* 親迎).⁵⁸

In every one of the Six Rites, the groom’s family was obliged to offer gifts to the woman’s family. A wild goose (*yan* 雁) was given as a present in all but the *nazheng* rite.⁵⁹ Five rolls of black and light red silks (*xuanxun shubo* 玄纁束帛) and a pair of deer skins (*lipi* 儷皮)

⁵⁶ All these points are also included in the “Benming” chapter of the *Da Dai Liji*. See Gao, *Da Dai Liji*, 80.506-12.

⁵⁷ In Kong Yingda’s commentary to the *Liji*, the name that is requested of by the man’s family is the girl’s birth mother’s name, not the girl’s own name 問名者, 問其女之所生母之姓名, see *Liji zhushu* 禮記註疏, 44.1000a.

⁵⁸ “Shi hunli,” *Yili zhushu* 儀禮註疏 vol. 2, in Ruan, *Chongkan Song ben shisanjing zhushu*.

⁵⁹ “There are six marriage rites, five of which employ geese: *nacai*, *wenming*, *naji*, *qingqi* and *qinying* 昏禮有六, 五禮用鴈, 納采問名納吉請期親迎是也.” See *Yili zhushu*, 2.39a.

were presented as standard betrothal gifts in the *nazheng*.⁶⁰ Once the betrothal gifts were accepted, the marriage agreement between the two families became official. Upon that, the girl would have her hair pinned, be offered wine (*ji er li zhi* 笄而醴之), and be given a style name (*zi* 字) to signify her engagement.⁶¹ She would then be engaged in an educational program of three months preparing her for life as a married woman, to learn matters such as preparing foods and clothes and offering ancestral sacrifices.

After the bride was taken to the groom's family, elaborate wedding ceremonies would follow in which the most important event was for the bride and groom to eat from the same sacrificial pig and drink sweet wine from a split gourd. This rite was essential in establishing the bride as the wife (*qi* 妻) of the groom. The bride would then be introduced to her parents-in-law the morning after her wedding, and ceremonies would ensue to establish her as a daughter-in-law (*fu* 婦). Distinction was made between a *qi* and a *fu*.⁶²

⁶⁰ *Yili zhushu*, 2.39a-42b.

⁶¹ *Yili zhushu*, 2.60a.

⁶² Although both *fu* and *qi* are translated as wife, a distinction is made between these two terms. *Fu* is spoken of a married woman vis-à-vis her parents-in-law, whereas *qi* is spoken of her vis-à-vis her husband. "According to the rites, if a man gets married after his parents passed away, he should [introduce his wife to his deceased parents] in the ancestral temple in order to establish her as a *fu*. Also, if a woman's parents-in-law are alive, she should attend to them when they wash themselves and serve them the ceremonial food of a pig. This is to complete the Way of a *fu*. Both rituals show that the importance is placed on establishing a woman as a *fu*, not as a *qi* 禮, 父母既歿而娶, 三月廟見, 成婦之義; 舅姑存則盥饋特豚, 以成婦道: 皆明重其成婦, 不繫其成妻也." Another text says: "Even though [husband and wife] share food and bed, it is simply the affectionate relationship [formed] on a sleeping mat in an inner chamber. There is no comparison between this and the ancient practice. Ancient women offered sacrifice to their parents-in-law when they were deceased and waited on them in washing and served them food when they were alive. By way of this they completed the Way of a *fu*. Furthermore, if a woman died before she was introduced to [her parents-in-law] in the ancestral temple, she was to be

Once married, a woman was expected to fulfill her obligations as a wife. Some of the most important wifely duties included serving her parents-in-law, participating in ancestral sacrifices, producing male offspring, raising children and managing the household. Her manners are important. She was expected to be respectful and obedient to her parents-in-law, loyal to her husband, diligent in carrying out wifely duties, quiet around the house and amicable to other family members and relatives.⁶³

Segregation between the sexes (*nannü youbie* 男女有別) was expected both before and after a woman is married.⁶⁴ Segregation before the wedding was to guarantee a virgin bride, and in married life to warrant the wife's fidelity to her husband. Mutual marital fidelity between husband and wife seems to have been required in some periods of Chinese history, but later on

returned to her natal family and buried there. From this we can conclude that the importance is placed on establishing a woman as a *fu*, not as a *qi*, and that it is more important for a woman to pay respects to her parents-in-law than to be received by her husband 雖同牢而食，同衾而寢，此曲室衽席之情義耳，豈合古人亡則奠菜，存則盥饋而婦道成哉！且未廟見之婦，死則反葬女氏之黨，以此推之，貴其成婦，不係成妻，明拜舅姑為重，接夫為輕。” See Du You 杜佑 (735-812), *Tong dian* 通典 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), 59.1679.

⁶³ The “Pattern of the Family” (*neize* 內則) chapter in the *Liji* contains passages that prescribe the proper conduct and the duties of a wife, see *Liji zhushu*, 27.518a-522b,

⁶⁴ Two passages in the “Neize” chapter, overlapping to a certain degree, speak of the segregation between the inner and the outer, between husband and wife, and between men and women, see *Liji zhushu*, 27.520b, 28.533b-534a. One passage speaks of the segregation between boys and girls once they reach the age of seven *sui* 歲, see *Liji zhushu*, 28, 538b.

only the wife's fidelity was demanded for the purpose of ensuring an unadulterated patriarchal lineage.⁶⁵

Gender equality between married couples seems to have been suggested in the orthodox ritual texts. The ritual of a couple eating from the same animal and drinking from the same vessel in the wedding ceremony symbolizes the merging of two persons into one body and the equalizing of the high and the low.⁶⁶ However, the husband should always occupy a higher position in marriage as the wife was expected to view him as her heaven. She should occupy the lower position of earth. She was also required to follow and obey her father before she was married, her husband in marriage, and her adult son after she was widowed. This is the so-called Three Followings.

Widows were not encouraged to remarry. Since a woman was supposed to look up to her husband as heaven and one should not serve two heavens, ideally she should not remarry (*wu*

⁶⁵ Qin Shihuang required mutual marital chastity of husband and wife, see *Quan Qin wen* 全秦文, in Yan Kejun 嚴可均 (1762-1843), ed., *Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han sango liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文 [hereafter Yan] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991), 1.123a.

⁶⁶ “They ate together of the same animal, and joined in sipping from the cups made of the same melon; thus showing that they now formed one body, were of equal rank, and pledged to mutual affection 共牢而食, 合巹而醕, 所以合體同尊卑以親之也.” Legge's translation of the *Liji*. See *Liji zhushu*, 44.1000a.

zaijiao 無再醮) after her husband died.⁶⁷ Although chastity in widowhood seems to have been preferred, sages did approve of the remarriage of a widowed woman, especially a young one.⁶⁸

Divorce was allowed, but only men were entitled to divorce their wives and when carrying out divorce, men were expected to follow certain divorce ethics. A marriage could be dissolved if one of the Seven Conditions applied. However, men were also expected to abide by certain restrictions on divorce. That is, under any of the Three Prohibitions men must not divorce their wives: if she had no family to return after divorce; if she had served three years of mourning for her parent-in-law; and if the husband was poor and humble then and rich and noble now.⁶⁹ Nowhere in the orthodox ritual texts did the sages say that a woman could divorce her husband. The complications of the divorce issue will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two.

Men could have only one principal wife, but could take a number of concubines depending on his official ranking.⁷⁰ A concubine was acquired in ways very different from that in which a principal wife was procured. A man needed not to go through the elaborate marriage

⁶⁷ Wang, *Kongzi jiayu*, 26.64.

⁶⁸ “For those who did not remarry, they were truly chaste women who held fast to their principles. For those women who did remarry, although they were not as good as those who did not, sages did approve of it 彼不嫁者自是貞女守志。而有嫁者，雖不如不嫁，聖人許之。” See *Yili zhushu*, 31.364a.

⁶⁹ Wang, *Kongzi jiayu*, 6.64.

⁷⁰ There are a number of appellations for concubine, such as *shufu* 庶婦, *xiaofu* 小婦, *xiaoqi* 小妻, and *ru furen* 如夫人. For the history of the institution of concubinage and the difference between a principal wife and a concubine, see Wang Shaoxi 王紹璽, *Xiaoqi shi* 小妾史 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1995). See also Qu Tongzu 瞿同祖 (1910-2008), *Zhongguo falü yu Zhongguo shehui* 中國法律與中國社會 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1947; reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 130-5. This book is translated into English as T'ung-Tsu Ch'ü, *Law and Society in Traditional China* (Paris: Mouton, 1961).

ritual in order to take a concubine.⁷¹ Although concubinage was allowed, men were repeatedly warned of not replacing one's principal wife with a concubine. One of the predominant concerns regarding the marital relationship in the ancient time was ensure the status of the principal wives and prevent them from being supplanted by concubines. Some of the major players in the political arena of the Spring and Autumn 春秋 (770-476 BCE) period had stressed the importance of rectifying the marital relationship and had it inscribed in their pacts with other feudal lords. For example, Duke Wen of Jin 晉文公 (697-628 BCE) once proclaimed: "Do not compare your beautiful concubines with your wife 無以美妾疑妻."⁷² Duke Huan of Qi 齊桓公 (d. 643 BCE) declared this principle on at least two different occasions.⁷³ This concern was often stated together with the concern for ensuring the legitimate status of the eldest son from one's principal wife (*dizi* 嫡子).⁷⁴ Both concerns reflected the desire of perpetuating the hierarchical system within the family and society at large.

The duties of a concubine included assisting the principal wife in carrying out household chores, serving the husband, and producing more male offspring in order to guarantee the

⁷¹ "If there were the betrothal rites, she became a wife; and if she went without these, a concubine (*pin ze wei qi, ben ze wei qie* 聘則為妻, 奔則為妾," Legge's translation. *Liji zhushu*, 28.539a.

⁷² *Yi* 疑 should be read as *ni* 擬. Yan, *Quan shanggu sandai wen* 全上古三代文, 4.30a.

⁷³ In his meeting with Duke of Chu 楚 in Yushang 遇上, Duke Huan asked him not to establish a concubine as the principal wife 無置妾以為妻, see Yan, *Quan shanggu sandai wen*, 7.56a. In his "Pact on Kuiqiu" (*Kuiqiu meng* 葵丘盟), he once again demanded that the lords not make concubines their wives 無以妾為妻, see Yan, *Quan shanggu sandai wen*, 7.56b.

⁷⁴ For example, in both pacts, Duke Huan of Qi demanded that *dizi* not be abolished or changed arbitrarily (*wu shan fei dizi* 無擅廢嫡子 and *wu yi shuzi* 無易樹子), see Yan, *Quan shanggu sandai wen*, 7.56a and 7.56b.

continuation of the patriarchal lineage.⁷⁵ She was, however, excluded from participating in ancestral sacrifices and worship due to her lowly status. Such duties were exclusively the principal wife's.⁷⁶

Such are the orthodox prescriptions on marriage rites and norms. Some scholars argue that by the end of the Zhou 周 (1046-256 BCE) dynasty, these marriage rites and norms were very much in place. Later developments were to engage commoners with the rites and norms originally designed for the nobility.⁷⁷ As we will see, sages painted an ideal picture of an orthodox marriage, and there had always been a gap between this ideal and the social reality. Repeated efforts were made by governments to live up to this ideal, but these efforts were only met with limited success.

Institutional Regulations on Marriage

Institutional regulations on marriage issues were first spelled out in the *Zhouli*. The Marriage Officer (*Meishi* 媒氏) specified the aspects of marriage and family life that the idealized Zhou government should attempt to regulate: birth registration for the sake of future marriage records, legal marriage ages, registration of divorcée remarriage, promotion of

⁷⁵ One passage in the “Neize” speaks of how a concubine should serve her husband, see *Liji zhushu*, 28.533b-534a.

⁷⁶ The principal wife of the eldest son assisted her husband in carrying out the sacrifice in the ancestral shrine. All other women in the household, including the eldest son's concubines and his younger brothers' principal wives and concubines, were excluded from participating in ancestral sacrifice rituals. See *Yili zhushu*, 6.62b.

⁷⁷ Liu Tseng-kuei 劉增貴, “Qin Se He Ming: Lidai de Hunli 琴瑟和鳴：歷代的婚禮,” in Liu Tseng-kuei and Lan Jifu 藍吉富, eds., *Zhongguo wenhua xinlun zongjiao lisu pian: jingtian yu qinren* 中國文化新論 宗教禮俗篇：敬天與親人 (Taipei: Lianjing chuban gongsi, 1982).

simplified marriage arrangements, discouragement of sumptuous betrothal gifts, and finally mediation of marriage disputes.

Marriage Officer: in charge of the marriages of the myriad people. After men and women are given names, they should have their birth year, birth month, birth day and name registered.⁷⁸ It is mandated that men marry at the age of thirty and beyond, and women at the age of twenty and beyond. If one marries a divorcée, he should have her and his stepchildren registered. In the second month of spring, let men and women mingle. At this time, no prohibition should be issued to those who elope.⁷⁹ If one fails to follow this mandate for no good reason, penalties should be meted out. The meeting is for unmarried men and women. When one marries, the betrothal gift of plain silk shall not exceed five rolls. It is prohibited to move a widow and a widower into one tomb chamber if they were not married when alive. It is also prohibited to move two prematurely deceased persons into one tomb chamber. Hearings of marriage disputes between men and women shall take place in the shrine of the former state.⁸⁰ If punishment is required, bring the case to the officer in charge of crimes.⁸¹

媒氏：掌萬民之判。凡男女自成名以上，皆書年月日名焉。令男三十而娶，女二十而嫁。凡娶判妻入子者，皆書之。中春之月，令會男女。於是時也，奔者不禁。若無故而不用令者，罰之。司男女之無夫家者而會之。凡嫁子娶妻，入幣純帛無過五

⁷⁸ Children were given names by their fathers three months after their birth, see *Liji zhushu*, 28.535.

⁷⁹ The interpretation of “benzhe bujin 奔者不禁” is debated. Some take it as a licentious practice of the ancient people. However, it more likely refers to a simplified marriage process. The Six Rites were prescribed as the orthodox marriage procedure which involved the giving of a large amount of betrothal gifts. In order to help those who could not afford betrothal gifts and had to postpone their marriage, the Zhou government decreed a gathering of unmarried man and women in spring and encouraged them to elope without going through the Six Rites. It was meant to ease the financial burden of marriage arrangements for the poor. The practice of “timely marriage” (*baishi hun* 拜時婚) in the south in the Six Dynasties period could be seen as a similar practice to “benzhe bujin,” which will be discussed later in the chapter.

⁸⁰ The structure of the shrine of a defeated state makes it a good venue for hearing marital disputes. According to the commentary to the *Mao shi* 毛詩: “The shrine of the defeated state is covered on the top but is open underneath, and this makes it impossible [for the uninvited parties] to get to it. That it is used to hold hearings of domestic disputes shows that [such disputes] shall not be revealed to the public 亡國之社，掩其上而棧其下，使無所通就之，以聽陰訟之情，明不當宣露。” See *Mao shi zhushu* 毛詩註疏, 3.110.

⁸¹ *Zhouli zhushu*, 14.216a-218b.

兩。禁遷葬者與嫁殤者。凡男女之陰訟，聽之于勝國之社；其附于刑者，歸之于士。

The passage cited above suggests that the idealized Zhou government took a role in regulating marriage related issues. It mandated the legal marriage ages for both men and women: thirty *sui* 歲 for men and twenty *sui* for women. It is to be noted that the age requirement for marriage was significantly higher than that in later practices. Confucius (551-479 BCE) suggested that the age requirement should be understood as the latest marriageable age, not the earliest.⁸² In fact, governments in late times usually encouraged early marriage for various reasons.

Marriage unaffordability was already perceived as an issue in the *Zhouli*. As mentioned above, a proper marriage required a great deal of gift giving. People without means were forced to put off their marriages. Sometimes they passed the proper marriage age because of financial strains. The mandated mixer of unmarried men and women in spring was devised to solve this problem. The government specified a period of time during which marriages without proper rituals were sanctioned. In this way, marriage unaffordability for the poor could be solved without compromising the ideals for the nobles. During the Six Dynasties, similar solutions were designed to cope with expensive marriages in chaotic times.

⁸² When Duke Ai of Lu 魯哀公 (d. 468 BCE) asked Confucius: “The rite says that men marry at thirty and women twenty. Is it not too late 而禮男子三十而有室，女子二十而有夫也，豈不晚哉?” Confucius answered: “The rite speaks of the upper limit, not the lower limit 夫禮言其極，不是過也。” See Wang, *Kongzi jiayu*, 26.63.

To sum up, an ideal marriage as described in the Classics is elaborate both in terms of ceremonies and the amount of gift giving. And an ideal woman was many things: a virgin bride, a faithful and respectful wife, a responsible mother, an obedient daughter-in-law, and a chaste widow. Gender equality between husband and wife existed to a certain extent, and it was under the premise that husband took a higher position in the household. Although their biological sex played a part in determining their social status, women were viewed primarily in terms of the social roles they play, just as men were. As such, mothers-in-law always had power over daughters-in-law and principal wives over concubines.

Marital union was not a matter of private nature. Marriage related issues, such as legal marriage ages and marriage unaffordability, were regulated and mediated by the state; and a specific government office (*Meishi*) was established to handle such issues. Civil marital disputes were dealt with in the shrine of a defeated state, and those of criminal nature were handled by the judge of criminal matters.

II. Women's Lived Experiences in Early Medieval China

Against the backdrop of the orthodox prescriptions for marriage and family life as delineated in the first section, this section offers a chronological depiction of women's lived experiences from the late Han till the end of the Six Dynasties period. Key issues to be examined in this section include marriage age, choice of marriage candidate, marriage rites and ceremonies, dissolution of marriage, remarriage, marital fidelity and widow chastity. It also discusses women's status in family and society, their relation with their spouses, in-laws and children, and finally their social spheres and womanly education.

Different types of evidence seem to suggest that women in the Han relatively freely engaged with men in social and domestic settings. Marriage was not entirely the business of two families, and sometimes women's opinions on their own marriage arrangements were taken into consideration. Marital affection and intimacy were also approved of by society. Early marriage was mandated by the government for the purpose of population growth, but problems with early marriage were also acknowledged. If women were from families of higher social standings than their husbands' families, they usually occupied the dominant position in the household. Legally speaking, women seem to have enjoyed more or less equal rights as their male counterparts. Toward the end the Han dynasty, however, criticisms of unethical marital and sexual practices were frequently voiced. Efforts of various kinds were made to amend these problems. These efforts might not have been very successful, for most of the Han practices continued into the Six Dynasties period, and some of the problematic practices were considered to have experienced a certain degree of aggregation.

The Six Dynasties was a period of political disunion and the resulting segregation between northern and southern China. This new socio-political context gave rise to some novel marital and familial practices. Population drops, late marriages caused by war, and corrupt marital practices compelled the state to repeatedly issue early marriage laws and to encourage simplified and affordable marriage rites and ceremonies. Records of jealous women were overwhelmingly many during this period of time, for reasons yet to be understood. Differing perceptions of women and of marriage between northerners and southerners were pronounced in writings of this period.

In general, women in the Han through the Six Dynasties period seem to have lived a life that was freer from orthodox prescriptions than that of their counterparts in later times. However, the tension between the state (and official-scholars) and the popular practices in private life could always be felt throughout early medieval China.

The Han Dynasty

This section is a brief introduction of the documented life of women in the Han society, especially the last hundred years of the Han dynasty. Topics covered include the general perceptions of the two sexes, early marriage laws and the problems that came with it, the relaxation of gender segregation, the popularization of certain marital practices, the phenomenon of powerful wives, the display of marital intimacy, the struggles between in-laws, and finally the promotion of widow chastity. As Jack Dull rightly points out, “[M]arriage and divorce in the Han Dynasty (or dynasties) do not correspond with the patterns of the commonly accepted norms

of traditional China.”⁸³ In fact, in almost every aspect of a woman’s life, orthodox prescriptions went largely unheeded. That is, of course, not to suggest that women held equal or even higher status than men in general. In his study of women in the Han society, Bret Hinsch has argued that it was women’s social roles that had determined her social standing, not her biological gender alone.⁸⁴ The section on the overpowering wives confirms Hinsch’s argument.

Early Marriage

Women were required to marry young in the Han dynasty and would be punished if they failed to abide by the early marriage law. The reproductive power of the female was always in the mind of the rulers since the antiquity.⁸⁵ The first extant record of state regulation on marriage ages of men and women is found in the state of Qi 齊. It is said that after seeing an old yet unmarried man roaming in his domain, Duke Huan of Qi 齊桓公 (d. 643 BCE), one of the most powerful overlords of the Spring and Autumn period, adopted his able minister Guan Zhong’s 管仲 (725-645 BCE) suggestion to set marriage ages. Men were required to marry at twenty *sui*

⁸³ Jack L. Dull (1930-1995), “Marriage and Divorce in Han China: A Glimpse at ‘Pre-Confucian’ Society,” in David C. Buxbaum, ed., *Chinese Family Law and Social Change in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1978), 23.

⁸⁴ Bret Hinsch, *Women in Early Imperial China* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002).

⁸⁵ Anne Kinney states: “Early Chinese rulers also took women’s reproductive role into account. The earliest explicit discussion of encouraging early marriage and childbirth is found in the *Guoyu* (ca. 300 BCE), where King Goujian of Yue (fl. ca. 496 BCE) is said to have proclaimed that parents of girls still not married at the age of 17 *sui* would be punished, whereas females who gave birth, whether to a boy or a girl, would be rewarded with wine and meat.” In her *Representations of Childhood and Youth in Early China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 137. Anne Kinney is right about her statement. However, the earliest piece of evidence might be that from Duke Huan of the Qi who died in 643 BCE. See the main text for the discussion.

and women at fifteen *sui*.⁸⁶ However, no penalty was specified if people failed to follow this law. Goujian 勾踐 (d. 464 BCE), King of Yue 越王, eager to boost the population in his kingdom within a short period of time, backed up a similar regulation with consequences, even though the exact nature of the punishment remains unclear.⁸⁷

Out of the same consideration for population growth, the second emperor of the Han dynasty issued a similar law in 189 BCE. The law ruled that a woman would be taxed the head tax five times more than usual if she failed to marry between fifteen and thirty *sui*.⁸⁸ According to the Han law, a person generally paid one *suan* 算, that is, a hundred and twenty strings of cash to the state as his or her head tax. Merchants and slaves were made to pay twice as much as a regular person as a form of penalty for their low social status.⁸⁹ If a woman did not marry after thirty *sui*, her family would have to pay five *suan*, a handsome sum of cash indeed. Clearly, the penalty for an unmarried woman was much more severe than for a merchant or even a slave. Under this law, it was only natural for parents to marry off their daughters as early as possible.

⁸⁶ Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷, ed., *Hanfei zi* 韓非子 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958), 14.786-7.

⁸⁷ “If women are not married at the age of seventeen *sui*, their parents will be held guilty. If men are not married at the age of twenty *sui*, their parents will be held guilty 女子十七不嫁, 其父母有罪. 丈夫二十不娶, 其父母有罪.” Yan, *Quan shanggu sandai wen*, 5.42a.

⁸⁸ In 189 BCE, the sixth year of the reign of Emperor Hui of Han 漢惠帝 (210-188 BCE, r. 195-188 BCE), the government decreed: “women who are not married between fifteen and thirty *sui* [will be subjected to] taxes five times more [than those who are married] 女子年十五以上至三十不嫁, 五算.” See Ban Gu 班固 (32-92), *Han shu* 漢書, commentary by Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581-645) (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1986), 2.91.

⁸⁹ See the second-century scholar Ying Shao’s 應劭 comment to the *Han shu*, *ibid*.

However, early marriage gave rise to another problem which the Han official Wang Ji 王吉 (d. 48 BCE) discussed in a memorial to his emperor. Wang Ji claimed that the immaturity of young parents had caused a lot of premature deaths of their young children.

I, Ji, believe that the relationship between husband and wife is the main principle among all human relationships, and is what gives birth to the long or short-lived lives. The current custom is to marry too early and to have children before one understands how to be a parent. As a result, the insufficiency in teaching and rearing has led many children to die young.⁹⁰

吉意以為夫婦，人倫大綱，夭壽之萌也。世俗嫁娶太早，未知為人父母之道而有子，是以教化不明而民多夭。

Although the Han law required that parents marry their daughters when they were between fifteen and thirty *sui*, Wang Ji's memorial suggests that there was the practice of marrying women at a very young age, possibly in their teen years. As is known, the Chinese way of reckoning a person's age was different from the Western way, and sometimes it would make a Chinese girl one year or even two years younger than her Western counterpart.⁹¹ Girls married in their teen years were indeed children themselves. To fully assume the responsibilities of a wife and a mother at such a tender age was simply too much to ask from a child.

⁹⁰ Ban, *Han shu*, 72.3064.

⁹¹ A Chinese newborn turns two years old (that is, two *sui*) after s/he passes the first Lunar New Year, rather than her/his first actual birthday. For example, if a Chinese baby is born in the tenth month of the Lunar year, by the time of the Lunar New Year, s/he will in her/his second year; whereas in the Western system, s/he will not even be one year old.

Relaxation of Gender Segregation, Display of Marital Intimacy and Lousy Wedding Banquets

Although the Classics stress a strict segregation between men and women before and during marriage, it does not seem to have been seriously carried out in the Han dynasty. The divide between the two realms of inner/female and outer/male was not strictly enforced. Women frequently interacted with other male members of their husbands' families. Interactions between male and female might not have been considered a violation of propriety in the Han society. To demonstrate this point, I will cite the following the *yuefu* poem presumably from the Han.

“Ballad of Longxi” (*Longxi xing* 隴西行):

.....

| | |
|---|--------|
| The good wife comes out to greet the guest, | 好婦出迎客。 |
| her countenance is easy and kind. | 顏色正敷愉。 |
| She leans forward, bows and kneels, | 伸腰再拜跪。 |
| asks the guest whether he is comfortable. | 問客平安不。 |
| She invites the guest to the north hall ⁹² | 請客北堂上。 |
| and seats him on the woolen blankets. | 坐客氍毹氈。 |
| Clear ale and white each in different cups, | 清白各異樽。 |
| on the ale's surface the sparkles grow few. | 酒上正華疏。 |
| She pours the ale and holds it to give to the guest, | 酌酒持與客。 |
| the guest says, let the hostess take it. | 客言主人持。 |

⁹² According to the *Yili*, “The wife washes in the north hall 婦洗在北堂.” *Beitang* is therefore used to designate the principal wife's quarter.

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>She draws back, bows, and kneels, and only then takes a cup in hand. Before they finish laughing and chatting, she turns to give orders to the kitchen. She commands some rough fare to be prepared with all haste, and warns them not to be long about it. Dropping ceremony, she goes out with the guest, lovely, as she hurries through the courtyard. She does not go with the guest very far, her feet never cross beyond the gate. If you can get a wife like this, even a Jiang of Qi is no match.⁹³ If a stout woman maintains the gate, it is even better than a man.⁹⁴</p> | <p>卻略再拜跪。 然後持一杯。 談笑未及竟。 左顧勅中廚。 促令辦麤飯。 慎莫使稽留。 廢禮送客出。 盈盈府中趨。 送客亦不遠。 足不過門樞。 取婦得如此。 齊姜亦不如。 健婦持門戶。 亦勝一丈夫。</p> |
|---|--|

This anonymous poem describes an able wife who plays the role of a fine hostess in receiving and entertaining a male guest. The behavior of the wife in this poem is considered controversial, and the poem is “much maligned by the much more conservative late imperial critics because

⁹³ “Jiang was the surname of the Qi ruling house; that is, a noblewoman.” Owen, *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry*, 158.

⁹⁴ *Han shi* 漢詩, in Lu Qinli 逯欽立 (1910-1973), ed., *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin nanbeichao shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩 [hereafter Lu] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 9.267-8. Translation by Owen, in *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry*, 157-8.

they think the woman in the poem is behaving inappropriately.”⁹⁵ Yet “Li Yindu 李因篤 in his *Hanshi yinzhu* 漢詩音注 tries to explain it as the customs of Longxi, on the frontier.”⁹⁶ And Owen argues that “[w]hile there is no question such a lyric could possibly have been used satirically in a certain circumstance, it could just as easily have been praise for the good hostess in an era very different from the Ming and Qing.”⁹⁷ Consider this poem in the larger social context of the Han society, it might have been normal for women to receive male guests, at least it might be the case in certain parts of the Han empire, such as Longxi 隴西, on the frontier.

Contact between a married woman and her male relatives in the husband’s home might have been hard to avoid in the Han society, possibly due to a new family structure. A story recorded in Ying Shao’s 應劭 (fl. 2nd c.) *Comprehensive Meanings of Airs and Customs* (*Fengsu tongyi* 風俗通義) can serve as a good example of the inevitable contact between male and female members in a household:

Zhang Bojie from Chenliu had a younger brother called Zhongjie. Zhongjie’s wife was cooking behind the hearth. Later she went to the well and asked Bojie: “Is my makeup

⁹⁵ Xiaofei Tian’s wording in her comments on my writing. Thanks to Tian’s suggestion, I am including this poem in the discussion of the relaxing gender segregation in the Han dynasty.

Chen Zuoming 陳祚明 (1623-1674) and Shen Deqian 沈德潛 (1673-1769) both believed that the poem was satirical about the woman. In his comment on this poem, Chen said, “This must be something that really happened back then, therefore a poem was made to satirize it...How can greeting guests be handled by women? 此必當時實有其事，故作詩以譏之...迎客豈婦人之事?” Chen Zuoming, *Caishu tang gushi xuan* 采菽堂古詩選, *juan* 2. Shen Deqian simply said that the poem was satirical 自有諷意. Shen Deqian, *Gushi yuan* 古詩源 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 79.

⁹⁶ Owen, *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry*, 159.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

today not nice?” Bojie responded: “This is Bojie!” The wife was terribly embarrassed. That evening when Bojie was using the privy, the wife again grabbed him and said: “I made an awful mistake this morning. I had mistaken Bojie for you.” Bojie answered: “This is that same old Bojie!”⁹⁸

陳留張伯喈。弟仲喈婦炊于竈下。至井上謂伯喈曰。我今日妝奩好不。伯喈曰。我伯喈也。婦大慙愧。其夕時伯喈到更衣。婦復牽伯喈曰。今旦大誤。謂伯喈為卿。荅曰。我故伯喈也。

There are three points in this story that are noteworthy. First of all, different from the nuclear family structure observed in the Qin society in which married brothers lived separately, the two Zhang brothers here—at least one of them married—lived together under the same roof.⁹⁹ This kind of family structure makes the interaction between a married woman and her male relatives possible and sometimes even inevitable. Secondly, what embarrassed the woman in the story was not the frequent chance encounters with her brother-in-law, but her misdirected question. The question was playful, intimate and intended only for her spouse. That is to say, the gender segregation was not an issue here, but the misplaced display of conjugal intimacy.¹⁰⁰

Conjugal intimacy is the third point. The wife’s behavior indicates that she and her husband enjoyed an affectionate and intimate relationship. It seems that such an intimacy was considered fine by society. However, some Han officials considered it inappropriate for husband and wife to display affection and intimacy. For this reason, Zhang Chang 張敞, the mayor of the

⁹⁸ Yan, *Quan hou Han wen* 全後漢文, 38.683b.

⁹⁹ Household split was practiced in the Qin, and the Qin family structure was likely that of the nuclear family, which was different from the family structures commonly seen in the succeeding dynasties. A nuclear family consists of parents and their unmarried children who would move out upon marriage and establish their separate households.

¹⁰⁰ It is also possible that this woman was trying to seduce her brother-in-law.

capital city Chang'an 長安 during Emperor Xuan's 漢宣帝 (91-48 BCE, r. 74-48 BCE) reign, was impeached for painting eyebrows for his wife.

[Zhang] also painted the eyebrows for his wife. It was circulated among people in Chang'an that the eyebrows painted by Mayor Zhang were very charming. Officials reported this to the emperor. Emperor [Xuan] asked Zhang about this, and Zhang responded: "I have heard more private things that husband and wife do in their bedrooms than painting eyebrows." Because the emperor admired his ability, he did not reprimand him [on this ground].¹⁰¹

又為婦畫眉，長安中傳張京兆眉撫。有司以奏敞。上問之，對曰：臣聞閨房之內，夫婦之私，有過於畫眉者。上愛其能，弗備責也。

The fact that people in the capital city Chang'an were fondly circulating the story of Zhang Chang painting eyebrows for his wife and praising eyebrows painted by him as charming indicates the general acceptance of marital intimacy and affection by the public. Indeed, according to Zhang Chang, painting eyebrows was not nearly as an intimate act as other more private things that married couples would do in their bedchambers. However, as the story goes, had it not been for his political competence, Zhang Chang would have been punished by the emperor for his conspicuous display of marital affection.

Toward the end of the Eastern Han, opinions on tightening up gender segregation and purifying sexual and marital customs were more frequently voiced. In his *Admonitions for My Daughters* (*Nü jie* 女誡), the Eastern Han historian Xun Shuang 荀爽 (128-190) explained, presumably to the women folk in his family, that one of the sagely intentions for setting up rites was to separate the masculine (*yang* 陽) from the feminine (*yin* 陰). Xun said: "If a boy is seven

¹⁰¹ Ban, *Han shu*, 76.3222.

sui, he should not be carried by his grandmother; if a girl is seven *sui*, she should not be held by her grandfather. A female should not share one carriage with any kin other than her father or a male, his mother; nor should she share a mat with any man other than her brothers 七歲之男, 王母不抱. 七歲之女, 王父不持. 親非父母, 不與同車. 親非兄弟, 不與同筵.”¹⁰² The gender segregation discussed here is meant for the segregation between women and the male members of their natal families.

Zhongchang Tong 仲長統 (180-220), a late Eastern Han thinker, was another proponent for a strict segregation between men and women before and during marriage. Disturbed by the immoralities of his contemporaries, Zhongchang Tong suggested a fundamental reform of the current customs in order to promote sexual chastity and marital fidelity.

To be upright, uncompromising, chaste and pure is the best of all virtues. To be flirtatious, lascivious, and to run away and elope is a stain on one’s conduct. Airs and customs do not come from nowhere. Those who criticize the end should cut off the root; those who dislike the tributaries should block up the source of the river. As for the segregation between men and women, even after the delineation between the inner and outer quarters is clearly marked, the sound from both sides is blocked from a great distance, the sense of is encouraged and stimulated, and the holes in the blockage [separating them] are filled up, there are still dissolute thoughts from one’s heart and the excessiveness in one’s glances, let alone if one opens the door and leads the way! Today at wedding banquets, clubs are used in urging obscene tricks; wines are used in pursuit of lustful desires. Licentiousness is displayed among the broad masses; intimate personal matters are exposed among the relatives. Customs are defiled and usages perverted; licentiousness is produced and lecherousness is nurtured. Nothing is worse than this! We must cut this off.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Yan, *Quan hou Han wen*, 67.841b-842a. This piece of admonition is based on the “Neize” chapter in the *Liji* which says that “at the age of seven, boys and girls do not sit on the same mat nor do they eat together 七年男女不同席不共食.” See *Liji zhushu*, 28.538b.

¹⁰³ Yan, *Quan hou Han wen*, 89.952a. The last four lines are Dull’s translation, see Dull, “Marriage and Divorce in Han China,” in Buxbaum, *Chinese Family Law and Social Change in Historical and Comparative Perspective*, 50.

廉隅貞潔者。德之令也。流逸奔隨者。行之汙也。風有所從來。俗有所由起。病其末者刈其本。惡其流者塞其源。夫男女之際。明別其外內。遠絕其聲音。激厲其廉恥。塗塞其虧隙。由尚有匈心之逸念。睇盼之過視。而況開其門導其徑者乎。今嫁娶之會。捶杖以督之戲謔。酒醴以趣之情欲。宣淫佚于廣眾之中。顯陰私于族親之間。汙風詭俗。生淫長姦。莫此之甚。不可不斷者也。

It is believed that in the second half of the passage cited above, Zhongchang Tong was talking about the custom of “hazing the bride” (*xifu* 戲婦) during wedding banquets, and flogging with a club might be one of the mischievous things done to the newly-weds.¹⁰⁴ In Zhongchang Tong’s view, such “disgraceful and deceitful” customs were to be blamed for “opening the door and leading the way” in deteriorating social moralities.

In the received writings, the phrase *xifu* first appeared in Ge Hong’s 葛洪 (283-343) *The Master Who Embraces Simplicity* (*Baopu zi* 抱朴子). In his criticism of the unethical marriage customs of his time, the Eastern Jin 東晉 (317-420) official and Daoist thinker Ge Hong reported the practice of *xifu* among the southerners. He wrote:

Among the populace there is the practice of hazing the bride. It is carried out amongst the crowd and in front of the relatives. Filthy questions are asked, and slow responses are reprimanded. I cannot bear to comment on how vulgar this practice is. Sometimes [the bride] is pressed by flogging, at other times [her] feet are tied up and [she] is put upside down. Drunken guests behave ridiculously and know no limit. There are cases in which people are hurt to bleed, or their bones fractured. How deplorable it is! Ancient people

¹⁰⁴ It seems that sometimes flogging was directed to the bridegroom as well. In the *Fengsu tongyi*, Ying Shao recorded a court case in which one man accidentally killed a bridegroom at his wedding banquet. “Zhang Miao of Ru’nan met Du Shi. [Du] Shi was holding a wedding banquet. During the carousing after drinking, Zhang Miao tied Du Shi up, beat him for twenty strikes. He then tied [Du] Shi up by his toes. Shi subsequently died 汝南張妙會杜士。士家娶婦，酒後相戲。張妙縛杜士，捶二十下，又懸足指。士遂至死。” See Yan, *Quan hou Han wen*, 38.684a.

were so stirred by the sorrows of departure that they did not put out candles; they were so saddened by the succession of family members that they did not play music.”¹⁰⁵

俗間有戲婦之法，於稠眾之中，親屬之前，問以醜言，責以慢對，其為鄙黷，不可忍論。或蹙以楚撻，或繫腳倒懸。酒客酗醬，不知限齊，至使有傷於流血，踣折支體者。可歎者也。古人感離別而不滅燭，悲代親而不舉樂。

With alcohol as the catalyst, the boundary between men and women could not have been more easily broken down at a wedding banquet where bride-hazing had increasingly become a part of the wedding ceremony both in the northern and southern societies.¹⁰⁶

To conclude, the multigenerational family structure in Han society made it almost unavoidable for married women to interact with their male in-laws in their everyday lives. The unpleasant custom of bride hazing in wedding banquets and the practice of wives receiving male guests have also pointed to the fact that separation between opposite sexes in the Han society was weak, if at all observed. Marital intimacy was not something to be ashamed of. However, toward the end of the Han dynasty, denunciations for corrupt social mores and appeals for stricter gender segregation and purer marriage customs were frequently made by scholars and

¹⁰⁵ Ge Hong, *Baopu zi waipian* 抱朴子外篇, ed. Yang Mingzhao 楊明照 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991), 25.628.

¹⁰⁶ The bride-hazing activity seems to have been practiced across China and throughout the early medieval period. The bride-hazing accounts presented by Ying Shao and Zhongchang Tong took place in the north, and the bride-hazing criticized by Ge Hong happened in the south. It is fair to say that such a custom, which was not included in the classical ritual texts, gained popularity and was practiced across China. Also, this custom seems to have been practiced well into the 8th century. In 712, the early Tang 唐 (618-907) court official Tang Shao 唐紹 (d. 713) sent in a memorial to remonstrate the vulgar wedding customs that were practiced by the lower members of the society, among which was the act of merrymaking by blocking a bride's carriage and onlookers inviting themselves to wedding banquets. Tang Shao reported that the custom was gaining increasing popularity in his time and that its influence even reached up to the upper class. Dukes would spend more money on gifting the bride-teasers than on betrothal gifts. Tang Shao urged the emperor to put a stop to this practice, and his suggestion was heeded. See Du, *Tong dian*, 58.1653.

officials. Didactic works such as Ban Zhao's *Admonitions for My Daughters* that were targeted exclusively at a female readership started to be compiled.¹⁰⁷

Overpowering Wives

Although generally speaking women were treated as inferior to men in the Han society, the power politics between a married couple had less to do with the gender inequality than with the social standings of their respective families. Observations of wives overpowering their husbands were made and concerns over it repeatedly expressed by Han scholars.

In the same memorial that he sent to Emperor Xuan, the aforementioned Wang Ji brought up the issue of power reversal in the domestic sphere. He claimed:

In the Han imperial family princesses marry down to feudal lords; within the vassal states, daughters of the feudal lords marry down to residents in the states. This has led men to serve women and husbands to yield to their wives. The positions of *yin* and *yang* are reversed, hence the frequent chaos caused by women.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ *Nü jie* is the title of Ban Zhao's lessons for her soon-to-be-married daughters. Since Ban Zhao's works on women's prenuptial education were routinely entitled *Nü jie*, making it a suitable generic designation for works of this nature.

The earliest extant work in this genre is Ban Zhao's *Nü jie*. Ban's contemporary Du Du 杜篤 (d. 78) also composed a work called *Nü jie*, but his work is long lost. Toward the end of the Eastern Han, historian Xun Shuang wrote a *Nü jie*, a portion of which is preserved in the *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚. Xun Shuang's contemporary Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133-192) also has a work of *Nü jie*, and certain passages are preserved in later writings. Half century later, Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181-234) produced a *Nü jie* which does not seem to survive. There are other works in this genre that bear slightly different names, such as *Nü xun* 女訓 "Instructions for Daughters," *Nü zhen* 女箴 "Admonitions for My Daughters," *Nü jian* 女鑒 "Mirror for Daughters," *Furen xunjie* 婦人訓誡 "Instructions and Warnings for Women," and *Disi xun* 娣姒訓 "Instructions for Sisters-in-law." These works were being compiled throughout the early medieval period.

¹⁰⁸ Ban, *Han shu*, 72.3064.

又漢家列侯尚公主，諸侯則國人承翁主，使男事女，夫誦於婦，逆陰陽之位，故多女亂。

Almost a verbatim observation and criticism was recorded in Ying Shao's *Fengsu tongyi*:

Feudal lords marry princesses and vassal subjects marry daughters of the vassal lords. Wives control their husbands and the *yang* yields to the *yin*.¹⁰⁹

列侯尚公主。國人尚翁主。以妻制夫。陽屈于陰爾。

The two quotations show that women who dominated their husbands usually came from families of higher social standing than that of their husbands. It is now clear why Yang Qiao 楊喬, Emperor Huan's 漢桓帝 (132-168, r. 146-168) favorite prime minister and a very handsome and learned man, rejected so adamantly the proposal to marry one of the princesses. It is said that when the emperor "refused to listen to his plea, [Yang Qiao] shut tight his mouth and fasted. He died in seven days 固讓不聽，遂閉口不食，七日而死."¹¹⁰ Yang Qiao may have over-reacted, but understandably so.

The phenomenon of the powerful princesses not only was present in the Han society, but persisted throughout the rest of the early medieval period. It had only become more pronounced. In the section on princesses in his *A Comprehensive Examination of the Written Record* (*Wenxian tongkao* 文獻通考), an administrative history compiled by the Yuan 元 (1279-1368) dynasty historian Ma Duanlin 馬端臨 (1254-ca.1324), Ma made the following comment:

¹⁰⁹ Yan, *Quan hou Han wen*, 37.679a.

¹¹⁰ Li Fang 李昉 (925-996) et al., eds., *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1975), 152.872a.

Since the custom of imperial princesses upholding wifely virtues had lost among later generations, princesses all enslaved their husbands. The Jin people already had the saying that “[marrying a princess is like] making trouble with the government out of nothing.”¹¹¹ When it comes to the Six Dynasties the situation had become much worse. Although the “Memorial to Reject a Marriage Proposal,” recorded in the “Biography of Wang Dan (375-413)” in the *Southern Histories*, is a playful piece, it does reflect the social reality of the time.¹¹²

自王姬執婦道之風不見於後世。後之公主。皆庸奴其夫。晉人已有無事取官府之說。至六朝而其弊尤甚。南史王誕傳載辭婚表。雖戲笑之言。然亦當時事實也。

The prevalence of jealous princesses and their strong attitudes against concubines could also testify to the fact that these women often occupied the dominant position in marriage.

According to the “Memorial to Reject a Marriage Proposal,” one of the reasons for declining an imperial marriage proposal was that jealous princesses usually forbade their husbands from taking concubines, hence putting the husbands’ clans in danger of being extinguished.¹¹³ As stated in the Classics, men were entitled to take concubines for the purpose of perpetuating their patriarchal lineages. Women who were against concubinage were labeled as jealous wives and could be divorced by their husbands. However, throughout the Han and the succeeding Six Dynasties, there were many jealous wives who forbade their husbands from taking concubines. The Han general and *fu* 賦 writer Feng Yan 馮衍 (ca. 1-76) was one of the first men in written

¹¹¹ The proverb goes like this: If one marries a princess, it is as if one makes trouble with the government out of nothing 娶婦得公主，無事取官府。” See Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019-1086), *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (Beiping: Guji chubanshe, 1956), 202.6402.

¹¹² Ma Duanlin, *Wenxian tongkao* (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1987), 258.2043b.

¹¹³ The “Memorial to Reject a Marriage Proposal” refers to a long piece of writing written on behalf of a fifth-century aristocrat Jiang Xiao 江斅 (452-495) who attempted to turn down the offer to marry a princess. A detailed discussion of this memorial is given in Chapter 4.

record who reportedly suffered from an overbearing and jealous wife who prohibited him from taking concubines.¹¹⁴

Struggles Between In-laws

One of the most basic and important codes of conduct for a married woman was to respect and obey her parents-in-law; otherwise she could be divorced according to the first of the Seven Conditions for divorce. Law in the Han dynasty was also enacted to severely punish disobedient daughters-in-law. If a woman injured and physically or verbally abused her parents-in-law, she should be executed in the market place (*qishi* 棄市).¹¹⁵ However, no such law was designed to punish men who physically or emotionally bullied their parents-in-law, though they would be punished for mistreating his own parents.¹¹⁶ An anecdote from Ying Shao's *Fengsu tongyi* reveals exactly such an unequal treatment.

A lawsuit in the Nanjun Commandery concerned a woman named He Shi, wife of Xu Yuan. He Shi's father He Yang was an alcoholic. He tried to borrow money from Xu Yuan but did not always get his wish fulfilled. He Yang scolded Xu Yuan a number of times. Xu Yuan said to He Shi: "If your old man scolds me one more time, I will beat him up." He Shi replied: "Like-minded people become husband and wife; how could you humiliate me like this? If you beat my father, I will beat your mother." Later He Yang scolded Xu Yuan again and Xu Yuan indeed struck him. He Shi then went up to Xu's mother and slapped in her face a few times. Councilor Bao Xuan ruled: "The wife of a

¹¹⁴ Fan Ye 范曄 (398-445), *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1981), 28.1002.

A detailed discussion of Feng Yan is given in Chapter 4.

¹¹⁵ *Zhangjiashan Hanmu zhujian (ersiqi hao mu)* 張家山漢墓竹簡 (二四七號墓), ed., Zhangjiashan ersiqi hao Hanmu zhujian zhengli xiaozu 張家山二四七號漢墓竹簡整理小組 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2001; rev. 2006), 104.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 139.

man is supposed to wait upon her mother-in-law. Xu Yuan humiliated her father of his own accord, and it was not instigated by his mother. A gentleman would not vent his anger on the ordinary and the lowly, let alone on those whom he venerates. He Shi should be given a commuted death penalty.”¹¹⁷

南郡讞女子何侍。為許遠妻。侍父何陽素酗酒。從遠假求。不悉如意。陽數罵詈。遠謂侍。汝公復罵者。吾必揣之。侍曰。類作夫妻。奈何相辱。揣我公者。搏若母矣。其後陽復罵遠。遠遂揣之。侍因上搏姑耳再三下。司徒鮑宣決事曰。夫妻。所以養姑者也。今遠自辱其父。非姑所使。君子之于凡庸。尚不遷怒。況所尊重乎。當減死論。

Bao Xuan's (d. 3) ruling was partial. He punished the wife for slapping her mother-in-law but did not mete out any penalty to the husband who physically attacked his father-in-law. Also, while daughters-in-law were punished for mistreating their parents-in-law, the reversed situation called for no legal consequences. That is, parents-in-law were exempted from penalty for mistreating their daughters-in-law.

The new family structure in the Han society might also have contributed to the increasing frictions between in-laws. In the Han, instead of having all adult sons move out after getting married, at least the eldest married son had to remain with his parents. This multi-generational family environment made the life of a new wife, essentially an outsider, much harder than in a nuclear family structure that was likely the case in the Qin society. Not only did she have to answer to the needs of her husband, but also his extended family. Conflicts between the wife and her in-laws, especially between her and the mother-in-law, were often unavoidable. Stories of new wives being mistreated by their mothers-in-law must be many. One of such stories was recorded in the *Hou Han shu*:

¹¹⁷ Yan, *Quan hou Han wen*, 38.684a.

Hua Zhong's wife was originally the ex-wife of Deng Yuanyi. Yuanyi's father Bokao was the Deputy Director in the Imperial Secretariat. While Yuanyi returned to his hometown, his wife was left behind to take care of his mother. She was careful and dutiful in serving her. But the mother-in-law detested her, locked her up in an empty room and provided only with a limited amount of food and drinks. She grew weak and emaciated day by day but complained of nothing. Later Bokao found it strange and inquired about it. At the time her son Lang was several years old. He answered: "My mother is not sick, but is suffering from starvation." Bokao wept and said: "Why would a mother-in-law harm a daughter-in-law to such an extent!" He then sent her back to her natal family. She was remarried to Hua Zhong who was the Court Architect. One day she was riding in his official carriage. Yuanyi saw her by the roadside and told onlookers: "She is my ex-wife. She made no mistakes in her conduct but was badly treated by my own mother. The two of us, however, had always cherished each other." Her son Lang was a court official now. She sent him letters but received no reply. She sent him clothes, which were burnt by him. She, however, did not take offense. She longed to see him, so she went to her relative Madame Li's home and had someone cook up an excuse to bring over Lang. When Lang arrived and saw his mother, he bowed again and again, weeping. He then stood up and took leave. She ran after him and said: "I almost died, and was abandoned by your family! What wrongs have I done? Why are you treating me like this?" Whereupon she cut herself off from her son.¹¹⁸

華仲妻本是汝南鄧元義前妻也。元義父伯考為尚書僕射，元義還鄉里，妻留事姑甚謹，姑憎之，幽閉空室，節其食飲，羸露日困，妻終無怨言。後伯考怪而問之。時義子朗年數歲，言母不病，但苦飢耳。伯考流涕曰：何意親姑反為此禍！因遣歸家。更嫁為華仲妻。仲為將作大匠，妻乘朝車出，元義於路傍觀之，謂人曰：此我故婦，非有它過，家夫人遇之實酷，本自相貴。其子朗時為郎，母與書皆不荅，與衣裳輒燒之。母不以介意，意欲見之，乃至親家李氏堂上，令人以它詞請朗。朗至，見母，再拜涕泣，因起出。母追謂之曰：我幾死，自為汝家所棄，我何罪過，乃如此邪？因此遂絕也。

This poignant story reveals several aspects of the marriage and family life in the Eastern Han society: divorce, remarriage, mother-child relationship and especially the struggles of a new wife in her husband's family. Liu Lanzhi, the female protagonist in the long narrative poem "Southeast Fly the Peacocks" received a similar treatment from her mother-in-law and was

¹¹⁸ Fan, *Hou Han shu*, 48.1607.

eventually thrown out of her husband's home.¹¹⁹ Although not included in the Seven Conditions, if parents were displeased with one's wife, she had to be divorced 父母不說出.¹²⁰

Litigations Between Husband and Wife

Marital litigations had been part of the marriage and family life since ancient times. The *Zhouli* designated the Marriage Officer to handle marriage disputes in the shrine of the former state. Some of the Qin legal codes on marital and familial disputes survive in wooden or bamboo strips.¹²¹ Legal disputes between married couples are said to have been common in the Han society. It is stated in the *Book of Jin* (*Jin shu* 晉書) that Judge Bao Yu 鮑昱 (d. 81), the grandson of the previously mentioned Judge Bao Xuan, made a compilation of marriage-related lawsuits (*jiaqu cिसong* 嫁娶辭訟) of nine hundred and sixty *juan* 卷.¹²² The Eastern Han thinker Wang Fu 王符 (ca. 76-ca. 157) had a section on lawsuits in his treatise *Comments of a Recluse* (*Qianfu lun* 潛夫論). Peng Duo 彭鐸 (1913-1985), one of the commentators of the *Qianfu lun*, points out that there were two popular types of lawsuits in the Eastern Han society, one of which was marriage-related.¹²³ I will come back to Wang Fu's discussion later. Here I will introduce

¹¹⁹ Lu, *Han shi*, 10.283-6.

¹²⁰ *Liji zhushu*, 27.521b.

¹²¹ A.F.P. Hulswé, *Remnants of Ch'in law: An Annotated Translation of the Ch'in Legal and Administrative Rules of the 3rd Century B.C., Discovered in Yün-meng Prefecture, Hu-pei Province, in 1975* (Leiden: Brill, 1985).

¹²² Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 (579-648) et al, eds., *Jin shu* 晉書 (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1980), 30.922-3.

¹²³ Wang Fu, *Qianfu lun jian jiaozheng* 潛夫論箋校正, edited by Wang Jipei 汪繼培 (1751-1819) and Peng Duo 彭鐸 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 19.224.

two court cases initiated by a wife or her natal family. The first one concerns a court official who was accused by his divorced wife.

Yang Zheng, style name Zixing, was a student of Erudite Fan Sheng. In the mid Jianwu [25-56] reign, Fan Sheng was appointed Secretary General at the Ministry of Rites. He was falsely accused by his divorced wife and was found guilty. He was thrown into prison and faced capital punishment. Zheng laid himself on the roadside waiting for the emperor's carriage. Carrying Fan Sheng's son in his arm, Zheng grasped the carriage and kowtowed. Imperial warriors, fearing to startle the horse, drew their bows to shoot at him. Zheng did not leave. The head of the warriors stabbed Zheng with the halberd and injured his chest. Zheng wept and pled, and the emperor then issued an edict and released Fan Sheng.¹²⁴

楊政，字子行，師事博士范升。建武中，范升為太常丞，為去妻所誣告，坐事繫獄，當伏重罪。政以車駕出時伏道邊，抱升子持車叩頭。武騎虎賁恐驚馬，引弓射之，不去。旃頭以戟叉政，傷胸前。政遂涕泣求哀，上即尺一出升。

The biography of Fan Sheng in the *Hou Han shu* also mentions, though very briefly, this litigation. Neither of the two sources explains the reasons behind the lawsuit, but both state that it was Fan's divorced wife (*quqi* 去妻/*chuqi* 出妻) who sued him. It is therefore reasonable to speculate that the lawsuit had something to do with marriage, or more precisely, divorce disputes. The *Record of the Han from the Eastern Library* (*Dongguan Han ji* 東觀漢記) indicated that it was a false accusation (*wugao* 誣告). Nevertheless, Fan Sheng was imprisoned and faced severe punishment. Had it not been for his student's persistent efforts to secure imperial pardon, Fan would not have escaped imprisonment.

The next story was truly a tragedy. The premature death of an Eastern Han figure Li Yan 酈炎 (150-177) was caused by a lawsuit brought against him by his wife's family:

¹²⁴ Liu Zhen 劉珍 (d. ca. 126) et al., *Dongguan Han ji jiaozhu* 東觀漢記校註, edited by Wu Shuping 吳樹平 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1987), 18.794.

Later on, Yan was deranged and was always in a daze. He was extremely filial and his illness was aggravated when his mother died. His wife, right after childbirth, was startled [by his behavior] and died as a result. Her family brought a lawsuit against Yan. Yan was therefore arrested and put in prison. Yan was too ill to defend himself at court. In the sixth year of the Xiping reign [177], Yan died in prison at the age of twenty eight *sui*.¹²⁵

炎後風病慌忽。性至孝，遭母憂，病甚發動。妻始產而驚死，妻家訟之，收繫獄。炎病不能理對，熹平六年，遂死獄中，時年二十八。

Grief-stricken by the unexpected death of their daughter, it is understandable for the wife's parents to sue their son-in-law. However, the death of Li's wife was an accident, and if Li Yan was well enough to defend himself, he might have won the case. The discussion of a similar lawsuit from the Jin indicates that even if Li Yan lost the ability to defend himself, he still could have been pardoned had the judge followed a supposedly ancient legal practice known as "conviction based on motives" (*yuanxin dingzui* 原心定罪). Zu Taizhi 祖台之 (ca. 317-419), the Minister of Justice (*yushi zhongcheng* 御史中丞), questioned the death penalty meted out to someone who was mentally ill and had accidentally killed his wife. Zu argued for an unintentional killing that should not have led to death penalty. He said:

I finished reviewing the lawsuits in Jiankang. The prisoner Qian Geng beat and killed his wife while he was mentally deranged. The death of his wife was not caused by any other reasons. Even though he was about to die, no mercy was bestowed on him. Instead, the ignorant judge sentenced him to death. I am afraid that the ancient practice of determining [the nature of] crime based on criminal motive was not followed here.¹²⁶

尋建康獄竟。囚錢耿癡疾發作。毆殺妻。折無他變故。將死之人。不蒙哀矜之施。無知之吏。加以大辟之刑。懼非古原心定罪之議。

¹²⁵ Fan, *Hou Han shu*, 80.2648-9.

¹²⁶ Yan, *Quan Jin wen* 全晉文, 138.2260b.

The cases of Fan Sheng and Li Yan indicate that women in the Han dynasty could initiate lawsuits against their husbands. They or their families could seek legal protections when necessary. Here are a few general points in legal disputes between married couples: any verbal or physical abuses could be punished, but the punishment for the wife was more severe than that for the husband; the death penalty, applicable to both husband and wife, would be meted out for accidental killing as well as murder in marriage; a death penalty due to accidental killing or murder could be pardoned or reduced only under very special circumstances; children were not allowed to litigate either of their parents for their marital disputes.¹²⁷

Wang Fu's Criticism: Multiple Engagements Versus Widowhood Chastity

In the section on lawsuits (*duansong* 斷訟) in his *Qianfu lun*, Wang Fu tried to make sense of the causes for the myriad litigations that had allegedly flooded Han courts. He boiled them down to one reason: the deceitful tendency of the people. People not only cheated each other in business dealings, but also in matters related to marriage. Wang Fu suggested that the reduction of lawsuits and the rectification of marriage customs lay in a fundamental reform of the corrupt mores of his time. In his description of the indecent dealings in marriage practice, he pointed out two problems: the shameless multiple engagements for unmarried women and the forced remarriage for chaste widows.

Driven by the financial gains in betrothal gifts, greedy parents would promise their daughter to multiple men and marry her to whoever offered the highest bride price. Women from

¹²⁷ A. F. P. Hulsewé, *Remnants of Han Law* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1955).

these families were not ashamed by the behavior of their parents and would go along with their parents' plans. There was, according to Wang Fu, much cheating going on in the marriage culture of the Eastern Han. To prevent such things from happening again, Wang Fu suggested heavy punishments for these unchaste women:

For those who promised their daughter to multiple families, even if the woman had given birth to ten sons or experienced a hundred times of general amnesty, she should not be allowed to return to her parents [for another marriage]. The crime would then stop. Otherwise, her parents should have their heads shaved and be exiled to a harsh county a thousand miles away from home.¹²⁸

諸一女許數家，雖生十子，更百赦，勿令得蒙一還私家，則此姦絕矣。不則髡其夫妻，徙千里外劇縣。

Wang Fu also pointed out the vulnerable position in which chaste widows found themselves after the death of their husbands. These women, usually having sons and daughters and financially secure, harbored the resolution of staying faithful to their deceased husbands. However, their shameless and greedy uncles or brothers, coveting their riches and offspring, often forced them to remarry. Usually these women ended up committing suicide.

Among those chaste widows there were those who had both sons and daughters and plenty of money and goods. They wanted to hold fast to the ritual of one marriage and share one tomb chamber with their husbands. They upheld their principles steadfastly and resolved to die had their fidelity been violated. They never had any thought of remarriage. However, they were unfortunate to have malevolent uncles or unrighteous brothers who either wanted to profit from their betrothal gifts, coveted their riches, or desired their children. They forcefully acted as their matchmakers, or deceived them to remarry. They would immediately compel and send away the women. Some women hung themselves in their chambers, and some swallowed poison in their [bride] carriage. They

¹²⁸ Wang, *Qianfu lun*, 19.236.

lost their lives and left behind their orphaned children. It was no different from forcing one to commit suicide.¹²⁹

又貞絜寡婦，或男女備具，財貨富饒，欲守一醮之禮，成同穴之義，執節堅固，齊懷必死，終無更許之慮。遭值不仁世叔，無義兄弟，或利其娉幣，或貪其財賄，或私其兒子，則彊中欺嫁，處迫脅遣送，人有自縊房中，飲藥車上，絕命喪軀，孤捐童孩。此猶迫脅人命自殺也。

Or the second husband would arrange more hands and threaten and force the woman into the carriage. They would guard her, drag her, hold her and arrest her for days. It was not different from kidnapping and forcing a woman to become one's wife. Women were vulnerable and weak, and were suddenly held by force by multiple strong men for days. Later when they decided to restore to their original aims, they had to commit suicide by hanging themselves with a silk rope or swallowing poison.¹³⁰

或後夫多設人客，威力脅載，守將抱執，連日乃緩，與彊掠人為妻無異。婦人軟弱，猥為眾彊所扶與執迫，幽阨連日，後雖欲復修本志，嬰絹吞藥。

Although the Confucian ideal of “one marriage” (*yijiao* 一醮) might indeed have been a concern for these women, it seems that the real reason behind the resolute widow chastity lay in the fact that these widows were well-positioned and financially secured.¹³¹ Well-to-do women could free themselves from the economic concerns that had likely compelled many less fortunate widowed or divorced women into remarriage. If this were indeed the case, it would be an interesting context for understanding Ban Zhao's *Admonitions for My Daughters* that is said to have promoted widow chastity. Consider that her readers were all upper-class women, Ban Zhao's

¹²⁹ Wang, *Qianfu lun*, 19.236.

¹³⁰ Wang, *Qianfu lun*, 237-8.

¹³¹ Thanks to Wilt Idema who reminds me of this: another reason might have to do with the fact that these women had sons. If they were remarried, then their sons' right to inheritance would be compromised.

advocacy for widow chastity might be considered a strategy for women in light of forced remarriage, instead of being a purely conservative pro-Confucian measure.¹³²

Another possible reason for observing widow chastity might be that it could spare women from experiencing life transition into a new home all over again. As marriage often took the form of a patrilocal arrangement, a married woman was almost always required to move into her husband's home, and the transition into a brand new environment could be a daunting task and refusal to remarriage could be a decent solution.¹³³

Ban Zhao's *Admonitions for My Daughters*

Judging from the above introduction of the marriage practices in the Han dynasty, there was a big gap between the common Han practices and the orthodox ideal prescribed in the Classics. The deviance from the ideal increased toward the end of the Eastern Han when the society was besieged with many a social problems. Criticism toward sexual and marital practices that were deemed unethical was voiced and efforts were made to amend the deviant customs.

It is conventionally believed that one of the first such efforts in the ideological sphere was Ban Zhao's *Admonitions for My Daughters*. A few other Eastern Han scholars had also

¹³² Thanks to Xiaofei Tian for teasing out this point for me.

Yu-shih Chen's study of Ban Zhao's *Lienü zhuan* is highly relevant to the point I'm making here, see "The Historical Template of Pan Chao's *Nü Chieh*," *T'oung Pao* (1996) 82: 229-57.

¹³³ Two groups of women were exempt from this marriage arrangement: women who had their husbands marrying into their parents' families; or imperial daughters who usually had their own residences and lived separately from their husbands. Their husbands were called upon to visit them in their residences, but did not live with them.

composed similar works, including Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133-192) and the aforementioned Xun Shuang. However, Cai's and Xun's works only survived in fragments.¹³⁴

Ban Zhao married at the age of fourteen *sui*. She was widowed young and lived a cautious life of some forty years with her husband's family. A talented scholar and erudite historian herself, she was constantly apprehensive of being humiliated and dismissed by her in-laws and causing humiliation and bringing burden to her natal family. Writing from her personal experiences, she urged her unmarried daughters to remember the seven pieces of advice and to practice them in marriage: to be humble, to serve the husband, to serve the husband with respect and caution, to be faithful to the husband, to cultivate the four womanly virtues, to obey the parents-in-law and not to argue with them, and finally to maintain a harmonious relationship with the husband's siblings.

Ban Zhao reiterated the analogy between husband and heaven and proposed fidelity to the husband even after his death. Contrary to common contemporary practice of remarriage, she wrote:

According to ritual [as prescribed in the Classics], husbands are allowed for a second marriage, but nowhere does it say that it is right for women to remarry. This is why husband is compared to heaven. One cannot escape heaven, just like one cannot leave her husband.¹³⁵

禮，夫有再娶之義，婦無二適之文，故曰夫者天也。天固不可逃，夫固不可離也。

¹³⁴ See Note 107 for more information.

¹³⁵ Fan, *Hou Han shu*, 84.2790.

It is said that Ma Rong 馬融 (79-166), a renowned Eastern Han expert on the Classics and a commentator of *Biographies of Exemplary Women* (*Lienü zhuan* 列女傳), praised Ban Zhao's *Nü jie* and ordered his wife and daughters to study it. There should be no doubt that Ma Rong saw in Ban Zhao's work the potential in promulgating marriage and family values.¹³⁶ However, as discussed in the last section, Ban Zhao's campaign for chaste widowhood may not have been simply a promotion for patrilineal ideology, but a covert strategy to prevent forced remarriage, an issue that some well-to-do widows were bound to face. With this in mind, we may have a different understanding of the surge of cases in which divorced or widowed women so vehemently resisted remarriage that they readily resorted to disfiguration and suicide.

¹³⁶ Even though Ban Zhao's own sister-in-law disagreed with her. For more information on Ban Zhao and a full translation of Ban Zhao's *Nü jie*, see Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 17-42.

The Wei, the Jin and the Northern and Southern Dynasties

The late Han efforts to regulate marriage customs and practices seem to have had limited success in the Han society and little impact in the following centuries. Many marital customs and practices popular in the Han were carried on into the new era, such as relaxing gender segregation, early marriage age, excessive betrothal gifts, extravagant wedding ceremonies, easy divorce and remarriage, and so forth. Jealous wives and their strong objection to concubinage had become such a prominent social issue that state interventions were sometimes made. Conflicts between in-laws and family violence were still very much a common domestic issue.

After the disintegration of the Han Empire, China experienced long periods of political disunion, punctuated with only one brief period of reunification under the Western Jin 西晉 (265-317). Chaos and insecurity in wartime propelled the development of new marriage customs and practices. The coexistence of two principal wives (*liangdi*) was one of them. A novel social phenomenon very much produced by the conditions of the times, *liangdi* occurred frequently. People in the south started to adopt a type of quick, simplified marriage ceremony called *baishi* 拜時, and “meet-and-elope” was encouraged in the north.¹³⁷ Governments also repeatedly enforced laws to promote affordable and simplified marital rites and ceremonies.

After the Western Jin ruling house lost its power, China was divided between the north and the south. Non-Han aristocracy ruled most of the northern territory as well as the Chinese subjects that were left behind during the great southward migration in the early fourth century.

¹³⁷ Lee, “Women and Marriage in China during the Period of Disunion,” 95.

The south, traditionally perceived as an uncivilized backwater, was colonized by the émigré northern elite. Cultural clashes and adaptations, including those in marriage and family life, took place both in the north and the south.

During the period of disunion, regional differences in marital and familial customs and practices were pronounced. Northern and southern attitudes toward concubines and their offspring were different. Expectations of a married woman differed in the north and the south. In the aspect of family life, northerners stressed the importance of multigenerational family structure whereas southerners seem to have preferred the practice of household split.

Relaxing Gender Segregation

As discussed earlier, gender segregation was prescribed in Classics, but it was not strictly observed in Han society. However, it remained an ideal for scholars such as Ge Hong. Ge recapitulated this ideal in his attack on the indecent behavior of his contemporaries which is the focus of the chapter “Detesting the Erroneous” (*Jimiu* 疾謬) in the *Baopu zi*:

According to the rites, without go-betweens, men and women should not meet, sit together, exchange greetings, share clothes and everyday objects, or have physical contacts. Married sisters, while visiting their natal homes, should not sit on the same mat with their brothers. Words from outside should not enter the inner chambers and vice versa. In seeing people off, women should not go beyond the door. When traveling, women must cover their faces. On the road, men walk on the left side and women on the right side. These are the explicit rites that sages set up to emphasize the importance of guarding against gradual corruptions.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Ge, *Baopu zi waipian*, 25.614. The passage that Ge Hong referred to is a section on the segregation between men and women in the “Neize” chapter of the *Liji*, see *Liji zhushu*, 27.520b.

在禮：男女無行媒，不相見；不雜坐，不通問，不同衣物，不得親授。姊妹出適而反，兄弟不共席而坐。外言不入，內言不出。婦人送迎不出門，行必擁蔽其面。道路男由左，女由右。此聖人重別杜漸之明制也。

However, what Ge Hong saw in reality was the very opposite of this classical ideal. He depicted men who climbed over walls to meet women (*chuanyu zhi nan* 穿窬之男) and women who eloped with men (*bensui zhi nü* 奔隨之女);¹³⁹ men who casually entered others' bedrooms and checked out their wives (*rushi shiqi* 入室視妻),¹⁴⁰ and women who visited relatives (*zhishi qinqi* 之適親戚),¹⁴¹ “slept over at others' homes, came home at night, roamed in Buddhist temples, watched fishing and hunting, climbed mountains, looked upon rivers, or crossed regional borders to attend weddings or funerals 宿于他門, 或冒夜而反. 游戲佛寺, 觀視漁畝, 登高臨水, 出境慶弔.”¹⁴² According to Ge Hong, there were women who, when partying in the city, opened the carriage doors and lifted up the carriage curtains and who, when touring in the suburbs, drank and sang at roadside.¹⁴³ They constantly exposed themselves in public and considered it fashionable. That his female contemporaries enthusiastically engaged in such a variety of social

¹³⁹ Ge, *Baopu zi waipian*, 25.625.

¹⁴⁰ Ge, *Baopu zi waipian*, 25.623.

¹⁴¹ Ge, *Baopu zi waipian*, 25.616.

¹⁴² Ge, *Baopu zi waipian*, 25.618.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

activities became the source of anxieties for a conservative southern scholar like Ge Hong, who was keen to adhere to ancient proprieties.¹⁴⁴

Ge Hong descended from a prominent southern family and was himself a noted literary figure in the south. The erroneous (*miu* 謬) behaviors that he observed and criticized were presumably originated in those northern émigré elite who brought these behaviors to the more conservative south. When the Wu 吳 recluse Yang Quan 楊泉 (fl. 280) arrived in the Western Jin capital Luoyang 洛陽, he observed similar behaviors among the northern elite. At the time it was a popular custom to offer sacrifice at the graveyard (*muji* 墓祭). Yang Quan claimed that this custom did not exist in antiquity. He speculated that the formation of such a custom might have to do with the northern aristocrats' desire to party outdoors. Their extravagant parties involved women and lasted for days.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Gan Bao 干寶 (d. 336), another renowned southern historian and literary figure and a close contemporary of Ge Hong, also harshly criticized the corrupted state of the elite womanhood in the Jin Dynasty. In his *General Comments on the History of the Jin* (*Jin ji zonglun* 晉紀總論), Gan Bao said: "As for women, they all sat back and enjoyed the fruits of their servants' labor in dressing and weaving, and knew nothing about womanly works on silks and hems and kitchen tasks of preparing wine and food. They married before the proper time and acted solely according to their feelings. Therefore they were not at all ashamed of their misconduct, and were not refrained from committing the evils of jealousy. Some of them rebelled against their parents-in-law; some reversed the order of *yin* and *yang*; some murdered concubines; and still some confused the hierarchy within the family. Their fathers and brothers did not blame them and society did not criticize them 其婦女莊櫛織紵, 皆取成于婢僕. 未嘗知女工絲枲之業, 中饋酒食之事也. 先時而婚, 任情而動. 故皆不恥淫逸之過, 不拘妬忌之惡. 有逆于舅姑, 有反易剛柔, 有殺戮妾媵, 有躐亂上下. 父兄弗之罪也, 天下莫之非也." See Yan, *Quan Jin wen*, 127.2192a.

¹⁴⁵ Yan, *Quan Sanguo wen* 全三國文, 75.1454.

Though practiced among the northern elite, their attitude toward relaxed gender segregation must have had influenced the more conservative southerners after the former had settled in the south. According to Ge Hong, the southern elite were enthusiastic about imitating the northern customs and practices, of which Ge expressed great disapproval. In the “Ridiculing the Muddleheaded” (*jihuo* 譏惑) chapter of the *Baopu zi*, Ge Hong listed four areas in which the southern elite most passionately emulated the northerners: calligraphy, language, wailing in funerals, and mourning.¹⁴⁶

To conclude, from the turn of the fourth century when the northern émigré migrated to the south and started colonizing it, the southern customs had undergone a series of changes. Some of the obvious changes included the much-relaxed observance of the separation between opposite sexes and the expansion of the range of social activities in which women could engage themselves without suffering too much criticism.

Obstacles to a Proper Marriage, Population Concern and Early Marriage Law

Getting married proved to be a difficult task during the period of disunion. The old hindrances such as expensive betrothal gifts and costly wedding ceremonies, continued to plague societies in the Six Dynasties period. Unstable social and political environments that were characteristic of this period produced new obstacles to marriage. Difficulties of getting married propelled a general trend of late marriage. Some even chose to stay unmarried in order to avoid

¹⁴⁶ See a detailed discussion in Tang Changru 唐長孺 (1911-1994), “Du *Baopu zi* tuilun nanbei xuefeng de yitong” 讀抱朴子推論南北學風的異同, in his *Wei Jin Nan bei chaos hi lun cong* 魏晉南北朝史論叢 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000), 338.

the financial burdens that came with marriage. Having suffered great population loss from continuous wars, governments in both the north and the south repeatedly issued early marriage laws and promoted affordable and simplified marriage rites.

The extravagance in marriage expenses for the rich and the unaffordability of marriage for the underprivileged were not new problems in the Six Dynasties period. Wang Fu of the Eastern Han had criticized it. Ge Hong and Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (531-591), who respectively lived at the two “book ends,” so to speak, of the period of disunion, both had taken up this issue in their writings.

Echoing Wang Fu’s discussion on marriage-related lawsuits in his *Qianfu lun*, Ge Hong also wrote about a similar situation that troubled the Jin society, namely, breaking off marital engagements for a higher bride price. This unethical practice was undoubtedly at odds with the ancient marital proprieties. To address the problem, some proposed to determine the legitimacy of a marriage based exclusively on whether the involved parties had completed the ritual of eating from the same sacrificial animal (*tonglao* 同牢), that is, whether men and women had concluded their wedding ceremony. In rebutting this proposal, Ge Hong argued that this measure would not mend the problem but instead would further foment the current corrupt practice of extravagant betrothal gift-giving competition. “If this method prevails, there will be many cases in which the rich are provided for by way of robbing the poor 此法之行，則必多奪貧賤而與富

貴者矣。” “It suits the desires of those who are wealthy 豐於財者, 則適其願矣,” Ge said, but it would certainly hurt the poor who might not be able to afford marriage after all.¹⁴⁷

One solution that Ge agreed upon was to draft an engagement contract on the day when betrothal gifts were received (*jiri baoban* 即日報板). On the contract the amount of betrothal gifts, whether big or small, should be clearly stated and more than ten signatures from the woman’s family be affixed. The contract should be used as a legal document in future disputes over the breach of marriage engagement.¹⁴⁸ It seemed that the worsened situation had propelled the creation of a new custom.

The mercenary nature of the marriage practice can be strongly felt from both Wang Fu’s and Ge Hong’s writings about marriage disputes. In the *Family Instructions for the Yan Clan* (*Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓), Yan Zhitui warned his family not to fall into the pitfall of these corrupt practices:

Nowadays there are those who sell their daughters for money or buy a woman with a payment of silk. They compare the rank of fathers and grandfathers, take account of trifling items, ask for more and offer less, just as if bargaining in the market. Under such conditions a boorish son-in-law might appear in the family or an arrogant woman assume power in the household. To covet honor and seek for gain are, on the contrary, incurring shame and disgrace; is that not lack of care?¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Ge, *Baopu zi waipian*, 23.566.

¹⁴⁸ Ge, *Baopu zi waipian*, 23.567. According to the classical ritual text, the acceptance of the betrothal gifts is the evidence for an official marriage alliance between the two families. The “engagement contract” was not something mentioned in the classical texts.

¹⁴⁹ Yan Zhitui, *Yanshi jiaxun jijie* 顏氏家訓集解, edited by Wang Liqi 王利器 (1912-1998) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980), 5.64. Translation by Ssu-yü Teng 鄧嗣禹 (1905-1988), in his *Family Instructions for the Yen Clan* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 20.

近世嫁娶，遂有賣女納財，買婦輸絹，比量父祖，計較錙銖，責多還少，市井無異。或猥壻在門，或傲婦擅室，貪榮求利，反招羞恥，可不慎歟！

Chen Guyuan 陳顧遠 (1896-1981), one of the first Chinese scholars who worked on the history of Chinese marriage, saw such marital alliances described in Wang's, Ge's and Yan's writings as "money marriages" (*caihun* 財婚) and stated that these were popular during the period of disunity.¹⁵⁰ In fact, these practices were probably already widespread at the end of the Han dynasty. As *Qianfu lun*'s commentator Peng Duo pointed out, of the myriad lawsuits that filled up the Han governments about half were related to marriage disputes.

Another Chinese scholar Lu Yaodong 逯耀東 argues that the mercenary marriage (*maimai hun* 買賣婚, in his term) was the result of "the declining political power of the aristocracy on the one hand and the rising influence of the wealthy commoners on the other."¹⁵¹ The statement may be more accurate in assessing the situation toward the end of the period of disunion. The fact that money marriage was already common in the Han society calls for a different explanation.

Not only were betrothal gifts hard to afford for the less privileged, wedding costs could also be a daunting challenge. It is said that wedding expenses could range between a person's ten

¹⁵⁰ Chen Guyuan 陳顧遠, *Zhongguo hunyin shi* 中國婚姻史 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshiguan, 1936; reprint, Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1984), 94-5.

¹⁵¹ Lu Yaodong 逯耀東, *Cong Pingcheng dao Luoyang: Tuoba Wei wenhua zhuanbian de licheng* 從平城到洛陽：拓跋魏文化轉變的歷程 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006).

years of salary to his whole family fortune.¹⁵² Being unable to afford a decent marriage, some chose to stay single and some postponed their marriage.

Extravagant betrothal gifts and expensive weddings prevented many from getting married at the right time, and thus were impediments for population increase. In his memorial to Emperor Xiaowu 孝武帝 (r. 453-464), the Liu-Song 劉宋 (420-479) official Zhou Lang 周朗 (425-460) informed us of a few more factors that accounted for population shrinkage of his time. On top of wars, harsh legal punishments and natural disasters, Zhou Lang pointed out two more causes: soldiers' long-term military services at the borders (which led to the aging of their left-behind wives and their consequent infertility 戍淹徭久, 妻老嗣絕), and the abandonment of illegally born children by eloped parents 淫奔所孕, 皆復不收.¹⁵³ He urged the government to reinforce laws that forbade infanticide and encouraged early marriage. He proposed that if girls were not married at the age of fifteen *sui*, their parents should be punished.¹⁵⁴ He also suggested that betrothal gift expenses be curtailed and marriage rites be simplified. Finally he recommended that legal actions be brought against those who put off marriages for whatever reason.¹⁵⁵

The increasing number of unmarried people and the tendency for late marriage were not only detrimental to government's vested interest in population growth but also to their image. One of the indicators of a benevolent ruler was his ability to ensure that people at marriageable

¹⁵² Lee Jen-Der, "Women and Marriage in China during the Period of Disunion," 93.

¹⁵³ Shen Yue 沈約 (441-513), *Song shu* 宋書 (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1980), 82.2094.

¹⁵⁴ The Han law punished parents who did not marry their daughters if they were older than thirty *sui*.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

ages were all properly married. The physical and mental health of the old bachelors and maids (*kuangfu yuannü* 曠夫怨女) could also be a potentially serious social issue. Governments therefore set latest marriage ages, which were, as mentioned above, significantly lower than those prescribed in the Classics. For example, in the year of 273, the Western Jin government mandated that girls who were not married at the age of seventeen *sui* and above would be forcefully matched and married by county officials 女年十七父母不嫁者，使長吏配之。¹⁵⁶ Zhou Lang also suggested legal punishments for parents who did not marry off their daughters at the age of fifteen *sui*.

The repeated issuing of early marriage laws by different governments indicates that marriage in early medieval China might have been relatively late, due to the varieties of obstacles that confronted many in this period.

New Customs and Practices: *Baishi* and *Liangdi*

Two new phenomena in marital and familial life in early medieval China, namely, *baishi* and *liangdi*, will be discussed in this section. Both *baishi* and *liangdi* are believed to have developed to cope with the new socio-political situations during the period of disunion. *Baishi* marriage evoked the ancient practice of simplifying marriage process at a time of social upheaval. The history and procedures are explained in the following comment on *baishi* from the *Comprehensive Institutions* (*Tong dian* 通典), an encyclopedic text on Chinese institutional history compiled by the Tang historian Du You 杜佑 (735-812) in late eighth century.

¹⁵⁶ Fang, *Jin shu*, 3.63.

Taking in a wife without any of the proper marriage rites is not recorded in ritual classics, but it occurred both in the Eastern Han, the Wei, the Jin, and the Eastern Jin. Judging from the rite, it was likely that when a lucky day was chanced upon in a difficult time, those who were eager to get married invented this custom. The bride's head was covered with a piece of gauze, which would be removed by the bridegroom. She would then bow to his parents, and this would make her a wife. The Six Rites were abandoned altogether. The ceremony of bride and bridegroom drinking from the same nuptial cup was also abandoned. People abandoned and ruined the great way of the sagely teachings and developed easy and corrupted practice. Wang Su, Zhong Yu [d. 263], Chen Qun [d. 237], Shan Tao [205-283], Zhang Hua [232-300] and Cai Mo [281-356] were all men who knew rites very well and were insightful and talented in their times. Why did they not criticize it? Was it because that this custom had been practiced for so long that people simply followed it and did not bother to change it? Or was it because the ritual specialists were so outnumbered by those who practiced it that their opinions were not followed? From the Liu-Song and Qi [479-502] onward, this practice died out. Gentlemen of those later generations could indeed be compared to the former worthies favorably.¹⁵⁷

拜時之婦，禮經不載，自東漢魏晉及於東晉，咸有此事。按其儀，或時屬艱虞，歲遇良吉，急於嫁娶，權為此制。以紗縠幪女氏之首，而夫氏發之，因拜舅姑，便成婦道。六禮悉捨，合卺復乖，隳政教之大方，成容易之弊法。王肅、鍾毓、陳羣、山濤、張華、蔡謨，皆當時知禮達識者，何謂不非之邪？豈時俗久行，因循且便，或彼眾我寡，議論莫從者乎？宋齊以後，斯制遂息，後之君子，無愧前賢。

Baishi marriage was both a solution to the expensive marriage practices and to the difficulties and uncertainties of the chaotic times. This may explain why even the renowned ritual specialists of the time did not oppose it.

According to the *Tong dian* record, the only ceremonial element in a *baishi* marriage was the covering of the bride's head with a silk scarf and the uncovering of the scarf by the bridegroom. Sometimes a silk fan was used instead of the silk headscarf. The remarriage of the famous Jin general and governor Wen Qiao 溫嶠 (288-329) with his maternal cousin Miss Liu, as recorded in the *A New Account of the Tales of the World* (*Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語),

¹⁵⁷ Du, *Tong dian*, 59.1681-2.

demonstrated a simplified wedding ceremony in which the bride was holding a silk fan (*shashan* 紗扇).¹⁵⁸

Baishi was not a practice designed and sanctioned by the state, but rather an initiative from those who faced marriage difficulties during tough times. From the *Tong dian* we can tell that *baishi* was later criticized as a corrupt practice that deviated from the sagely teaching. However, it was an expedient and effective measure to counteract the difficulty of getting married during the period of disunion.

The *Liangdi* phenomenon seems to have occurred with some frequency throughout the Six Dynasties period. It was a situation in which a man kept two women as his principal wives. This practice became noticeable toward the end of the Eastern Han dynasty when the empire suffered continuous warfare waged by various powerful warlords. Families were often broken up and “wives lost contact with their husbands (*qi shi fu* 妻失夫).”¹⁵⁹ Having no way of knowing the life or death of one’s spouse, remarriages taking place in those chaotic times inevitably led to the possibilities of having two principal wives or husbands.¹⁶⁰ *Liangdi* posed great challenges to the orthodox ritual system, and raised a series of social and political issues, not the least of which

¹⁵⁸ Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 (403-444), *Shishuo xinyu jianshu* 世說新語箋疏, edited by Liu Xiaobiao 劉孝標 (462-521) and Yu Jiaxi 余嘉錫 (1884-1955) (Taipei: Huazheng shuju, 1984), 27.857. The authenticity of the story is questioned by *Shishuo xinyu* commentators Liu Xiaobiao and Yu Jiaxi, for historical records fail to indicate that Wen Qiao had a wife with the surname of Liu. This, however, should not affect the point being made here, which is that the custom of holding a silk fan on a wedding ceremony was indeed being practiced.

¹⁵⁹ Lu, *Han shi*, 8.213.

¹⁶⁰ There were cases in which a woman was married to two men, but such cases were few.

was the issue of inheritance, since only the eldest son by one's principal wife had the right to inherit his father's official title. As a result, *liangdi* triggered heated debates in court. At the core of these debates was the question of how to define the status of the two women and what constituted a "divorce." This will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

Jealous Wives and Anti-concubinage Sentiments

There are more extant records of jealous wives during the period of disunion, both in the north and the south, than ever before. Jen-der Lee links the prevalence of jealous wives with women's higher social status. But jealous wives have always existed in Chinese history, or world history for that matter, and the increasing records of jealous wives may not constitute evidence for the argument of a higher female social status. The question really lies in why records of such jealous wives appeared more frequently in the Six Dynasties period.

Jen-der Lee also demonstrates a geographical difference in general attitudes toward jealous wives and their anti-concubinage sentiments.¹⁶¹ Jealous wives could be punished, sometimes quite severely, in the south. One southern emperor commissioned a compilation of stories of jealous wives to ridicule them and deter jealousy. However, jealousy was regarded a womanly virtue in the north and was practiced as an effective marital strategy. Attitudes toward concubinage differed too between northerners and southerners. Concubines and their offspring were greatly despised in the north but not nearly as much in the south.

¹⁶¹ Lee, "Women and Marriage in China during the Period of Disunion," 152.

As mentioned early, imperial daughters throughout the Six Dynasties were portrayed as extremely jealous. They also forbade their husbands from taking concubines. As a result, they earned an infamous reputation as undesirable marriage candidates. Their marriage proposals were sometimes rejected by aristocrats.

After the death of the principal wife, southerners often recognized their concubines as their wife, but low tolerance of and little regard for concubines and their children made remarriage to a woman from the outside very common in the north. In the story of Cui Daogu 崔道固 (mid 5th c.) we see a perfect demonstration of the differing attitudes toward concubines and their children between the north and the south. Cui, a fifth-century man born in the north, was bullied and despised by his half-brothers because his mother was a concubine.¹⁶² His father, after failed attempts to amend the fraternal relationship, sent Cui to the south for career opportunities and advancements. Cui's talents and abilities were immediately recognized by Liu Jun 劉駿 (430-464) who later became Emperor Xiaowu of the Liu Song 宋孝武帝 (r. 453-464). Liu Jun sighed over the fact that Cui was looked down upon simply because of his birth. Liu said:

Cui Daogu is such a fine character! How would he grow old as a lowly person! However, people humiliated him merely for the fact that he was born of a concubine. What a shame it is!¹⁶³

崔道固人身如此，豈可為寒士至老乎？而世人以其偏庶，便相陵侮，可為歎息。

¹⁶² “Daogu was born of a concubine. His brothers such as Youzhi and Mulian who were born of the principal mother belittled and humiliated him 道固賤出，嫡母兄攸之目連等輕侮之。” See Wei Shou 魏收 (506-572), *Wei shu* 魏書 (Taibei: Dingwen shuju, 1980), 24.628.

¹⁶³ Wei, *Wei shu*, 24.629.

These differing attitudes toward concubines and their offspring seem to have been reflected by historians who composed official histories of the Northern and Southern Dynasties. Cui Daogu's biography appears in three dynastic histories: the *Song shu* 宋書, the *Wei shu* 魏書 and the *Bei shi* 北史. The *Song shu* was compiled by Shen Yue 沈約 (441-513) of the southern Liang 梁 (502-557) dynasty. The *Wei shu* was compiled by Wei Shou 魏收 (507-572) of the Northern Qi 北齊 (550-577) dynasty. The *Bei shi* was compiled by the early Tang historian Li Yanshou 李延壽 (fl. 650). The *Bei shi* compilation was largely based on the four northern histories: the *Wei shu*, the *Qi shu* 齊書, the *Zhou shu* 周書 and the *Sui shu* 隋書. Since the biographies of Cui Daogu in both the *Bei shi* and the *Wei shu* are almost identical, it is safe to assume that Li Yanshou copied Wei Shou's writing about Cui Daogu. What is worth noting is that while the northern historian Wei Shou dedicated half of Cui Daogu's biography to recount his lowly status as the son of a concubine and how this status had affected Cui in family and in society, the southern historian Shen Yue left this part out altogether. In other words, if one did not read his biography in the *Wei shu*, one would have no idea that Cui Daogu suffered from discrimination as a concubine's son.

It seems that there are significantly more accounts of jealous wives in the Six Dynasties period, both in northern and southern sources. Some scholar links this phenomenon to the elevated social status of women of this period, but whether such a claim holds true remains a matter of debate. There are marked difference in the northern and southern perceptions of jealous wives and concubines. Northern women were taught to act jealously and were encouraged to control their husbands, whereas southern women received harsh punishment for acting out

jealousy. Concubines were greatly looked down upon in the north but were much more tolerated in the south. Accordingly, the offspring of concubines received equally discriminative treatments as their mothers in the north.

III. Concluding Remark

This chapter offers a brief introduction of the marriage rites and norms as prescribed in ritual classics. It also broadly delineates the lived experiences of women from the Han down to the end of the Six Dynasties period, a truly long stretch of almost eight hundred years. While the aim has been to touch upon as many aspects of women's life as possible, the limit of the scope of the chapter as well as the available sources has prevented me from doing so. In the process of writing, I have kept in mind the discrepancies between the orthodox ideals of womanhood and the represented historical realities. The discrepancies are shown in almost every aspect of women's life. Orthodox ideals on marriage and family life were repeatedly called upon to criticize and rectify popular social practices, but were yet to be fully institutionalized so as to be able to prescribe for the behavior of the society as a whole. As such, women in this period of time had generally enjoyed a relatively free and relaxed social and familial environment. Against this background, I will discuss the issue of divorce in the period of disunion in the second chapter.

Chapter 2 Divorce in Early Medieval China

This chapter presents a close look at the issue of divorce in the centuries between the fall of the Han Empire and the reunification of China under the Sui. It consists of three parts. Part 1, entitled “Divorce in Early Medieval China,” is a general discussion of the issue of divorce in early medieval China. It first reviews the prescriptions of divorce ethics in ritual Classics, including the Seven Conditions (*qichu*) under which a man might divorce his wife, the Three Prohibitions (*san buqu*) under which a man should refrain from divorcing his wife, and the proper divorce procedure. It then offers a review of the current scholarship on the study of divorce in early medieval China. The review shows that the topic of divorce in early medieval China is very much understudied. Finally, it examines actual cases of divorce as recorded in historical writings, and discusses the new phenomena such as forced divorce and divorce under the special two-principal-wives (*liangdi*) situation, which will be further studied in Part 2.

Part 2, entitled “*Liangdi*: A Thorny Case of Divorce,” first investigates how the new social environment following the collapse of the Han dynasty propelled the occurrence of the *liangdi* phenomenon, a ritual anomaly. It then examines the recorded *liangdi* cases from the third through the sixth century and the ways in which the *liangdi* situation was handled. It concludes with a study of the discussions on *liangdi* cases in the third and fourth century and how these discussions may have potentially influenced the development of the divorce law in imperial China.

Part 3, entitled “A Case Study of *Liangdi*: Wang Su 王肅 (464-501) and His Two Wives,” uses the story of Wang Su and his two principal wives as recorded in various historical

accounts to examine a specific type of *liangdi* dilemma in the fifth and sixth century when the conflict between the northern and southern courts intensified, and the cross-state movement of political and military personnel increased. This case study is situated within the narrative context of an entry in Yang Xuanzhi's 楊銜之 (fl. 528-547) *A Record of Buddhist Monasteries in Luoyang* (*Luoyang qielan ji* 洛陽伽藍記), a famous account of Buddhist temples in Luoyang, as well as within the larger historical context of the clash between North and South China. It aims to demonstrate how the contest for the status of the principal wife between Wang Su's northern and southern wives reflects the competition for cultural supremacy and political legitimacy between northerners and southerners.

I. Divorce in Early Medieval China

Divorce is a social phenomenon. When there is marriage, there is divorce. In China, the ritual Classics provided not only instructions for a proper marriage, but also guidelines for a proper divorce. A proper marriage required the fulfillment of the six-part ceremony called the Six Rites by the man's family. Under one of the Seven Conditions a man might divorce his wife, but he could not do so if one of the Three Prohibitions applied.

Just as marriage was the union of two families, divorce concerned more than two individuals. It not only involved the husband and wife, but also their respective families, even their neighbors. Parental consent was required for divorce and neighbors' intervention could change the course of divorce.¹⁶⁴ Divorce can be seen as a community event to a certain degree.

¹⁶⁴ According to the *Supplement to the Tang Ordinances* (*Tangling shiyi* 唐令拾遺), compiled by Niida Noboru, a Tang statute issued in 737 states: "The husband has to personally prepare a divorce document. Signatures from him, his parents, his paternal uncles, his maternal uncles and aunts, her parents, her paternal uncles, her maternal uncles and aunts, their neighbors and witnesses are required. If one cannot write, one has to leave his or her fingerprints as a mark 夫手書棄之。男及父母伯姨舅，並女父母伯姨舅，東鄰西鄰，及見人皆署。若不解書，畫指為記。" See Noboru, *Tangling shiyi*, 9.162-3.

It is worth noting that the Tang sources require the signatures from the wife's family as well (I thank Wilt Idema for making this suggestion). Since a married woman usually lived in her husband's home, once divorced she was cut off from his clan (*juezu* 絕族) and his immediate community, and had to be sent back to her natal family (*guizong* 歸宗). Without the assent of her family, the divorced wife would have no home to return and the divorce would create a feud between the two families. As marrying families tended to be of equal status, such feuds could be extremely disruptive.

The Tang sources also specify that neighbors' signatures—presumably neighbors of the husband's family—were required in a divorce document. There is no hard evidence indicating that neighbors' signatures were required at any time before the Tang dynasty, but their influence and intervention was seen in an early divorce account. Due to the intervention of the neighbors, the Western Han official Wang Ji, who divorced his wife because she fed him dates from his neighbor's tree, took her back. See Ban, *Han shu*, 72.3066.

Classical Prescriptions on Divorce

According to the *Da Dai Liji* and the *Kongzi jiayu*, the Seven Conditions under which a man might divorce his wife are as follows¹⁶⁵: she is 1) disobedient to her parents-in-law; 2) unable to bear a son; 3) licentious; 4) jealous; 5) having incurable diseases¹⁶⁶; 6) gossipy, or 7) a thief.¹⁶⁷ However, if the woman is the principal wife of a monarch (*tianzi* 天子) or a feudal lord (*zhuhou* 諸侯), she should not be divorced for her failure to give birth to sons, since the various consorts of a monarch or a feudal lord might bear sons, and the chance for the lineage to be extinguished was slim.¹⁶⁸

The rationales behind the Seven Conditions are explained in the commentaries to the ritual Classics. According to the *Liji*, the two major functions of a marriage are first to provide sacrifice to the husband's ancestors (*shi zongmiao* 事宗廟), and second to continue his lineage (*ji houshi* 繼後世); thus *wuzi* and *ejj* are two situations that will allow a husband to divorce his wife.¹⁶⁹ Among the responsibilities expected of a married wife, caring for her parents-in-law

¹⁶⁵ As mentioned in Note 50, the “Benming” chapter in the *Da Dai Liji* overlaps greatly with the “Benming jie” chapter in the *Kongzi jiayu*.

¹⁶⁶ The “incurable disease” usually refers, though not only, to leprosy; see Ch'ü, *Law and Society in Traditional China*, 120. See also Tai Yen-hui 戴炎輝 (1909-1992), “Divorce in Traditional Chinese Law,” in Buxbaum, *Chinese Family Law and Social Change in Historical and Comparative Perspective*, 88.

¹⁶⁷ Wang, *Kongzi jiayu*, 26.64. Gao, *Da Dai Liji*, 80.510.

¹⁶⁸ See Zheng Xuan's commentary to the Seven Conditions, *Yili zhushu*, 2.49b.

¹⁶⁹ *Liji zhushu*, 44.999b.

comes first, and thus *bushun fumu* is a ground for divorce.¹⁷⁰ Licentiousness as a ground for divorce reflects the concern for preserving an unadulterated male bloodline. A jealous wife may be divorced because she may pose a challenge to the institution of concubinage considered necessary for the multiplication of male offspring. A gossipy wife may be divorced because she can cause discord among family members, especially in an extended multigenerational family. And finally theft is not only unethical, but is against the patrilineal belief that the family property should be held by the head of the family and individuals must not possess private property. It is also out of the concern that the wife may steal money and goods to give to her own relatives. The Seven Conditions are clearly designed with the intention of preserving and perpetuating a patrilineal line. The divorce ethics in the Classics is thus a clear reflection of the patrilineal values.¹⁷¹

The wife can be spared from divorce if one of the Three Prohibitions applies: if she has no family to return to after her husband is remarried; if she has served three years of mourning

¹⁷⁰ As is made clear in the marriage ritual, the rite immediately following the wedding ceremony was the introduction of the bride to her parents-in-law, or, if they were dead, to their spirits in the ancestral shrine three months after she was married. Without this step, the bride was not formally recognized as a member of her husband's clan, and if she died, would be buried in her birth family's graveyard.

¹⁷¹ For a discussion of the Seven Conditions, see T'ung-tsu Ch'ü, *Han Social Structure*, edited by Jack L. Dull (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1972), 37-41. For the application of the Seven Conditions in Han society, see Dull, "Marriage and Divorce in Han China: A Glimpse at 'Pre-Confucian' Society," in Buxbaum, *Chinese Family Law and Social Change in Historical and Comparative Perspective*, 52-64.

for her parent-in-law, or if the husband was poor and humble in the past, a fate shared by her, and rich and noble later.¹⁷²

Although the Seven Conditions and the Three Prohibitions for divorce are both mentioned in the Han ritual literature, whether they were codified in Han law remains unknown. Their codification is first seen in the Tang code under the “Household and Marriage Law” (*huhun fa* 戶婚法). The Tang code was heavily based on the Northern Qi 北齊 (550-577) code which contained a section on “Marriage and Household” (*hunhu* 婚戶).¹⁷³ Supposedly the Seven Conditions and the Three Prohibitions were included in the Northern Qi code, and they might have been included in the Han code as well. But this awaits further verification.

When the wife was divorced, she would be sent back to her parents’ home. Standard procedures are laid out in the *Liji*. If the woman was the wife of a feudal lord, she would be accompanied by a messenger who acted on behalf of the lord. The messenger would politely explain the matter to the head of her family, and the head of her family would courteously accept

¹⁷² Wang, *Kongzi jiyu*, 26.64. For a discussion of the Three Prohibitions, see Ch’ü, *Han Social Structure*, 41; Dull, “Marriage and Divorce in Han China: A Glimpse at ‘Pre-Confucian’ Society,” in Buxbaum, *Chinese Family Law and Social Change in Historical and Comparative Perspective*, 64.

As for what it means to have no family to return to, Tai Yen-hui explains: “Family in this sense was interpreted to mean the persons who could have presided over marriage. The persons who would have been qualified to preside over the marriage were: paternal and maternal grandparents, parents, paternal and maternal uncles, brothers, and maternal aunts and cousins. However, the wife could not be sent back to maternal uncles, aunts, or cousins who did not live together nor own property together, even if they had presided over the marriage.” See Tai, “Divorce in Traditional Chinese Law,” in Buxbaum, *Chinese Family Law and Social Change in Historical and Comparative Perspective*, 90.

¹⁷³ Zhangsun Wuji 長孫無忌 (594-659) et al., *Tangü shuyi* 唐律疏議 (Taipei: Hongwenguan chubanshe, 1986), 12.231.

the arrangement. Then the messenger would return the articles (usually vessels, *qimin* 器皿) that the woman brought into the lord's family. The template below is provided in the *Liji* for feudal lords to carry out a divorce properly.

When a feudal lord sends his wife away, she proceeds on her journey to her own state; she undertakes the journey according to rituals befitting a lord's wife, and is received there with the observances due to a lord's wife. The messenger, accompanying her then discharges his commission, saying, "My unworthy lord, from his want of ability, was not able to follow her and take part in the services at the altars and in the ancestral temple. He has, therefore, sent me, so-and-so; and I venture to inform your officer, appointed for the purpose, of what he has done." The officer presiding (on the occasion) replies, "My unworthy lord in his former communication did not lay (her defects) before you, and he does not presume to do anything but respectfully receive your lord's message." The officers in attendance on the commissioner then set forth the various articles sent with the lady on her marriage and those on the other side receive them.¹⁷⁴

諸侯出夫人。夫人比至于其國。以夫人之禮行。至。以夫人入。使者將命曰。寡君不敏。不能從而事社稷宗廟。使使臣某敢告於執事。主人對曰。寡君固前辭不教矣。寡君敢不敬須以俟命。有司官陳器皿。主人有司亦官受之。

If the woman was the wife of someone lower than a feudal lord, the procedure was more or less the same, except that the return of the dowry was not mentioned:

When the wife is divorced, her husband sends a messenger and says: "so-and-so, through his want of ability, is not able to keep on supplying the vessels of grain for the sacrifices; and has sent me, so-and-so, to presume to announce this to your attention." The principal party replies: "My daughter, in her inferiority, does not presume to avoid your punishing her, and dares not but to respectfully receive your orders." The messenger then retires, and the principal party bowing to him and escorting him.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ *Liji zhushu*, 21.755a. James Legge's translation, with minor modifications, see Legge, *Li Chi: Book of Rites*.

¹⁷⁵ *Liji zhushu*, 21.755a. James Legge's translation with major modifications, see Legge, *Li Chi: Book of Rites*. Legge misread this passage as describing the procedure of a woman leaving her husband and having a messenger sent to her husband to represent her. But it should be understood as the other way around. Zheng Xuan and Kong Yingda, the two commentators to the *Liji*, both understood this passage as

妻出，夫使人致之曰：某不敏，不能從而共粢盛，使某也敢告於侍者。主人對曰：某之子不肖，不敢辟誅，敢不敬須以俟命。使者退，主人拜送之。

The template of sending a divorced woman back to her natal family prescribes a great amount of courtesy and civility from both sides. The husband would ritualistically take the blame for the failure of the marriage and the woman's family would politely accept the divorce decision. Although such a civil divorce may have happened among the aristocracy, there is no doubt that this is an ideal situation at best. Divorce disputes were seen throughout history.

This set of divorce rituals may have been maintained in later times, though not much information could be gleaned from extant writings. That being said, the long narrative poem “Southeast Fly the Peacocks” preserved in the sixth-century poetry anthology *New Songs of the Jade Terrace* (*Yutai xinyong* 玉臺新詠) contains a section in which a modified version of the divorce procedure is depicted.¹⁷⁶

In the poem, the heroine Liu Lanzhi, wife of an Eastern Han local clerk Jiao Zhongqing 焦仲卿, was disliked and driven out by her mother-in-law. Her family received a good amount of betrothal gifts of cash and silk before the marriage.¹⁷⁷ When she took off, she left her dowry to the husband. The dowry included her silk dresses, silk funnel-shaped bed-curtain (presumably

prescribing the procedure of sending away a divorced wife by men who were ranked below the feudal lord, such as a grand minister (*qing dafu* 卿大夫). See *Liji zhushu*, 21.755.

¹⁷⁶ An alternative title of the poem is “An Old Poem Written for the Wife of Jiao Zhongqing” (*Gushi wei Jiao Zhongqing qi zuo* 古詩為焦仲卿妻作). See Lu, *Han shi*, 283.

¹⁷⁷ Lu, *Han shi*, 10.284. “Much money and silk did I receive from Mother 受母錢帛多”, Hans Frankel's translation, in his “The Chinese Ballad ‘Southeast Fly the Peacocks,’” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 34 (1974), 252.

the bed as well), about sixty or seventy boxes (filled with wedding gifts of all kinds) and so on.¹⁷⁸ On her departure day, she rose before dawn, meticulously dressed herself up, and went to bid farewell to her in-laws. She then left the gate of her husband's house and ascended into a carriage. Led by her husband on horseback, she was escorted back to her natal family.

| | |
|--|--------|
| Out the door she went and mounted the carriage. | 出門登車去， |
| Her tears fell in more than a hundred rows. | 涕落百餘行。 |
| The prefectural clerk's horse was in front. | 府吏馬在前， |
| The young wife's carriage behind. ¹⁷⁹ | 新婦車在後。 |

According to the Han law, when divorced, the wife could reclaim the dowry she brought with her at the wedding. In his commentary to the divorce process described in the *Liji*, the Han

¹⁷⁸ Before she took off, the young wife addressed to her husband:

| | |
|--|--------|
| I have an embroidered jacket, | 妾有繡腰襦， |
| Gorgeous and scintillating, | 葳蕤自生光。 |
| A red-gauze bed curtain of double thickness | 紅羅復斗帳， |
| with incense bags suspended at the four corners, | 四角垂香囊。 |
| And sixty or seventy boxes | 箱簾六七十， |
| Of blue-green jade with green silk strings, | 綠碧青絲繩。 |
| Each one different | 物物各自異， |
| Including all kinds. | 種種在其中。 |

Lu, *Han shi*, 10.283-4. Hans Frankel's translation, "The Chinese Ballad 'Southeast Fly the Peacocks,'" 251.

¹⁷⁹ Lu, *Han shi*, 10.284. Hans Frankel's translation, in "The Chinese Ballad 'Southeast Fly the Peacocks,'" 252.

dynasty commentator Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200) said: “Statute: The divorced wife is given back what she brought 律: 弃妻畀所齎.”¹⁸⁰ Zheng’s comment indicates that it was a Han statute to return the dowry to the divorced wife.

The classical ritual texts did not mention whether the divorced wife had to pay back the original betrothal gifts her family had received, but returning betrothal gifts seemed to be practiced in later times. Tai Yen-hui suggests that traditional Chinese marriage resembled a purchase and sale. “Since the gift was taken from the husband’s family property and exchanged for the bride, she could not be allowed to leave his family without some replacement of the original expenditure.”¹⁸¹ Perhaps, other than the sentimental reasons, Liu Lanzhi left her dowry to her husband as a way of partly compensating his family for the expenses on the betrothal gifts.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ *Liji zhushu*, 21.759b.

¹⁸¹ Tai, “Divorce in Traditional Chinese Law,” in Buxbaum, *Chinese Family Law and Social Change in Historical and Comparative Perspective*, 104-5.

¹⁸² After listing the things that she would leave to her husband, Liu Lanzhi said:

| | |
|--|--------|
| As my person is cheap, the things are also vile, | 人賤物亦鄙， |
| not worthy of being handed to the next. | 不足迎後人。 |
| You just keep them to give away some day. | 留待作遺施， |
| From now on we’ll have no chance to meet again. | 於今無會因。 |
| Always take care of yourself, | 時時為安慰， |
| Let’s never forget each other. | 久久莫相忘。 |

The divorce procedure prescribed in the ritual Classics did not mention a divorce letter. Writing a divorce letter was likely a later practice. Judging from the template cited above, one of the duties of the messenger was to convey the intent of a divorce verbally. This might have been changed later into a written form, that is, a divorce letter, along with the general simplification of other divorce rituals. A divorce letter prepared by the divorcer and signed by various parties was an official part of the divorce procedure in the Tang dynasty. Whether it was the case in early medieval periods remains unknown.

Impacts of Divorce on Women

What did it mean to be a divorced woman in early medieval China? There were ritual, legal, and social impacts for a divorced woman. Ritually speaking, a divorced woman would receive a shortened mourning period from her son. The commentary to the *Yili* states that the son should mourn for his divorced mother for one year 出妻之子為母期, as opposed to the regular three-year mourning period (*zhan cui* 斬纊) that a son should observe for his deceased parent.¹⁸³ If her son was made the heir to her ex-husband, she would then receive no mourning at all from her son 為父後者, 則為出母無服.¹⁸⁴

Lu, *Han shi*, 10.284. Hans Frankel's translation, in "The Chinese Ballad 'Southeast Fly the Peacocks,'" 251.

¹⁸³ *Yili zhushu*, 11.355a.

¹⁸⁴ *Yili zhushu*, 11.355a. An heir (*hou* 後, or sometimes "*houzi* 後子") was "ideally the eldest son born by the principal wife. If she had no sons while the husband had concubines, the *houzi* should be the eldest son born by a concubine. If there was a divorce and then remarriage, the *houzi* should be the eldest son of the new wife." See Yun Jae-seug 尹在碩, "Shuihudi Qinjian he Zhangjiashan Hanjian fanying de Qin

As a divorced woman, not only was the mourning ritual for her from her son reduced or removed altogether, but also the mourning from her son for her own parents would also be affected. Normally, deceased maternal grandparents would receive a period of five months of mourning (*xiaogong* 小功) from their grandchildren. But if their daughter was divorced, they would receive no mourning from their grandson. The idea behind the change of mourning obligations due to the change of marital status was, in Hinsch's term, "patrilinealism."

Legally speaking, a divorced woman would be affected in a number of ways. First of all, she would not be punished for the crime her husband or anyone in his family committed if the divorce was completed before the crime was discovered. The reason behind the exemption was that a divorced wife was cut off entirely from her former husband's clan (*juezu* 絕族). Since the institution of collective legal culpability (*lian-zuo* 連坐) was designed to punish a group of people who were related, a divorced wife was no longer related to her former husband and was therefore not subjected to this punishment.

Secondly, she had the right to reclaim her private property, which not only included the dowry she brought with her into marriage but also the property she inherited from her natal family prior to marriage. As mentioned above, Zheng Xuan's commentary to the divorce procedure described in the *Liji* indicates that there was a Han statute that required the return of the dowry to the divorced wife. A statute found in one of the Han bamboo strips excavated in Zhangjiashan 張家山 indicates that the property a divorced woman inherited from her natal

Han shiqi houzi zhi he jiaxi jicheng" 睡虎地秦簡和張家山漢簡反映的秦漢時期後子制和家系繼承, *Zhongguo lishi wenwu* 中國歷史文物 1 (2003): 33-5.

family prior to marriage was also to be returned to her at the event of divorce. The bamboo strips read:

When a woman is the head of a household, if when she gets married, there is no one [in her family to succeed her], let her husband take the land and houses of his wife's to add to his own. If the houses [she owns] are not adjacent to her husband's, the husband cannot take them. When the husband divorces his wife or when the husband dies, the wife can retrieve her property and become a household head again. When a husband divorces his wife, he gives the wife her property back.¹⁸⁵

女子為戶，毋後而出嫁者，令夫以妻田宅盈其田宅。宅不比，弗得。其棄妻，及夫死，妻得復取以為戶。棄妻，畀之其財。

Thirdly, the son of a divorced woman would lose the qualification to inherit the family property if his father had sons from his second legal marriage. One of the articles in the Zhangjiashan Han bamboo strips says: “The sons of divorced wives are not allowed to compete with the sons of the later legal wives to be the heir 棄妻子不得與後妻子爭後。”¹⁸⁶ Apparently, the mother's divorce would have a legal impact on her son's status and right for family inheritance.

There could be serious social impacts for a divorced woman. A woman's place in society was defined by her relation to three men: her father before marriage, her husband in marriage, and her son when she was widowed. If for some reason a divorced woman remained unmarried

¹⁸⁵ See *Zhangjiashan Hanmu zhujian (ersiqi hao mu)* 張家山漢墓竹簡 (二四七號墓), ed., Zhangjiashan ersiqi hao Hanmu zhujian zhengli xiaozu 張家山二四七號漢墓竹簡整理小組 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2001; rev. 2006), 61.

Zhaoyang Zhang's translation with minor modification, in his “Civil Laws and Civil Justice in Early China” (Ph.D. diss., University of California Berkeley, 2010), 57.

¹⁸⁶ *Zhangjiashan hanmu zhujian*, 60-61.

and childless, she could face an identity issue. A divorced adult woman did not have a proper place in society.

Financially speaking, a divorced woman could lose her source of support if her natal family was unable or unwilling to provide for her. Without a family to return to and without her own means of livelihood, she might find herself in a very difficult situation. “When she was alive, she did not have someone to depend on and a place to stay; when she died she did not have a place to return to and take abode. She was taken in to a stranger’s home and was buried in a nameless graveyard 存無所從以容居, 沒無所歸以託終. 寄命于他人之門, 埋尸于無名之冢.”¹⁸⁷ Without an affiliation with either her father, her husband or her son, a woman could be marginalized in a male-dominated society.

Remarriage was therefore a sensible option for a divorced woman. To be remarried meant for a divorced woman to be affiliated with another man and to be reincorporated into, and to occupy a proper place in, society. Sometimes a small excuse, instead of the real reason for divorce, would be given to the wife so that her remarriage would not be impeded. When Zengzi 曾子 (505-435 BCE), one of Confucius’ disciples, was asked why he divorced his wife just because she did not cook the *li* [-vegetable] properly 藜烝不熟, Zengzi cited a proverb which says that “When break off a friendship with someone, one should make sure that the person can make friends again; when divorce a wife, one should make sure that the woman can get married

¹⁸⁷ Bian Kun 卞壺 (281-328), “Zouyi Wang Shi shi” 奏議王式事, in Yan, *Quan Jin wen*, 84.1944a.

again 絕交令可友, 棄妻令可嫁也。”¹⁸⁸ The remarriage of a divorced woman was expected and encouraged.

The remarriage of a female divorcée was encouraged, but the remarriage of a widow was not, though the sages did allow it, or so we are told. The prescription of mourning obligations for one's stepfather (*jifu* 繼父) in the *Yili* led the Tang commentators to assume that the sages approved of the remarriage of a widowed woman. Though widow remarriage was not prohibited, it was not encouraged, either. Ideally, a woman should be faithful to one man only. Even “death should not end her fidelity.”¹⁸⁹

The *Records of the States South of Mount Hua* (*Huayangguo zhi* 華陽國志), a history of the southwestern part of China composed by the fourth-century historian Chang Qu 常璩 (ca.

¹⁸⁸ In the “Admonitions” (*Jianzheng* 諫諍) section of the *Baihu tong* 白虎通. The *Baihu tong* was translated by Tjan Tjoe Som 曾珠森. But Tjan Tjoe Som's translation of this proverb—“bonds of friendships are severed in order to seek another friend, and wives are rejected in order to seek another mate”—is wrong. The proverb means that when one divorces his wife, one should make sure that she would have no problem getting married again. See Tjan Tjoe Som, trans., *Po Hu T'ung: The Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall*, vol. 2 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1952), 473.

The *Kongzi jiayu* has a different take on the Zengzi story:

Someone asked: “[Not] cooking the *li* [-vegetable] [properly] is not one of the Seven Conditions.” [Zeng] Shen [i.e. Zengzi] responded: “Cooking a meal is a small matter. I wanted her to cook a meal well, but she could not follow my demand [in such a small matter]. How much less so in major tasks!

人曰: 非七出也。參曰: 藜蒸小物耳, 吾欲使熟而不用吾命, 況大事乎!

See Wang, *Kongzi jiayu*, 9.88.

¹⁸⁹ Lee, “Women and Marriage in China during the Period of Disunion,” 265.

291-ca.361), strongly advocated widow chastity.¹⁹⁰ The predominant theme in Chang Qu's biographies of women is how widowed women, usually young, some with sons and some without, vehemently refused to be remarried by their parents, uncles, or brothers. They readily resorted to extreme measures in order to preserve their fidelity. Such measures include bodily disfigurement and suicide attempts. Dull comments: "for some reason not known to me, the *Huayang-kuo-chih* abounds with biographical sketches of exemplary widows who cut off a finger, slashed or cut off an ear, shaved their heads, or cut off their noses in order to show their determination not to remarry."¹⁹¹ Sometimes, there were widowed women who, in their attempt to avoid remarriage, committed suicide even when they had young children to care for. It seems that a woman's bond with her child could be sacrificed when she had to devote her life to her dead husband. These chaste widows were often commended by local officials.

While a divorced woman was better off getting remarried, a widowed woman could choose between observing widowhood in her deceased husband's family or remarrying. A widow did not have to deal with the identity issue as she still belonged to her deceased husband's family. And if she was financially secure and already had one or more children, she might very well be better off without remarriage. It was not necessarily the case that she was indoctrinated with the idea of widow chastity, but it could simply be that it was a better life choice for her. Remarriage took another around of getting assimilated into a new family and getting used to a

¹⁹⁰ Other wifely virtues that were promoted in the *Huayangguo zhi* include: serving the mother-in-law with great care, treating the children from one's husband's former wife with fairness, preserving female integrity in chaotic times, etc.

¹⁹¹ Dull, "Marriage and Divorce in Han China," in Buxbaum, *Chinese Family Law and Social Change in Historical and Comparative Perspective*, 66.

new set of kinship relations. Going through this process could be difficult for a woman, because she usually had to leave her parents' home and moved into a brand new environment. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Ban Zhao's advocacy for widow chastity among elite women could very well be understood as a strategy to avoid the emotional turmoil of a remarriage and not necessarily as a promotion of Confucian family values.

Although Ban Zhao spoke of how she feared that a divorce might disgrace her natal family, the strong social stigma placed on a divorced woman of the late imperial period was yet to be felt in the early medieval period.¹⁹² A divorced woman could be just as desirable a potential mate as a maiden in the marriage market. In other words, being a divorcée alone did not necessarily depreciate a woman's value as a marriage candidate. Liu Lanzhi, the divorcée in the anonymous ballad "Southeast Fly the Peacocks," was courted by more powerful suitors than her former husband soon after she was sent back to her parents' home. A number of historical stories could also testify to this statement.¹⁹³

¹⁹² In her preface to the *Precepts for My Daughters* (*nüjie* 女誡), Ban Zhao described her constant fear of being divorced: "Trembling with fear, I was always afraid of bringing divorce and dishonor upon myself, which would bring further shame on my parents and add to the burdens of my relatives 戰戰兢兢, 常懼黜辱, 以增父母之羞, 以益中外之累." So she instructed her daughters to behave well in order not to be divorced. She said: "I am afraid that you may lose face with your husbands' families and bring shame upon your ancestors 懼失容它門, 取恥宗族." Translation by Idema and Grant, in *Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China*, 36.

¹⁹³ Huazhong's 華仲 (i.e. Ying Shun 應順, Huazhong was his style name.) wife was the former wife of Deng Yuanyi 鄧元義. Deng Yuanyi's mother treated her very poorly. To free her from suffering, Deng Yuanyi's father sent her back to her own family. She then remarried Huazhong, a Court Architect (*jiangzuo dajiang* 將作大匠). Fan, *Hou Han shu*, 48.1607. The story of Huazhong is discussed on Page 57.

Secondary Literature on Divorce

Jack Dull argues that divorce was prevalent in the Han society, and could be initiated by both men and women. Although there were prescriptions in the Classics—Seven Conditions and Three Prohibitions—which were supposed to regulate divorce, Dull maintains that no social stigma was attached to divorce cases that went beyond the Seven Conditions or fell under the Three Prohibitions. As a matter of fact, there were many divorce cases in the Han dynasty that were “in no way associated with any of the ‘seven conditions.’”¹⁹⁴ “Politics, social status, and economic concerns were all crucial factors not found among the ‘traditional’ conditions.”¹⁹⁵ Dull, however, cites pitifully few cases from the Han materials to exemplify each of the Seven Conditions for divorce, except for the category of “incurable disease 惡疾,” and argues that most of the time the Seven Conditions were not on the mind of the husband when he divorced his wife. That is, Dull argues that divorce in the Han society required no justifications from the Classics, and the Three Prohibitions was largely ignored. Dull also argues that “there is no

After Zhu Maichen’s 朱買臣 (d. 115 BCE) wife divorced him, she married another man. “Later, Maichen was walking alone on the road and chanting. When he was carrying firewood in the graveyard, his former wife and her husband were visiting the grave. They saw Maichen was hungry and cold, and called upon him and fed him food and drinks 其後，買臣獨行歌道中，負薪墓間。故妻與夫家俱上冢，見買臣饑寒，呼飯飲之。” See “Biography of Zhu Maichen,” in Ban, *Han shu*, 64.2791.

The mother of Wang Zhengjun 王政君 (71 BCE-13 CE), who later became Empress Xiaoyuan 孝元皇后, was divorced by her first husband Wang Jin 王禁 (d. 42 BCE) on the ground of jealousy. Later, she was remarried to Gou Bin from Henei 後以妒去，更嫁為河內苟賓妻. See Ban, *Han shu*. 98.4015.

¹⁹⁴ Dull, “Marriage and Divorce in Han China,” in Buxbaum, *Chinese Family Law and Social Change in Historical and Comparative Perspective*, 58.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

evidence that the ‘seven conditions’ or ‘three prohibitions’ were a part of the Han code.”¹⁹⁶ Dull warns students of Chinese society of the “erroneous assumption that the values and sanctions contained in the Chinese classics were generally accepted and practiced in traditional Chinese society.”¹⁹⁷ He presents the essence of his argument as follows: “[M]arriage and divorce in the Han dynasty (or dynasties) do not correspond with the patterns of the commonly accepted norms of traditional China.” He suggests that the Han was a “much freer” “pre-Confucian” society.¹⁹⁸

Unlike some scholars who believe that there used to be a Han code but that it was lost, Dull suspects that the so-called Han code might not even have existed. Dull’s suspicion may not be validated as we do see evidence in the Han sources of marriage-related criminal charges, including adultery by consent (*hejian* 和姦), rape (*qiangjian* 強姦), fornication during a mourning period (*jusang jian* 居喪姦), reversing the status of a principal wife and a concubine (*luan qiqie wei* 亂妻妾位), and raping subordinate’s wife (*jian bumin qi* 姦部民妻).¹⁹⁹ All these violations had concrete legal consequences and were punishable. For example, a man who was charged with adultery by consent was sentenced to three years of service in the royal ancestral temple with his beard and hair shaved (*nai wei guixin* 耐為鬼薪).²⁰⁰ According to the Tang code,

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ Cheng Shude 程樹德 (1877-1944), *Jiuchao lükao* 九朝律考 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1927), 114-5.

²⁰⁰ Ban, *Han shu*, 16.551. *Nai* means to shave body and facial hair. *Guixin* literally means to gather firewood for the royal ancestral temples. It was a type of punishment for men and it lasted for three years.

punishment for rape was one degree heavier than adultery by consent. The Han example of rape did not specify the punishment. It only stated that a man was charged with rape, but upon amnesty he was pardoned. Confusing the status of a principal wife and that of a concubine was punishable. In the year 1 BCE, Fu Yan 傅晏, the Marquis of Kongxiang 孔鄉侯, was charged with confusing the status of his principal wife and that of his concubine.²⁰¹ Even though he was pardoned, he was still exiled to Hepu 合浦 (in present day Guangxi 廣西 Province), a very remote place from the Han capital city. Although we do not have a Han code, it seems clear that offenses in marriage were punished according to specific legal statutes.

The excavation of the Han dynasty bamboo strips from Zhangjiashan 張家山漢簡 in 1983, after the publication of Jack Dull's article "Marriage and Divorce in Han China," further challenges some of Dull's assessments on legal matters related to marriage and divorce. Relying on the information gathered from the Zhangjiashan bamboo strips, Zhaoyang Zhang argues in his recently completed doctoral dissertation that "even though there was no such codified body of 'family law' in early China, we do find a quite sophisticated system of justice that managed domestic matters during the Han period, if not earlier. This justice system was based on statutes, including the 'Statutes on Households' (*Hu lü* 戶律), the 'Statutes on Establishing Heirs'

According to the Tang code, those who were charged with adultery by consent were sentenced to one year of hard labor (*tu yinian* 徒一年).

²⁰¹ Ban, *Han shu*, 18.711.

(*Zhihou lü* 置后律), and the ‘Statutes on Registration’ (*Fu lü* 傅律).”²⁰² The second chapter of his dissertation deals primarily with the statutes regulating domestic issues.

Bret Hinsch agrees with Jack Dull on a number of aspects of divorce in Han China. He states that divorce “seems to have been common in early imperial China.”²⁰³ It was governed predominantly by customs, rather than rites and laws. The classical prescriptions for divorce under the Seven Conditions and the Three Prohibitions were largely ignored in practice.²⁰⁴ Divorce could be initiated by both men and women. Women divorced their husbands for reasons such as “poverty, disease, and contentious in-laws,” and men divorced their wives for reasons such as “ambition, political expediency, or financial gain.”²⁰⁵

Hinsch differs from Dull on two accounts. Firstly, contrary to Jack Dull’s doubt about the existence of a Han code, Hinsch argues for an active role that the state played in bringing “divorce under the jurisdiction of the law,” even though Hinsch does acknowledge the power of custom and suspects that “custom was probably still the standard guide to divorce proceedings.”²⁰⁶ Due to the availability of new archeological evidence, Hinsch’s revision of Dull’s assessment of the existence of a Han code is expected.

²⁰² Zhang, “Civil Laws and Civil Justice in Early China,” 37.

²⁰³ Hinsch, *Women in Early Imperial China*, 40.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

Secondly, Hinsch discusses divorce from the perspective of a woman in the kinship organization (i.e. her husband's family) in a patrilineal society.²⁰⁷ He argues that even though divorce was allowed for women, unhappy wives had to "think long and hard before resorting to divorce."²⁰⁸ The prospect of a divorced woman in Hinsch's description looks very bleak.²⁰⁹ He says that often a divorced woman would find herself marginalized, pitiful and helpless. Differing from this "dismal picture of unmarried women," Dull's estimation of the life of a divorced woman is more on the optimistic side. Since remarriage was an option not only for men, but also for women no matter whether they had children or not, Dull argues that a divorced woman was often remarried, stayed connected with her second husband and his family, and found support in her old age. Hinsch does not address the option of remarriage for a divorcée, which may explain his pessimistic assessment of the future of a divorced woman in early medieval China.

Tai Yen-hui's 戴炎輝 (1909-1992) article "Divorce in Traditional Chinese Law," published in the same volume in which Dull's article "Marriage and Divorce in Han China" appeared, approaches the matter of divorce entirely from the legal perspective. His article covers

²⁰⁷ Hinsch insists on using the term "patrilineal," as the conventional term "patriarchal" is, in his opinion, not adequate for describing traditional Chinese society. He says: "Patrilinealism is something very different from patriarchy. Early Chinese patrilineal values derived from an idealized view of ancient kinship relations. According to this way of thinking, the core organization of society ought to be either large extended families of multiple generations or else lineages descended from a common male ancestor. ... [Patrilinealists] believed that individual interest should be sacrificed to bolster the strength of the kin group. Grandparents, parents, sons, and daughters-in-law should all live and work together. The young should obey the old. And the property of kinfolk should be held in common and managed by family elders. Nowadays, these ideas are often called 'Confucian.'" Hinsch, *Women in Early Imperial China*, 10-1.

²⁰⁸ Hinsch, *Women in Early Imperial China*, 40.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

a range of issues: the types of divorce, the criminal aspects of divorce, the development of the divorce law, the methods of divorce, the effects of divorce, and women's private property in the event of divorce. Tai's research relies heavily on the scholarship of the Japanese legal scholar Niida Noboru 仁井田陸 (1904-1966) who specialized on family law in China, especially in the Tang dynasty. Tai's sources are mainly from the Tang dynasty, with some from the Han dynasty, and very little from the long period of disunity between the Han and the Tang.

Tai discusses four types of divorce: divorce by mutual consent, of which were many cases; divorce under one of the Seven Conditions, which was civil in nature;²¹⁰ divorce under "Breaking the Bond" (*yijue* 義絕), which contained certain criminal aspects; and a wife's petition for divorce, which was very rare. He focuses his discussions on the second and third types, because "traditional law emphasized the institutions of the Seven Conditions and Breaking the Bond."²¹¹ Although both terms (Seven Conditions and Breaking the Bond) appeared in the Han dynasty, their codification was first seen in the Tang code. Tai states that "[t]he effectiveness of the Seven Conditions decreased with time, while the causes for divorce under Breaking the Bond were increased. Traditional divorce law may be said to have developed from the concept of Breaking the Bond."²¹²

²¹⁰ By "civil" Tai means such cases of divorce did not appear in court, and were settled among family and relatives. It is in contrast with cases of divorce under Breaking the Bond.

²¹¹ Tai, "Divorce in Traditional Chinese Law," in Buxbaum, *Chinese Family Law and Social Change in Historical and Comparative Perspective*.

²¹² *Ibid.*

Tai points out that divorce under Breaking the Bond could be compulsory and sometimes was initiated by an official. “The only specific ground for Breaking the Bond that has been found in the Han period was killing of the wife’s parents.”²¹³ When a husband’s faulty acts such as killing his parents-in-law rendered him the charge of Breaking the Bond, a divorce was imposed on the couple by an official. Failure to carry out the required divorce was punishable. This system of Breaking the Bond, Tai thus argues, “gave some relief to the wife.”²¹⁴

Tai’s discussion on Breaking the Bond, one of the four types of divorce and one that was rendered instrumental in the development of traditional Chinese divorce law, was an important part of the debate on the two-principal-wives (*liangdi*) phenomenon during the early medieval period.²¹⁵ Breaking the Bond was proposed by some participants in the debate to be used as a new ground for divorce in a *liangdi* situation. It was sometimes understood as being the same thing as Seven Conditions.²¹⁶ Tai’s otherwise extensive study on divorce under the traditional Chinese law fails to include discussions on Breaking the Bond in debates on the *liangdi* dilemma.

In her Ph.D. dissertation on women and marriage in the early medieval period, Jen-der Lee, a student of Jack Dull, discusses many aspects of a woman’s life, including divorce, during

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ The discussion of *liangdi* will follow in the next section.

²¹⁶ Xu Meng 許猛 (fl. 290s): “There are three manners of divorce. First, Separation by Breaking the Bond, which was the violation of one of the Seven Conditions 絕有三道. 有義絕者, 犯七出也.” See Du, *Tong dian*, 89. 2442.

the years of disunity. Lee's discussion of divorce focuses mostly on the issue of jealousy, for, as she observes, female jealousy was a prominent phenomenon in this period. Lee compares the differing attitudes toward jealous women in north and south China, and remarks that "jealousy alone may not have been a legitimate enough reason to divorce one's wife in the North."²¹⁷ But in the south, jealous wives were executed by officials, sometimes even by an emperor. Lee comments on the female-initiated divorce in the early medieval period, and remarks that the reason was usually because of poverty. Lee also mentions the *liangdi* anomaly and rightly points out that it could be caused by "political segregation and reunification, legal consideration of collective responsibility, or simply personal choice or preference."²¹⁸ She contends that although the imperial government usually tried to distinguish the status of the two women involved in each case, people often cared more about family harmony than status distinction.²¹⁹ This statement may be truer about the *liangdi* phenomenon in the south. The competition between two wives in the north was often so fierce that family harmony was seldom considered.

Recorded Divorce Cases in Early Medieval China

Lü Simian 吕思勉 (1884-1957) observes that divorce was easy and remarriage was common in the Jin and the Northern and Southern Dynasties.²²⁰ Divorce was indeed common in this period, and reasons for divorce varied greatly. Sometimes men divorced their wives on

²¹⁷ Lee, "Women and Marriage in the Period of Disunion," 155.

²¹⁸ Lee, "Women and Marriage in the Period of Disunion," 175.

²¹⁹ Lee, "Women and Marriage in the Period of Disunion," 181.

²²⁰ Lü Simian, *Liang Jin Nanbeichao shi* 兩晉南北朝史 (Shanghai: Shanghai chuji chubanshe, 1983), 908-9.

grounds prescribed in the ritual literature, especially the following three ones: disobedience to parents-in-law, jealousy, and barrenness. Sometimes, they divorced wives for reasons not included in the Seven Conditions. Still sometimes, they divorced wives for bizarre reasons. There were also many cases of forced divorce, either for political or personal reasons. Divorce was not a male privilege. Female-initiated divorce was seen in this period as well. Below is a list of divorce cases recorded in history.

Zhong You's 鍾繇 (151-230) son Zhong Hui 鍾會 (225-264) wrote a biography for his mother Zhang Changpu 張昌蒲 (199-257), who was one of Zhong You's concubines.²²¹ Zhong You's first principal wife remains unknown. As the mother of Zhong You's eldest son Zhong Yu 鍾毓 (d. 263), another concubine Lady Sun 孫氏 (d. 249) was given the highest status among the concubines (*guiqie* 貴妾). According to Zhong Hui's account, Lady Sun was jealous and hostile toward other women in the household. She poisoned Lady Zhang when she was pregnant with Zhong Hui. Zhang survived, and Lady Sun was divorced by Zhong You because of her crime (*Sun shi youshi dezui chu* 孫氏由是得罪出).²²² Zhong You subsequently married another

²²¹ *Mu furen Zhang shi zhuan* 母夫人張氏傳 may be the first biography that a son wrote for his concubine mother, see Yan, *Quan Sanguo wen*, 25.1190b-1191a.

²²² It is noted that Lady Sun was only a concubine, not a principal wife. We do not know to what extent rules for divorcing a principal wife were applied to a concubine, or whether a concubine could be dismissed without further ado. But it seems that in South China, when the principal wife died, the head concubine became the *de facto* principal wife. According to Yan Zhitui, “when one's principal wife died, one often had his concubine take charge of household affairs 喪室之後, 多以妾媵終家事.”

It is likely that when it comes to dismissing a concubine, especially a *guiqie*, the rules of divorce might be applicable to her. According to the *Annals of the Wei House* (*Weishi chunqiu* 魏氏春秋), the history of Cao-Wei compiled by historian Sun Sheng 孫盛 (302-373), the divorce of Lady Sun was intervened by Cao Pi, Emperor Wen of Wei 魏文帝 (187-226, r. 220-226). When Cao Pi's mother Empress Bian 卞太

woman, a certain Lady Jia 賈氏, who became Zhong's principal wife.²²³ Lady Sun's divorce was the result of her jealousy, a strong negative emotion that finally led her to commit crime against her husband's other women.

In 249, Zhong Yu performed mourning at his home for his divorced mother Lady Sun, who is said to have no one to mourn for her (*wu zhuhou* 無主後).²²⁴ Because Zhong Yu was the heir (*renhou* 人後) of Zhong You, his action stirred up controversy among officials.

Commandery Aide (*juncheng* 郡丞) Wu Shen 武申, Cheng Qia 成洽 and Wu Shang 吳商 debated about the legitimacy of Zhong Yu's action.²²⁵ Cheng Qia argued that "if one who is made the heir to his father can mourn his step-father, it is clear that one can mourn his own mother 為父後服繼父服, 則自服其母可知也."²²⁶ Wu Shen and Wu Shang both disagreed with Cheng Qia. They cited the Classics and contended that a son who was made the heir to his father must not mourn his divorced mother.

后 (159-230) heard about the divorce, she spoke of it to Cao Pi. Cao Pi ordered that Zhong You reinstate Lady Sun. Zhong You was enraged and decided to take a poisonous drink in order to defy the imperial order. But he was stopped. He then ate peppers and lost his voice. Finally the emperor dropped the matter. See Pei Songzhi's 裴松之 (372-451) commentary to the *Book of Cao-Wei* (*Wei shu* 魏書), in Chen Shou 陳壽 (233-297), *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1980), 28.784.

²²³ Yan, *Quan Sanguo wen*, 25.1190b-1191a..

²²⁴ Lady Sun might not have been remarried after she was divorced.

²²⁵ Du, *Tong dian*, 94.2546-7.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

Wang Song 王宋 was the wife of Liu Xun 劉勳, General for Subjugating the Barbarians (*Pinglu jiangjun* 平虜將軍), for more than twenty years.²²⁷ Later, Liu Xun fancied the daughter of a Sima 司馬 family from Shanyang 山陽 and divorced Wang Song on the ground that she did not produce any son 後勳悅山陽司馬氏女, 以宋無子出之.²²⁸ When Liu Xun took a fancy to another woman, the lack of a son (*wuzi*), one of the Seven Conditions under which a man could justifiably divorce his wife, came in handy. As Hinsch rightly observes, sometimes “men who divorced their wives out of blatant self-interest invoked one of the ‘seven conditions’ as a pretext.”²²⁹ On her way back to her parents’ home, Wang Song supposedly composed a poem (*huan yu dao zhong zuoshi* 還於道中作詩), and the poem reads:

| | |
|--|--------|
| Billow, billow bed-curtains, | 翩翩床前帳。 |
| Flare out to hide the shining lamp. | 張以蔽光輝。 |
| Once I went away with you, | 昔將爾同去。 |
| Now I have come back with you. | 今將爾同歸。 |
| Locked up in your case | 緘藏篋笥裏。 |
| When will you lie open once more? ²³⁰ | 當復何時披。 |

²²⁷ Liu Xun was a favorite of Cao Cao 曹操 (155-220) and was a powerful official in the court. Later, he was executed (*fufa* 伏法). See Pei Songzhi’s commentary to the *Book of Cao-Wei* (*Wei shu* 魏書), in Chen, *Sanguo zhi*, 16.497.

²²⁸ Lu, *Wei shi* 魏詩, 4.402.

²²⁹ Hinsch, *Women in Early Imperial China*. 43.

²³⁰ Birrell, *New Songs from a Jade Terrace: An Anthology of Early Chinese Love Poetry, Translated with Annotations and an Introduction*, 65.

Wang Song's poem figures a bed-curtain that was very likely part of her dowry and a witness of her married life of more than twenty years. She brought it to Liu Xun's home at her wedding. Now divorced, she took it with her back to her parents' home. Her question in the end of the poem was directed both to the curtain and herself as well.

In the Cao-Wei times, divorced wives and widows seem to have suddenly captured the literary imagination of men of letters. Cao Pi 曹丕 (187-226) composed a poem for his friend Ruan Yu's 阮瑀 (d. 212) widow "Poem on a Widow" (*guafu shi* 寡婦詩).²³¹ Wang Song's divorce seems to have occasioned at least two poetic compositions. According to some source, Cao Zhi, Cao Pi's younger brother, also wrote a poem on behalf of Wang Song, "A Miscellaneous Poem on Behalf of Liu Xun's Wife Lady Wang (*Dai Liu Xun qi Wang shi za shi* 代劉勳妻王氏雜詩)."²³² Cao Zhi also composed a "Poem on a Divorced Wife" (*Qifu shi* 棄婦詩) and specified that the reason for divorce was barrenness (*wuzi dang guining* 無子當歸寧).²³³ Cao Pi composed a "Poetic Exposition on a Divorced Wife" (*Chufu fu* 出婦賦) and the ground

The authorship of this poem is uncertain. The *Yutai xinyong* attributed it to Wang Song herself. The *Yiwen leiju* assigned it to Cao Pi. Lu Qinli agrees with the *Yiwen leiju* and attributes the poem to Cao Pi. See Lu, *Wei shi*, 4.402.

It may very well be a case of an anonymous poem looking for an author.

²³¹ Lu, *Wei shi*, 4.403.

²³² The authorship of this poem is also uncertain. The *Yutai xinyong* attributed it to Cao Pi, whereas Lu Qinli assigns it to Cao Zhi. See Lu, *Wei shi*, 7.455. It is likely another case of an anonymous poem seeking an author.

²³³ Lu, *Wei shi*, 7.455.

for her divorce was also barrenness (*xin wuzi er yingchu* 信無子而應出).²³⁴ Cao Zhi and Wang Can 王粲 (177-217), one of the Seven Masters of Jian'an (*Jian'an qizi* 建安七子), both composed a poetic exposition under the same title as Cao Pi's.²³⁵

Many divorce stories are presented as stories of filial piety or of a man's loyalty to his family. Husbands are often said to have divorced their wives because they did not take good care of their parents, siblings or relatives. Liu Huan's 劉瓛 (434-489) and Sun Qian's 孫謙 (425-516) divorce cases are good examples for illustrating this point.

Liu Huan was a renowned scholar of the Classics and an exemplar of filial piety. When his grandmother was bedridden, he prepared medicated ointment plaster for her. His fingers were soaked in the herbal medicine for so long that they were damaged. His mother Lady Kong 孔氏 told relatives that her son was the Zengzi of their age (*jinshi Zengzi* 今世曾子). Zengzi was one of Confucius' disciples and was known for his filial devotion to his mother. Liu Huan did not get married until he was in his late forties. In around 480, the founding emperor of Southern Qi 南齊 (479-502) Xiao Daocheng 蕭道成 (427-482, r. 479-482) arranged for him to marry a woman from a Wang 王 family. One day, "Lady Wang drilled holes in a wall to hang shoes; some dust fell on Lady Kong's bed. Lady Kong was displeased, and Liu Huan immediately divorced his

²³⁴ Yan, *Quan Sanguo wen*, 4.1073a.

²³⁵ Wang Can's work is grouped in the *Quan Hou Han wen*, Cao Pi's and Cao Zhi's works are included in the *Quan Sanguo wen*. See Yan, *Quan Hou Han wen*, 90.958b; *Quan Sanguo wen*, 4.1073 and 13.1124b-25a, respectively.

The topic "Chufu fu" could very well be an assigned one, by Cao Pi, for competitive compositions.

wife 王氏椽壁掛履，土落孔氏牀上，孔氏不悅，躡即出其妻。²³⁶ Liu Huan was celebrated for his classical scholarship and his filial piety for his mother. Even though the ground on which he divorced his wife was not found in the Seven Conditions, as long as parents were not happy with the wife, she had to be divorced.

Sun Qian was an official who lived through the Liu-Song 劉宋 (420-479), the Southern Qi and into the Liang 梁 (502-557) dynasty. He gained great reverence from Emperor Wu of Liang 梁武帝 (464-549, r. 502-549) and was appointed Grand Master for Splendid Happiness (*Guanglu dafu* 光祿大夫), an intimate imperial aide and adviser. Once, his cousin Lingqing 靈慶 was sick and lodged in his place. Sun Qian came back from a journey and asked about his health. Lingqing answered: “The drinks I had earlier were not in the right temperature, and I am still feeling thirsty now.” Sun Qian immediately divorced his wife.²³⁷ The ground on which Sun Qian divorced his wife was not found in the Seven Conditions either. Both tales were clearly not so much about divorce as about demonstrating and advocating filial piety and fraternal love.

Some divorce stories were meant to showcase the personal integrity of the husband, such as the case of the Western Han official Wang Ji.²³⁸ Wang Ji was studying the Classics in the capital Chang’an 長安 when he was young. His wife picked some dates from their neighbor’s tree that hung over to Wang’s courtyard and fed him those dates. When Wang found out that the

²³⁶ Xiao Zixian 蕭子顯 (489-537), *Nan Qi shu* 南齊書 (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1980), 39.679.

²³⁷ Yao Silian 姚思廉 (557-637) et al., *Liang shu* 梁書 (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1980), 53.773.

²³⁸ See Chapter 1 page 26 for more information on Wang Ji.

dates belonged to his neighbor, he immediately divorced his wife. His neighbors were shocked to hear it. The owner of the date tree cut down the tree to protest. Other neighbors urged Wang to bring back his wife.²³⁹ Wang Ji's divorce was fundamentally an act of displaying his integrity.

One of the historical reasons for the abundance of divorce cases that fell into the aforementioned two categories was likely because of the recruiting mechanism developed in the Han dynasty. This system is known as Filial and Incorrupt (*xiaolian* 孝廉) and Worthy and Excellent (*xianliang* 賢良), two "recommendation categories for men nominated by local officials to be considered at the capital for selection and appointment to government posts."²⁴⁰ Wang Ji's divorce could be viewed as a step toward the building of his lofty reputation as an exemplar of Confucian ideals. Later on, Wang Ji was recommended for posts both in the central government and a princely establishment as *xiaolian* and *xianliang*.²⁴¹ "[T]he behavior of women married to Confucian bureaucrats needed to correspond to the high ideals professed by their husbands."²⁴² Otherwise, they would risk being divorced.

Divorce was requested when one of the spouses was connected with a capital crime, such as treason, which demanded collective responsibilities of one's family members and relatives. Divorce petitions under such circumstances were often granted by the emperor. For example, the powerful Western Jin minister Jia Chong's 賈充 (217-282) former wife Lady Li 李氏 was

²³⁹ See Note 164.

²⁴⁰ Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, 242.

²⁴¹ Ban, *Han shu*, 72.3058-68.

²⁴² Kinney, *Representations of Childhood and Youth in Early China*, 141.

implicated in her father Li Feng's 李豐 (d. 255) crime and was exiled. Jia Chong divorced Lady Li and remarried another woman Guo Huai 郭槐 (237-296). Later, Lady Li was pardoned and returned to Jia Chong. Jia Chong, fearing his jealous second wife Guo Huai, did not accept Lady Li back into his house, but instead set up a separate residence for her.²⁴³ The persecution and execution of Guanqiu Jian 毌丘儉 (d. 256) in the mid third century caused a few more cases of divorce around this time. Another example concerns the deposition of a crown prince. When Prince Minhuai 愍懷太子 (278-300) was deposed, his father-in-law Wang Yan 王衍 (256-311) who was known for his pure conversation (*qingtai* 清談) and self-preservation, memorialized to request a divorce of his daughter from the prince 表請離婚.²⁴⁴ Wang Yan was later impeached for it. "Political expediency," in Hinsch's term, was certainly behind these divorce petitions.

Sometimes, such petitions were rejected if emperors decided to pardon the petitioners. The powerful Eastern Jin minister Yang Man's 羊曼 (274-328) son Yang Bi 羊贲 married Princess of Nanjun 南郡公主, daughter of Emperor Ming of Jin 晉明帝 (299-325, r. 323-325). His uncle Yang Dan 羊聃 was sentenced to death for his ruthless governance as the Governor of Luling 廬陵太守. Yang Bi pled to the emperor for a divorce from Princess of Nanjun, in order to release her from the collective legal culpability that he was going to face. The emperor

²⁴³ Fang, *Jin shu*, 40.1171-3.

²⁴⁴ Fang, *Jin shu*, 53.1460.

responded: “Although Yang Dan committed capital crimes, what does it have to do with Yang Bi? Divorce is not granted 聃雖極法, 於責何有? 其特不聽離婚!”²⁴⁵

Since marriage was a union of two families, parental interferences in marriage were often felt. Sometimes, divorce was compelled by the head of the family. Wang Xun 王珣 (349-400) was an Eastern Jin official and famous calligrapher, and was the grandson of the renowned Eastern Jin minister Wang Dao 王導 (276-339). He married Xie An’s 謝安 (320-385) niece. His younger brother Wang Min 王珣 (351-388) married Xie An’s daughter. The Wang brothers did not get along with the Xie cousins and were divorced by Xie An. Thereafter, the two greatest clans were on bad terms for quite some time.²⁴⁶

In the Northern Qi, Liu Di 劉逖 (525-573), a poet and grandson of the Northern Wei 北魏 (386-534) Chamberlain for Ceremonials (*taichang qing* 太常卿) Liu Fang 劉芳, befriended Zu Ting 祖珽 whose scholarship he admired. Liu Di then married his younger brother Liu Jun 劉俊 to Zu Ting’s daughter. Later, Zu Ting was ousted from the court, and suspected that Liu Di was behind his removal. After Zu Ting left the capital, Liu Di made his brother divorce Zu Ting’s daughter, and married him to the daughter of his newly made friend.²⁴⁷ The historian

²⁴⁵ Fang, *Jin shu*, 49.1384.

²⁴⁶ Fang, *Jin shu*, 79.2078.

²⁴⁷ Li Baiyao 李百藥 (564-647), *Bei Qi shu* 北齊書 (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1980), 45.616.

commented on how easily a shallow friendship was severed, and indeed how easily the marital bond, too, was severed.²⁴⁸

When a man married a princess, the patriarchal order was at the same time an imperial order. The following two examples could exemplify this point.

[Zhao Bofu's] son Zhao Qian married Princess of Haiyan, the fourth daughter of Emperor Wen (407-453, r. 424-453), and loved and respected her very much. Once, Zhao Qian hit the princess when they were playing together; this was reported to the emperor. Emperor Wen was angry and had [Zhao and the princess] divorced. Zhao Bofu was ashamed and was scared. He subsequently died of illness.²⁴⁹

子倩尚文帝第四女海鹽公主，甚愛重。倩嘗因言戲，以手擊主，事上聞，文帝怒，離婚。伯符慚懼，發病卒。

The *Song shu*'s 宋書 account of this story is different. Princess of Haiyan had an incestuous relationship with her half-brother Liu Jun 劉濬 (429-453), Prince of Shixing 始興王, before she was married to Zhao Qian. Later it was discovered by Zhao Qian. Infuriated, Zhao Qian attacked the princess with a torrent of abuse and went into a fight with her. The emperor heard about the domestic dispute, had the two divorced, and had the princess's mother killed.²⁵⁰

In another anecdote that was meant to epitomize the sense of superiority possessed by members of the great clans during the early medieval period, we also see how a marriage was arbitrarily terminated by an emperor.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁹ Li, *Nan shi*, 18.494.

²⁵⁰ Shen, *Song shu*, 46.1390.

[Wang Jun's] son Wang Cong was a student at the National University. He married Princess of Fanchang District, daughter of Prince of Shixing.²⁵¹ Wang Cong was not very bright, and was laughed at by other students. He was thus divorced. Wang Jun apologized to the prince. The prince responded: "It is the emperor's decision. I truly did not want that to happen." Wang Jun replied: "Your humble servant's great-grandfather was the grandson of Xie An. I do not need to rely on the marriage alliance with Your Highness to establish my family status."²⁵²

子琮為國子生，尚始興王女繁昌主。琮不慧，為學生所嗤，遂離婚。峻謝王，王曰：「此自上意，僕極不願如此。」峻曰：「下官曾祖是謝仁祖外孫，亦不藉殿下姻媾為門戶耳。」

Such imperial intervention in marriage was seen in North China as well. In the Northern Wei, Liu Hui 劉輝 (d. 525), son of the defected Liu-Song prince Liu Chang 劉昶 (436-497), married Grand Princess of Lanling 蘭陵長公主 (ca. 480-ca. 520), the older sister of Emperor Xuanwu 宣武帝 (483-515, r. 499-515). Liu Hui impregnated a maidservant. Greatly angered, the princess brutally killed the servant and her infant. Empress Dowager Ling 靈太后 (d. 528) had their marriage investigated and was told that they did not get along and "there was no way for them to be husband and wife 無可為夫婦之理," so she had Liu Hui and the princess divorced.²⁵³

When a married man was chosen to wed an imperial princess, a divorce of his current wife would ensue. The first extant record of this kind of divorce from the early medieval period concerns the Eastern Han figure Dou Xuan 竇玄 who is said to have such an extraordinary

²⁵¹ Prince of Shixing was the son of Xiao Dan 蕭憺 (d. 522) who was the half-brother of Emperor Wu of Liang.

²⁵² Li, *Nan shi*, 24.654.

²⁵³ Wei, *Wei shu*, 59.1312.

appearance that the emperor married a princess to him. His former wife wrote him a letter to bid farewell.²⁵⁴

The famous Eastern Jin calligrapher Wang Xianzhi's 王獻之 (344-386) first marriage with his cousin Xi Daomao 郗道茂 was forced to end when he was chosen to marry Princess of Yuyao 餘姚公主, the third daughter of Emperor Jianwen 簡文帝 (320-372, r. 371-372).²⁵⁵ When at his death bed, a Daoist priest asked Wang Xianzhi his regrets in life, he answered: "I cannot think of anything else—the only thing I cannot get out of my mind is my divorce from Lady Xi 不覺有餘事, 惟憶與郗家離婚."²⁵⁶

Since its introduction at the end of the Han dynasty, Buddhism gained a rising popularity among the people during the early medieval period. There were cases in which divorce was due to one spouse's conversion and decision to become a monk or nun. The *Lidai sanbao ji* 歷代三寶紀, a Buddhist work compiled by the Sui dynasty scholar Fei Changfang 費長房 (dates unknown) relates a story of a man from the reign of Emperor Ai of Jin 晉哀帝 (341-365, r. 361-365) who abandoned his fiancée and became a monk.

²⁵⁴ Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (557-641), *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1999), 30.533.

²⁵⁵ Princess of Yuyao's first husband was Huan Ji 桓濟, son of the famous Eastern Jin general Huan Wen 桓溫 (312-373). Huan Ji was exiled later, which caused the divorce between him and Princess of Yuyao, then Princess of Xin'an 新安公主. See Richard R. Mather, "Intermarriage as a Gauge of Family Status in the Southern Dynasties," in Albert E. Dien, ed., *State and Society in Early Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 213.

²⁵⁶ Liu, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 40.

[Seng] Du's secular name was Wang Xi, and Xuanzong was his style name. He hailed from Dongguan. He came from a lowly family, but he was naturally endowed with a handsome face. When he was sixteen years old, both his spirit and manners were matchless. He was good-natured and had a gentle temperament, and was admired by his neighbors. He lived alone with his mother and served her diligently, and was known for his filial piety. He was engaged with Yang Tiaohua, daughter of the official Yang Deshen from his Commandery. Yang Tiaohua was beautiful and versed in classics and histories. She was born in the same year as Du. When they were engaged, they were devoted to each other. Before the wedding took place, Tiaohua's mother died, and soon after her father died too. Du's mother also passed away. Du experienced the impermanent nature of the world and was suddenly enlightened. He then abandoned the world and joined the monastic order. He changed his name to Seng Du. ... Once mourning ended, Yang Tiaohua realized that she must observe the "three followings," and must not live alone. So she sent a letter to Du, and told him that hair and skin must not be destroyed and hurt, and ancestral sacrifices must not be abandoned. She asked Du to return to the worldly teachings [i.e. Confucianism] and change his lofty aims, and let his brilliant appearance shine in this prosperous and bright age.²⁵⁷

度本姓王，名晞，字玄宗，東莞人。雖少出孤微，而天姿秀發。至年十六歲，神情爽拔，卓爾異人。性善溫和，鄉鄰所羨。獨居事母，以孝節聞。登媵同郡楊德慎女。乃衣冠家族。女字苕華，容貌端正。又善墳史，與度同年。初造婚時，即相然許。未及成禮，苕華母亡，頃父又終，度母亦卒。度見世代無常，忽然感悟。即捨俗出家，改名僧度……苕華服畢，自惟有三從之義，無獨立之道，乃與度書，謂髮膚不可毀傷，宗祀不可頓廢，令其顧世教，改遠志，曜翹爍之姿，於盛明之世。

Along with the letter, Yang Tiaohua presented five poems to Seng Du. Seng Du responded to her letter and composed five poems to match hers. In his letter, he bid farewell to Yang Tiaohua and urged her to find a suitable mate. He said:

Farewell forever, Miss Yang! Our love of ten thousand years ends today. The year comes to an end soon, and time flies past without stopping for us. Those who study the Dao should take as their aim the "daily reduction," and those who carry on in society should make seizing the moment their task.²⁵⁸ You are young and virtuous, and you should soon

²⁵⁷ Dazangjing kanxinghui 大藏經刊行會, ed., *Dazheng xinxiu dazangjing* 大正新脩大藏經 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 1983), 49.73.

²⁵⁸ *Risun*, daily reduction, is a phrase from the *Laozi*: "The one who devotes himself to study [seeks] to accumulate [his knowledge] daily; the one who devotes himself to the Dao [seeks] to reduce [his action] daily. He reduces it and reduces it again, until he reaches to the point of doing nothing 為學日益，為道日

find someone whom you admire. Do not concern yourself with a monk and let your prime years fly by.²⁵⁹

楊氏，長別離矣。萬世因緣於今絕矣。歲聿云暮。時不我與。學道者當以日損為志。處世者當以及時為務。卿年德並茂。宜速有所慕。莫以道士經心而坐失盛年也。

Seng Du did not go back to Yang Tiaohua and to the worldly affairs. He transformed himself from a Confucian paragon who was known for his filial devotion to his mother to a devoted religious practitioner. “Religious devotion gave men comfort to resolve their agonizing experiences and also provided them with the justification to go beyond the earthly ideas of marital responsibility, which was basically Confucian familism.”²⁶⁰

Forced Divorce

There were a few types of forced divorce in the early medieval period. Women in a *liangdi* situation were sometimes forced into divorce when their husbands remarried, which will be discussed in detail later in the chapter. Married women whose husbands were chosen to wed princesses were forced to divorce, a situation that was covered above. Sometimes, married women were forced into the state of divorce so that they could be matched with soldiers, and soldiers’ daughters were forced out of marriage with non-soldier husbands in order to be married to men in the military.

損，損之又損之，以至於無為。” See Zhu Qianzhi 朱謙之, ed., *Laozi jiaoshi* 老子校釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 48.192.

²⁵⁹ Dazangjing kanxinghui, *Dazheng xinxiu dazangjing*, 49.73.

²⁶⁰ Lee, “Women and Marriage in the Period of Disunion,” 271.

Matching widows with soldiers was likely one of the policies enacted during the Cao-Wei period. It was reported that officials would force married women out of their marriages and register them as widows. When the phenomenon of forced divorce was revealed to Emperor Wen of Wei 魏文帝 (187-226, r. 220-226), he appeared to be shocked.

The *Wei lue* records: “Back when Du Ji (ca.161-ca.222) served in the prefectural administration, he was asked to register widows. At that time there were widows from other prefectures who already were remarried. But according to the registration their marriages were voided and they cried by the roadside. Du Ji only registered those whose husbands were dead, so the reported widows were fewer. After Zhao Yan succeeded Du Ji, he reported more widows. Emperor Wen asked Du Ji: ‘Why is the number of widows you reported then much smaller than now?’ Du Ji replied: ‘I only recorded widows whose husbands were dead. But Zhao Yan sent in those whose husbands are still alive.’” The emperor and those attending on him look at one another and were all shocked.²⁶¹

魏略曰：初畿在郡，被書錄寡婦。是時他郡或有已自相配嫁，依書皆錄奪，啼哭道路。畿但取寡者，故所送少；及趙儼代畿而所送多。文帝問畿：「前君所送何少，今何多也？」畿對曰：「臣前所錄皆亡者妻，今儼送生人婦也。」帝及左右顧而失色。

Jen-der Lee interprets what Zhao Yan did as a manipulation of court policies on chaste widows. She states, “such policy was sometimes manipulated by officials who forced married widows to return to widowhood in order to show a record of good local custom.”²⁶² The real reason behind the recording of widows in the Cao-Wei was likely because widows were to be given to soldiers. The historical records from the Northern Qi and the Sui testify to this speculation. For example, Emperor Wenxuan of Northern Qi 文宣帝 (529-559, r. 550-559) issued the following two edicts:

²⁶¹ Chen, *Sanguo zhi*, 16.497.

²⁶² Lee, “Women and Marriage in the Period of Disunion,” 192.

[In 555,] widows were to be dispatched to marry soldiers who were building the great wall.²⁶³

發寡婦以配軍士築長城。

[In 556,] widows were to be dispatched from Shandong, totaling two thousand six hundred, to marry soldiers. Twenty to thirty percent of the “widows” had [living] husbands and were taken [from the husbands] wrongfully.²⁶⁴

發山東寡婦二千六百人配軍士，有夫而濫奪者十二三。

Emperor Yang of Sui 隋煬帝 (569-618, r. 604-618) issued a similar edict in 617 which demanded that widows from Jiangdu marry soldiers 帝括江都子女寡婦以配從兵。²⁶⁵ During wartime, the concern for satisfying soldiers might have outweighed the promotion of widow chastity.

There might be a shortage of widows to be matched with soldiers, so Zhao Yan snatched married women with living husbands to increase the number of widows. Indeed, we are told that there was a general shortage of women to be married to soldiers at the time. Cao Pi's wife Empress Guo 郭皇后 (184-235) warned her clansmen not to take concubines. She said: “There are not enough women nowadays. They should be matched with generals and soldiers. You must not take the opportunity to take possession of them as concubines 今世婦女少，當配將士，不得

²⁶³ Li Yanshou, *Bei shi* 北史 (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1980), 7.252.

²⁶⁴ Li, *Bei shi*, 7.253.

²⁶⁵ Zheng Qiao 鄭樵 (1104-1162), *Tong zhi* 通志 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1987), 18.354-3.

因緣取以為妾也。”²⁶⁶ To meet the matchmaking task, some officials like Zhao Yan might have classified married women as widows so as to marry them to soldiers.

Another cause for forced divorce in the Cao-Wei period was the law that demanded that soldiers' daughters marry within the army, which was also to ensure that soldiers had a sufficient supply of mates. In 235, Emperor Ming of Wei 魏明帝 (206-239, r. 226-239) issued an edict which demanded that daughters from military families who were married to officials or commoners be taken away from their current husbands and remarried to soldiers 錄奪士女前已嫁為吏民妻者, 還以配士.²⁶⁷ The edict also stated that husbands [whose wives were taken from them to be remarried to soldiers] were allowed to ransom their wives with female slaves with age and appearance commensurate to their wives. The result was that rich families spent their entire fortune to buy slaves in order to ransom their wives, whereas poor families had to borrow money or buy slaves on credit. Also, the authorities selected the good-looking women and offered them to the imperial harem, and only married homely ones to soldiers. As a result, those soldiers who received wives were not necessarily happy with their women, and those who lost their wives were definitely unhappy. Because of this, Zhang Mao 張茂 (3rd c.) who was on the staff of the Heir Apparent, remonstrated with Emperor Ming to reconsider the law.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ Chen, *Sanguo zhi*, 5.165.

²⁶⁷ Chen, *Sanguo zhi*, 3.105.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Female-initiated Divorce

The Classics did not mention that women could divorce their husbands; instead they were indoctrinated to stay faithful to their husbands even after their deaths. However, the gap between classical teachings and the social reality is evident in the issue of divorce, since some women did take the initiative to divorce their husbands in the early medieval period.

Poverty was usually cited as the reason for a woman to divorce her husband. One famous example was from the Western Han. Zhu Maichen 朱買臣 (d. 115 BCE), a poor man who was fond of chanting poetry when he was gathering firewood, was asked for a divorce in his forties. He tried to keep the wife and said: “I will obtain wealth and honors when I turn fifty. I am already more than forty years old. You have suffered with me for long. When I am rich and powerful, I will pay you back for your efforts 我年五十當富貴, 今已四十餘矣, 女苦日久, 待我富貴, 報女功.”²⁶⁹ The wife was infuriated and said: “People such as you die of starvation in a ditch; how can you ever have wealth and honors 如公等終餓死溝中耳, 何能富貴!”²⁷⁰ Wang Huan 王歡, a man from the Former Yan State 前燕 (337-370), lived contentedly as a poor scholar. But his wife was not content with their life of poverty. She burnt his books and asked permission to marry someone else 焚毀其書而求改嫁. Wang Huan tried to dissuade her by

²⁶⁹ Ban, *Han shu*, 64.2791. Dull’s translation, see his “Marriage and Divorce in Han China,” in Buxbaum, *Chinese Family Law and Social Change in Historical and Comparative Perspective*, 61.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

saying, “Have you not heard about Zhu Maichen’s wife?”²⁷¹ Both wives left their impoverished husband and remarried.

Jealousy sometimes would drive the wife away from her husband. Lady Xi 郝氏 was the wife of the Eastern Jin figure Xie Miao 謝邈 (d. ca. 400), Governor of Wuxing 吳興太守. She was said to be very jealous. When Xie took a concubine, she was resentful and discontent (*yuandui* 怨懟), and sent Xie a letter to break up (*yushu gaojue* 與書告絕).²⁷² Xie doubted that the letter was from the hand of a woman and suspected that his student Qiu Xuanda 仇玄達 penned it for her. Xie scolded Qiu, which angered Qiu. Qiu joined the force of the rebel Sun En 孫恩 (d. 402) that eventually killed Xie Miao and his brothers and exterminated Xie’s entire family.²⁷³

Concluding Remark

Divorce was a common phenomenon in the early medieval period. It took place at all levels of the society, and could be initiated by both men and women. As far as we can tell, male-initiated divorce cases greatly outnumbered those initiated by women.

²⁷¹ Fang, *Jin shu*, 91.2366.

²⁷² It is hard to tell whether Lady Xie formally divorced Xie Miao, and the letter she sent him was a divorce letter; or she simply left him and returned to her parents’ home, and the letter was just a farewell letter. The divorce procedure prescribed in the ritual Classics applies to men divorcing their wives. Ritual Classics are silent about under what circumstances a woman might divorce her husband, and what the procedure would be.

²⁷³ Fang, *Jin shu*, 79.2089.

Reasons for divorce varied greatly from one case to another. The Seven Conditions were sometimes invoked or implied, but many divorce cases had no direct relation to the classical prescriptions on divorce. Men might divorce women for reasons such as career advancement, political opportunism, or financial improvement. Women might divorce men for a better material life or a better marriage companion. In this sense, divorce in the early medieval period did not differ much from that in the earlier times.

During the period from the end of the Han empire to the unification of China under the Sui, the unstable social and political environments propelled the emergence of some new phenomena in social and familial lives. The two-principal-wife (*liangdi*) anomaly was one of the new situations in marriage life, and was a special case for divorce. The next section will be devoted to the discussion of *liangdi* in the context of divorce.

II. Liangdi: A Thorny Case of Divorce

Introduction

Early medieval China saw the rise and development of a new social phenomenon, namely, *liangdi*. *Liangdi* was a situation in which a man kept two women concurrently as his principal wives. It was considered a problem because it violated the prescriptions in the Classics that governed the man-woman relationship, and gave rise to confusion in funeral and mourning rituals and to disputes over inheritance of official titles and family property. Although it must have occurred in early China, it did not become a noticeable social phenomenon until the beginning of the early medieval period. From the mid third century on, writings on *liangdi* started to appear in masters' treatises (*zishu* 子書) and dynastic histories, and discussions of it took place both on the state and individual levels.

There were a number of reasons that could lead to the occurrence of a *liangdi* situation. Many *liangdi* cases were the result of the social mobility brought about by war. Throughout the early medieval period, except for the brief unification under the Western Jin, China was divided. *Liangdi* cases occasioned by the political segregation between north and south were many. Other reasons included imperial bestowing of wives on married subjects and avoidance of legal collective responsibilities.

There were mainly two ways of handling a *liangdi* situation. In the majority *liangdi* cases, one of the two wives was given a separate residence away from the residence of her husband and the other principal wife. Between the two women, the one who was less connected politically and socially was usually the one who was made to live in a separate residence along

with her children. Jia Chong was the first in record to place one of his wives in a separate home. Another way of dealing with the *liangdi* situation was to register both women as one's principal wives with the government and have them both live under the same roof with the husband.

Judging from the extant historical records, there seems to be a regional difference between these two modes of managing a *liangdi* situation. The first method—setting up a separate residence—was employed across China, but the second—registering two women as one's principal wives—was rarely seen in the northern society. Cases of official registration for both wives were all from the south. This geographical difference may be explained by the differing attitudes toward concubines and their offspring in the northern and southern societies.

Study of *liangdi* is not only relevant to but also necessary for the discussion of divorce in early medieval China. *Liangdi* was a thorny case of divorce, because at the core of the debates and discussions of this phenomenon was the question of how to define the marital status of those women. Only when one of the women was considered a divorced wife or a concubine, the *liangdi* dilemma would be considered solved. In other words, the matter of *liangdi* was closely related to issues of divorce, and yet the controversy of it illustrated the ambiguity of the definition of divorce in early medieval China.

The discussions and debates on *liangdi* reveal to us that the understanding of what constituted a divorce underwent some changes in history. The Classics prescribed Seven Conditions under which a man could divorce his wife. These conditions were either related to a woman's biology or her morality. However, in many *liangdi* cases, it was usually the impersonal geopolitical reasons that caused a married couple to physically separate from each other. In order

to solve the *liangdi* dilemma, some scholar-officials argued that physical separation be considered a legitimate reason for divorce.

Moreover, physical separation caused by geo-political reasons seemed to have justified women's divorcing their husbands. Justification for women to divorce their husbands can be seen as a new addition to the traditional prescription of divorce in the Classics. The Seven Conditions were solely applied to wives, and the Classics were silent on women's right to divorce men. However, in the *liangdi* debates, male scholars and officials argued that women, just like their male counterparts, could divorce their husbands when they were physically separated from their husbands. Historical records did document divorces initiated by women, but we rarely see men voicing and theorizing the justification of female-initiated divorces as much as in the *liangdi* debates.

Liangdi Cases: A Social Problem in the Third Century

The last decades of the Eastern Han dynasty were a chaotic time. In a ballad praising the Eastern Han general Huangfu Song 皇甫嵩 (?-195), who participated in quelling the Yellow Turban (黃巾 *huangjin*) Rebellion, we see the following lines:

| | |
|---|----------|
| The world is in a great chaos; markets turn into ruins. | 天下大亂兮市為墟 |
| Mothers cannot protect their children; wives lose their husbands. | 母不保子兮妻失夫 |
| Thanks to Huangfu, one is able to live peacefully again. ²⁷⁴ | 賴得皇甫兮復安居 |

²⁷⁴ Fan, *Hou Han shu*, 71.2302.

Against this backdrop occurred a few new situations concerning the relationship between husband and wife, among which the phenomenon of *liangdi* was one that was most noteworthy.

Although there are sporadic *liangdi* cases from the pre-Han period, it was not until toward the end of the second century when *liangdi* started to emerge as a new social phenomenon.²⁷⁵ One of the first *liangdi* instances concerns Qin Yilu 秦宜祿 (?-199), a subordinate of the warlord Lü Bu 呂布 (?-199) who sent Qin as an emissary to another warlord, Yuan Shu 袁術 (155-199). Impressed by Qin, Yuan Shu married a clanswoman of the Han royal family to Qin, disregarding the fact that he was already married to a woman Lady Du 杜氏. As a result, Lady Du was left behind with her son Qin Lang 秦朗 (fl. 3rd c.) in Xiapi 下邳.²⁷⁶ Though for a period of time Qin Yilu kept both Lady Du and his new wife as his principal wives, this

²⁷⁵ The only extant *liangdi* story prior to the Eastern Han comes from the Spring and Autumn period. Prince Chong'er 重耳 (697-628 BCE) fled his home state Jin 晉 and took refuge in the state of Zhai 翟 where he and his loyal follower Zhao Shuai 趙衰 (?-622 BCE) were given a pair of sisters as their wives. The older sister Shu Wei 叔猥 became Zhao Shuai's wife. After years of exile Chong'er returned home and became Duke Wen of Jin 晉文公. He married his own daughter Zhaoji 趙姬 to Zhao Shuai. Once Zhaoji found out that Zhao Shuai's first wife Shu Wei still remained in the Zhai, she urged Zhao Shuai to bring Shu Wei back to the Jin and made Shu Wei the principal wife. Zhaoji, though herself a princess, willingly took the lower position of a concubine. See *Zuozhuan zhushu* 左傳註疏, 15.254b-255a.

In later discussions of the *liangdi* phenomenon, Zhaoji and Shu Wei were considered Zhao Shuai's *liangdi* before Zhaoji willingly gave up on the title of the principal wife and assumed the status of a concubine. Zhaoji was hence praised for having handled the abnormal *liangdi* situation very gracefully.

The very first *liangdi* story from the Eastern Han period dates to the first half of the second century. While he was a prefect of Shu 蜀 prior to the year 140, Huang Chang 黃昌 (fl. 140) reconnected with his first wife with whom he had lost contact. He immediately made her the principal wife and put the second wife below her 得所失婦, 便為正室, 使後婦下之. The story was recorded in Ying Shao's *Fengsu tongyi*, see Yan, *Quan Hou Han wen*, 38.682b. Huang Chang was later praised for having properly handled a *liangdi* problem.

²⁷⁶ This story was recorded in the *Weishi chunqiu*, and cited in Pei Songzhi's commentary to Chen Shou's *Sanguo zhi*, see Chen, *Sanguo zhi*, 3.100.

liangdi story went largely unnoticed. But another *liangdi* story from the same period seems to have been circulated locally and remembered for decades. It happened to an otherwise unknown figure Zheng Ziqun 鄭子群 (fl. 2nd c.) who was from the same hometown as the Western Jin scholar Xun Xu 荀勗 (?-289). In the mid-3rd century when Xun Xu responded to Zhang Hua's 張華 (232-300) invitation to discuss a reality-inspired hypothetical *liangdi* scenario, he cited Zheng's instance.²⁷⁷ During the Lü Bu rebellion Zheng Ziqun was separated from his wife and subsequently lost contact with her. Not knowing whether she was still alive, Zheng married another woman. After the turmoil was over, Zheng's first wife returned home and Zheng treated both women as his principal wives (*erfei bingcun* 二妃並存).²⁷⁸

The emergence of the *liangdi* cases at the end of the Eastern Han dynasty was clearly a result of the tumultuous social environment of the times. The chaotic social reality only deteriorated after the Han Empire collapsed and China entered a half-century long period of war, known as the Three Kingdoms, during which *liangdi* cases experienced a surge. The social instability brought about by military campaigns and the geographical segregation caused by the division of three political powers were the chief reasons why the phenomenon of *liangdi* continued and intensified during this politically and socially turbulent period.

²⁷⁷ Although the *liangdi* phenomenon started to occur in the second century, it was not openly discussed until the third century. The debate on the hypothetical *liangdi* situation initiated by Zhang Hua took place between 265 and 274. It will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

²⁷⁸ Fang, *Jin shu*, 20.640.

Among the six recorded third-century *liangdi* cases, two of them (Wu Gang 吳綱 and Wang Bi 王毖) were the result of cross-regional travels between rival states; two (Liu Zhongwu 劉仲武 and Jia Chong) were the result of political purges of Cao-Wei officials by Sima Shi 司馬師 (208-255), an important member of the Sima family who greatly facilitated the founding of the Western Jin dynasty; one case was the result of the Western Jin imperial bestowal of a wife on a defected Wu subject Zhu 朱. The circumstances of the last *liangdi* case, that of Cheng Liang's 程諒 (3rd c.), remain unclear. Below is the list of the six *liangdi* cases from the third century.

Case 1: Wu Gang (3rd c.)

The Wei official Wu Gang, Aide in Campaign in the South, defected to the Wu state. His wife and children remained in the Central Kingdom. He remarried in the Wu. After the Wu was defeated, Wu Gang returned to the north, together with his second wife and children. Both wives cohabited in his household.²⁷⁹

魏征東長史吳綱亡入吳，妻子留在中國，於吳更娶。吳亡，綱與後妻并子俱還，二婦並存。

Case 2: Wang Bi (3rd c.)

In the first year of the Taikang 太康 (280-289) reign, Sima Mao, Prince of Dongping, sent in a memorial in which he asked: “My Administrator Wang Chang’s father Wang Bi originally lived in Changsha and had a wife Xi.”²⁸⁰ At the end of the Han, Wang Bi was

²⁷⁹ Du, *Tong dian*, 68.1984-5. However, the first mentioning of the Wu Gang case is found in the *Yuanzi zhenglun* 袁子正論, a treatise by the Western Jin official Yuan Zhun 袁準 (ca. 237-ca.316).

²⁸⁰ *Qixi* 妻息 could mean wife and child(ren) instead of wife whose name is Xi.

sent to the Central Kingdom as emissary. At the time the Wu rebelled. Wang Bi [stayed on and] served the Wei as the Gentlemen of Palace Gate. He was separated from his former wife Xi, and remarried Wang Chang's mother. Now the area south of the Yangzi River is unified. Wang Chang heard that his former mother had been long dead, and hastily pled for a discussion [of her status]."²⁸¹

太康元年，東平王楙上言，相王昌父毖，本居長沙，有妻息，漢末使入中國，值吳叛，仕魏為黃門郎，與前妻息死生隔絕，更娶昌母。今江表一統，昌聞前母久喪，言疾求平議。

Case 3: Jia Chong (217-282)

[Jia] Chong's former wife Lady Li was a beautiful, refined, talented and virtuous woman. She bore two daughters [Jia] Bao and [Jia] Yu. Bao was also known as Quan, and Yu, as Jun. When her father [Li] Feng was executed, Lady Li was sent into exile. [Jia Chong] later married the daughter of Guo Pei, Governor of Chengyang. Lady Guo was none other than Lady of Guangcheng.²⁸²

充前妻李氏淑美有才行，生二女褒、裕，褒一名荃，裕一名浚。父豐誅，李氏坐流徙。後娶城陽太守郭配女，即廣城君也。

Case 4: Liu Zhongwu (3rd c.)

Liu Zhongwu from Pei first married Lady Guanqiu who gave birth to two sons Zhengshu and Zhengze. When Guanqiu Jian (d. 255) failed in his revolt, Zhongwu divorced his wife and married Lady Wang who gave birth to Tao. Zhongwu set up a separate residence for Lady Guanqiu and did not cut off relation with her. After Lady Guanqiu died, Zhengshu requested a joint burial [with his father], which was denied by Tao. Zhengshu kept his mourning gown and appealed to the court everywhere. He wept blood

²⁸¹ Fang, *Jin shu*, 20.635.

²⁸² Fang, *Jin shu*, 40.1171.

and became emaciated. His hemp covering over the mourning gown was ragged. His request was not gratified. It went on for more than several decades until he died.²⁸³

是時，沛國劉仲武先娶毋丘氏，生子正舒、正則二人。毋丘儉反敗，仲武出其妻，娶王氏，生陶，仲武為毋丘氏別舍而不告絕。及毋丘氏卒，正舒求祔葬焉，而陶不許。舒不釋服，訟於上下，泣血露骨，縗裳綴絡，數十年弗得從，以至死亡。

Case 5: A certain Zhu (3rd c.)

A certain Zhu in the Wu Kingdom married Lady Chen and had a son Dongbo. After Zhu surrendered to the Jin, the Jin bestowed on him another wife with whom he had a son Suibo. During the Taikang reign (280-289), Zhu had already died, and Suibo returned to the clan [in the south] with his mother.²⁸⁴ The two brothers were loving and respectful toward one another. The two mothers were acting according to the order of their entering the Zhu household. It was a harmonious scene in which everyone was on very intimate terms with each other. When the two women died, both brothers observed mourning rituals for the other's mother. Gentlemen considered them worthy.²⁸⁵

時吳國朱某娶妻陳氏，生子東伯。入晉，晉賜妻某氏，生子綏伯。太康之中，某已亡，綏伯將母以歸邦族，兄弟交愛敬之道，二母篤先後之序，雍雍人無間焉。及其終也，二子交相為服，君子以為賢。

Case 6: Cheng Liang (3rd c.)

²⁸³ Fang, *Jin shu*, 20.639.

²⁸⁴ Zhu might have been a Wu official who defected to the Western Jin before his home state was subjugated by the Western Jin in the year 280. The fact that Zhu was given a wife by the rival state shows that Zhu might have been someone who was of use to the Western Jin, and very likely he was a defector. It cannot be ascertained when Zhu died, but by the end of 280s his son born of his northern wife was already an adult. It shows that Zhu must have gone to the north prior to the unification of China in 280.

²⁸⁵ Fang, *Jin shu*, 20.639.

The Governor of Anfeng already had a wife. Later he married again, whereupon he established two principal wives. After the first wife died, the son Xun from his second wife was confused about the correct mourning rituals [for his father's first wife].²⁸⁶

安豐太守程諒先已有妻，後又娶，遂立二嫡。前妻亡，後妻子勳疑所服。

As is shown from cases cited above, social mobility and segregation brought about by constant war was definitely the chief reason for causing *liangdi* dilemmas, though it was not the only cause. There were other factors that might have contributed to the recurrence of this ritual anomaly. As Xu Meng 許猛, an active participant in the debate on Wang Bi's *liangdi* case, pointed out that the Separation by Law (*fajue* 法絕) was one of the three legitimate ways of severing the marital bond between couples, hence creating the possibility of *liangdi*.²⁸⁷ Both Jia Chong and Liu Zhongwu can be seen as cases of *fajue*.

Liu Zhongwu's first wife Lady Guanqiu was related to Guanqiu Jian, a Cao-Wei general. Guanqiu Jian was killed in a failed revolt against the most powerful Cao-Wei minister Sima Shi in 255. As a consequence, his family was almost wiped out by Sima Shi. Guanqiu Jian's daughter-in-law Lady Xun 荀氏 was supposed to be executed. She was saved by her cousin Xun Yi 荀顗 (?-274) who pled to the emperor through Sima Shi, a relative of his by marriage. The

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁷ “There are three manners of divorce. First, Separation by Breaking the Bond, which was the violation of one of the Seven Conditions; second, Separation by Law, which was the violation of imperial law; and third, Separation by Distance, which was the separation caused by two people being at two locations 絕有三道，有義絕者，為犯七出也。有法絕者，以王法絕。有地絕者，以殊域而絕。” See Du, *Tong dian*, 89.2442.

Both *fajue* and *dijue* were new additions to the Seven Conditions prescribed in ritual Classics. This will be explained in detail later in the chapter.

emperor granted a divorce to Lady Xun, so she was able to separate herself from the Guanqiu family. According to the Wei legal code, a woman, regardless of her marital status, would be implicated in a treason committed by members of her birth family.²⁸⁸ Liu Zhongwu was related to Guanqiu family by marriage. In order to avoid the legal implication, he divorced his wife Lady Guanqiu.²⁸⁹

The year before Guanqiu Jian died, his friend Li Feng participated in a palace coup against Sima Shi and was killed by the latter. As his daughter, Jia Chong's wife Lady Li was sent to exile. Jia Chong remarried Guo Huai, who was known for her extremely jealous temperament. Twelve years later when Emperor Wu of Jin assumed the throne, he granted a general amnesty. As a result, Lady Li was pardoned and returned home. Emperor Wu issued a special edict to allow Jia Chong to establish both Li and Guo as his principal wives (*zhi zuoyou furen* 置左右夫人). It infuriated Guo Huai. Out of fear for Guo, Jia Chong politely turned down the emperor's offer. At the time, Lady Li's daughter Jia Quan 賈荃 was the consort of the prince Sima You 司馬攸 (248-283). She desperately urged her father to divorce Guo Huai and bring back her own mother, but Jia Chong refused to do so. Later, when Guo Huai's daughter became the consort of

²⁸⁸ “When Shima Shi was the grand counsel, the Wei law punished married women whose birth families had committed capital crimes 及景帝輔政，是時魏法，犯大逆者誅及已出之女。” Fang, *Jin shu*, 20.926. Sima Shi was the *de facto* ruler of the Cao-Wei state from 251 to 255.

²⁸⁹ Liu Zhongwu's wife Lady Guanqiu was probably the daughter of Lady Xun, and the granddaughter of Guanqiu Jian.

the crown prince, the emperor issued an edict prohibiting wives in cases such as Lady Li's from being brought back into their husbands' homes.²⁹⁰

The *Jin shu* points out that *liangdi* cases like that of the Lady Li's were plenty around that time: "Cases like this one are many, and officials in charge of rites cannot make a ruling. Although the second wife is not divorced, one often sets up a separate residence and communicates with her stealthily 此例既多, 質之禮官, 俱不能決. 雖不遣後妻, 多異居私通"²⁹¹ Indeed, Jia Chong built a home for Lady Li in the Yongnian Ward (*Yongnian li* 永年里), though he reportedly never visited her there.²⁹² The above-mentioned Liu Zhongwu also made a separate residence for Lady Guanqiu after he divorced her for political reasons, but did not sever his relation with her. The man in the hypothetical scenario that Zhang Hua designed in his discussion of the *liangdi* phenomenon also established a separate residence for one of his principal wives and communicated with her secretly 匿不說有乙, 居家如二嫡.²⁹³ Setting up a separate residence for one of the principal wives seemed to have been practiced in the north in the fifth and sixth centuries. For example, when the Northern Qi historian Wei Shou 魏收 (507-

²⁹⁰ Fang, *Jin shu*, 40.1171-2.

²⁹¹ Fang, *Jin shu*, 40.1172.

²⁹² *Ibid.*

²⁹³ Fang, *Jin shu*, 20.640.

572) was granted another wife by the emperor, his contemporaries compared him to Jia Chong 時人比之賈充置左右夫人。²⁹⁴

Liangdi Cases from the Period of North/South Divide

Compared with the third century, *liangdi* cases reported from the period of north/south divide seem to have been fewer, but we have reasons to believe that in reality there were many more *liangdi* cases than reported. In one comment on an Eastern Jin *liangdi* case, we are told that “there have been many cases like this since war and turmoil broke out 喪亂以來, 多有此比。”²⁹⁵ And yet, public discussions on the *liangdi* phenomenon certainly subsided after the third century. Except for one public discussion carried out among the staff members of a military commander of the Eastern Jin, no official discussions and debates on the *liangdi* phenomenon are reported from North China. When *liangdi* cases were mentioned in histories, the circumstances under which the phenomenon occurred were usually omitted.

The only recorded *liangdi* case in the south took place in the 340s. This time, a woman was separated from her husband due to banditry in her hometown.

²⁹⁴ Li, *Bei shi*, 56.2032.

Other examples include: 1), Wang Su. After he defected to the Northern Wei, he married Princess of Chenliu 陳留長公主. His first wife Lady Xie 謝氏 from the south came to join him and was turned away by the princess. Wang Su had a Buddhist monastery called Zhengjue Nunnery 正覺寺 built to house Lady Xie. The story of Wang Su and his two wives will be discussed in great detail later in this chapter; 2), Li Hongzhi 李洪之 (?-ca. 492). Li was a famous Northern Wei official, see discussion of his case later in the chapter; 3), Duan Shao 段韶 (?-571). Duan was one of the founding fathers of the Northern Qi. He took Lady Huangfu 皇甫氏 who was originally the wife of a rebel Yuan Yu 元瑀 and was confiscated as a government maidservant because of her husband’s rebellion. Duan set up a separate residence for Lady Huangfu and treated her as if she was the principal wife. See Li, *Bei shi*, 54.1963.

²⁹⁵ Du, *Tong dian*, 89.2445.

In the second year of the Xiankang reign (336), Li Fan's elder sister from Lingling [in present day Hunan province] was married to Chen Shen of Nanping Commandery [in present day Hubei province]. She bore four sons. Later, she encountered bandits, and surrendered herself to the bandits in order to save her mother-in-law. The bandits abducted her. Chen Shen later married Lady Yan who bore three sons. Later, Li Fan received a message from his sister and went to bring her back to Chen Shen. Chen Shen registered both wives [as principal wives].²⁹⁶

咸康二年，零陵李繁姊先適南平郡陳詵為妻，產四子而遭賊。姊投身於賊，請活姑命，賊略將姊去。詵更娶嚴氏，生三子。繁後得姊消息，往迎還詵，詵籍注領二妻。

This *liangdi* dilemma was submitted to the famous Eastern Jin General and Regional Inspector Yu Liang 庾亮 (289-340) for judgment. Yu Liang presided over the discussion, and the opinions from four of his staff members were recorded in the *Tong dian*.

Reports of *liangdi* cases from the Northern Dynasties usually did not state the conditions under which the phenomenon took place, but rather stressed the equal marital status that both wives enjoyed and the competition between their offspring over the inheritance. Below are two instances from the Northern Wei in the fifth century.

Liu Dingguo (d. 484) first married Lady Liu from Hedong. She gave birth to a son, Liu Anbao. Later, he took the daughter of Lu Dushi from Fanyang as his wife. She bore a son Liu Xinzhi (d. 511). Both wives were from old prominent families; therefore no distinction was made between a principal wife and a concubine. After Liu Dingguo died, the two sons fought for the inheritance of their father's title. Chief Administrator Li Chong was a court favorite at the time, and was a relative of Lu Dushi's son Lu Yuan by marriage. Li Chong therefore tried everything to help [Liu Xinzhi]. As a result, Liu Xinzhi inherited his father's title and was selected to marry a princess, and held prominent posts. Liu Anbao, on the other hand, sank into poverty and suffered from hunger and cold.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁶ Fang, *Jin shu*, 20.642.

²⁹⁷ Wei, *Wei shu*, 40.909.

初，定國娶河東柳氏，生子安保，後納范陽盧度世女，生昕之。二室俱為舊族而嫡妾不分。定國亡後，兩子爭襲父爵。僕射李沖有寵於時，與度世子淵婚親相好。沖遂左右申助，昕之由是承爵尚主，職位赫奕。安保沉廢貧賤，不免飢寒。

When Li Hongzhi (d. ca. 492) was still lowly and unknown, his wife, Lady Zhang helped him manage his property. From poor to rich, she had contributed greatly. They had close to ten children together.²⁹⁸ Later, Li Hongzhi married Lady Liu who was Liu Fang's (453-513) cousin. Li Hongzhi admired and respected her, and distanced himself from Lady Zhang. He set up two homes, one for each of them, but he favored Lady Liu. As a result, his wives were jealous and antagonistic toward each other. They filed lawsuits against one another. The two wives and their respective children treated the other like enemies. When [Li Hongzhi] went to govern Xizhou, he brought Lady Liu with him.²⁹⁹

初，洪之微時，妻張氏助洪之經營資產，自貧至貴，多所補益，有男女幾十人。洪之後得劉氏，劉芳從妹。洪之欽重，而疏薄張氏，為兩宅別居，偏厚劉室。由是二妻妬競，互相訟詛，兩宅母子，往來如讎。及莅西州，以劉自隨。

To sum up, *liangdi* was a new problem after the Han empire fell, and received much attention in the late third and early fourth century. Physical separation of married couples due to social upheaval and unrest was the main cause for *liangdi*. Imperial intervention with married subjects and avoidance of collective legal implication were also reasons for bringing about a *liangdi* situation.

When caught in a *liangdi* predicament, the typical way of dealing with it was to establish a separate home for one of the two wives. A much less common method was to recognize both wives as one's principal wives and officially register them as such with the government. Judging from the cases included in this chapter, the majority of *liangdi* cases were settled with the first

²⁹⁸ Instead of rendering *jishi* 幾十 as “several dozen,” I take *ji* as to mean “close to, up to.”

²⁹⁹ Wei, *Wei shu*, 89.1919.

method. The second method was only reported once in historical writings. It might have been a single instance and might not have been representative at all. Setting up separate homes for two wives, however, proved to be an ineffective and troublesome method. Many cases show the familial battles fought between two wives and their children for funeral rites and rights of inheritance.

III. A Case Study of Liangdi: Wang Su and His Two Wives

Wang Su's story exemplifies a typical *liangdi* situation during the period of Northern and Southern Dynasties when defections and surrenders happened frequently. On the one hand, Wang's *liangdi* case showcases the domestic power relation in an elite marriage in northern China. On the other hand, it reflects the ongoing debates between northerners and southerners on matters of cultural superiority and political legitimacy. The circulation and preservation of such a *liangdi* story, I argue, should be understood in connection with the discourse on cultural supremacy and political orthodoxy among the northerners.

Wang Su was the descendent of the renowned Eastern Jin Prime Minister Wang Dao and a member of the illustrious Wang clan from Langya 琅琊. He served the Southern Qi court, but fled the south and defected to the Northern Wei after his father and brothers were executed by the Southern Qi emperor Xiao Ze 蕭蹟 (440-493, r. 482-493) in the year 493. In his flight to the north, he left behind his wife Lady Xie 謝氏 and three young children. When he arrived in Luoyang, the newly established capital of the Northern Wei, he was welcomed with open arms by Emperor Xiaowen 孝文帝 (467-499, r. 471-499), who was very sympathetic to Wang Su's family tragedy.³⁰⁰ Emperor Xiaowen very much admired Wang Su's learning and consulted him on many aspects of the construction of the new capital.³⁰¹ Wang Su was also rewarded for his

³⁰⁰ The Northern Wei moved its capital from Pingcheng 平城 to Luoyang in 493.

³⁰¹ Yang Xuanzhi, *A Record of Buddhist Monasteries in Lo-yang* [Hereafter *A Record*], translated by Yit'ung Wang 王伊同 (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 139.

successful military campaigns against the southern state and held a series of prominent positions in the Northern Wei court. In 499, five years into Wang Su's defection to the north, Emperor Xiaowen died. In his last edict, he appointed Wang Su Director of the Department of State Affairs (*Shangshu ling* 尚書令) and made him one of the six regents (*liufu* 六輔) who were to assist Emperor Xiaowen's son, the new Northern Wei ruler Emperor Xuanwu 宣武帝 (483-515, r. 499-515).

Later in 499, Emperor Xuanwu married Grand Princess of Chenliu 陳留長公主 to Wang Su.³⁰² The imperial dowry consisted of two hundred thousand strings of cash and three thousand bolts of silk 賜錢二十萬, 帛三千匹.³⁰³ Grand Princess of Chenliu was Emperor Xuanwu's aunt and the newly deceased Emperor Xiaowen's sixth younger sister. She was formerly known as Grand Princess of Pengcheng 彭城長公主 while she was married to Liu Chengxu 劉承緒 (after 465-before 497), son of the Liu-Song prince Liu Chang 劉昶 (436-497) who defected to the Northern Wei in 465.³⁰⁴ When Liu Chang fled the south, he abandoned his mother and wife and

Note: for the sake of consistency, all Wade-Giles romanizations in Wang's translation are converted to *pinyin* romanizations.

For the Chinese text, see Fan Xiangyong 范祥雍 (1913-1993), *Luoyang qielan ji jiaozhu* 洛陽伽藍記校註 (Shanghai: Shanghaiguji, 1978).

³⁰² The exact date of Wang Su's marriage with Grand Princess of Chenliu remains unknown. It probably was between the death of Emperor Xiaowen in the fourth month of 499 and Wang Su's departure from the capital to Shouchun 壽春 in the first month of 500.

³⁰³ Wei, *Wei shu*, 63.1410.

³⁰⁴ Liu Chengxu's exact birth and death years are unknown. He was born after his father Liu Chang defected to the Northern Wei in 465 and died before Liu Chang who passed away in 497.

brought with him only his favorite concubine.³⁰⁵ After Liu Chang arrived in the north, he was received with high respect by the Northern Wei ruler and was granted three Northern Wei princesses consecutively as his wives.³⁰⁶ Liu Chengxu was born of one of the princesses.³⁰⁷

Before her marriage in 499, Grand Princess of Pengcheng had been widowed for a number of years. Her husband Liu Chengxu had a disabling disease (*wang ji* 尪疾) and died young. While she was a widow, Empress Feng 馮 (?-499) forcefully arranged a marriage between Grand Princess of Pengcheng and her brother Feng Su 馮夙. Grand Princess of Pengcheng refused the empress' marriage plan, but to no avail. At the time, Empress Feng was involved in a series of affairs with several men in court while Emperor Xiaowen was campaigning outside Luoyang. When her wedding date drew nearer, Grand Princess of Pengcheng sneaked out of the imperial palace and fled to Xuanhu 懸瓠 where Emperor Xiaowen was stationed. She reported Empress Feng's adultery to her brother and asked the emperor to terminate her marriage alliance with Feng Su. This time, she succeeded. Soon Empress Feng's title was recalled and she was ordered to die by Emperor Xiaowen.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁵ Shen, *Song shu*, 72.1869.

³⁰⁶ Wei, *Wei shu*, 59.1307-8.

³⁰⁷ “[Liu] Chengxu was the eldest son born of [Liu] Chang's principal wife who was a princess. When young, he became lamed. He married Grand Princess of Pengcheng, the younger sister of Gaozu (i.e. Emperor Xiaowen), and held the position of Commandant-escort. He died before [Liu] Chang and was granted a posthumous title of Supernumerary Attendant-in-ordinary 昶適子承緒, 主所生也. 少而尪疾. 尚高祖妹彭城長公主, 為駙馬都尉. 先昶卒, 贈員外常侍.” Wei, *Wei shu*, 59.1311.

³⁰⁸ Wei, *Wei shu*, 13.333.

Wang Su married Grand Princess of Pengcheng, now Grand Princess of Chenliu, sometime in the second half of the year 499. In the first month of 500, Wang Su went on another military campaign in Shoushun 壽春. He was stationed in Shouchun until he died at his post there in 501. Wang Su's marriage with Grand Princess of Chenliu lasted for less than two years.³⁰⁹ Not only was their marriage short-lived, but during the brief marriage Wang Su was mostly away from Grand Princess of Chenliu. This account in the *Wei shu* is inconsistent with the account of Wang Su in the *History of Southern Qi* (*Nan Qi shu* 南齊書) compiled in the early sixth century by the imperial clansman Xiao Zixian 蕭子顯 (489-537). The *Nan Qi shu* recounts:

When [Wang] Su first absconded to the barbarians, he spoke of how his family had been executed. [Yuan] Hong [i.e. Emperor Xiaowen of the Northern Wei] wept for him and married his sixth younger sister—the illegitimate “Princess of Pengcheng”—[to Wang Su]. He also made Su Commandery Duke of Pingyuan and had a residence built for him with fragrance smeared onto the walls. [Wang Su had since] gained trust and recognition.³¹⁰

肅初奔虜，自說其家被誅事狀，宏為之垂涕，以弟六妹偽彭城公主妻之，封肅平原郡公，為宅舍，以香塗壁，遂見信用。

The account in the *Wei shu* makes it clear that Grand Princess of Pengcheng had been a widow until her second marriage with Wang Su, and that the second marriage did not happen until after the death of Emperor Xiaowen in 499. For reasons unknown, the *Nan Qi shu* compiler

³⁰⁹ One thing is uncertain here: The Northern Wei inherited the system of mourning rituals from the Han. When an emperor died, there should be state mourning service performed and no weddings should be held immediately afterwards. Emperor Xiaowen died in the fourth month of 499, and Wang Su went to Shouchun in the first month of 500 and had since then been stationed in Shouchun until his death in 501. Wang Su's wedding likely took place sometime during the eight months between the death of Emperor Xiaowen and his departure for Shouchun. Could it be possible to have a wedding follow so closely after an emperor's death?

³¹⁰ Xiao, *Nan Qi shu*, 57.998.

Xiao Zixian stated that Wang Su was married to Grand Princess of Pengcheng soon after he defected to the Northern Wei.³¹¹

When Wang Su was on his deathbed in Shouchun, the *Wei shu* reports that Wang Su's former wife (*qianqi* 前妻) Lady Xie finally came to see him. She brought with her their three children, one of them was their son Wang Shao 王紹 (492-515).³¹² According to the funeral inscriptions for both her son Wang Shao and her daughter Wang Puxian 王普賢 (487-513), Lady Xie was the daughter of Xie Zhuang 謝莊 (421-466), a renowned poet and *fu* writer in the south whose literary fame had already spread to the Northern Wei when Xie Zhuang was still a young man.³¹³

It is clear that Wang Su was in a *liangdi* situation when he was married to Grand Princess of Chenliu in the north. His first wife Lady Xie was still married to Wang Su and was raising

³¹¹ For a detailed discussion of Grand Princess of Chenliu, see Luo Xin 羅新, "Chenliu Gongzhu," *Dushu* 讀書 (2) 2005: 125-134. Luo Xin points out that the account of Wang Su in the *Nan Qi shu* is inaccurate.

³¹² "[Wang] Shao was borne of [Wang] Su's former wife Lady Xie. It was not until Su was dying that Lady Xie came to Shouchun with their two daughters and Shao 紹, 肅前妻謝生也, 肅臨薨, 謝始攜二女及紹至壽春." See Wei, *Wei shu*, 63.1412.

Wang Puxian, one of the daughters, was taken by Emperor Xuanwu as his consort *furen* 夫人. The other daughter, name unknown, was the wife of Yuan Yuan 元淵, Prince of Guangyang 廣陽王. See Yuan Yuan's son Yuan Zhan's 元湛 (510-544) funeral inscription, in Zhao Chao 趙超, ed., *Han Wei Nanbeichao muzhi huibian* 漢魏南北朝墓誌彙編 (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 1990), 192.

³¹³ For Wang Puxian's funeral inscription, see Zhao, *Han Wei Nanbeichao muzhi huibian*. 69-70; for Wang Shao's funeral inscription, see *Ibid.*, 82.

Xie Zhuang's literary fame was known among the northerners. In 450, when Li Xiaobo 李孝伯 (d. 459), the Prime Minister of the Northern Wei, came to the Liu-Song court as an emissary, he paid a special visit to Xie Zhuang. See Shen, *Song shu*, 85.2167.

their three young children in the south.³¹⁴ Except for the brief mentioning of her coming to see her dying husband, the *Wei shu* fails to include anything else about Lady Xie and this *liangdi* situation. How did Lady Xie end up in the north? What happened when she discovered that her husband had married again? How did Grand Princess of Chenliu react when she found out that her new husband was still married to another woman? How did Wang Su deal with these two women? Thanks to an entry in Yang Xuanzhi's *A Record of Buddhist Monasteries in Luoyang*, more information about this *liangdi* situation was recorded.

In recounting the history of the Perfect Enlightenment Nunnery (Zhengjue si 正覺寺) in Luoyang, Yang Xuanzhi related an anecdote about Wang Su and his two wives. When Lady Xie discovered that her husband was remarried to a princess, she wrote a poem and had it delivered to him. Somehow, Grand Princess of Chenliu got hold of Lady Xie's poem and responded to her on behalf of Wang Su. Wang Su was embarrassed and had a nunnery constructed to give shelter to Lady Xie. That was how the Zhengjue Nunnery came to be.

When Wang Su was called upon to address the *liangdi* situation, he followed the popular practice and built a separate residence for his first wife. The difference lies only in the nature of the residence. It was a Buddhist nunnery rather than a typical residential home. Wang Su's handling of the *liangdi* situation reflects the Buddhist fervor that was characteristic of the Northern Wei, especially during its days in Luoyang.

³¹⁴ Wang Puxian was seven years old and Wang Shao was two years old when Wang Su fled the south in 493, and they were sixteen and eleven years old respectively when they were brought to their father's death bed in Shouchun in 502.

The length of Lady Xie's stay in the Zhengjue Nunnery is unknown, but in early 530s many Buddhist monasteries in Luoyang fell into disuse, and Zhengjue Nunnery was probably one of them.³¹⁵ Later it made its way into Yang Xuanzhi's record of Luoyang's monasteries.³¹⁶ As for Grand Princess of Chenliu, save for two brief accounts in the *Wei shu*, not much is known about her after her brief marriage with Wang Su.³¹⁷

Wang Su's *liangdi* case was far from unique. It happened to many men who had shifted their allegiance. Due to constant political and military confrontations between rival states and bloody power struggles within each state, treacherous activities such as defections and surrenders happened frequently. A great number of southerners, including members of the southern royal clans, fled to the north to escape political persecution, and vice versa.³¹⁸

³¹⁵ Palace struggles during the Yongxi 永熙 (532-534) reign split the Northern Wei into the Eastern Wei 東魏 (534-550) and the Western Wei 西魏 (534-557). The Eastern Wei moved the capital from Luoyang to Ye 鄴, and monks and nuns from various monasteries moved along with the imperial family. The Western Wei established its capital in Chang'an 長安. The old Northern Wei capital Luoyang was since abandoned and soon fell into ruins. In 547 when Yang Xuanzhi revisited Luoyang on an official trip, he was shocked by the desolated capital whose former glory vanished so rapidly. See Fan, *Luoyang qielan ji jiaozhu*, 1.

³¹⁶ Yang Xuanzhi based his selecting criterion of monasteries mainly on size. “[I]t is rather difficult to give an account of every single temple, since there were simply too many of them. I now keep a record of only the large temples, but I also select some small ones if there are auspicious or unusual stories pertaining to them 寺數最多, 不可遍寫. 今之所錄, 上大伽藍. 其中小者, 取其祥異, 世諦俗事, 因而出之.” *Ibid.*, 7. Considering the status of the beneficiary—a southern woman and former wife of the Grand Princess's newly wed husband, I would like to think that Zhengjue si was probably one of those lesser temples with an unusual story attached to it.

³¹⁷ See Wei, *Wei shu*, 64.1428-9, and 57.1311-2.

³¹⁸ Cai Xingjuan 蔡幸娟, “Ke si yiguo he luoye guigen zhijian de guo yu jia: yi Nanbeichao de xiangren wei kaocha zhongxin 客死異國和落葉歸根之間的國與家: 以南北朝的降人為考察中心,” *Chengda lishi xuebao* 成大歷史學報 35 (2008): 126. Can states: “Generally speaking, during the first half of the Northern and Southern Dynasties northerners surrendering to the south were greatly outnumbered by

One effective and commonly practiced way of retaining defectors and those who had surrendered was to bestow wives (*ciqu* 賜妻) upon them and to create new families for them in their host state.³¹⁹ Sometimes, their offspring born in the host state were treated as hostages. The accounts of Cui Mo 崔模 (d. ca. 463) and Shen Mo 申謨 are most revealing on this matter. Cui Mo and Shen Mo were Southern Qi officials. In 430, when the Northern Wei seized Hulao 虎牢, one of Southern Qi's four important military bases, Cui Mo surrendered to the Northern Wei.³²⁰ The next year, the Northern Wei sacked another important military base Huatai 滑臺 and captured Shen Mo and a number of Southern Qi generals. Both Cui Mo and Shen Mo were granted new wives in the north. Cui Mo spent the rest of his thirty some years in the north. Shen Mo, however, abandoned his northern wife and children and fled back to the south.

When [Cui] Mo was in the south, he had a wife Lady Zhang and two sons [Cui] Chongzhi and [Cui] Jirou. After [Cui] Mo came to the [Northern Wei] capital, he was bestowed a wife Lady Jin who gave birth to a son named [Cui] Youdu. Because their father was in a foreign country, Chongzhi and his brother accumulated goods, and tried to entrust people at the frontier pass, planning to ransom [Cui] Mo and bring him back. Their mother Lady Zhang would always say to them: "Your father's personality is indecisive to begin with. He will not come back!" The [southern] emissaries brought goods to the capital and were about to smuggle [Cui] Mo back. [Cui] Mo was indeed concerned with Youdu. He pointed at Youdu and said to the emissaries: "How can I bear to leave him and cause him punishment and humiliation! I will find another man for you. His fame and reputation shall not be lower than mine." He then presented them with Shen

southerners surrendering to the north." By "the first half of the Northern and Southern Dynasties" Cai means the period between the beginning of the fifth century to the first three decades of the sixth century. It should be noted that Cai's judgment is based on the names that had entered historical records.

³¹⁹ There were other ways of retaining defectors and surrenders, including regulations and prohibitions on burial locations so as to sever one's connection with his home state and foster identification with the new state. See Cai, "Ke si yiguo he luoye guigen."

³²⁰ According to the *Song shu*, Cui Mo did not surrender to the Northern Wei and died on the battlefield. See Shen, *Song shu*, 95.2333.

Mo. [Shen] Mo used to be the prefect of the East Commandery under the rule of Liu Yilong (407-453, r. 424-453). He and Zhu Xiuzhi guarded Huatai together. In the mid of the Shenjia (428-432) reign, both of them were captured and brought back to the north. Both were granted a wife. [Shen Mo] had a son called Lingdu. When Shen Mo heard about it, he abandoned his [northern] wife and son, and escaped back to the south of the Yangzi River. Lingdu was subsequently castrated [as punishment for his father's escape].³²¹

始[崔]模在南妻張氏，有二子，沖智、季柔。模至京師，賜妻金氏，生子幼度。沖智等以父隔遠，乃聚貨物，間託關境，規贖模歸。其母張氏每謂之曰：「汝父性懷，本自無決，必不能來也。」行人遂以財賄至都，當竊模還。模果顧念幼度等，指幼度謂行人曰：「吾何忍捨此輩，令坐致刑辱，當為爾取一人，使名位不減於我。」乃授以申謨。謨，劉義隆東郡太守，與朱脩之守滑臺，神廳中，被執入國，俱得賜妻，生子靈度。申謨聞此，乃棄妻子，走還江外。靈度刑為閹人。

Cui Mo and Shen Mo dealt with their *liangdi* situation quite differently. Cui Mo could not bear to inflict chastisement on his son born in the north, so he remained in the north with his new family and abandoned his southern wife and sons. Shen Mo, on the other hand, fled back to the south as soon as he was presented with the opportunity and cast aside his northern wife and son. As a result of his return to the south, his northern son suffered castration.

Of the defectors and those who surrendered, the noblemen were often given princesses as wives 子弟來降，貴者尚公主。³²² According to the biographies in the *Wei shu* and the *Bei shi* and the excavated funeral inscriptions, more than half of the Northern Wei princesses married Han Chinese men. Among the Han Chinese men, half of them were members of prominent clans in the south or royal members of southern courts who defected to the north, as well as their

³²¹ Wei, *Wei shu*, 24.627.

³²² See Wei, *Wei shu*, 35.816. Although this statement was about surrenders from the Ruru 蠕蠕 (i.e. Rouran 柔然) Confederacy specifically, it could apply to surrenders from any rival state.

descendants in the north.³²³ Among these men, the prominent ones are as follows: Eastern Jin royal clansman Sima Chuzhi 司馬楚之 (390-464) and his son Sima Yue 司馬躍 and his grandson Sima Fei 司馬肱, both of whom were born in the north;³²⁴ Liu-Song prince Liu Chang and his sons Liu Chengxu and Liu Hui, both of whom were born in the north;³²⁵ Southern Qi official Wang Su and his nephew Wang Song 王誦 (482-528) from the illustrious Langya Wang clan;³²⁶ Southern Qi prince Xiao Baoyin 蕭寶夤 (485-530), his son Xiao Lie 蕭烈 and his

³²³ Shi Guangming 施光明 discusses Northern Wei princesses' marriage situation and provides a breakdown of the ethnic backgrounds of their husbands. According to his calculation, there were altogether fifty Northern Wei princesses recorded in histories, and 48% of their marriages were with Han Chinese, and 44% of marriage alliances with Han Chinese were made with prominent southern officials and members of southern royal courts who defected to the north and their descendants in the north. See his "Wei shu suojian Beiwei gongzhu hunyin guanxi yanjiu 《魏書》所見北魏公主婚姻關係研究," *Minzu yanjiu* 民族研究 5 (1989): 106-112.

³²⁴ Sima Chuzhi's southern wife was sent to stay in Ye 鄴 while he was called into the Northern Wei court in the then capital Pingcheng. His oldest son Sima Baoyin 司馬寶胤, born in the south, went along with him to the north and died later. Sima Chuzhi later married Princess of Henei 河內公主. If Sima Chuzhi's southern wife was still alive at the time of his marriage with the Northern Wei princess, Sima Chuzhi would have been in a *liangdi* situation. Sima Yue married Princess of Zhaojun 趙郡公主. Sima Fei married Princess of Huayang 華陽公主 (d. 524), the younger sister of Emperor Xuanwu.

³²⁵ Liu Chang left behind his wife in the south when he fled to the north and married three Northern Wei princesses soon after he arrived the north. They were Princess of Wuyi 武邑公主, Princess of Jianxing 建興公主, and Princess of Pingyang 平陽公主. Liu Chengxu was born of one of the three princesses. Liu Chang's southern wife, Lady Xi 郗氏, is said to have suffered from her relentless mother-in-law and died young. It is unclear when Lady Xi died; it is very likely that she was still alive when Liu Chang remarried in the north.

³²⁶ Wang Song was Wang Su's older brother Wang Rong's 王融 (d. 494) son. At the beginning of Emperor Xuanwu's reign, Wang Su's younger brother Wang Bing 王秉 defected to the Northern Wei. He brought along with him his brothers' sons Wang Song, Wang Yan 王衍 (485-536) and Wang Yi 王翊 (493-529). For Wang Yi's funeral inscription, see Zhao, *Han Wei Nanbeichao muzhi huibian*, 57. According to the funeral inscriptions, Wang Song married two Northern Wei imperial women. His first wife was Princess of Ningling 寧陵公主 (489-510). Since both Wang Song's and Princess of Ningling's funeral inscriptions were excavated from the same tomb, it is believed that Wang Song was Princess of Ningling's husband even though his name was not specified in the princess's funeral inscription. See

nephew Xiao Zan 蕭贊 (502-531).³²⁷ Sima Chuzhi, Liu Chang, Wang Su, Xiao Baoyin and Xiao Zan had all been married in the south and were married again to Northern Wei princesses.³²⁸ At some point in their lives, most of them experienced a *liangdi* dilemma.

Generally speaking, a *liangdi* dilemma would not happen to a woman with such an elevated status as a princess, as a man could not possibly treat both women as his principal wives if one of them was a princess. Although there were many cases in which a man had two wives, and sometimes the situation seems to be accepted by society, if a married man was chosen to wed a princess, he had to formally divorce his wife. For example, Dou Xuan's wife was divorced when Dou Xuan was chosen to marry an Eastern Han princess. Grand Princess of Wuwei 武威長公主, was first married to the Northern Liang 北涼 (397-439) ruler Juqu Mujian 沮渠牧犍 (d.

Zhao Wanli 趙萬里, *Han Wei Nanbeichao muzhi jishi* 漢魏南北朝墓誌集釋 (Taiwan: Xin wenfeng chuban gongsi, 1986), 109. After Princess of Ningling died, Wang Song married Yuan Guifei 元貴妃 (489-517), daughter of the Northern Wei prince Yuan Meng 元猛 (d. 489). See Zhao, *Han Wei Nanbeichao muzhi jishi*, 109, and Zhao, *Han Wei Nanbeichao muzhi huibian*, 57.

³²⁷ Xiao Baoyin was the younger brother of Xiao Baojuan, the second-to-last Southern Qi emperor. In 501 when Xiao Yan conquered Jiankang and was prosecuting his brothers, Xiao Baoyin, then sixteen years old, escaped and fled to Shouchun 壽春. He was brought to the Northern Wei capital in 502 and was treated by Emperor Xuanwu with respect. He married Grand Princess of Nanyang 南陽長公主 who bore him three sons, and one of them was Xiao Lie who married Princess of Jiande 建德公主, younger sister of Emperor Xiaoming 孝明帝 (510-528, r. 515-528).

Xiao Zan, originally named Xiao Zong 蕭綜, was Xiao Baojuan's posthumous child and the Liang founding emperor Xiao Yan's foster son. Xiao Zan defected to the Northern Wei in 525, and in 528, married Grand Princess of Shouyang 壽陽長公主. He died in 531 and was buried together with Grand Princess of Shouyang. In 538, Xiao Yan, still considering Xiao Zan his son, had his grave secretly moved to the ancestral graveyard of the Xiao clan in the south. Xiao Zan was married in the south and had son(s). His remarriage with the Northern Wei princess yielded no offspring.

³²⁸ Wang Song was seventeen years old and Xiao Baoyin was sixteen years old when they fled the south and defected to the Northern Wei. It is unknown whether these two men were married before they left for north.

447, r. 433-439).³²⁹ After Juqu Mujian died, she was remarried to a Northern Wei general Li Gai 李蓋. Her second marriage resulted in the divorce of Li's wife Lady Yu 與氏.³³⁰

Although princesses were normally exempted from the *liangdi* dilemma, they might have to confront it under one kind of special circumstances. That is, when the other legitimate wife was from a foreign state (*yiguo* 異國) or a rival state (*diguo* 敵國). Such was the case for Wang Su and other married southern men who defected or surrendered to the northern courts. Was the divorce of their first wives still required under such circumstances? How were these cross-state bigamy cases regarded and handled by those who were directly involved? How were they perceived by the public? These questions are hard to answer as we rarely come across detailed historical records on these cases. The account of Wang Su and his two wives in the *Luoyang qielan ji* provides an unusual opportunity to catch a glimpse into this special *liangdi* situation. Not only that, but Wang Su's case is also useful in contextualizing some of the observations on women in the north and the south and their relations with their spouses.

³²⁹ Grand Princess of Wuwei was the younger sister of Emperor Taiwu of Northern Wei 太武帝 (408-452, r. 423-452).

³³⁰ “Shizu's younger sister Grand Princess of Wuwei was the wife of Juqu Mujian, the former king of the Liang. When Shizu (i.e. Emperor Taiwu) was conquering Liangzhou, he was secretly assisted by the princess. Thanks to this the princess was treated exceptionally well. [Li] Gai was called on to marry [her]. Gai's wife Lady Yu was thereupon divorced 世祖妹武威長公主, 故涼王沮渠牧犍之妻. 世祖平涼州, 頗以公主通密計助之, 故寵遇差隆. 詔蓋尚焉. 蓋妻與氏, 以是而出.” Wei, *Wei shu*, 83.1824.

Yang Xuanzhi's Account: Power Relation, Gender Reversal and Debates on Political Legitimacy
and Cultural Superiority

When [Wang] Su was in the south of the Yangtze, he was married to a daughter of Xie [Zhuang]. After his arrival in the [Wei] capital, he was married again to a princess. Later, Lady Xie became a nun.³³¹ She too came to join [Wang] Su. [Knowing that Wang Su had a wife who was a princess, Lady Xie] wrote a five-character-line poem for [Wang] Su as a gift, which reads:

In the past I was a silkworm on a bamboo stand,

Now I am silk in the loom.

Attached to the spinning wheel and following the spindle,³³²

“Don’t you recall the days of intimate relationship [between the silk and the worm]?”³³³

³³¹ Disguising oneself as a monk or nun was a popular practice in flights or travels during the tumultuous years of the Northern and Southern Dynasties. According to the *Jiankang shilu* 建康實錄 authored by a Tang historian Xu Song 許嵩 (8th c.), Wang Su dressed as a Buddhist monk in his flight to the north 肅初為道人奔虜. See Xu Song, *Jiankang shilu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 648. Lady Xie was probably adopting this same method in her journey to the north, but not when she was bringing up three children in the south!

³³² *Luo* 絡 has a variant of *lu* 路, and it is intended as a pun here. *Delu* 得路 means “to have achieved success or to be in power.”

Sheng 勝 is a loan word for *sheng* 滕, the comb-like part of a loom through whose teeth the warp goes. The length of the *sheng* is the length of the piece of fabric being woven on a loom. See Yin Yushan 尹玉珊, “Xie Shi Zeng Wang Su Xin Bian Xi 謝氏贈王肅信辨析,” *Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan yanjiushengyuan xuebao* 中國社會科學院研究生院學報 2 (Mar. 2010): 109.

Yi-t’ung Wang glosses *sheng* as a spindle, and explains that it “also had the meaning ‘to win, to have the upper hand.’ It is used as a pun here. A free translation of this line is: ‘Now you have found a way to better yourself.’” Wang disagrees with the traditional definition of *sheng* “as a type of barrette for women,” and argues that this definition “is unrelated to spinning, silk, and other ideas expressed in the lines, and therefore does not fit.” See Wang, *A Record*, 140.

In comparison, I think Yin Yushan’s glossary of *sheng* is more convincing.

The princess wrote a poem in reply for [Wang] Su, saying:

The needle lets the thread pass through,

In its eye it always takes in the silk.

Now sewing a new piece of fabric,³³⁴

How can it accept [the thread] of the past?³³⁵

Greatly embarrassed by this, [Wang] Su built the Zhengjue Nunnery for her to live a secluded life.³³⁶

³³³ *Chanmian* 纏綿, a binome, originally means threads intertwined together. It is extended to denote the intertwined human feelings and sentiments.

³³⁴ *Fengxin* 縫新, sewing the new [fabric], is a pun for *fengxin* 逢新, encountering a new [person]. The pronunciation of *fen* 縫 and *fen* 逢 in the Middle Chinese is identical, see Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *Lexicon of Reconstructed Pronunciation in Early Middle Chinese, Late Middle Chinese, and Early Mandarin* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1991), 96.

³³⁵ Yi-t'ung Wang rightly points out that *na* 衲 is a pun for “[N]a 納 ‘to accept.’” He suggests that “[I]t means the same loom would not take back the silk that was finished and removed.” See Wang, *A Record*, 140. I think that it makes better sense to understand this pun in the same metaphoric framework of clothes-making in the princess’s reply poem, rather than the textile-making metaphor in Lady Xie’s initial poem. *Nagu* 衲故, to mend the old [fabric], is a pun for *nagu* 納故, to accept the old [person]. In the Middle Chinese, *na* 衲 sounded exactly like *na* 納, see Pulleyblank, *Lexicon of reconstructed pronunciation*, 221.

³³⁶ The passage is translated by Yi-t'ung Wang with modification, see *A Record*, 139-141.

With regard to the last line, Wang remarks that the biography of Wang Li in the *Wei shu* “states Wang Su’s first wife came to meet with Wang Su in Shouchun shortly before his death. This information appears to be in disagreement with the *Qielan ji* account. Actually, this is not the case. The wife of the Xie clan came to the Wei at an earlier date, but was ordered by Wang Su to stay in Luoyang while he lived with his new wife in Shouchun. Accompanied by two daughters and a son, Wang’s first wife came to Shouchun from Luoyang, not from the Southern Dynasty Qi, to join her dying husband.” See Wang, *A Record*, 141.

Yi-t'ung Wang takes the account in the *Luoyang qielan ji* as a historical fact and believes that Lady Xie came to Luoyang before Wang Su and Grand Princess of Chenliu left for Shouchun. The account in the *Luoyang qielan ji*, however, does not specify where this episode took place. It is uncertain whether Lady Xie met Wang Su and his princess wife in Luoyang. Neither is it certain whether Grand Princess of Chenliu accompanied Wang Su to Shouchun.

肅在江南之日，聘謝氏女為妻。及至京師，復尚公主。其後謝氏入道為尼，亦來奔肅。見肅尚主，謝作五言詩以贈之。其詩曰：本為箔上蠶，今作機上絲。得絡逐勝去，頗憶纏綿時。公主代肅答謝云：針是貫線物，目中恆任絲。得帛縫新去，何能衲故時。肅甚有愧謝之色，遂造正覺寺以憩之。

Yang Xuanzhi's short account of Wang Su and his two wives is vague about the time when Wang Su married Grand Princess of Chenliu. The line in the original Chinese language gives the impression that Wang Su married the Northern Wei princess as soon as he arrived in the capital Luoyang.³³⁷ However, as is demonstrated earlier in this section, Wang Su did not marry Grand Princess of Chenliu until five years after he defected to the Northern court. Ritualistically speaking, it was very unlikely for Wang Su to remarry shortly after his father and brothers were executed by his southern emperor. In fact, from one of Emperor Xiaowen's edicts to Wang Su we know that Wang Su observed at least three years of mourning for his father who died in 493, and was extolled by Emperor Xiaowen for his filial piety. When Wang Su planned on extending the three-year mourning period for his father, Emperor Xiaowen issued an edict in 496 so as to put an end to Wang's mourning.³³⁸

Similarly, Yang Xuanzhi was not explicit about when Lady Xie came to the north, where she met with Wang Su, or if she ever met with him. The *Wei shu* said that it was not until Wang Su was dying in Shouchun in 501 that Lady Xie finally came to see him on his deathbed. The *Wei shu* implied that since their separation in 493, Wang Su and Lady Xie did not meet again until his last moment. It is also unclear how Lady Xie's poem to her husband came into Grand

³³⁷ Yang Xuanzhi's account of the marriage between Wang Su and Princess of Chenliu was in fact closer to the account in the *Nan Qi shu*.

³³⁸ Wei, *Wei shu*, 63.1408.

Princess of Chenliu's possession, why Grand Princess of Chenliu responded to Lady Xie on behalf of Wang Su, and why Wang Su did not personally reply Lady Xie's poem. One possible scenario would be as follows: Lady Xie arrived in Luoyang in 500 after Wang Su already left for Shouchun. She was disappointed to find that Wang Su was remarried to a princess. Not knowing that Wang Su was no longer in the capital, she presented a poem to him. Grand Princess of Chenliu did not go with Wang Su on his military campaign and stayed in their Luoyang residence. She received the poem addressed to her new husband, and responded to Lady Xie on behalf of her absent husband. Somehow Wang Su in Shouchun heard about the poetry exchange between his two wives. He felt sorry for his first wife and commissioned the construction of a nunnery to give shelter to Lady Xie.

Still, how reliable is Yang Xuanzhi's account? What was his source for this story? Was the pair of poems indeed authored by Lady Xie and Grand Princess of Chenliu, the southern and northern wives of Wang Su? Were the poems really occasioned by the *liangdi* dilemma? Was the story truly about Wang Su and his two wives?

Yang Xuanzhi was very possibly a contemporary of Grand Princess of Chenliu, and was a court guest (*fengchaoqing* 奉朝請) at some point after her short-lived marriage with Wang Su. Our last record of Grand Princess of Chenliu indicates that she was still active in mid 520s, and in late 520s, Yang Xuanzhi was invited to imperial gatherings as a court guest.³³⁹ Yang Xuanzhi might have heard Grand Princess of Chenliu's story from other courtiers who were closer to the

³³⁹ See Wang, *A Record*, 64.

lives in the inner palace. Even if Yang Xuanzhi might have been mistaken about certain details, it is reasonable to believe that his account is credible to a great degree.

Moreover, the two poems that Yang Xuanzhi took as penned by Lady Xie and Grand Princess of Chenliu should be read as a pair of Matching Songs (*dui ge* 對歌). “*Dui ge* is a very wide spread folk song form that sets up a dialogue between a man and a woman (and in some case, between two people of the same sex).”³⁴⁰ The basic characteristics of the *dui ge* are “correspondence of content and a deliberately identical use of word or phrase.”³⁴¹ The princess’s reply poem is an answer to Lady Xie’s initial poem. These two poems share some identical words and phrases. Thematically, these two poems form a dialogue, and the theme in these two poems does seem to be befitting for a *liangdi* dilemma. This pair of thematically related *duige* poems could conceivably have been from Wang Su’s two wives who confronted each other poetically in a tricky *liangdi* predicament.

Grand Princess of Chenliu’s Reply Poem and the Status of Lady Xie as a Divorced Woman

Grand Princess of Chenliu’s reply poem on behalf of her new husband Wang Su to his former wife Lady Xie was skillfully composed and achieved twofold purposes. Through the clever and effortless employment of the southern poetic forms and traditions, Grand Princess of

³⁴⁰ Xiaofei Tian, “Configuring the Feminine: Gender and Literary Transvestitism in the Southern Dynasties Poetry,” 24.

³⁴¹ Tian, “Configuring the Feminine: Gender and Literary Transvestitism in the Southern Dynasties Poetry,” 26.

Chenliu convincingly asserted her superiority to her husband and firmly claimed her status as the principal wife and labeled Lady Xie a divorcée.

As is stated earlier, a pair of *dui ge* was usually exchanged between lovers, between a man and a woman. When Lady Xie presented to her husband a poem written in this manner, she was expecting a reply from her husband. It must have been to her astonishment when she received a reply from the northern princess.

The northern princess intercepted Lady Xie's poem, and penned an artfully composed and perfectly matched poem on behalf of her husband, and had it delivered to Lady Xie. Following all the rules of *dui ge*, the northern princess demonstrated her mastery of this foreign poetic form.

I would like to mention that Grand Princess of Chenliu was among the first generation of Xianbei 鮮卑 elite who learned to speak Chinese. Many of her fellow Xianbei nobles still refused to learn and speak this foreign language. The fact that the northern princess was so versed in a foreign poetic form makes her response even more impressive. Through the act of matching Lady Xie's poem, it is as if the northern wife was saying to her southern rival that she could be just as good, if not better, at writing this type of southern poetry. This reminds us of the tales of competition of poetic competence between northerners and southerners.

Also, the fact that Grand Princess Of Chenliu bypassed Wang Su and wrote the poem on his behalf, is something worth noting. The voice of the husband, who was to reply to his southern wife with a matching song, was effectively silenced by his new northern wife. Although the man was caught in a difficult marital situation, he was denied the chance to speak up.

There is more to the princess's reply poem than just muting the voice of her husband. The conventional gender roles are reversed in her poem. Writing in the voice of her husband, the princess had "Wang Su" explain to his southern wife that since he had obtained a new piece of fabric, he must be sewing with the new fabric, and could not go back and mend the old piece. In just a couple of lines the princess not only discarded Wang Wu's first wife by deeming her obsolete, but also portrayed Wang Su as a wife performing the traditional womanly tasks (*nügong* 女工) such as sewing and mending. In the princess's reply poem, Wang Su, the husband to two wives, was not only being silenced, but also being feminized by his northern wife.

This powerful and domineering image of herself that the princess insinuated in the poem seems to confirm the contemporary observations of women in the north: that they were jealous and controlling, and that they overpowered their husbands. Reportedly, this was especially true for imperial princesses. Yuan Xiaoyou, the same man who complained about the one-wife no-concubine situation in his country, complained of the jealous and domineering behaviors of his female contemporaries. He said in a memorial to his emperor: that they were jealous and controlling, and that they overpowered their husbands. Reportedly it was especially true for imperial princesses. Yuan Xiaoyou 元孝友, an Eastern Wei imperial clansman, complained exactly such a reversal of the traditional man-woman relationship in marriage. He said:

People nowadays have entirely foregone standards and principles. When parents marry their daughters, they teach them to be jealous. When aunts and old sisters meet their nieces and younger sisters, they definitely urge the latter to be jealous. [Women] uphold controlling their husbands as a wifely virtue, and being capable of jealousy as part of womanly tasks. [These jealous women] say that they do not want to be bullied [by their

husbands], and that they fear being mocked by others. Even kings and lords dare not [treat their wives] half-heartedly, how could men below them dare to?³⁴²

凡今之人。通無準節。父母嫁女。則教之以妬。姑姊逢迎。必相勸以忌。持制夫為婦德。以能妬為女工。自云不受人欺。畏他笑我。王公猶自一心。已下何敢二意。

Was the princess truly the type of jealous and controlling woman that Yuan Xiaoyou complained about in the memorial? We are told that when the jealous Grand Princess of Lanling tried to forget her husband's repeated betrayals, it was her aunt, our Grand Princess of Chenliu, who fanned her niece's flames of jealousy into a volcano.³⁴³ When Yuan Xiaoyou said, "when aunts and older sisters meet their nieces and younger sisters, they urge the latter to be jealous," it is as if Yuan Xiaoyou had the story of Grand Princess of Lanling and her aunt Grand Princess of Chenliu in mind. Taking jealousy as the woman's task, Grand Princess of Chenliu had her husband do the traditional type of *nügong* in her stead in the reply poem. When challenged by her husband's southern wife, the princess might have felt the need to not only assert her status as the only principal wife, but to demonstrate her power over her new husband.

How did Grand Princess of Chenliu claim her legitimacy as Wang Su's principal wife and denounce Lady Xie as a divorced woman? It was done by using puns that was a very common practice in the *yuefu* poetry. When the "Wang Su" persona said that he was sewing the new (*fengxin* 縫新), it means that he encountered a new love (*fengxin* 逢新); and when the

³⁴² Wei, *Wei shu*, 18.423.

³⁴³ Wei, *Wei shu*, 57.1311-2.

For a detailed discussion of Grand Princess of Lanling and the bloody and violent domestic tragedy that happened to her, see Jen-der Lee, "The Death of a Princess: Codifying Classical Family Ethics in Early Medieval China," in Sherry J. Mou, ed., *Presence and Presentation: Women in the Chinese Literary Tradition* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999).

persona said he could not mend the old (*nagu* 衲故), it means that he could not accept the old love (*nagu* 衲故). Grand Princess of Chenliu had “Wang Su” make this point very clear to his former wife by using puns.

And it was not just any old love that “Wang Su” was denouncing in the reply poem, it was his former wife. The link between the old and the divorced was established by utilizing yet another poetic trope that had developed in the sub-genre of poetry on abandoned women (*qifu shi* 棄婦詩): the dichotomy of new (*xin* 新) and old (*gu* 故). In this sub-genre, the “new” was referred specifically to a man’s current wife and the “old” a divorced one. This can be demonstrated amply by an anonymous old poem from the Han Dynasty “I Climbed the Hill to Pick Deerweed” (*Shangshan cai mifu* 上山採靡蕪).

| | |
|---|--------|
| I climbed the hill to pick deerweed, | 上山採靡蕪。 |
| going down I met my husband of old. | 下山逢故夫。 |
| I knelt down and asked my husband, | 長跪問故夫。 |
| “And how do you find your new bride?” | 新人復何如。 |
| “Though good do I find my new bride, | 新人雖言好。 |
| she’s not as fine as my wife of old. | 未若故人姝。 |
| In fairness of feature both are alike, | 顏色類相似。 |
| but in skill of hands you are not the same. | 手爪不相如。 |
| When the new bride entered the gate in front, | 新人從門入。 |
| the old wife left by the door at the side. | 故人從閣去。 |
| The new bride weaves the golden silk, | 新人工織纈。 |

| | |
|--|--------|
| the old wife wove the plain. | 故人工織素。 |
| Of golden silk, four yards a day, | 織縑日一匹。 |
| to more than five yards of the plain. | 織素五丈餘。 |
| Then put the plain silk by the gold, | 將縑來比素。 |
| the new bride cannot match the old. ³⁴⁴ | 新人不如故。 |

This poem describes a scenario in which a divorced woman encounters her former husband and inquires about his new wife. The man's reply is a lengthy comparison between his new bride and his divorced wife, between *xinren* 新人 and *guren* 故人. In the end the man comes to the conclusion that his new bride is not as worthy as the divorced one. Wang Su never officially divorced Lady Xie. He was in a *liangdi* situation. But by evoking this old poetic convention, Grand Princess of Chenliu had Wang Su divorce Lady Xie in her reply poem and therefore symbolically claimed her status as Wang's principal wife.

To consider Grand Princess of Chenliu's reply poem in the larger narrative context of the entire entry of Zhengjue Nunnery in the *Luoyang qielan ji*, and still larger social context of the political and geographical divide of the Northern and Southern Dynasties, we could even argue that Grand Princess of Chenliu's reply poem reflected the greater political and social concerns of the time.

Although the *Luoyang qielan ji* is a record of Buddhist temples in the Northern Wei capital Luoyang, Yang Xuanzhi sometimes devoted significant portions of his writing to report

³⁴⁴ Translation by Stephen Owen, in *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 262.

cultural and political debates between northerners and southerners. The entry on Zhengjue Nunnery is one of the examples.³⁴⁵ Soon after the account of Wang Su and his two wives, which explained the reason for the construction of the nunnery, Yang Xuanzhi went on to tell stories of cultural debates. He said:

When [Wang] Su first came to the state of [Wei], he did not take such food as lamb and goat's milk. He often ate carp soup; when thirsty he drank tea. ... Several years later, at a palace banquet [hosted by] Emperor Gaozu, [Wang] Su partook of a large amount of lamb and yogurt. Emperor Gaozu found it strange and asked: "When you taste the dishes of the Central Land, how does lamb compare with fish soup and tea with yogurt drink?" In reply, [Wang] Su said: "Lamb is the best of land produce, while fish leads among sea foods. Depending on one's preference, both are considered delicacies. In terms of taste, there is a difference between the superior and inferior. Lamb is comparable to such large states as Qi and Lu; fish, such small kingdoms as Zhu and Ju.³⁴⁶ Only tea is no match; it is a slave of milk." ... From then on, tea was known as milk slave. ... [A]t the banquets, court dignitaries all were ashamed of taking tea, although it was provided. Only those destitute refugees from the south, who came to surrender from a distance, liked it.³⁴⁷

肅初入國，不食羊肉及酪漿等物，常飯鯽魚羹，渴飲茗汁。... 經數年已後，肅與高祖殿會，食羊肉酪粥甚多。高祖怪之，謂肅曰：『卿中國之味也。羊肉何如魚羹？茗飲何如酪漿？』肅對曰：『羊者是陸產之最，魚者乃水族之長。所好不同，並各稱珍。以味言之，甚是優劣。羊比齊、魯大邦，魚比邾、莒小國。唯茗不中，與酪作奴。』... 因此復號茗飲為酪奴。... 自是朝貴讌會，雖設茗飲，皆恥不復食，唯江表殘民遠來降者好之。

After having explained why Zhengjue Nunnery was built, Yang Xuanzhi allots the remaining two thirds of the entry space to record debates between northerners and southerners on cultural

³⁴⁵ Another salient example is the entry on the Temple of Peaceful Prospect (*Jingning si* 景寧寺). Chen Qingzhi 陳慶之, a southern general, was severely attacked by a northerner for claiming that the southern court held the political legitimacy. When Chen fell ill, the northerner claimed that he could cure Chen by exorcising the evils from him, but in fact, he took advantage of the situation and further humiliated Chen. See Wang, *A Record*, 110-119.

³⁴⁶ Zhu and Ju were two vassal states in present-day Shandong Province, and were only smaller in size to Qi and Lu, the two biggest states in this area.

³⁴⁷ Translation by Wang with modifications, *A Record*, 141-4.

superiority that are irrelevant to the history of the Buddhist nunnery in question. We are told that the defected southerner Wang Su adopted northern cuisine. He was called upon in public to praise northern foods and drinks and to put down his native southern cuisine. And it was thanks to Wang Su that tea, the much beloved drink among southerners including Wang Su himself, earned a derogatory name in the north and became a laughing stock there.

How should we understand the seemingly out-of-place account of northerners bashing southern cuisine in an entry on a Buddhist monastery? I argue that northerners' attacks on southern foods and drinks were thematically related to the reason why Zhengjue Nunnery came into being. The existence of Zhengjue Nunnery was the result of a northerner's triumph over her southern contender for the status of a principal wife in a *liangdi* situation. Grand Princess of Chenliu's victory might have been shared and celebrated by her northern contemporaries. This may explain why the story of poetic exchange between Wang Su's northern and southern wives was remembered, circulated and transmitted to posterity. This may also explain the embarrassment that Wang Su had felt at the time.

The battle between Wang Su's two wives was fought through the medium of poetry and ended with the northern wife's triumph over her southern competitor. Another anecdote in which Wang Su is featured again depicted yet another poetic competition between northern and southern elite and ended with a northern triumph as well.

Wang Su, Director of the Department of State Affairs, was sitting in his office intoning his poem *Lamenting Pingcheng*. Yuan Xie (473-508), Prince of Pengcheng, exclaimed over the beauty of the poem. He wanted [Wang Su] to recite it again. With a slip of the tongue, he asked: "Can you, sir, please recite the poem 'Lamenting Pengcheng,' once more?" Wang Su jokingly replied to Yuan Xie: "Why did you call Pingcheng, Pengcheng?" Yuan Xie was embarrassed. Zu Ying was there and swiftly replied:

“‘Lamenting Pengcheng’—it is a poem that you haven’t laid your eyes on.” Wang Su said: “Please do recite it for me!” Without a pause, Zu Ying began to recite. Wang Su was very impressed. Yuan Xie was greatly pleased. Leaving the office, Yuan Xie thanked Zu Ying: “That must be a divine mouth that you have! If it were not for you today, I might have been humiliated by that Wu lad.”³⁴⁸

尚書令王肅於省中詠悲平城詩。彭城王勰甚嗟其美。欲使更詠。乃失語云。公可更為誦悲彭城詩。肅戲勰云。何意呼悲平城為彭城也。勰有慚色。瑩在座。即云。悲彭城。王公自未見。肅云。可為誦之。瑩應聲為之。肅甚嗟賞。勰亦大悅，退謂瑩曰：「即定是神口。今日若不得卿，幾為吳子所屈。」

The claim for marital legitimacy, when considered within the larger social context, could very well be understood as a symbolic claim for political legitimacy. As we recall, the first wave of serious discussions and debates on the *liandgi* phenomenon occurred at the time when the political segregation between the north and the south was lifted as a result of the reunification of China under the Western Jin reign. One of the reasons that was put forth by those who argued that Xi, Wang Bi’s first wife in the south, should be considered a divorced woman was entirely a political one. Yu Pu 虞溥 (fl. 256) argued:

Chang’s father was appointed office in the Wei and took a second wife here. How could he still think of his former ruler to the south of the Yangzi River and keep a wife on the side in the enemy state? Not only was it forbidden by the then policies but it was not something a subject should do.³⁴⁹

昌父既策名魏朝。更納後室。豈得懷舊君于江表。存外妻于讎國乎。非徒時政之所禁。乃臣道所宜絕。

Yu Pu argued that accepting a former wife was equal to recognizing the political legitimacy of a rival state. For someone like Wang Bi who already severed his political ties with his former

³⁴⁸ Wei, *Wei shu*, 82.1799.

³⁴⁹ Yan, *Quan Jin wen*, 79.1914b .

ruler, it was only natural to sever his marital ties with his former wife as well. Li Yin 李胤 (?-282) had the same argument as Yu Pu. He said:

The Southern Land was already a rebellious state. If Shi Hou were there, he would have been killed [by his father] for the sake of the great principle.³⁵⁰ Considering the principle that Wang Bi upheld, how could he possibly take [Xi] as his wife?³⁵¹

江南已叛。石厚與焉，大義滅親，況於毖之義，可得以為妻乎！

Li Yin argued that Wang Bi already switched his allegiance from his former ruler in the Southern Land to the Wei court in the north, so he should not accept his former wife from the south.

The backbone of Yu Pu's and Li Yin's arguments was the well-known analogy between state (*guo* 國) and family (*jia* 家). A state is run like a family, only on a much grander scale. Just as two rulers should not coexist in one state 猶國不可以二君, Li Bao argued, no two principal wives should be in one household. There should be only one legitimate ruler in a state, so should it be only one legitimate wife in a family.

The poetry exchange between Lady Xie and “Wang Su” (and in fact Grand Princess of Chenliu) was supposed to be a private matter. However, the poems were circulated, probably in court, and finally recorded by a court guest who visited the palace two decades later. The nature of the interest in circulating a story of the exchange of poems between a northern princess and a

³⁵⁰ During the Spring and Autumn period, Shi Hou 石厚 and the Wei 衛 prince Zhouxu 州吁 designed a plan to kill another prince, later known as Duke Huan of Wei 衛桓公 (d. 719 BCE), in order to establish Zhouxu as the lord. Shi Hou's father Shi Que 石碭, a Wei minister, supported Duke Huan and killed his son Shi Hou and the prince Zhouxu. The *Zuo Commentary* praised Shi Que's readiness to kill his own family in order to hold fast to the great principle (*dayi mieqin* 大義滅親).

³⁵¹ Fang, *Jin shu*, 20.637.

southern elite woman might be similar to the interest in circulating quarrels and debates between northerners and southerners about cultural superiority and political legitimacy. In both cases, northerners triumphed over their southern counterparts. In this sense, the seemingly out-of-place record of the competition between northern and southern cuisines was, in fact, thematically connected to the marital competition between Wang Su's northern and southern wives.

Chapter 3 The Historical and Poetic Representation of the Divorced Woman

This chapter examines the representation of the divorced woman in the male-dominated sphere of writings. The divorced woman was a problematic figure in the eye of male writers. Because she was considered a discord to the harmony of familial relations, historians who recognized societal norms had to decide under what light she should be cast. In writing a work of literature, authors were more concerned with the emotional ramifications of the figure of the divorced woman, someone who was alienated from the male-centered world and who denied the male fantasy of the ideal woman. Male poets, for example, were particular about the sort of emotions and sentiments harbored by a divorced woman that were deemed appropriate in poetry. The ways in which the divorced woman was depicted in early medieval writings not only reflect the mindsets of her creators, but also manifest the constraints imposed by individual forms of writings in which she was portrayed.

I. The Historical Representation of the Divorced Woman

The representation of the divorced woman in historical sources is by and large a byproduct of the representation of the man who divorced her. The divorced woman was rarely the focus of divorce accounts in historical writings, and often served as the foil for the historian to elucidate certain moral points—showcasing filial sons, loving brothers, perceptive judges of character, upright Confucian gentlemen, and so forth. Although she was not the reason why such accounts came to exist in the first place, these accounts do reveal a number of things about divorce and the divorced woman in early medieval China such as the publicity of divorce, the impact of divorce on women as well as men, the influence of a woman's birth family in her married life, and her uneasy relationship with her husband's extended family. I would like to start my discussion with accounts of two second-century events that are recorded in Fan Ye's *Hou Han shu* as well as other histories of the Eastern Han.

The Divorced Woman and Her Husband's Extended Family

A comparison between two similar divorce stories taking place at the beginning and the end of the early medieval period respectively, in which both wives were divorced because of their wish to live independently of their husbands' families, demonstrates an increasing emphasis on favoring and preserving multi-generational family structure over the course of the early medieval period.

The bold act of divorce in the first story could very well have facilitated a man's rise to prominence. Li Chong 李充 (fl. 106), coming from a deprived background, came to be regarded by his contemporaries as a man with upright conduct, and this reputation eventually earned him

an honored place in the central government and the respect from the emperor. It was thanks to his act of divorcing his wife that Li Chong started to build up his reputation. Li Chong's biography opens up with his divorce story:

Li Chong, style name Daxun, was a man from Chenliu [in present day Henan 河南]. His family was poor. His six brothers ate the same foods and took turns to wear the same clothes. His wife said to [Li] Chong in private: "We live such an impoverished life, and it is hard to maintain concord for long. I have some private property, and I would like us to separate [from the family]." [Li] Chong responded insincerely: "If you want us to live separately, you should brew some wine and prepare for a gathering, and invite relatives and friends over to discuss the matter together." His wife followed [Li] Chong's suggestion and prepared wine to entertain guests. In the middle of the banquet, [Li] Chong knelt to his mother and confessed: "This wife of mine is wanting in proper conduct. She has instigated me to separate from you and my brothers. She deserves to be expelled." [He] then scolded his wife, and ordered her to leave his house. His wife sobbed and left. People at the banquet were dumbstruck and quieted down, and the party was subsequently dismissed.³⁵²

李充字大遜，陳留人也。家貧，兄弟六人同食遞衣。妻竊謂充曰：「今貧居如此，難以久安，妾有私財，願思分異。」充偽酬之曰：「如欲別居，當醞酒具會，請呼鄉里內外，共議其事。」婦從充置酒讌客。充於坐中前跪白母曰：「此婦無狀，而教充離間母兄，罪合遣斥。」便呵叱其婦，逐令出門，婦銜涕而去。坐中驚肅，因遂罷散。

Li Chong divorced his wife because he considered her selfish and indifferent to his impoverished family. Li Chong's wife possessed some private property.³⁵³ Her private property

³⁵² Fan, *Hou Han shu*, 81.2684. Other than Fan's *Hou Han shu*, Li Chong's biographical information is also preserved in a number of histories of the Eastern Han, see Liu Zhen 劉珍 (fl. 125) et al., *Dongguan Han ji jiaozhu* 東觀漢記校註, annot. Wu Shuping 吳樹平 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1987), 19.12a; Xie Cheng 謝承 (182-254), *Hou Han shu* 後漢書, 5.176, in Zhou Tianyou 周天遊 ed., *Bajia Hou Han shu jizhu* 八家後漢書輯註 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986); Sima Biao 司馬彪 (d. 306), *Xu Han shu* 續漢書, 5.496, in Zhou, *Bajia Hou Han shu jizhu*; and Yuan Hong 袁宏 (328-376), *Hou Han ji jiaozhu* 後漢紀校註, annot. Zhou Tianyou (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 1987), 15.421.

³⁵³ It was likely her dowry and was therefore not part of the family property.

might not have been sufficient to support Li Chong's big and poor family, but was enough to afford the couple a more comfortable life. Li Chong, who shared everything with his brothers, could not bear the thought of divorcing himself from his family. Instead, he divorced his wife.

Before he expelled his wife, Li Chong revealed her private thought to friends and relatives and humiliated her in public. He first coaxed her into hosting a drinking party, then disclosed her secret to the party, and finally scolded her and expelled her in front of the guests. His wife, so greatly mortified by Li Chong, left his home in tears.

Though his manner of divorcing his wife might have shocked and upset his guests, Li Chong was nevertheless praised in the remainder of his biography for being a great Confucian scholar (*daru* 大儒). He was said to have possessed a lofty conduct (*gaoxing* 高行) and an upright character (*gaojie* 高節), and was appointed Erudite (*boshi* 博士), a special appointment made by the emperor. When he was in his eighties, he was revered as one of the Three Elders (*Sanlao* 三老), an honor given to an aged and highly experienced retired government official who would be treated by the emperor as if he were his father (*wangzhe fushi Sanlao* 王者父事三老).³⁵⁴ According to the *Han guanyi* 漢官儀, such an honor was only conferred on those who stayed with their first wives and had both male and female children 皆取有首妻男女全具者.³⁵⁵

³⁵⁴ Ban, *Han shu*, 22.1035.

³⁵⁵ Li Xian's 李賢 (654-684) citation of Ying Shao's *Han guanyi* in Li's commentary to Fan's *Hou Han shu*. See Fan, *Hou Han shu*, 2.102.

On the one hand, Li Chong's act of publicizing his wife's "fault" and publicly shaming her was not at all detrimental to his reputation as a great Confucian scholar; instead, it seems to have facilitated his rise to prominence. His wife, on the other hand, was punished for being too concerned with her private interest and suffered a blot on her wifely reputation. She was openly humiliated and was repudiated by her husband before the crowd. She did not utter a word of self-defense, and left the husband's home in tears.

A very similar divorce story happened at the end of the early medieval period. Liu Junliang 劉君良 (6th c.) was an early Tang figure who lived through the last years of the Sui dynasty when chaos and famine prevailed. In order to persuade Liu to move out of his multi-generational family and live separately, Liu's wife took baby birds away from their parents and placed them in others' nests. Pointing at the chicks fighting against each other, she said to Liu: "Even beasts and birds cannot get along with each other, let alone people!" Liu thus moved out of his big family. After a little over a month, Liu realized that he was tricked by his wife, so he grabbed her hair in the middle of the night and accused her of being "a thief who ruined his family (*pojia zei* 破家賊)." He immediately divorced his wife and sent her away (*tuiqian qi qi* 遣其妻), moved back in with his brothers, and restored the fraternal love like it was before (*qingqi ruchu* 情契如初).³⁵⁶

The conceptualization of Li Chong's and that of Liu Junliang's divorce appears different in the two histories in which their divorce stories were recorded. Li's biography is placed under

³⁵⁶ Liu Xu 劉詢 (888-947), *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1981), 188.4919. See also Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072) et al., *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1981), 195.5579.

the category of “Noble Conduct” (*duxing* 獨行) in Fan Ye’s *Hou Han shu*, whereas Liu’s biography is put in the chapter of “Filial and Fraternal” (*xiaoyou* 孝友) in the *Jiu Tang shu*. Although the manners of their divorce might not have constituted the reason for the differing classifications, the perceptions of their behaviors were indeed different. Li’s behavior was shocking to his guests. Liu’s act, however, earned him respect from people from near and far who came to seek shelter and shared his idea of upholding a multigenerational household. The comparison between these two divorce accounts serves to illustrate the increasing popularity of forming extended families among members of the elite society.³⁵⁷

Moreover, the recorded reason for Li Chong to divorce his wife differs in the earliest and latest sources of this divorce account. In the second-century official history *Dongguan Han ji*, Li Chong divorced his wife because her wish to separate from his family disqualified her from participating in ancestral worship 此婦勸異居, 不可奉祭祀.³⁵⁸ However, when the story was recounted by Fan Ye in his fifth-century *Hou Han shu*, Li Chong “claimed” that his reason for divorcing her was that she attempted to alienate him from his mother and brothers 離間母兄. It is obvious that Fan’s account places the emphasis on preserving the big family. This textual

³⁵⁷ The renowned Confucian scholar Liu Huan 劉瓛 (434-489), to be introduced shortly in the main text, championed filial piety (*xiao* 孝) as the basis of governance. Once asked by the founding emperor of the Southern Qi 南齊 (479-502) to discuss statecraft, Liu Huan responded: “Governance lies in the *Classic of Filial Piety* (*zheng zai Xiao jing* 政在孝經).” See Li, *Nan shi*, 50.1236. Toward the end of the early medieval period, emphasis on filial piety seems to have been increasingly stressed. For an in-depth discussion of filial piety and its importance in solidifying the otherwise fragile large families and forging loyalty among members of extended families, see Keith Knapp, *Selfless Offspring: Filial Children and Social Order in Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005).

³⁵⁸ Liu, *Dongguan Han ji jiaozhu*, 19.12a.

variation on the reason for divorce also speaks to the fact that multigenerational family structure was increasingly being favored in the late early medieval period.

The Divorced Woman and Her Birth Family

When faced with a divorce, especially one that is hard to justify, what recourses did the woman have? What role could her birth family play in the process? How would her family background impact the way she handled the divorce? The divorce story of a second-century man Huang Yun 黃允 (fl. 169) can help to answer some of the questions.

Unlike Li Chong who profited from his divorce act, Huang Yun suffered a great deal from divorcing his wife. Huang's story is preserved in two different sources: Yuan Hong's 袁宏 (328-376) *Hou Han ji* 後漢紀 and Fan Ye's *Hou Han shu*.³⁵⁹ Although both histories share the basic storyline, they contain different, and sometimes contradictory details. I will quote the earlier and more detailed account of Huang Yun's divorce from Yuan's *Hou Han ji*, and explain the differences between Yuan's and Fan's versions.

[Guo] Tai said to Huang Yuan'ai [i.e. Huang Yun] from Jiyin: "Your talent is unsurpassed and will be enough to bring you great success. Yet, you have to wait until you have passed forty to have your name known. At this moment you should correct and maintain yourself. Otherwise, you may lose [the chance to success]." Yuan'ai laughed: "I am afraid that my talent will not last till that year! If it is indeed like what you have just warned me, I will endeavor to restrain and preserve myself, and hope that I will not cause

³⁵⁹ In the section on Divorcing a Wife (*chufu* 出婦), the late-tenth-century encyclopedic work *Taiping yulan* cited this story verbatim from Fan's *Hou Han shu*, and so did the early-eleventh-century encyclopedic work *Cefu yuangui* 冊府元龜. See Li, *Taiping yulan*, 521.2498a, and Wang Qinruo 王欽若 (962-1025) et al., eds., *Cefu yuangui* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1994), 842.9987a. However, in the *Zizhi tongjian*, Sima Guang combined accounts of Huang Yun's divorce event from both Yuan's *Hou Han ji* and Fan's *Hou Han shu*. See Sima, *Zizhi tongjian*, 55.1772.

any trouble.” Linzong [i.e. Guo Tai] said: “My words will be confirmed. You do be careful.” Yuan’ai’s reputation had therefore risen. Later on he met Minister of Education Yuan Wei who admired his unrivaled talent and said: “If only I could secure a son-in-law like him, that would be great!” Someone conveyed what [Yuan] Wei said to Yuan’ai, and also added his own guess: “Mr. Yuan has a daughter; is it not that he wants to marry her to you?” Yuan’ai’s wife Lady Xiahou had given him three sons, but he immediately sent her back to her parents’ home, and was going to divorce her and seek [Yuan] Wei’s daughter. Lady Xiahou’s parents said: “When a woman is divorced, hairpins need to be separated and the belt severed. We ask that she be returned to you.”³⁶⁰ She was thus returned. Yuan’ai hosted a gathering and invited more than twenty relatives and guests [to complete the divorce]. Lady Xiahou rolled up her sleeves and shouted out in the middle of the meeting. She enumerated fifteen nasty things that Yuan’ai had done that were not to be divulged, and said: “I have long wanted to leave you, but I could not bring myself to do so. Yet now *you* divorced me!” She rose from her seat and left. Yuan’ai’s various wrongdoings were revealed. Because of this, he was discarded by society.³⁶¹

泰謂濟陰黃元艾曰：「卿高才絕人，足為偉器。然年過四十，名聲著矣。於此際當自匡持，不然將失之矣。」元艾笑曰：「但恐才力不至此年矣！若如所勅，敢自克保，庶不有累也。」林宗曰：「吾言方驗，卿其慎之。」元艾聲聞遂隆。後見司徒袁隗，隗歎其英異，曰：「若索女婿如此，善矣！」有人以隗言告元艾，又自生意謂之曰：「袁公有女，得無欲嫁與卿乎？」元艾婦夏侯氏，有三子，便遣歸家，將黜之，更索隗女也。夏侯氏父母曰：「婦人見去，當分釵斷帶，請還之。」遂還。元艾為主人，請親屬及賓客二十餘人。夏侯氏便於座中攘臂大呼，數元艾隱慝穢惡

³⁶⁰ I cannot locate the origin of this phrase *fenchai duandai*. It seems like a procedural requirement in divorce. The *chai* consists of two hairpins, as opposed to the *zan* 簪 which has only one pin. The two hairpins in a *chai* would be taken apart in the event of a married couple being separated or divorced. The fact that Lady Xiahou’s parents sent her back to Huang Yun to complete this procedure and Huang Yun subsequently gathered friends and relatives to perform the ritual indicates that a divorce may not be effective if this procedure was left uncompleted. *Fenchai duandai*, which might have been an actual procedural requirement in a divorce, has become a figure of speech, meaning the severance of a marital bond or the separation between husband and wife. The Liang dynasty poet Lu Zhao 陸罩 (6th c.) wrote a poem “Boudoir Lament (*guiyuan* 閨怨),” the opening couplet of which is a poetic paraphrase of *fenchai duandai*:

| | |
|---|--------|
| I pitied myself the day the belt was severed, | 自憐斷帶日。 |
| and am particularly resentful the moment the hairpins were separated. | 偏恨分釵時。 |

See, in Lu, *Liang shi* 梁詩, 13.1777.

³⁶¹ Yuan, *Hou Han ji jiaozhu*, 23.650.

十五事，曰：「吾早欲棄卿去，而情所未忍耳，今反黜我！」遂越席而去。元艾諸事悉發露，由此之故，廢棄當世。

Among all the differences between Yuan's and Fan's accounts of the divorce story, there are some important points. According to Yuan Hong, Huang Yun's wife Lady Xiahou was a mother of three sons; the new woman that Huang wished to marry was the daughter—not the niece—of Yuan Wei; Lady Xiahou's parents intervened when she was sent back to them; and Lady Xiahou claimed to have long wanted to leave Huang Yun but could not have done so. For a detailed comparison between these two versions, see the chart at the end of this section.

Out of self-interest, Huang Yun decided to divorce his wife, even though she had borne him three sons, and wished to marry a woman from much more powerful families. If Yuan Wei was indeed looking for a husband for his own daughter, Huang Yun would be marrying into two most prominent families of his time: the Yuan's and the Ma's. Yuan Wei was a member of the famous Yuan clan of Runan 汝南 (in present day Henan), and was the uncle of the powerful warlord Yuan Shao 袁紹 (d. 202). Yuan Wei's wife Ma Lun 馬倫 (122-184) was none other than the daughter of the renowned scholar Ma Rong, whose family was also one of the most prestigious in north China.³⁶² In an age when family prestige was given such a premium, it is understandable that Huang Yun wished to marry a woman with much higher social standing than his own or his current wife's.

³⁶² Ma Lun enjoys an independent biography in the "Lienü zhuan" in the *Hou Han shu*, in which she is noted for her historical knowledge and quick wit. Cai Yong wrote an epitaph for Ma Lun "Situ Yuangong furen Ma shi bei" 司徒袁公夫人馬氏碑, see Yan, *Quan Hou Han wen*, 77.980.

Huang Yun would have had his way had Lady Xiahou dutifully followed his design, but instead Lady Xiahou staged a public denouncement and busted his plan. In the midst of a banquet held to discuss the divorce with family and friends, Lady Xiahou publicly criticized her husband.³⁶³ Huang Yun's reputation was ruined. His contemporaries, including Yuan Wei with whom Huang aspired to connect through marriage, abandoned him. Huang Yun divorced Lady Xiahou, but he was divorced, so to speak, by society.

The most salient element in Yuan's account is the furious words that Lady Xiahou uttered before she took leave of Huang Yun. She claimed that she had long wanted to divorce her husband but she could not bring herself to do so. She was angry at herself for not having divorced Huang Yun sooner, and at her husband for being such an ungrateful and opportunist man. Her anger is vividly conveyed in her emotional taunts, with her sleeves rolled up, in the midst of the guests.

Portrayed as an unyielding, defiant, resentful and self-defensive woman, Lady Xiahou provides a stark contrast to Li Chong's wife who passively accepted the fate of divorce and departed in tears. Through her strategic and brave confrontation, Lady Xiahou made Huang pay a truly heavy price for heartlessly discarding her. The contrast between Lady Xiahou and Li Chong's wife shows how different the reactions from a divorced wife could be.

More importantly, the contrast between the reactions from Lady Xiahou and Li's wife sheds light on the importance of a woman's birth family in her adult life. It is noteworthy that Li

³⁶³ According to Fan's account, Lady Xiahou called for an assembly of over three hundred guests under the pretext of bidding farewell to her in-laws and relatives.

Chong's wife did not bear a surname, but Huang Yun's wife did. This leads to the speculation that the differing reactions from these two women may have something to do with their family backgrounds. Lady Xiahou had the backing of her family when she dealt with the divorce. Indeed, according to Yuan Hong's account, Lady Xiahou's parents actively intervened in her divorce.

Historian's Focus in Divorce Narratives

Both Li Chong's and Huang Yun's divorce accounts seem to suggest that neither the divorce event itself nor the divorced woman was the real focus of the historian's narrative. The focus lied elsewhere. As mentioned earlier, Li Chong's biography was placed within the biographies of "Noble Conduct," and it indeed consists of several Li's extraordinary acts, which include divorcing his wife, killing thieves who stole trees from his parent's graveyard, and defying a powerful man who interrupted Li's commendation of virtuous recluses. Divorce was only one of the feats that defined the character of Li Chong. Huang Yun did not enjoy an independent biography, but was mentioned in the biography of Guo Tai, a renowned arbiter of characters. Huang Yun's divorce was used as one of the multiple examples to illustrate how perceptive Guo Tai was in judging people. Guo's appraisal of Huang Yun's talents and his prediction of his failure were both confirmed in Huang's divorce incident.

This observation holds for other divorce stories recorded in dynastic histories. In order to demonstrate how filial a son the well-respected Confucian scholar Liu Huan was, the *Nan Qi shu* relates that Liu divorced his wife after she inadvertently dropped some dust on his mother's bed

and upset his mother.³⁶⁴ This event was mentioned alongside the tale of Liu Huan who allowed his fingers to rot away from serving medicinal ointment to his long-term bedridden grandmother,

³⁶⁴ Xiao, *Nan Qi shu*, 39.679. Famous divorce stories of this kind include Bao Yong 鮑永 (d. 42) who divorced his wife because she yelled at a dog in front of his mother, and Jiang Shi 姜詩 (fl. 60) who divorced his wife because she was slow in getting water for his mother. See Fan, *Hou Han shu*, 29.1017 and 84.2783 respectively.

The Neo-Confucian master Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033-1107) had a different take on why people in the past divorced their wives for minor faults.

The person asked again: “Among the ancients who divorced their wives, someone did it because his wife yelled at a dog in front of her mother-in-law, and someone did it because she did not stream the pigweed well enough. Those were not serious flaws, yet they divorced their wives hastily. Why?” “It is because ancient people were honest and kind. When ancient people severed a friendship, they did not utter nasty words. A gentleman could not bear to divorce his wife for the grave sin she had committed, instead he divorced her for the minor faults she had made. Through this you can see how so very gentle and kind the ancient people were. As for yelling at a dog in front of his mother, there isn’t anything too wrong about it. But because of the other mistakes the wife had made before, the husband divorced her on the occasion of this one thing.” Someone asked: “If she was divorced for such minor errors, how could she not say anything? Moreover, other people cannot tell whether this was right or wrong. How do you deal with it?” “She must know her own mistakes. As long as one’s action is justified, why does one need to be known by others? However, those who are perceptive must know it. If one has to wait until after people had already broadcast and exposed their wives’ unkindness and made it known to others, one is merely a shallow man. Gentlemen are not like that. In general when people talk, most of them want to make the others sound unjustified and oneself reasonable. But gentlemen are usually more tolerant.” Someone asked: “There is an ancient saying which goes: ‘Make a divorced wife be able to remarry, and a discarded friend be able to make friends.’ Is that what you mean?” “Exactly!”

又問。古人出妻。有以對姑叱狗。梨蒸不熟者。亦無甚惡。而遽出之。何也。曰。此古人忠厚之道也。古之人絕交。不出惡聲。君子不忍以大惡出其妻。而以微罪去之。以此見其忠厚之至也。且如叱狗於親前者。亦有甚大故不是處。只為他平日有故。因此一事出之爾。或曰。彼以此細故見逐。安能無辭。兼他人不知是與不是。則如之何。曰。彼必自知其罪。但自己理直可矣。何必更求他人知。然有識者當自知之也。如必待彰暴其妻之不善。使他人知之。是亦淺丈夫而已。君子不如此。大凡人說話。多欲令彼曲我直。若君子自有一箇含容意思。或曰。古語有之。出妻令可嫁。出友令可交。乃此意否。曰。是也。

See Liu Yuancheng 劉元承 (1068-1116), ed. *Er Cheng yulu* 二程語錄, in Zhang Boxing 張伯行 (1651-1725), comp., *Zhengyitang quanshu* 正誼堂全書. Tongzhi (1862-1874) Zuo Zongtang (1812-1885) zengkan ben 同治左宗棠增刊本, 11.66b-67a.

his mother favorably comparing him to Zengzi—the paragon of filial piety, and his excessive mourning for his deceased mother. Indeed, divorcing a wife who displeased his mother due to even a minor misconduct was only one of the indicators of Liu Huan’s strong commitment to filial piety. In order to demonstrate the fraternal love that Sun Qian had for his cousin, the *Liang shu* 梁書 narrates that Sun expelled his wife just because he suspected that she did not take good care of his sick cousin while he was away from home.³⁶⁵ These stories are not so much about divorce as about the commendation and promotion of certain values such as fraternal love, and especially filial piety, which was the real interest of the historian.

Different Images of a Divorced Woman

It is interesting to note that not only the image of the divorced wife varied in dynastic histories, but also how contrarily the same person could be portrayed in different forms of historical writings. Lady Wang, for example, was remembered as Liu Huan’s divorced wife in the dynastic history, but was highly praised for her wifely virtues in her epitaph written by the prominent literary figure Ren Fang 任昉 (460-508). Granted that praises, and sometimes quite exaggerated ones, are expected in epitaphs, it is nevertheless striking to notice that Lady Wang was addressed as Madame Liu in her epitaph, as if she was never divorced by Liu Huan.

“Tomb Epitaph for Madame Liu” (*Liu xiansheng furen muzhi ming* 劉先生夫人墓誌銘):

Cheng Yi argued that it was because those husbands were kind enough not to reveal serious flaws of their wives so that their divorced wives could get remarried again.

³⁶⁵ Yao, *Liang shu*, 53.772.

She may be compared to the wife of Lao Laizi, she may also be called yet another “wife of Liang Hong.”³⁶⁶ She possessed great virtues, and once mated with her husband, [all her life she did not change (her feeling of duty to him).]³⁶⁷ She aided the gentleman, fastening her hair with bramble hairpin and walking with a bramble stick.³⁶⁸ She gladly carried [firewood along with her husband] and delivered lunch to the farmland in Ji.³⁶⁹ Both when she was a maiden and when she was married, she was known to be modest. She carried out the admonitions from Danyang, and promoted the teachings of the minister.³⁷⁰ How illustrious these two families are! Their elegant influence indeed reaches far. Verily this was a talented and refined woman, and her womanly virtues were true. The Zheng County was overgrown [by underbrushes], and the Yang tomb was silent and lonely.³⁷¹ The trees on Confucius’ graveyard had already grown tall.³⁷² But for the

³⁶⁶ Lao Laizi 老萊子 was an ancient recluse. He escaped the world and farmed in Mount Meng 蒙山. When the king of Chu 楚王 invited him to come out of seclusion and serve him, Lao Laizi agreed. His wife heard about it and said that she did not want to be controlled by others and put down the dustbin and left. Lao Laizi immediately followed her and abandoned his plan of serving the king.

Because of her virtues, Liang Hong 梁鴻, an Eastern Han figure, married the daughter of the Meng 孟 family regardless of her ugly looks. They first retired to the Baling Mountain 霸陵山, and later came to Kuaiji 會稽 together. They made a living by pounding rice for the rich. Even though they were among the slaves, Lady Meng served every meal to Liang Hong with the food tray held at the height of her eyebrows to show her respect for her husband.

³⁶⁷ *Li ji zhengyi*, 26.506a. This line is taken from James Legge’s (1815-1897) translation with minor change. “Faithfulness is requisite in all service of others, and faithfulness is (specially) the virtue of a wife. Once mated with her husband, all her life she will not change (her feeling of duty to him) and hence, when the husband dies she will not marry (again) 信, 事人也。信, 婦德也。壹與之齊, 終身不改。”

³⁶⁸ The bramble hairpin and bramble walking stick are indicators of the pure and impoverished life that Liu Huan lived.

³⁶⁹ Zhu Maichen was a woodcutter. His wife followed him while carrying firewood. Ji Que’s 冀卻 wife was seen to be delivering food to her husband while he was weeding in the field. Lady Wang was compared to Zhu Maichen’s and Ji Que’s wives.

³⁷⁰ Liu Huan was the sixth generation grandson of Liu Tan 劉惔 (4th c.) who was an Eastern Jin magistrate of Danyang 丹陽. Lady Wang was a descendent of the eminent Eastern Jin Prime Minister Wang Dao.

³⁷¹ Zheng Xuan’s hometown was named after him upon the request from Kong Rong 孔融 (153-208) who greatly admired Zheng’s scholarship. The Yang tomb was the tomb of Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE-18 CE). This is to compare Liu Huan to the famous scholarly figures Zheng Xuan and Yang Xiong.

³⁷² This is to compare Liu Huan to Confucius.

moment the pathway to the desolate tomb is opened up.³⁷³ And then forever the dark grave is closed. The husband was noble and therefore the wife was revered. Their esteem has nothing to do with office-holding.³⁷⁴

既稱萊婦。亦曰鴻妻。復有令德。一與之齊。實佐君子。簪蒿杖藜。欣欣負戴。在冀之畦。居室有行。亟聞義讓。稟訓丹陽。弘風丞相。藉甚二門。風流遠尚。肇允才淑。闔德斯諒。蕪沒鄭鄉。寂寥揚冢。參差孔樹。毫末成拱。暫起荒埏。長扃幽隴。夫貴妻尊。匪爵而重。

Lady Wang was portrayed as someone who served her recluse-like husband with high regard, a contented companion of a poor scholar with whom she willingly endured hardships. Although the epitaph offers a very positive portrayal of Lady Wang, it nevertheless reflects a strong male perspective. Lady Wang's life events that were recorded and commemorated in her epitaph were those solely linked to the man who divorced her. It is as if the marriage, short-lived and failed, was the only highlight of her life that was worth being transmitted to posterity.³⁷⁵ Whether she was remembered unfavorably as a divorced wife in the dynastic history or positively as a devoted wife in her epitaph, her existence in historical writings seems to have depended entirely on her connection with the man who occupied a place in history.

Because of her talents and virtues, and more importantly, the influence of her powerful family—the famed Wang clan—she got to be buried into her ex-husband's tomb chamber.

³⁷³ Liu Huan's grave was temporarily opened up to have Lady Wang buried in it.

³⁷⁴ Liu Huan was known to have turned down a number of offers to serve the government and remained as a non-office-holder.

³⁷⁵ Liu Huan did not get married until he was in his late forties and died at the age of fifty-six. His marriage could only have lasted for a few years. Lady Wang, presumably much younger than Liu Huan, died years after Liu Huan passed away. According to her epitaph, the trees on Liu's graveyard had grown tall when she was buried into his tomb. Even though her marriage with Liu Huan only occupied a very brief period of her life, her epitaph consists entirely of her short-lived marriage.

According to Li Shan 李善 (630-689), the commentator of *Wen xuan* 文選 in which this epitaph was included, it was due to the power of her clan that Lady Wang enjoyed a joint burial with her long-deceased ex-husband.³⁷⁶ Once again, we witness the hidden force behind an adult woman's life: her birth family. Lady Wang may be portrayed only in relation to her husband, but with her family's backup she carried behind her as much social power as her husband.

The previous passages suggest that the divorced woman, whether favorably or critically portrayed in historical writings, served as a handy tool in demonstrating the character of the man with whom she was (de)associated. Although the historian's interest in her lies beyond her own person, the vivid narrative of her personalities in historical accounts provides a good contrast to the image of the divorced woman in poetic writings, which is to be discussed in the second part of this chapter.

³⁷⁶ Li Shan's commentary to the *Wen xuan*: "Xiao Zixian's *History of Qi* says that Lady Wang was divorced. Now it says they were buried together. It must be that after Liu Huan died, Wang's family gave them a joint burial 蕭子顯齊書曰: 王氏被出, 今云合葬, 璣卒之後, 王氏宗合之." See Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501-531) ed., *Wen xuan* 文選, commt. Li Shan (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 59.2569. For Liu Huan's divorce account, see Xiao, *Nan Qi shu*, 39.679.

| | 名字 | 郭泰之語 | 黃允語 | 郭泰回語 | 女子 | 孩子 | 夏侯氏父母 | 婦謂姑 | 誰請客 | 婦座中語 | 如何離去 | 黃允結局 |
|-------------|--------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------|-----|-----------------|---------------------------|------------------|---------------------|------|--------------------|
| 袁宏 《後漢紀》 | 黃元艾 | 卿高才絕人，足為偉器。然年過四十，名聲著矣。於此際當自匡持，不然將失之矣。 | 但恐才力不然至此年矣！若如所敕，敢自克保，庶不有累也。 | 吾言方驗，卿其慎之。 | 女婚 / 女兒 | 有三子 | 婦人見去，當分釵斷帶，請還之。 | 無 | 元艾為主人，請親屬及賓客二十餘人 | 吾早欲棄卿去，而情所未忍耳，今反黜我！ | 越席而去 | 元艾諸事悉發露，由此之故，廢棄當世。 |
| 范曄 《後漢書》 | 黃允，字子艾 | 卿有絕人之才，足成偉器。然恐守道不篤，將失之矣。 | 無 | 無 | 婿 / 從女 | N/A | 無 | 今當見弃，方與黃氏長辭，乞一會親屬，以展離訣之情。 | (婦)於是大集賓客三百餘人 | 無 | 登車而去 | 允以此廢於時 |

(Chart 1: A Comparison between Yuan Hong's and Fan Ye's accounts of Huang Yun's divorce.)

II. The Representation of the Divorced Woman in Early Medieval Poetic Writings

In his treatise on the figure of the abandoned woman, Lawrence Lipking states that “[p]oetry about abandoned women has pervaded many traditions and dominated many imaginations; it is part of the history of humankind.”³⁷⁷ There is indeed a long tradition of writing on abandoned women in Chinese literature, starting with the *Classic of Poetry* (*Shi jing* 詩經), the first poetry anthology in China. During the early medieval period, the theme of abandoned women was prominent in poetic writings.

Who are these abandoned women in poetry? An abandoned woman could be anyone who fell out of favor with her lover. She could be a palace lady, a concubine, or a woman from the entertainment world. The abandoned woman could also be a wife who, though not divorced, was nevertheless left behind and lived in a state of longing, waiting for the return of her husband from the frontier or a business trip. She would be pounding silk and making clothes for him, anticipating his homecoming.

Missing from the group of abandoned women in early medieval poetry was the *divorced* wife. Divorce initiated by men was, more often than not, a case of abandonment; but the divorced wife was rarely featured in the poetry of abandonment. She was the subject of a handful of poems in the *Shi jing*; she was also the topic for a few poetic compositions of the Jian’an poets. From the Western Jin onward, the presence of the divorced woman in poetry seems to have been greatly reduced.

³⁷⁷ Lawrence Lipking, *Abandoned Women and Poetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), xxv.

In the long literary tradition leading to the Tang dynasty, except for the divorcées in the *Shi jing* poems, there are only a few women who can be firmly identified as divorced wives: the wife of an Eastern Han man Dou Xuan; the unnamed divorced wife in the anonymous Old Poem 古詩 “I Climbed the Hill to Pick Deerweed” (*Shangshan cai miwu*); Wang Song, the wife of the Cao-Wei official Liu Xun; and finally the heroine Liu Lanzhi in “Southeast Fly the Peacocks.”³⁷⁸ Compared to many named or nameless abandoned women in literature, the number of divorced wives is indeed small.

Contrary to the near absence in the poetry of abandonment, divorced wives were featured in the biographies of their husbands in dynastic histories, as shown in Part 1. In fact, the divorced wife often played a crucial role in demonstrating the character of her husband. In other words, a divorced wife had a place in history, albeit minor, but was very much absent in poetry. Why was a divorced wife largely missing from the poetic category of abandoned women?

The central questions to be considered in this part of the chapter include the following ones: how did the poetic representation of the divorced woman evolve from the *Shi jing* of the antiquity to the romantic verses anthologized in the *Yutai xinyong* of the end of the early medieval period? Why did poetry choose to include certain emotions and sentiments of a divorced woman and exclude others? What problems or dangers did the figure of the divorced

³⁷⁸ Liu Lanzhi supposedly had lived around the mid of the Jian'an reign. According to the ballad, she was dismissed by her implacable mother-in-law, even though her husband Jiao Zhongqing 焦仲卿, a lowly government clerk, loved her dearly. After Liu Lanzhi was returned to her parents, men with much higher social status than Jiao Zhongqing immediately courted her. However, she chose to die rather than remarry. When the news of her death reached Jiao, he also committed suicide. The long narrative poem should be viewed more as a hymn of Liu's and Jiao's mutually faithful and unwavering love than a poetic representation of a pitiful abandoned woman.

wife pose to the male poets? What are the characteristics that an abandoned woman in poetry possessed but a divorcee wife lacked that account for the latter's sporadic appearance in the poetry of abandonment? What does her absence in the poetry of abandonment tell us about men, women, and poetry?

The following pages are divided into five sections. Section 1, "The Representation of the Divorced Woman in the *Shi jing*: Shifting Perspectives on Divorce," introduces the first literary debut of the divorced woman in the *Shi jing*, and sets the stage for an analysis of how the *Shi jing* model was invoked in poetic representation of the divorced woman at the beginning of the early medieval period, but was largely foregone by the end of this period. It also points out the shifting perspectives in the interpretation of the *Shi jing* poems. Section 2, "The Poetic Representation of the Female Divorcée by the Jian'an Poets: A Continuation of and a Departure from the *Shi jing* Model," compares and contrasts representations of Wang Song, a third-century divorcée, in two poetic genres, namely the *fu* 賦 and the *shi* 詩, and contends that while the *fu* compositions continued the *Shi jing* model, the *shi* poems seemed to have started a distinct literary tradition of representing the divorced wife.

Entitled "The Deerweed-picker: A Model of Representing the Divorced Wife," Section 3 presents the Old Poem, "I Climbed the Hill to Pick Deerweed," as a new model of representing the divorced woman, and demonstrates that this model influenced compositions on the divorced woman throughout the early medieval period.

Section 4, "A Different Voice in a New Genre: the Angry Letter-writer," takes up a new literary genre, namely, the letter (*shu* 書), to examine a different image of the divorced wife

represented in this genre, and to illustrate how the representation of the divorced woman was impacted by generic conventions. The last section, “Stereotyping the Image of the Abandoned Woman and the Problem of Doing So,” delineates the stereotyped images of the abandoned woman, and points out the suppressed side of the abandoned wife who defied the typecasting of the abandoned woman motif in poetry.

Revolving round an array of interconnected issues such as representation, genre, gender, and literary conventions, Part 2 of this chapter aims to shed new light on our understanding of the image of the divorced woman in the early medieval Chinese literary writings.

Section 1: The Representation of the Divorced Woman in the Shi jing: Shifting Perspectives on Divorce

The very first literary representation of the divorced woman appears in the *Shi jing*, the earliest Chinese poetry anthology allegedly compiled and edited by Confucius. The *Shi jing* poems provide literary precedents for the representation of the divorced woman in the poetry of the early medieval period, but its influence seems to have been limited. The *Shi jing* influence is most strongly felt in the writings of the Jian’an era, and is much less palpable toward the end of the early medieval period. Moreover, the *Shi jing* influence in this aspect seems to have been limited to a particular poetic genre, namely, the *fu*, and to have had very little impact on the *shi* poems. As will become evident, the *shi* poems on the divorced woman in the early medieval period took literary precedents from the more recent past of the Han and Cao-Wei periods, rather than the distant antiquity of the *Shi jing* era. The diminishing influence of the *Shi jing* might be seen, among other things, as a result of the ongoing process of removing unfitting emotions and

sentiments from the poetry of abandonment that came to be written predominantly by male poets.³⁷⁹

Before the discussion of the *Shi jing* influence on the early medieval poetry of abandonment, I will first introduce the handful of poems in the *Shi jing* that are recognized as early as the Han dynasty as pertaining to the theme of the divorced woman.³⁸⁰ These poems are “Gufeng” 谷風 from the “Airs of the Bei” (*Bei feng* 邶風), “Mang” 氓 from the “Airs of the Wei” (*Wei feng* 衛風), “Zhonggu you tui” 中谷有蕓 from the “Airs of the Royal Domain” (*Wang feng* 王風), “Baihua” 白華, “Huangniao” 黃鳥 and “Wo xing qi ye” 我行其野 from the “Lesser Odes” (*Xiaoya* 小雅). According to the late Qing 清 (1644-1911) classical scholar Wang Xianqian 王先謙 (1842-1917), who compiled *Shi sanjia yi jishu* 詩三家義集疏, the Lu 魯, Qi 齊 and Han 韓 schools of interpretation of these six poems largely agree with the Mao 毛 school.³⁸¹

³⁷⁹ Needless to say, the reasons are more complicated. Most of the divorce poems in the *Shi jing* are *bianfeng* 變風, “degenerate airs of the domains,” and they were legitimated because they represented the moral history of the past.

³⁸⁰ There are more poems from the *Shi jing* that were later understood as depicting divorce and the divorced woman, but in the early medieval and medieval exegetical tradition, only these six poems are unanimously agreed upon by all schools of interpretation to be about divorce and the divorced woman.

³⁸¹ Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Shi sanjia yi jishu* 詩三家義集疏 (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1957). The *Shi jing* was transmitted in the early Han through four different schools Qi, Lu, Han and Mao. The first three hermeneutic traditions were prominent during the Western Han period and had a chair in the imperial academy. The Mao tradition rose in the Western Han and became influential in the Eastern Han. Xu Shen's 許慎 (ca. 58-ca. 147) *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 quoted almost exclusively from the Mao's tradition of the *Shi jing*. The great Eastern Han classical scholar Zheng Xuan expounded the Mao's tradition of *Shi jing*. The Sui-Tang commentary to the *Shi jing* (a Sui-Tang adjudication of Sx Dynasties classical scholarship) was also based on the Mao's tradition, hence the title *The Correct Meaning of the Poetry in*

“Gufeng,” a relatively long poem, is one of the most famous *Shi jing* poems on the divorced woman, and it is this *Shi jing* poem that is most often invoked in later compositions on the female divorcée.

“Valley Winds” (*Gufeng* 谷風):

| | |
|------------------------------------|-------|
| Valley winds are howling; | 習習谷風， |
| Bringing darkness, bringing rain. | 以陰以雨。 |
| I did my best to share your heart; | 黽勉同心， |
| Unfair—this rage of yours! | 不宜有怒。 |
| Pull up turnips, pull up radish, | 采葑采菲， |
| Not just for the bottom half. | 無以下體。 |
| In no way did I fail my good name— | 德音莫違， |
| I was with you until death. | 及爾同死。 |
| | |
| Slowly then I walk my road, | 行道遲遲， |

Mao's Tradition (*Maoshi zhengyi* 毛詩正義). Major Han and Tang scholarships on the *Shi jing* from the Mao school include *Prefaces to Mao's Tradition of the Poetry* (*Maoshi xu* 毛詩序), *Exegesis on Mao's Tradition of the Poetry* (*Maoshi guxun zhuan* 毛詩故訓傳), Zheng Xuan's *Commentary to Mao's Tradition of the Poetry* (*Maoshi zhuanjian* 毛詩傳箋), and Kong Yingda's *Correct Meaning of Mao's Tradition of the Poetry* (*Maoshi zhengyi* 毛詩正義). The authorship of the *Maoshi xu* is a matter of debate. Fan Ye claims that it was authored by Wei Hong 衛宏 (1st c.), but some argue that the *Preface* was transmitted from Zixia 子夏 (507BCE-ca. 420BCE) who was one of Confucius' disciples.

Although the Mao school became dominant throughout the early medieval period, the continuity of the other three hermeneutic traditions can still be seen. For a detailed discussion of the continuity of the Lu reading of the *Shi jing* in the Eastern Han and Six Dynasties periods, see Martin Kern, “Beyond the ‘Mao Odes’: *Shijing* Reception in Early Medieval China,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 127.2 (2007): 131-142.

| | |
|--|-------|
| I fault you in my heart. | 中心有違。 |
| You did not go so far with me, | 不遠伊邇， |
| Just rushed me to the door. | 薄送我畿。 |
| Who says bitterroot is harsh?— | 誰謂荼苦， |
| it tastes as sweet as cane. | 其甘如薺。 |
| But peace to you and your new bride, | 宴爾新昏， |
| be as kin, be as brothers. | 如兄如弟。 |
| | |
| The Jing is muddied by the Wei, | 涇以渭濁， |
| but then it settles, crystal clear. | 湜湜其沚。 |
| Peace to you and your new bride, | 宴爾新昏， |
| you take me as a paltry thing. | 不我屑以。 |
| But stay away from my fish-weir, | 毋逝我梁， |
| and don't upset my gill-net. | 毋發我筍。 |
| I am someone you cannot stand— | 我躬不閱， |
| why should I care for what will come? ³⁸² | 遑恤我後。 |

³⁸² These two couplets appear verbatim in “Xiaobian”小弁 from the “Lesser Odes”: 莫高匪山，莫浚匪泉。君子無易由言，耳屬於垣。無逝我梁，無發我筍。我躬不閱，遑恤我後。 See *Maoshi zhengyi*, 12.422b. Arthur Waley (1889-1966) suspects that it might have been a quotation. See Arthur Waley, *The Book of Songs* (New York: Grove Press, INC., 1960), 100.

The imagery of fish or fish-related objects and activities in the *Shi jing* often carries a sexual connotation. It may be a figure of speech here too. It is as if the divorced wife is saying to the new bride: “Don’t you touch my husband!” But she immediately realizes that she is no longer accepted by her husband, and therefore not in the position to say such things to the legitimate new wife.

| | |
|--|--------|
| When you come to where it's deep, | 就其深矣， |
| cross by raft, cross by boat; | 方之舟之。 |
| and when you come to the shallows, | 就其淺矣， |
| wade across or swim. | 泳之游之。 |
| What we had, what we lacked, | 何有何亡， |
| I did my best to get it. | 黽勉求之。 |
| When great ills came to others, | 凡民有喪， |
| on hands and knees I helped them. | 匍匐救之。 |
| | |
| A man who could not care for me | 不我能愜， |
| but took me as his foe; | 反以我為讎。 |
| you spurned my honor | 既阻我德， |
| as goods that can't be sold. | 賈用不售。 |
| Once it was fear I felt, and dread, | 昔育恐育鞫， |
| tumbling together with you; | 及爾顛覆。 |
| but then I gave birth and suck, | 既生既育， |
| and now you think of me like venom. | 比予于毒。 |
| | |
| Fine dried foods I have | 我有旨蓄， |
| that still may last through winter. | 亦以御冬。 |
| But peace to you and your new bride: | 宴爾新昏， |
| you had me to last through the hard times. | 以我御窮。 |
| Seething you were and storming | 有洸有潰， |

you gave me the hardest tasks. 既詒我肄。
You gave no heed to earlier times, 不念昔者，
when once you came and loved me.³⁸³ 伊余來暨。

This poem is a monologue of a divorced woman who has just been hastily expelled by her husband. The poem starts with the husband's stormy outburst, which resembles the howling winds in a dark and rainy valley. She protests, saying that she has done nothing wrong to deserve this terrible rage of his. Instead, she has always wanted to be with him till death. Nevertheless, she is driven out of his home and is walking back to her birth family. He is too callous to see her off any further than by the gate, and is already holding a wedding banquet for his new bride. This divorced woman, feeling bitterer than the bitterroot, still wishes him and his new bride a peaceful and harmonious marriage. But at the same time, she cannot help but resent the new woman for stealing him away from her. However, she realizes that she is not in the position to resent the new bride. After all, it is the man who divorced her. She thinks back of the hardships she endured with him and realizes that he only used her to pull through hard times. Now that his life is much improved, he is off with a new wife and thinks no more of the earlier days when he used to love her. Why would the man so heartlessly divorce his loyal and hardworking wife? Scholars have different opinions on this issue.

Although there is little internal textual evidence, some suspect that this unfortunate woman is divorced because she did not produce a son. The modern scholar Mao Zhongxian 毛忠

³⁸³ *Maoshi zhengyi*, 2.89b-92a. Translation by Stephen Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 37-8.

賢, for example, is one of the proponents for this interpretation. Mao argues that barrenness (*buyu* 不育) is in fact the cause for all divorce cases in the *Shi jing* poems. Mao bases his argument on two grounds: firstly, when the faithful, industrious and virtuous women speak of their contributions to their husbands' families, they say nothing about producing sons, which is considered the most important contribution that a woman can make to her husband's family. Secondly, when these divorced women take leave of their husbands, they do not express deep sorrow of leaving behind their children. Mao states that the lack of any mention of children is a common feature among poems on divorced women in the *Shi jing* and Han *yuefu* poetry, and the reason for this omission is that these women are infertile.³⁸⁴

It is necessary to point out the shifting perspectives on divorce between early medieval and modern scholars. Unlike Mao Zhongxian, early medieval readers do not insist on “infertility” as a reason for divorce/abandonment. Zheng Xuan's reading of the last two lines of the third stanza, “I am someone you cannot stand—why should I care for what will come?” for example, differs from Mao Zhongxian's interpretation. Zheng glosses the said two lines as follows: “Since I cannot even find a place for my own person, how can I worry about my children and grandchildren 我身尚不能自容, 何暇憂我後所生子孫也.”³⁸⁵ It is clear that Zheng takes *hou* 後 to mean “children,” that is, the divorced woman's children who are left behind with her husband. The Sui-Tang dynasty commentary agrees with Zheng Xuan and elaborates on

³⁸⁴ Mao Zhongxian 毛忠賢, “Qifu shi zhong furen beiqi yuanyin jie” 棄婦詩中婦人被棄原因解, in *Disanjie Shi jing guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwen ji* 第三屆詩經國際學術研討會論文集 (Hong Kong: Tianma tushu gongsi, 1998), 982.

³⁸⁵ *Maoshi zhengyi*, 2.90b.

Zheng's commentary: "Mother and son are the closest of kin. They must care about and miss each other. The reason [she] says that '[she has] no time for' is to show how greatly she resents and how deeply she is pained 母子至親, 當相憂念. 言已無暇, 所以自怨痛之極也."³⁸⁶ As I discussed in Chapter 2, *wuzi*, that is, unable to produce a son, is rarely cited as a reason for divorce during the early medieval period. Might modern scholars such as Mao Zhongxian have been impacted by the influence of Neo-Confucianism of late imperial times?

Not only do early and medieval *Shi jing* scholars not insist on infertility as a reason for divorce, but also they do not blame the woman for the divorce, which is in contrast with the modern scholar who seeks reasons for divorce *in* the woman. Instead, they single out the husband to be the sole recipient of the criticism. The Mao preface to this poem states: "'Gufeng' is a criticism for husband and wife who had lost the marital principles. The Wei people were influenced by those above them, and thus indulged in their new spouses and abandoned their old ones. Husbands and wives were separated and cut off from each other, and the customs of the state were harmed and destroyed 谷風, 刺夫婦失道也. 衛人化其上, 淫於新昏, 而棄其舊室. 夫婦離絕, 國俗傷敗焉."³⁸⁷ The preface takes the composition of this poem to be mainly a criticism of the corrupt marital practice initiated by the Wei court and spread among the people within the Wei domain. Though implicit, the criticism is directed at the male members of the society who abandoned their old wives for new brides. This point is made explicit by the Sui-Tang dynasty commentators: "It is to criticize the husband who did not treat his wife properly.

³⁸⁶ *Maoshi zhengyi*, 2.90b.

³⁸⁷ *Maoshi zhengyi*, 2.89b.

Therefore, [when the preface says that] ‘husband and wife had lost the marital principles,’ it does not mean that both husband and wife were reproached. Having been divorced by her husband, the wife told the story of how her husband abandoned her, mistreated her, and indulged himself in the new bride 此指刺夫接其婦不以礼. 是夫婦失道, 非謂夫婦並刺也. 其婦既與夫絕, 乃陳夫之棄已, 見遇非道, 淫於新昏之事.”³⁸⁸ The fickle nature of the man’s love, and the larger social environment that encourages and endorses such an unfaithful behavior, are the true focus of the early *Shi jing* commentaries on this poem, and indeed other poems on the divorced woman. In other words, it is a criticism of the morality of the Wei domain, instantiated in a particular case of divorce. Whether the wife is sonless or not does not seem to concern the early *Shi jing* commentators, whose stance on the issue of divorce can also be seen in their notes on the following poem in which a lonely woman is picking a plant in the wilderness and lamenting her misfortune.

“In the Midst of the Valley is Motherwort” (*Zhonggu you tui* 中谷有蕓):

| | |
|---|-------|
| In the midst of the valley is motherwort ³⁸⁹ | 中谷有蕓, |
| All withered and dry. | 嘆其乾矣。 |
| A girl on her own, | 有女仳離, |
| Bitterly she sighs, | 嘸其歎矣。 |
| Bitterly she sighs, | 嘸其歎矣, |

³⁸⁸ *Maoshi zhengyi*, 2.89b.

³⁸⁹ Arthur Waley’s note: *Tui*, Siberian motherwort, is also called “The herb good for mothers” (*yimu cao* 益母草) See Waley, *The Book of Songs*, 59.

Faced with man's unkindness. 遇人之艱難矣。

In the midst of the valley is motherwort 中谷有蕓，

All withered and seared. 曠其脩矣。

A girl on her own, 有女化離，

Long she groans, 條其歎矣。

Long she groans, 條其歎矣，

Faced with man's wickedness. 遇人之不淑矣。

In the midst of the valley is motherwort 中谷有蕓，

All withered and parched. 曠其濕矣。

A girl on her own, 有女化離，

Quietly she weeps, 啜其泣矣。

Quietly she weeps; 啜其泣矣，

But what does grief avail?³⁹⁰ 何嗟及矣。

Though Arthur Waley takes the subject of the poem to be an unmarried maiden and places the poem under the category of “courtship” in his translation of the *Shi jing* verses, the early commentaries clearly state that she is a divorced wife and that her husband has divorced her during famines caused by bad harvests 凶年饑饉，室家相棄。³⁹¹ Despite the strenuous

³⁹⁰ *Maoshi zhengyi*, 4.150b-151b. Translation by Arthur Waley with minor changes, in *The Book of Songs*, 59.

³⁹¹ *Maoshi zhengyi*, 4.150b.

argument of infertility made by the modern scholars, early commentators of the “Zhonggu you tui” take no note of the divorced woman’s unproductiveness and instead focus their denunciations on the husband.³⁹²

Not only do the early *Shi jing* commentators spare the divorced woman from criticism of infertility, but they also show sympathy for her by acknowledging the steadily intensified resentment that she experiences. The Sui-Tang dynasty commentary states: “The last four lines [of each stanza] speak of how the resentment and hatred of the divorced woman is gradually deepened, from sighing, to groaning, and finally to weeping 下四句言婦既被棄, 怨恨以漸而甚. 初而嘆, 次而歎, 後而泣.”³⁹³ It is evident that in both the “Gufeng” and the “Zhonggu you tui,” the early commentators do not hold the divorced woman accountable for her divorce, but reproach the man for having foregone the marital principles and corrupted the marriage customs.

The criticism toward the man can be more strongly felt in the commentaries to the following poem on a divorced woman.

“I Went into the Country” (*Wo xing qi ye* 我行其野):

I went into the country; 我行其野。

Deep the shade of the ailanto. 蔽芾其樗。

³⁹² Modern scholars such as the aforementioned Mao Zhongxian have argued that the real reason for her divorce has to do with her infertility. The plant *tui*, also known as *yimu cao* 益母草, is believed to help in maternity. That it is withered and seared in the valley symbolizes the unfruitfulness of the woman who picks the plant. Because she is infertile, she is divorced and is sent back to her parents. The wilderness in which she is found picking the *tui* plant may very well be located alongside the road back to her birth family.

³⁹³ *Maoshi zhengyi*, 4.151a.

| | |
|---------------------------------|-------|
| It was as bride and wife | 昏姻之故。 |
| That I came to your house. | 言就爾居。 |
| But you did not provide for me— | 爾不我畜。 |
| Sent me back to land and home. | 復我邦家。 |

| | |
|---------------------------------|-------|
| I went into the country; | 我行其野。 |
| I plucked the dockleaf. | 言采其蓴。 |
| It was as bride and wife | 昏姻之故。 |
| That I came to live with you. | 言就爾宿。 |
| But you did not provide for me— | 爾不我畜。 |
| Back to my home you sent me. | 言歸斯復。 |

| | |
|--|-------|
| I went into the country; | 我行其野。 |
| I plucked the pokeweed. | 言采其藟。 |
| You thought nothing of the old marriage— | 不思舊姻。 |
| Found for yourself a new mate. | 求爾新特。 |
| Not for her wealth, oh no! | 成不以富。 |
| But merely for a change. ³⁹⁴ | 亦祇以異。 |

According to the commentators, the divorce is due to the husband's inobservance of the proper marriage rites. The Sui-Tang commentary elaborates on Zheng Xuan's succinct comment on the careless abandonment of the marital rites:

³⁹⁴ *Maoshi zhengyi*, 11.383. Translated by Waley, *The Book of Songs*, 98.

As far as the marriage rites go, kings and feudal lords, once married, cannot change [their wives]. As for Grand Masters and those below them, only after their wives have died or were divorced are they allowed to remarry. Otherwise, they are also forbidden from remarriage. These are the principles for marriage. ... Toward the end of King Xuan's reign [r. 827 BCE-782 BCE], even though wives did not violate any of the *qichu* offenses, their husbands divorced them for no good reason and then remarried. The King could not stop the practice because he could not rectify the marriage principles... When the state suffers from famine, its people are too poor to afford complete [marriage] rites, so the government loosens the rites and allows its people not to prepare marriage gifts so that many of them can get married. Now, it was not a famine year during the time of King Xuan, but many often got married without preparing marriage gifts. Since this custom was practiced in a harvest year, the poem therefore criticizes the king.³⁹⁵

凡嫁娶之礼。天子諸侯一娶不改。其大夫以下。其妻或死或出。容得更娶。非此。亦不得更娶。此為嫁娶之數。... 今宣王之末。妻无犯七出之罪。无故棄之更婚。王不能禁。是不能正其嫁娶之數。... 國家凶荒。民貧不能備礼。乃寬之。使不備礼物。而民多得昏。今宣王之時。非是凶年。亦不備礼多昏。豐年而有此俗。故刺王也。

Men were reproached for abandoning their spouses during bad harvests, as is the case in “Zhonggu you tui.” They were also criticized for divorcing their wives during good harvests, as is the case in the “Wo xing qi ye.”

A comparison between the interpretations of the divorce poems in the *Shi jing* by early medieval commentators and modern scholars shows that there are shifting perspectives on the issue of divorce and on the perception of the divorced woman. Early medieval scholars focus their criticism of the moral failure on the man who divorced his wife, and sympathize with the divorced woman by acknowledging the sufferings inflicted on her. Infertility as a reason for divorce does not register in early medieval commentaries to the divorce verses in the *Shi jing*. This confirms the observation that *wuzi*, one of the Seven Conditions for divorce, was rarely

³⁹⁵ *Maoshi zhengyi*, 11.383a.

evoked in divorce of the early medieval period. The divorced woman's resentment and hatred toward, and criticism and denouncement of her faithless husband are very much justified and endorsed by early medieval *Shi jing* scholars. The ways in which the divorced woman was represented in *Shi jing* are inherited in the *fu* compositions on the divorced woman by the Jian'an poets, even though the depiction of her in the newer poetic form, that is, the *shi* poetry, seems to have started a different literary tradition.

Section 2: The Poetic Representation of the Female Divorcée by the Jian'an Poets: A Continuation of, and a Departure from, the Shi jing Model

The third-century woman Wang Song was a divorced wife to whom a number of *shi* poems and *fu* compositions from the most famous poets of her time were dedicated. Wang's marriage lasted for more than twenty years. But when her husband, a high-ranking Cao-Wei official, fell for a younger woman, she was divorced and her failure to produce a male heir (*wuzi*) was given to her as the reason for divorce. Cao Pi, Cao Zhi and Wang Can each composed a *fu* about her, entitled "A Poetic Exposition on a Divorced Wife" (*Chufu fu* 出婦賦). Cao Pi and Cao Zhi also wrote a poem for her, entitled "A Miscellaneous Poem on Behalf of Liu Xun's Wife Lady Wang" (*Dai Liu Xun qi Wang shi za shi* 代劉勳妻王氏雜詩). In addition, Cao Zhi composed "A Poem on a Divorced Wife" (*Qifu shi* 棄婦詩) and two *yuefu* poems, "Floating Duckweed" (*Fuping pian* 浮萍篇) and "Planting Kudzu" (*Zhongge pian* 種葛篇), that feature an abandoned wife, though it is not clear whether the last three poems by Cao Zhi were inspired by Wang Song's divorce or a general lament for divorced women.

In the *fu* compositions, allusions to the *Shi jing* divorce poems are obvious. For example, in Wang Can's *fu*, "Wang Song" complains:

| | |
|--|---------|
| You, my lord, are not faithful to the end, | 君不篤兮終始。 |
| and now take delight in your young bride. ³⁹⁶ | 樂枯蕘兮一時。 |
| Your heart has been stirred and changed, | 心搖蕩兮變易。 |
| you have forgotten and abandoned your old marriage. ³⁹⁷ | 忘舊姻兮棄之。 |

The phrase *jiuyin* 舊姻 undoubtedly recalls the couplet in the poem "I Went into the Country," in which the divorced woman condemns her husband for having discarded her and married a new wife:

| | |
|--|-------|
| You thought nothing of the old marriage, | 不思舊姻。 |
| Found for yourself a new mate. | 求爾新特。 |

Both Cao Pi's and Cao Zhi's *fu* compositions make references to the "Gufeng" poem.

Indeed, Wang Song's experience is so similar to the putative experience of the divorced woman in the "Gufeng" that allusions to this particular *Shi jing* poem seem to be most appropriate. Cao Pi explicitly mentions the phrase "Gufeng" in his *fu*:

| | |
|--|---------|
| I would happily share the same tomb with you in death, | 甘沒身而同穴。 |
| Thus ending the normal span of a hundred years. | 終百年之常期。 |
| Yet truly a sonless woman should be divorced, | 信無子而應出。 |

³⁹⁶ *Kuyi* 枯蕘 is the new twig on a withering branch. It is used here to mean a marriage between a young woman and an old man.

³⁹⁷ Yan, *Quan Hou Han wen*, 90.958b.

for it is the normative rule in the canon of rites. 自典禮之常度。

I am sad that [the woman] in the “Gufeng” is not repaid, 悲谷風之不答。

and feel resentful that

my former spouse suddenly changed his heart.³⁹⁸ 怨昔人之忽故。

Not only does Cao Pi overtly invoke “Gufeng,” but the diction in his poem also reminds readers of this *Shi jing* verse. For example, the first couplet in the section of the *fu* cited above echoes the two lines from the “Gufeng”: “In no way did I fail my good name— / I would have been with you until death 德音莫違, 及爾同死.” The woman’s desire to stay with her husband in marriage till death is expressed only slightly differently in Cao Pi’s *fu* on Wang Song. Also, the last line in Cao Pi’s *fu* recalls the last two lines in the *Shi jing* poem: “You gave no heed to earlier times, / when once you came and loved me 不念昔者, 伊余來墜.” The unbearable fact of infidelity is depicted in comparable ways in these two literary works.

Cao Zhi’s *fu* on Wang Song also invokes the “Gufeng” poem by recycling the phrase *xinhun* 新昏 from the *Shi jing* poem.

You take delight in the new bride and forget me. 悅新昏而忘妾。

I am sad that your love and favor are cut off midway.³⁹⁹ 哀愛惠之中零。

One of the most memorable scenes from the “Gufeng” is that after the man rushes out the divorced wife, making her feel more bitter than the bitterroot, he is feasting gaily with his new

³⁹⁸ Yan, *Quan sanguo wen*, 4.1073a.

³⁹⁹ Yan, *Quan sanguo wen*, 13.1124b.

bride. The contrasts between the new bride and the old wife, the boisterous marriage and the sad departure are crystalized in the single phrase *yaner xinhun* 宴爾新昏, which is repeated three times throughout the *Shi jing* poem. By invoking the phrase *xinhun*, the contrasting emotions are effectively reenacted in Cao Zhi's *fu* on Wang Song.

The verbal echoes between these two *Shi jing* poems and the three Jian'an *fu* compositions on Wang Song clearly suggest that the early third-century *fu* writings on the divorced woman take the *Shi jing* poems as their literary precedent. Jian'an poets' conscious referencing to the *Shi jing* is not only manifested in the verbal similarities, but also in the similar narrative structure.

There exists a tripartite narrative structure in the *fu* on the divorced woman by the Jian'an writers: her reminiscences of the happy past, her reproaches of the heartless husband, and her departure from his home. All these narrative elements are present in the *Shi jing* poems.⁴⁰⁰ In Wang Can's "Chufu fu," for example, after the divorced wife recalls the happy time she spent with her husband, she goes on to accuse him of infidelity and takes her leave without lingering. She speaks:

⁴⁰⁰ C. H. Wang summarizes "the typical complaint of the deserted (or frustrated) wife in the poetic tradition of *Shih Ching* as exemplified by" the "Gufeng" and the "Zhonggu you tui": (1) reference to the valley (wind) as the essence of a *hsing*; (2) recall my willingness to come to your house to bear you many sons; (3) my suffering with you while you were in difficulties in contrast to my forlornness now when you are better off—i.e., you are tired of me; (4) you sent me back because you take delight in your new mate; (5) I go into the field (or, climb over the rocky hill) to wail while pretending to be plucking some (edible or not edible) plants; and (6) a general statement of the principles of marital harmony, sometimes followed by a warning, provided in metaphors or similes, for the unmarried girls.

C. H. Wang, *The Bell and the Drum: Shih Ching as Formulaic Poetry in an Oral Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 107.

...

| | |
|--|---------|
| You, my lord, are not faithful to the end, | 君不篤兮終始。 |
| and now take delight in your young wife. | 樂枯蕘兮一時。 |
| Your heart has been stirred and changed, | 心搖蕩兮變易。 |
| you have forgotten and abandoned your old marriage. | 忘舊姻兮棄之。 |
| The horse is already harnessed by the gate, | 馬已駕兮在門。 |
| I should be leaving, and this is certain. | 身當去兮不疑。 |
| I tie the sash of my gown and go out my chamber, | 攬衣帶兮出戶。 |
| looking back at the halls and rooms I depart forever. ⁴⁰¹ | 顧堂室兮長辭。 |

After more than twenty years of marriage, Wang Song's husband chooses to divorce her for a young bride, and uses barrenness as a handy excuse. "Chasing the new and forgetting the old, / is something a gentleman reproaches and criticizes 重新而忘故, 君子所尤譏."⁴⁰² It is precisely what Wang Song does in the middle section of Wang Can's *fu* cited above; that is, to reproach her husband for his betrayal.

Wang Song in Cao Pi's "Chufu fu" understands that the inability to bear a son may cost a woman her marriage, but she knows that the real, or the more important, reason is that her color has declined (*seshuai* 色衰). This is why she speaks of *seshuai* before she laments her failure to give birth to a male heir. This is also what makes her feel resentful.

...

⁴⁰¹ Yan, *Quan Hou Han wen*, 90.958b.

⁴⁰² Lu, *Wei shi*, 3.377.

| | |
|---|---------|
| When the color declines, the love stops. | 夫色衰而愛絕。 |
| Such things indeed happen in ancient and present times. | 信古今其有之。 |
| I pity myself—alone and having no one to depend on, | 傷榮獨之無恃。 |
| I regret having failed to bear sons. | 恨胤嗣之不滋。 |
| I would happily share the same tomb with you in death, | 甘沒身而同穴。 |
| Thus ending the normal span of a hundred years. | 終百年之常期。 |
| Yet truly a sonless woman should be divorced, | 信無子而應出。 |
| for it is the normative rule in the canon of rites. | 自典禮之常度。 |
| I am sad that [the woman] in the “Gufeng” is not repaid, | 悲谷風之不答。 |
| and feel resentful that | |
| my former spouse suddenly changed his heart. | 怨昔人之忽故。 |
| I wear the clothes I wore when I first entered your home, | 被入門之初服。 |
| I go out, mount the carriage and take to the road. | 出登車而就路。 |
| ... | |
| Feeling disappointed and resentful, I look around, | 情悵恨而顧望。 |
| My heart is distraught and unsteady. ⁴⁰³ | 心鬱結其不平。 |

“Wang Song’s” anger and despair are embodied in the reference to the “Gufeng” verse. The woman in the “Gufeng” is divorced after she has gone through many hardships with her husband. The husband is happily remarried, and the woman is sadly deserted. The poem “Gufeng” is her outcry for the injustice she receives and the strong criticism she has toward the faithless husband.

⁴⁰³ Yan, *Quan sanguo wen*, 4.1073.

By explicitly comparing herself with the woman in the *Shi jing*, “Wang Song” expresses her pains and sorrows, and voices her resentment for the man who has deserted her.

In Cao Zhi’s “Chufu fu,” “Wang Song” once again speaks of how much she is saddened by the betrayal of her husband, and how resentful she feels toward him. She walks away from her marriage and embarks on a new journey.

| | |
|---|---------|
| You take delight in the new bride and forget me. | 悅新昏而忘妾。 |
| I am sad that your love and favor are cut off midway. | 哀愛惠之中零。 |
| ... | |
| I wear the clothes I wore when I first entered your home, | 衣入門之初服。 |
| I turn my back on the bed and chamber and embark on the journey. | 背牀室而出征。 |
| Assisted by the driver I mount the carriage, | 攀僕御而登車。 |
| my attendants, overcome with sadness, burst into tears. | 左右悲而失聲。 |
| Alas, resentment builds, and I have no one to complain to. | 嗟冤結而無訴。 |
| I will grieve and suffer for eternity. | 乃愁苦以長窮。 |
| I am upset that I have been abandoned for no fault of my own, | 恨無愆而見弃。 |
| and lament that your favor does not last to the end. ⁴⁰⁴ | 悼君施之不終。 |

All three *fu* compositions on Wang Song’s divorce share a three-part narrative structure. The first part consists of Wang Song’s memories of her happy marriage, her untiring effort to be a good wife, her hope for a lasting love and union, her fear for potential abandonment, or all of

⁴⁰⁴ Yan, *Quan sanguo wen*, 13.1124b-25a. Zhao Youwen 趙幼文, *Cao Zhi ji jiaozhu* 曹植集校註 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1984), 35-6.

the above. The second part consists of her emotional outburst—the sorrows and resentments as a divorced woman, and her criticism of the disloyal husband. The last section is the scene of her departure. She puts on the dress of her maiden days, turns her back on the life she shared with her husband, mounts on a carriage and takes to the road. The *fu* compositions always end with her taking leaving of the man who divorced her. This tripartite narrative structure is missing from the *shi* compositions on the same divorced woman.

A comparison between the *fu* and *shi* compositions yields more interesting findings. The sentiments that the divorced wife chooses to express in these two genres of poetic writings are rather different. In the *fu*, she criticizes the man’s unfaithful and fickle love, speaks of her sorrows and resentments, and shows her act of leaving him. In the *shi* poems, however, she talks about how unwilling she is to part with him, how much affection she still has for him, and how she hopes to be taken back by him. The scene of her leaving his home and going back to her birth family is absent in the *shi* poems.

The following two poems omit altogether the woman speaker’s resentment and reproach. The *Yutai xinyong* attributes both poems to Wang Song with a title “Two Miscellaneous Poems with a Preface” (*Zashi ershou bing xu* 雜詩二首并序).⁴⁰⁵ But the *Yiwen lieju* states that Cao Pi is the author of the first poem and gives the poem the title “On Behalf of Liu Xun’s Divorced Wife Lady Wang” (*Dai chuqi Wang shi* 代劉勳出妻王氏). Lu Qinli agrees with the *Yiwen leiju* on the authorship of the first poem, but assigns the second poem to Cao Zhi—based on a southern song

⁴⁰⁵ See Wu Zhaoyi 吳兆宜 (fl. c. 1672), *Yutai xinyong jianzhu* 玉臺新詠箋註 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 58.

source—and gives both poems the same title “A Miscellaneous Poem on behalf of Liu Xun’s Wife Lady Wang” (*Dai Liu Xun qi Wang shi zashi* 代劉勳妻王氏雜詩).⁴⁰⁶ The preface goes:

Wang Song was the wife of Liu Xun, General of Subjugating the Barbarians. She had been married to him for more than twenty years. Later on, Liu Xun took delight in a woman from the Sima family in Shanyang, and divorced her on the ground of her failure to produce a son. She composed the poems on her way back [to her parents].

王宋者。平虜將軍劉勳妻也。入門二十餘年。後勳悅山陽司馬氏女。以宋無子出之。還於道中作詩。

In the first poem attributed to Cao Pi, we read the one-sided conversation that “the speaker” has with a bed curtain, an object that has witnessed her marriage as well as divorce.

| | |
|--|--------|
| Billow, billow bed-curtains, | 翩翩床前帳。 |
| Flare out to hide the shining lamp. | 張以蔽光輝。 |
| Once I went away with you, | 昔將爾同去。 |
| Now I have come back with you. | 今將爾同歸。 |
| Locked up in your case | 緘藏篋笥裏。 |
| When will you lie open once more? ⁴⁰⁷ | 當復何時披。 |

Not a word of reprimand, not a word of hatred. The whole event of the divorce is reduced to one scene: “the woman speaker” gently asks the bed curtain when it will be taken out of the casket and put up again. The last line is ambiguous. Does “the speaker” mean that she will reuse the bed curtain when she is taken back by her ex-husband, or that she will use it when she is remarried? If it is the first case, “the speaker” hopes to be taken back by her husband. If the second, she

⁴⁰⁶ See Lu, *Wei shi*, 4.402 and 7.455.

⁴⁰⁷ See Note 230.

wonders whether she will ever be remarried. In any case, she does not speak a word about her unfaithful husband. The man who is the source of her pains does not even feature in this little poem written in the voice of a divorced wife.

In the second poem, attributed to Cao Zhi, defending herself against potential accusations of resentment upon the divorce, “the speaker” explicitly expresses her strong attachment for the man who has divorced her.

| | |
|---|--------|
| Who says a divorced wife’s feelings are shallow? | 誰言去婦薄。 |
| A divorced wife’s love is deeper. | 去婦情更重。 |
| One does not even spit in the well | |
| even though one will be a thousand <i>li</i> away, ⁴⁰⁸ | 千里不唾井。 |
| so why would one [spite] the person one used to serve. | 況乃昔所奉。 |
| Looking into the distance, it is not far, | 遠望未為遙。 |
| yet I linger here, I cannot make it over there. ⁴⁰⁹ | 踟躕不得往。 |

Clearly “the woman speaker” does not reproach and resent the husband like she does in the *fu* compositions. She hopes that he will change his mind. She understands that she must leave, but she lingers. “The woman speaker” has not left her chamber in Cao Pi’s poem, and the parting is too painful to proceed in Cao Zhi’s poem. Unlike the *fu* compositions that always end with the

⁴⁰⁸ It is probably a common saying meaning that one will not spit in the well despite the fact that one will move away and will no longer draw water from it. Here it means that the divorced wife will not slander her husband even though she is driven out of his home.

⁴⁰⁹ Lu, *Wei shi*, 7.455.

scene of her departure and her journey back to her birth home, both Cao Pi's and Cao Zhi's *shi* poems stop before “the woman speaker” takes her leave.

Cao Zhi has three long poems that may or may not be about Wang Song or inspired by Wang Song's divorce incident, but they all depict a divorced woman.⁴¹⁰ In the poem “On a Divorced Wife” (*Qifu shi* 棄婦詩),⁴¹¹ a divorced woman tries to convince her husband that she is not infertile, the stated cause of her divorce. Deep into the night, this sleepless woman is stirred up by the mournful cry of a bird. The bird mourns for the pomegranate tree in her courtyard. Contrary to the typical pomegranate tree that bears numerous seeds (*zi* 子),⁴¹² this pomegranate tree, though growing beautifully, does not bear any fruits. The woman compares herself to this unusual pomegranate tree, and tries to persuade her husband that her day of pregnancy, though delayed, will eventually come.

| | |
|---|--------|
| A pomegranate tree is planted in the front courtyard, | 石榴植前庭。 |
| green leaves sway in light green. | 綠葉搖縹青。 |
| Red flowers shine brilliantly, | 丹華灼烈烈。 |
| bright colors give off radiance. | 璀璨有光榮。 |
| Radiance glitters like colored glass, | 光榮曄流離。 |

⁴¹⁰ Huang Jie 黃節 (1873-1935) follows Zhu Xuzeng's 朱緒曾 (1805-1860) suggestion that the “Qifu shi” is about Wang Song. See Huang Jie, *Cao Zijian shizhu* 曹子建詩註 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1957), 59.

⁴¹¹ The *Taiping yulan* has a slightly different title “Qiqi shi” 棄妻詩.

⁴¹² The *zi* 子, seeds of the pomegranates, puns with the *zi* 子, sons. Pomegranates are thus considered symbol of fertility.

| | |
|---|--------|
| it can amuse the spirits. ⁴¹³ | 可以戲淑靈。 |
| A bird flies to rest there, | 有鳥飛來集。 |
| it flaps its wings and gives a mournful cry. ⁴¹⁴ | 拊翼以悲鳴。 |
| What is the sad cry for? | 悲鳴夫何為。 |
| The red flowers do not bear fruits. | 丹華實不成。 |
| Beating my chest, [I] give a long sigh, | 拊心長歎息。 |
| a sonless woman should be returned to her parents. | 無子當歸寧。 |
| With a son one is like the moon going through the sky, | 有子月經天。 |

⁴¹³ Huang Jie takes *shuling* 淑靈 in this line and *shenling* 神靈 in the fifth to the last line, both translated as “spirits” here, to mean the bird that comes to rest on the pomegranate tree. Instead of *youniao* 有鳥, the *Taiping yulan* has *cuiniao* 翠鳥, “kingfishers.” Huang, *Cao Zijian shizhu*, 58.

⁴¹⁴ The first half of this poem resembles the poem “On Kingfishers” (*Cuiniao shi* 翠鳥詩) by Cai Yong. Huang, *Cao Zijian shizhu*, 58.

| | |
|--|--------|
| At the corner of the courtyard is the pomegranate tree, | 庭陬有若榴。 |
| its green leaves cover the red flowers. | 綠葉含丹榮。 |
| Kingfishers often come to gather on it, | 翠鳥時來集。 |
| flapping wings and adorning themselves. | 振翼脩形容。 |
| When they look back, they give off the azure aura, | 回顧生碧色。 |
| when they move around, they flutter light green color. | 動搖揚縹青。 |
| Luckily they escaped the ranger’s trap, | 幸脫虞人機。 |
| and were able to come close to the gentleman’s courtyard. | 得親君子庭。 |
| Their obedient temperament depends on your pureness, | 馴心託君素。 |
| both the male and the female live out a life of a hundred years. | 雌雄保百齡。 |

See Lu, *Han shi*, 7.193.

| | |
|--|--------|
| without a son one is like a shooting star. | 無子若流星。 |
| Sky and moon always stay with each other, | 天月相終始。 |
| a shooting star, once fallen, loses its luster. | 流星沒無精。 |
| If I do not move forward I will lose my proper place, ⁴¹⁵ | 棲遲失所宜。 |
| and will be reduced to the rank of tiles and stones. | 下與瓦石并。 |
| Worry rises from [my] heart, | 憂懷從中來。 |
| [I] keep sighing till the cocks crow. | 歎息通雞鳴。 |
| Tossing and turning, I cannot sleep, | 反側不能寐。 |
| and pace back and forth in the front courtyard. | 逍遙於前庭。 |
| Slowly [I] return to [my] chamber, | 踟躕還入房。 |
| fluttering is the sound of the bed curtain. | 肅肅帷幕聲。 |
| [I] lift up the curtain and tighten my sash, | 牽帷更攝帶。 |
| plucking the strings I play the zither. | 撫節彈鳴箏。 |
| Stirring emotions, the music lingers— | 慷慨有餘音。 |
| beautiful, subtle, sad and pure. | 要妙悲且清。 |
| [I] stop crying and heave a long sigh. | 收淚長歎息。 |
| How have I failed the spirits? | 何以負神靈。 |
| Cassia awaits frost and dew, | 招搖待霜露。 |
| Why must it bear fruit in spring and summer? | 何必春夏成。 |
| A late harvest is good harvest. | 晚穫為良實。 |

⁴¹⁵ I take *qichi* 棲遲 to mean “to loiter, not to move forward.”

I hope you will remain at ease for a while.⁴¹⁶

願君且安寧。

This deeply troubled woman takes all the blame to herself. She wonders: “How have I failed the spirits?” She heaves long sighs. She is worried. She is sleepless. She is saddened. She cries. She sighs again, and she pleads to the man to have faith in her. We see no reproach directed to the man. It is the woman who endures all the pains. We also do not see her taking leave of him. She understands that she ought to leave; otherwise she will lose her proper place in her husband’s home and be regarded as lowly as “tiles and stones.” But she walks back to her chamber to play music. The music calms her down. She stops crying and beseeches her husband to have faith in her belated pregnancy.

In Cao Zhi’s *yuefu* poem “On Floating Duckweed” (*Fuping pian* 浮萍篇), a woman is divorced either for no reason or for her old age, depending on which textual variant one adopts.⁴¹⁷ She, like the barren wife in the previous poem, tries to convince the man that she, though different from the cassia and orchid that is the new bride, is better than the new bride. She hopes that he will eventually come back to her and take her back.

The floating duckweed lodges on the clear water,

浮萍寄清水。

it floats east and west with the wind.

隨風東西流。

I left my parents, strands of our hair bound,⁴¹⁸

結髮辭嚴親。

⁴¹⁶ Lu, *Wei shi*, 7.455-6. See Zhao, *Cao Zhi ji jiaozhu*, 33-5.

⁴¹⁷ See Note 419.

⁴¹⁸ *Jiefa* 結髮, to tie two strands of hair from the husband and wife on the wedding night, is a marriage custom still practiced in certain areas in China.

| | |
|--|--------|
| I came to be my good lord's mate. | 來為君子仇。 |
| Day and night, I was careful and diligent, | 恪勤在朝夕。 |
| but for no reason I am blamed and criticized. ⁴¹⁹ | 無端獲罪尤。 |
| ... | |
| The dogwood has its own fragrance, | 茱萸自有芳。 |
| it is not as good as that of cassia and orchid. | 不若桂與蘭。 |
| The new bride may be lovely, | 新人雖可愛。 |
| she cannot be compared with the one you used to love. | 無若故所歡。 |
| The traveling cloud has a return date, | 行雲有返期。 |
| Perhaps your love may also return midway. ⁴²⁰ | 君恩儻中還。 |
| ... | |

In the poem “On Planting the Kudzu” (*Zhongge pian* 種葛篇), as the woman ages, she discovers that her husband falls for someone else. She is saddened and depressed, and walks out of her chamber to wander in a grove. She laments the loss of her love and happiness, and blames Heaven for her unbearable destiny.

| | |
|---|--------|
| I plant the kudzu at the foot of the southern mountain, | 種葛南山下。 |
| the kudzu ranks form shade on its own. ⁴²¹ | 葛藟自成陰。 |

⁴¹⁹ The *Yiwen leiju* has a variant of *zhongnian* 中年, “middle of life,” for *wudian* 無端, “without cause.” The variant *zhongnian* indicates that the divorce is due to the wife’s passing her prime.

⁴²⁰ Lu, *Wei shi*, 6.424. *Xingyun*, “the traveling cloud,” in the last couplet refers to the story of the goddess of Wushan 巫山神女 who transforms into the cloud in the morning and rain in the evening after she visited King of Chu 楚王.

| | |
|--|--------|
| When I first married you, | 與君初婚時。 |
| strands of our hair were bound, and our love deepened. | 結髮恩義深。 |
| We enjoyed pleasure and love on pillow and mat, | 歡愛在枕席。 |
| we shared the same clothes and blankets at night. | 宿昔同衣衾。 |
| I secretly admired the verse of the “Bush Cherry Trees.” | 竊慕棠棣篇。 |
| We loved our pleasure as harmonious as the harp and zither. ⁴²² | 好樂和瑟琴。 |

⁴²¹ The first two lines make a reference to the *Shi jing* poem “The Drooping Boughs” (*jiumu* 樛木). The Mao school interprets the poem to be a praise of the king’s wife who is not jealous of the king’s concubines. However, Wang Xianqian points out that the other three schools interpret the poem differently. Pan Yue’s “Poetic Exposition on a Widow” (*Guafu fu* 寡婦賦) makes uses of the “Jiumu” reference as well: “I look at how the creepers spread, and tie their thin stems onto the drooping boughs 顧葛藟之蔓延兮，託微莖於樛木。” Li Shan’s commentary to these two lines reads: “To say that these two types of creepers tie onto the drooping boughs is to say metaphorically that the wife relies on her husband 言二草之託樛木，喻婦人之託夫家也。” See Wang, *Shi sanjia yi jishu*, 19.

⁴²² *Tangdi* 棠棣 (Latin name *prunus japonica*), also known as *changdi* 常棣, is a plant from the rose family. The verse of “Bush Cherry Trees” praises the fraternal love between brothers, see “Changdi” 常棣, in the *Maoshi zhushu*, 30.320-3. This couplet makes reference to the following stanza in the “Changdi” verse:

Children and wife we love;
 Union with them is sweet.
 As lute’s soft strain that smoothes our pain,
 How joyous do we meet.
 But brothers, more than they,
 Can satisfy the heart.
 ’Tis *their* accord does peace afford,
 And lasting joy impart.
 妻子好合，如鼓瑟琴。兄弟既翕，和樂且湛。

| | |
|---|--------|
| When the year comes to an end, | 行年將晚暮。 |
| the fair one harbors disloyal thoughts. | 佳人懷異心。 |
| Your favor is discontinued and gone, | 恩紀曠不接。 |
| my heart is thus depressed and sunken. | 我情遂抑沈。 |
| Stepping out the gate, what should I look at? | 出門當何顧。 |
| I linger around in the northern grove. | 徘徊步北林。 |
| Below there are necking beasts, | 下有交頸獸。 |
| above there are birds perching in pairs. | 仰有雙棲禽。 |
| I hold on to a branch and heave a long sigh, | 攀枝長歎息。 |
| tears drop down and wet my silk lapel. | 淚下沾羅襟。 |
| A fine horse understands my sorrows, | 良馬知我悲。 |
| it extends its neck and whinnies to me. | 延頸對我吟。 |
| In the past we were like fish in the same pond, | 昔為同池魚。 |
| now we are [as distant as] <i>shang</i> and <i>shen</i> . | 今為商與參。 |
| People from ancient times all met with happiness, | 往古皆歡遇。 |
| I, alone, am trapped here. | 我獨困於今。 |
| My abandonment is arranged by the mandate of Heaven, | 棄置委天命。 |
| but how can I endure the long-lasting sorrows. ⁴²³ | 悠悠安可任。 |

Translation by James Legge, *The She King; or, the Book of Ancient Poetry* (London: Trübner, 1876), 193-4.

⁴²³ Lu, *Wei shi*, 6.435-6.

Poetic expositions on divorced wives cease to be produced for the remainder of the early medieval period.⁴²⁴ Likewise, poems explicitly on divorced wives are rarely seen. Once a woman is divorced from her husband, she is also divorced from the male poet, and from poetry. The poetic interest in a divorced wife in the third century is like the morning hibiscus (*zhaojin* 朝槿) that does not last till the end of the day. Poetry on abandoned women continued, but it seems to have excluded the figure of the divorced wife.

Jian'an poets inherited the *Shi jing* literary model of representing the divorced woman only in their *fu* compositions, not in their *shi* poems. The *shi* poems on the divorced woman contain quite a different set of emotions than that in the *fu* compositions. The emotions expressed in the *fu* are comparable to those in the *Shi jing* poems, but the emotions conveyed in the *shi* poems are not. As has been demonstrated earlier, the divorced woman in the *Shi jing* reproaches, criticizes, resents and condemns the man who divorces her. Her criticism of her husband is acknowledged by early *Shi jing* commentators who also denunciate the corrupt behavior of the man. However, such a strong, critical attitude toward the male is hardly seen in the *shi* poems on the divorced woman composed by the Jian'an poets. Instead, the female sentiments expressed in

⁴²⁴ This is not to say that poetic expositions on the broader category of abandoned women cease to be produced. Jiang Yan's 江淹 (444-505) "Poetic Exposition on the Self-lament of an Entertainer" (*Changfu zibei fu* 倡婦自悲賦), Xiao Yi's 蕭繹 (508-555, r. 552-555) "Poetic Exposition on a Wanderer's Wife's Autumn Thoughts" (*Dangfu qiusi fu* 蕩婦秋思賦), and Yu Xin's 庾信 (513-581) "Poetic Exposition on a Wanderer" (*Dangzi fu* 蕩子賦) continued to be written. Jiang Yan's *fu* is about an abandoned palace lady who was formerly a dancer. Xiao Yi's *fu* is very well written, and is the source of inspiration for a number of very famous Tang dynasty poetic lines. Although Yu Xin's *fu* is entitled "Dangzi fu," it is truly about the wanderer's wife. The whole *fu* is written from the perspective of the wife who is longing for the return of her wandering husband. See Yan, *Quan Liang wen*, 33.3143b, 3038a, and 3925b respectively. The woman in all three *fu* is referred to as a *changfu* 倡婦, a woman who was formerly an entertainer who now is married to a wanderer.

the *shi* poems are much more restrained and subdued, and harsh criticism is hardly voiced. The literary representation of the divorced woman in the Jian'an *fu* writings is largely modeled on the *Shi jing* poems. However, both in terms of the diction, the narrative structure and the emotional content, Jian'an *shi* poems on the divorced woman seem to have begun a different literary tradition.

Section 3: The Deerweed-picker: A Model for Representing the Divorced Wife

The anonymous Old Poem "I Climbed the Hill to Pick Deerweed," preserved in the sixth-century anthology *Yutai xinyong*, depicts a divorcée's chance encounter with her former husband on her way back from picking deerweed on a hill.⁴²⁵ The reason why the woman is divorced is unclear. The poem is made up largely of the husband's long reply to his former wife's brief inquiry about his new bride. The lengthy reply is a comparison between his new bride and the divorced wife, both in terms of their appearance and their productivity. The husband comes to the realization at the end of the poem that his divorced wife is more useful and the new bride is no match for her.⁴²⁶

⁴²⁵ "I Climbed the Hill to Pick Deerweed" is the opening poem of the *Yutai xinyong*. For the translation of this poem, see Page 163-4.

⁴²⁶ The husband's focus on the wife's productivity may suggest that the woman is divorced on the ground of her "unsatisfying" work ability. An old poem reads: "As your wife, I am saddened in heart. / I weave night after night, and am not allowed to get off the loom. / I produce a roll every three days, yet you still say I am slow 為君作妻, 中心惻悲. 夜夜織作, 不得下機. 三日載疋, 尚言吾遲." See Lu, *Han shi*, 10. 291. In "Southeast Fly the Peacocks," the wife says: "It is not because I am slow at weaving, / it is just difficult to be a wife in your household 非為織作遲, 君家婦難為." See Lu, *Han shi*, 10.283. Low productivity in weaving could be used as an excuse to divorce a wife.

This anonymous divorced wife in the Old Poem has become an enduring figure in the Chinese poetic tradition. We do not know when this poem was composed and who composed it, but it proves to be influential throughout the early medieval period. It is frequently referenced in poems on the abandoned woman, especially in the fifth and sixth century. Set phrases such as “deerweed” (*miwu* 麋蕪), “coming down the hill” (*xiashan* 下山), “the new one” (*xinren* 新人), “the old one” (*guren* 故人), “the new golden silk” (*xinjian* 新縑), and “the old plain silk” (*gusu* 故素) are all indicators of the reference to this Old Poem. For instance, Xiao Ziyun 蕭子雲 (487-549) has a poem entitled “On Spring Thoughts” (*Chunsi shi* 春思詩) that reads:

| | |
|---|--------|
| The spring breeze flutters the gauze curtains, | 春風蕩羅帳。 |
| the last petals fall on the dressing table. | 餘花落鏡奩。 |
| Lotus leaves curl in the pond, | 池荷正卷葉。 |
| willows in the courtyard once again cover the eaves. ⁴²⁷ | 庭柳復垂簷。 |
| You were the bamboo and cypress, now you have changed, | 竹柏君自改。 |
| and have abandoned me, the round fan. ⁴²⁸ | 團扇妾方嫌。 |
| Who will take pity on the old plain silk | 誰能憐故素。 |
| as she weeps for the new fine silk? ⁴²⁹ | 終為泣新縑。 |

⁴²⁷ The new and young lotus leaves curl. As they grow larger, they will spread out and become flat. The curling lotus leaves and the hanging willow branches are indicators of the passing of the spring and the arrival of the summer.

⁴²⁸ *Zhubai* 竹柏, bamboo and cypress trees, are symbols of constancy and integrity. *Tuanshan* 團扇, the round fan, alludes to the poem “On Resentment” (*Yuan shi* 怨詩, also known as “Round Fan”) that is conventionally attributed to Ban Jieyu 班婕妤 (48 BCE-2 CE) but likely from a later period. The round fan, a figure for the abandoned woman, fans the man in the summer time, but is discarded by him when the autumn wind arrives.

The allusions to the Old Poem in the last couplet—the old plain silk and the new golden silk—help to identify that the status of the woman in this poem may very well be a divorced wife.

In later poems that make allusions to this Old Poem on the divorced wife, we see some profound change in terms of the power relation between man and woman. We may go as far as to say that the abandoned/divorced woman is presented as empowered when her former husband beseeches her to take him back. Liu Xiaochuo 劉孝綽 (481-539), a renowned Liang poet, composed a little verse about chancing upon his former concubine at a friend's party.⁴³⁰ The poem reads:

“Seeing a Former Concubine at the Banquet of Yuan Jingzhong, [the Regional Chief of] Guangzhou” (*Yuan Guangzhou Jingzhong zuo jian guji shi* 元廣州景仲座見故姬詩)⁴³¹:

| | |
|---|--------|
| Make your former husband stay. | 留故夫。 |
| Do not hesitate! | 不峙蹢。 |
| Otherwise we would each wait till we meet on the spring hill | 別待春山上。 |
| and look at each other while you pick the deerweed.” ⁴³² | 相看採靡蕪。 |

Although I translate the poem from the point of view of the former husband, it is unclear exactly who is speaking in this poem. It could be the poet urging the woman to persuade her

⁴²⁹ Lu, *Liang shi*, 19.1886-7.

⁴³⁰ Or someone else's concubine, depending on which variant title one chooses to accept. The *Shi ji* 詩紀 has an alternative title “Writing on Behalf of Someone about Seeing a Former Concubine of His (*Dairen yong jian guji* 代人詠見故姬).” Lu, *Liang shi*, 16.1845.

⁴³¹ Yuan Jingzhong was a Northern Wei imperial clansman. He defected to the Liang around 525. See Yao, *Liang shu*, 39.553-4.

⁴³² Lu, *Liang shi*, 16.1845.

former husband to stay with her, and warning her that she would otherwise end up like the divorced woman in the Old Poem. It is also possible that the poet is having the man persuade his former concubine to take him back. Taking the poem title into consideration, the second reading is more plausible and interesting. Moreover, as Xiaofei Tian argues convincingly in her dissertation, the male anxiety over his inability to control the female is often expressed in the sixth century romantic verses. In light of Tian's discussion of the women being subversive and morally ambiguous in this type of poetry, we see that Liu's poem is bold in expressing the male desire to reclaim the female, and his anxiety over losing her, which is rightly so as she no longer belongs to him. Compared with the husband in the anonymous Old Poem who simply regrets having divorced his wife—"The new bride cannot match the old," the man in Liu's poem goes a step further, and asks his former concubine to keep him. He even cautions her with the scene from the Old Poem: "If you do not take me back now, we will end up being separated like the man and his divorced wife on that spring hill." This little poem by Liu Xiaochuo could very well be read as a sequel to the Old Poem—developing the husband's regret in the original to an act in the sequel.

When the poem is read as written in the voice of the former husband urging the woman to keep him, it presents the woman as the one who is in control, because it is up to her to decide what she wants to do with him. The vulnerability of the man and the empowerment of the woman are simultaneously demonstrated in this short poem. The power of the female can also be seen in the following poem written by Wang Sengru 王僧孺 (465-522), a contemporary of Liu Xiaochuo. In Wang's poem, the woman uses her past identity of a *changjia* 倡家, a singing girl

from the entertainment quarter, “as a powerful rhetorical weapon—either to defend her infidelity, or to warn the man from further wandering.”⁴³³

“Tune of Plucking Zither: There is One Whom I Desire” (*Guse qu you suosu* 鼓瑟曲有所思):

| | |
|--|--------|
| The night breeze scatters the fireflies, | 夜風吹熠熠。 |
| then dawns the morning light, illuminating the green moss. | 朝光照昔邪。 |
| Again and again, the leaves of deer-parsley fade away, | 幾銷靡蕪葉。 |
| all to no avail fall the grape blossoms. | 空落蒲桃花。 |
| How can I bear weaving plain silk for long? | 不堪長織素。 |
| and who can wash gauze all alone! | 誰能獨浣紗。 |
| Time is immeasurable—when will it end? | 光陰復何極。 |
| yet when desire is strong, you move even further from me. | 望促反成賒。 |
| I know you were born to wander, being a man of pleasure; | 知君自蕩子。 |
| but consider this, my lord: | |
| I myself also came from a public house. ⁴³⁴ | 奈妾亦倡家。 |

⁴³³ Tian, “Configuring the Feminine: Gender and Literary Transvestitism in the Southern Dynasties Poetry,” 127.

⁴³⁴ Lu, *Liang shi*, 12.1760. Xiaofei Tian’s translation, in “Configuring the Feminine: Gender and Literary Transvestitism in the Southern Dynasties Poetry,” 126.

Through a comparison between this poem and the original Han model text “Green, Green is the Grass by the River” (*Qingqing hepan cao* 青青河畔草), as well as the three imitative works on the Han text by Lu Ji 陸機 (261-303), Liu Shuo 劉鑠 (431-453) and Bao Linghui 鮑令暉 (fl. mid-5th century), Tian argues that “the essence of the Han poem is much more scrupulously preserved in this lyric [i.e. Wang Sengru’s poem] than any of the imitation pieces,” and that the southern dynasties romantic verses [exemplified by Wang Sengru, Liu Xiaochuo and other Liang dynasty poets] has the “tendency of keeping faith to the spirit of the Han text.” This Han spirit is what Tian calls the “revolutionary subversiveness” and “moral ambiguity” of the abandoned woman in the Han poem that denies the political or allegorical reading of

As Tian puts it nicely, “in a forceful voice” in the ending couplet, the woman “asserts herself not only as a subject of desire but also as an individual with a strong, independent personality.”⁴³⁵

She refuses to carry out the womanly tasks and wait in vain for her husband to return, like the stereotypical abandoned woman in poetry always imagined to be doing. But she prefers to take control of her youth, and may even act out her desire, which can be very disturbing to the wanderer husband.

It is noteworthy that it is the abandoned concubine, not the divorced wife, who seems to have attracted the interest of the Southern Dynasties poets when they wrote poems of abandonment. Liu Xiaochuo’s poem is about encountering a former *ji* 姬, a concubine and/or an entertainer. Wang Sengru also has a poem written for a former *ji*:

“Imitating the ‘Deerweed’ Line: A Poem Written on Behalf of the Former Concubine of Mr. He, Director of Bureau of Provisions” (*Wei He kubu jiuji ni miwu zhi ju shi* 為何庫部舊姬擬靡蕪之句詩)⁴³⁶:

I step out the door to look at the fragrant orchids, 出戶望蘭薰。

the female in the *Shi jing* and the *Chuci* traditions. Tian argues that the abandoned woman in the romantic poetry of the sixth century “can be understood as the uneasy progeny of the wanderer’s wife” in the original Han text.

⁴³⁵ Tian, “Configuring the Feminine: Gender and Literary Transvestitism in the Southern Dynasties Poetry,” 127.

⁴³⁶ Mr. He’s identity cannot be ascertained. The title of the poem is different in the *Yiwen leiju* which has “Imitating ‘I Climbed the Hill to Pick Deerweed’: A Poem Written on Behalf of He Xun’s Former Concubine” (*Wei He Xun jiuji ni shangshan cai miwu shi* 為何遜舊姬擬上山采靡蕪詩). Thus the *Yiwen leiju* takes Mr. He to be He Xun 何遜 (ca. 480-ca. 519) whose literary collection was first put together by Wang Sengru. See Ouyang, *Yiwen leiju*, 32.566. The *Yutai xinyong jianzhu* identifies Mr. He as He Jiong 何炯 who, according to the *Liang shu*, once served as the director of the Bureau of Provision (*kubu* 庫部), a major subsection under the Ministry of War (*bingbu* 兵部). See Wu, *Yutai xinyong jianzhu*, 241.

| | |
|---|--------|
| lifting the door-curtain, I encounter you, my lord. | 褰簾正逢君。 |
| I gather myself and ask you: | 歛容裁一訪。 |
| “Can I learn something about your new sweetheart?” ⁴³⁷ | 新知詎可聞。 |
| The new person approaches with a smile, | 新人含笑近。 |
| and the old person retreats in tears. | 故人含淚隱。 |
| I compare my heart to the pine tree in cold weather, | 妾意在寒松。 |
| yet your heart chases after the morning hibiscus.” ⁴³⁸ | 君心逐朝槿。 |

The title of Wang’s poem shows that referencing to the Old Poem is a conscious act. The contrast between the “new person” and the “old person” also makes the reference obvious. Although writing with the Old Poem in mind, Wang Sengru has replaced the divorced wife with an abandoned concubine, just as Liu Xiaochuo does in his poem. The woman in Wang’s poem is once again a *ji*, a concubine who has been discarded by her former husband. The triangular relationship in the Old Poem and these later poems remains the same, but the female actors have changed. The wife has retreated and the concubine has entered the stage.

Other than the aforementioned Liu Xiaochuo and Wang Sengru, prominent literary figures such as Wu Jun 吳均 (469-520), Xiao Gang 蕭綱 (503-551, r. 549-551) and Xiao Yi 蕭繹 (508-555, r. 552-555) all wrote about abandoned concubines: *quqie* 去妾, *qiqie* 棄妾, *guji* 故

⁴³⁷ Both the *Yutai xinyong* and the *Yiwen leiju* versions have *wen* 聞 instead of *jian* 間. Lu Qinli might be mistaken to have it as *jian* 間.

⁴³⁸ Lu, *Liang shi*, 12.1764. The morning hibiscus is the type of flower that only lasts for a day. Here it means that the husband is constantly pursuing the fleeting romance.

姬 or *jiuji* 舊姬.⁴³⁹ Here is a poem by Wu Jun on an abandoned concubine (*quqie*) longing to hear from her former husband:

“A Poem Presented to My Former Husband, from the Abandoned Concubine” (*Quqie zeng qianfu shi* 去妾贈前夫詩):

| | |
|---|--------|
| This abandoned concubine lingers at the river bridge, | 棄妾在河橋。 |
| longing for you, yet you are far away. | 相思復相遼。 |
| The phoenix-shaped pin falls from my hair, | 鳳凰簪落鬢。 |
| the belt with lotus patterns hangs loosely around my waist. | 蓮花帶緩腰。 |
| My heart is broken at our separation, | 腸從別處斷。 |
| my looks decay in tears. | 貌在淚中消。 |
| I wish that you, my lord, would remember our past, | 願君憶疇昔。 |
| and send me a word or two to comfort me. ⁴⁴⁰ | 片言時見饒。 |

It is unlikely that these terms *quqie*, *qiqie*, *guji* or *jiuji* are self-humbling appellations for those who were actually divorced wives, for it would be insulting to the divorced wife if the poet presents her as a lower class concubine/entertainer.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁹ Wang Sengru has at least two poems on Mr. He's abandoned concubine. The other one that is not cited in the main text is “A Poem on Mr. He's Concubine Harboring Resentment” (*He sheng jiren you yuan shi* 何生姬人有怨詩). Lu, *Liang shi*, 12.1764. “A Poem of Self-Lament, on Behalf of a Concubine” (*Wei jiren zishang shi* 為姬人自傷詩) is another poem on an abandoned concubine who was formerly an entertainer. Lu, *Liang shi*, 12.1768. It is not clear whether this concubine is associated with Mr. He. Xiao Gang, “A Poem on Someone's Abandoned Concubine” (*Yong ren qiqie shi* 詠人棄妾詩). Lu, *Liang shi*, 22.1953. Xiao Yi, “A Poem on Feeling Resentful, on Behalf of a Former Concubine” (*Dai jiuji you yuan shi* 代舊姬有怨詩). Lu, *Liang shi*, 25.2309.

⁴⁴⁰ Lu, *Liang shi*, 11.1723.

The divorced deerweed-picker in the Old Poem clearly serves as a major model for the representation of the abandoned woman in these romantic verses. However, these later compositions sometimes modify this figure by presenting her as someone who is empowered by her detachment from the man and by her will to fulfill her sexual desires. Although men of letters were willing to give the woman a voice, they tend to shy away from the figure of a divorced wife, and instead concubines more frequently turn out to be the subject of poetry of abandonment of the fifth and sixth century. Perhaps it is less threatening to imagine the lower-class concubines being freer to explore sexuality than to imagine divorced wives doing so?

Section 4: A Different Voice in a New Genre: the Angry Letter-writer

Up to this point, I have discussed the representation of the divorced woman in the poetic genres of *shi* and *fu*. Thanks to a chance survival, we get to see a divorced woman expressing her feelings in yet another literary genre, namely, the letter (*shu*). The generic conventions undoubtedly play a role in the differing expressions of the feelings of the woman, as we see the image of the divorced woman conjured up in this epistolary form instantiated in this lone letter is quite distinct from that in the *shi* and *fu* writings.

We know that a divorce letter (*xiushu* 休書) became a part of the divorce procedure as early as the Tang dynasty, but there is no way of knowing whether such a letter was required in the divorce process of the early medieval times. Even if it was a required step in divorce, no such letters have survived. Not exactly a divorce letter, but “A Letter to Dou Xuan” (*Yu Dou Xuan shu*

⁴⁴¹ Also, men might well be forced by their parents (or their own wives) to dismiss a courtesan/concubine/entertainer precisely because he was (too much) in love with her.

與竇玄書) from the hand of an Eastern Han female divorcée—thanks to its preservation in the early Tang encyclopedic compilation *Yiwen leiju*—allows us a peek at how a divorced woman might express her own feelings in the epistolary form.

Dou Xuan of the Latter Han had unusual looks. The emperor married a princess to him. His former wife sent Xuan a letter to bid farewell. [The letter] reads:

This divorced wife and abandoned woman respectfully addresses Mr. Dou: I am lowly and humble, and am inferior to the noble person [i.e. the princess]. I grow more distant from you daily, and daily she becomes dearer to you. To whom can I complain? —I call out to the blue heaven above. Alas, Mr. Dou! “With regards to clothes, we never tire of those that are new; with regards to people, we never tire of those who are old.” My sorrows are impossible to contain, and my resentment will not go away by itself. Who exactly is that person who now occupies my place!⁴⁴²

後漢竇玄，形貌絕異。天子以公主妻之，舊妻與玄書別，曰：

⁴⁴² Yan, *Quan Hou Han wen*, 96.990b. An old *yuefu* poem contains two lines that resonate with this letter. The Qing literary critic Shen Deqian 沈德潛 (1673-1769) attributes the old *yuefu* poem to Dou Xuan’s wife and claims that she “sent both the letter and the poem to Xuan (*ji shu ji ge yu Xuan* 寄書及歌與玄).” See Shen Deqian, *Gushi yuan* 古詩源 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002). The old *yuefu* poem reads:

| | |
|--|-------|
| Lonely is the white rabbit, | 瑩瑩白兔。 |
| it now runs, it now looks back. | 東走西顧。 |
| As for clothes, it is always better to be new, | 衣不如新。 |
| and for people, it is always better to be old. | 人不如故。 |

According to the *Hanyu da cidian* 漢語大詞典, the solitary white rabbit became a metaphor for an abandoned woman (*qifu* 棄婦), and the image of the white rabbit running while keeping looking back (*dongzou xigu* 東走西顧) is interpreted as an abandoned woman remembering her old love (*nianjiu* 念舊). Yet, Shen Deqian’s assignment of this *yuefu* poem to Dou Xuan’s wife is arbitrary. The *Taiping yulan*, the source of this song, cites it as an Ancient Prelude Song (*Gu yan ge* 古艷歌). This is likely a case of the desire to find an author for an anonymous old poem.

棄妻斥女敬白竇生：卑賤鄙陋。不如貴人。妾日已遠。彼日已親。何所告訴。仰呼蒼天。悲哉竇生。衣不厭新。人不厭故。悲不可忍。怨不自去。彼獨何人。而居我處。

Dou's wife, angered by the unfair fate, expressed her strong emotions in the farewell letter to her husband. She was sad, resentful, and unable to come to terms with the unjust treatment she received. The intense feelings that Dou Xuan's wife expressed in this letter are rarely seen in Chinese poetry of abandonment.

One of Liu Xiaowei's 劉孝威 (496-549) *yuefu* poems depicts a case of abandonment set in the Han dynasty. When we compare Dou's wife's letter with the sentiment of the abandoned woman in Liu's poem, we can tell how very different the emotions shown in these two texts are.

“Don't You See” (*Du bu jian* 獨不見)⁴⁴³:

| | |
|--|--------|
| My husband dons the hair clasp and cap tassels of an official, | 夫婿結纓簪。 |
| he receives special favors from the Han emperor. | 偏蒙漢寵深。 |
| Led by palace eunuchs, he enters the inner chamber; | 中人引臥內。 |
| escorting the imperial carriage, he roams in the Shanglin Park. ⁴⁴⁴ | 副車遊上林。 |
| His seal sash is dyed in the color of the Langya plant; | 綬染瑯琊草。 |
| the cicada [on his cap] is cast in Wuwei metal. ⁴⁴⁵ | 蟬鑄武威金。 |

⁴⁴³ According to the *Yuefu jieti* 樂府解題, “Du bu jian” is an old *yuefu* title that expresses a desire to see an old love that is never fulfilled 傷思而不得見.

⁴⁴⁴ *Fuche* 副車 is the chariots that escort the imperial carriage.

⁴⁴⁵ *Langya cao*, a type of green plant growing in the Langya region (in present-day Shandong), was traditionally used to dye seal sashes and had thus become the metonym for seal sashes. Only the high-ranking officials, such as those with an annual salary of 2,000 bushels of grains (*erqian dan* 二千石),

| | |
|--|--------|
| He split from me and moved into the first-grade home, ⁴⁴⁶ | 分家移甲第。 |
| and leaves me behind to live to the south of the River. ⁴⁴⁷ | 留妾住河陰。 |
| I sleep alone under a quilt of mandarin ducks, | 獨寢鴛鴦被。 |
| and play in solitude the zither of phoenixes. | 自理鳳凰琴。 |
| Who takes pity on the pair of jade chopsticks, ⁴⁴⁸ | 誰憐雙玉筯。 |
| that runs down my face, and then my lapel? ⁴⁴⁹ | 流面復流襟。 |

The first four lines of this poem allude to the story of Han Yan 韓嫣, Emperor Wu of Han 漢武帝 (156-87 BCE, r. 141-87 BCE) favorite official, with whom it is believed the emperor had a homosexual relationship. Han Yan reached the rank of Senior Grand Master (*shang dafu* 上大夫), a high position in the Han officialdom with an annual salary of 2,000 bushels of grain (*erqian dan* 二千石). Han Yan frequently shared a bed with Emperor Wudi. Liu Fei 劉非 (169-127 BCE), Prince of Jiangdu 江都王 and Emperor Wudi's half-brother, was once invited to go hunting in the Shanglin Park with the emperor. The emperor ordered his entourage, led by Han Yan, to arrive at the park before him in order to survey the hunting grounds 先使嫣乘副車, 從數

were entitled to decorate their official cap with a gold cicada (*jinchan* 金蟬) and to carry a silver seal fastened with a green sash (*yinyin qingshou* 銀印青綬). See Liu, *Dongguan Han ji jiaozhu*, 4.143.

⁴⁴⁶ *Jiadi* 甲第, the first-grade home, was one of the many wedding gifts that Emperor Cheng of Han 漢成帝 (51-7BCE, r. 33-7BCE) bestowed on Zhang Fang 張放 (d. 6BCE) on the occasion of his marriage with Empress Xu's 許皇后 (d. 8BCE) niece. Zhang Fang was Emperor Chengdi's cousin and his favorite male lover. See Ban, *Han shu*, 59.2654.

⁴⁴⁷ Heyin may be the proper name for the Heyin county 河陰郡, in present-day Henan Province.

⁴⁴⁸ The jade chopsticks are the two streams of tears.

⁴⁴⁹ Lu, *Liang shi*, 18.1871.

十百騎馳視獸。When Han Yan and the entourage arrived at the park in their chariots, Liu Fei mistook Han Yan to be the emperor, and kowtowed on the roadside. Han Yan did not see Liu Fei and rode passed him. Liu Fei was greatly humiliated and complained of this incident to the empress dowager. Soon after, Han Yan was accused by the empress dowager of having sexual relations with palace ladies, and was executed.⁴⁵⁰

In light of the allusions to Han Yan and Emperor Wudi, we may say that what the woman in Liu Xiaowei's poem experiences is similar to Dou Xuan's wife, except that her husband was chosen to serve the emperor himself, not to wed a princess.⁴⁵¹ That is, she lost her husband to another man. Yet, unlike Dou Xuan's wife, this woman does not call out to heaven, nor does she cry out and question her husband's new love. Her feelings are much more reserved in Liu's poem. The contrast between her lone self and the paired mandarin ducks on her quilt or the matching phoenixes on her zither is all she says about her feelings. Even when she cries, tears streaming down her face silently, though one may say copiously.

The generic conventions may partly explain the different ways of expressing emotions in these two texts. Letter as a literary genre is known for allowing more open and straightforward expressions. But we should also acknowledge that poetry of abandonment only permits certain moods and feelings—longing and melancholy, for example, in an abandoned woman to exist.

⁴⁵⁰ Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145-86 BCE), *Shi ji* 史記, annotated by Pei Yin 裴駟 (5th c.) and Zhang Shoujie 張守節 (7th c.), indexed by Sima Zhen 司馬貞 (8th c.) (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1981), 125.3194-5.

⁴⁵¹ If the allusion to Zhang Fang is intended in the seventh line of the poem, then the woman's husband is not only having a homosexual relationship with the emperor, but also is getting married with a new woman.

Should we have only the poems to read, we may be misled to stereotype the emotional reactions of an abandoned/divorced woman.

Section 5: Stereotyping the Image of the Abandoned Woman and the Problem of Doing So

If a divorced wife is not a typical type of the abandoned woman, who are those abandoned women in whose voice almost “every great male poet has written at least one poem”?⁴⁵² There are three prominent types of abandoned women in the early medieval Chinese poetry: a wife left behind by her husband who might be a traveler, an official who goes off to seek office, or a soldier who fights in the frontier; a deserted concubine who might have been an entertainer in the past; and a palace lady who falls into disfavor. The ways in which these types of abandoned women are depicted in poetry are very similar. In the following pages, I will take the first type of the abandoned woman as an example, and demonstrate how she is portrayed in the poetry of abandonment.

There are a great number of poems depicting a woman longing for her absent man who may be an official in the capital city, or a traveler whose reason of absence from home is unspecified. Usually, the wife is left in the south and the man sojourns in the north. A great distance separates the couple, and sometimes the distance is so great that it makes the epistolary communication between them almost impossible. Often, there is an anticipated date of homecoming, but this date is always missed. And her husband’s return date seems to be forever postponed. When the man is away, the woman loses all her interest in adorning herself. She also loses appetite and has trouble sleeping at night. She is pining away. She laments:

⁴⁵² Lipking, *Abandoned Women and Poetic Tradition*, xxv.

| | |
|---|--------|
| You have gone traveling and have not returned, | 君行殊不返。 |
| for whom should I dress up? | 我飾為誰容。 |
| The incense burner is covered up and not used, | 鑪薰闔不用。 |
| dust gathers on my mirror case. | 鏡匣上塵生。 |
| Silk clothes lose its colors, | 綺羅失常色。 |
| gold and kingfisher jewelry darken and dull. | 金翠暗無精。 |
| I forget to take fine foods, | 嘉肴既忘御。 |
| choice wine is also often stopped. ⁴⁵³ | 旨酒亦常停。 |

She is confined to her empty chamber while longing for her absent lover. Her dressing table is covered by dust, her mirror no longer bright, her brazier is put away, her silk clothes have lost color, and her fine jewelry is dulled. She is no longer interested in adorn herself.⁴⁵⁴ It is a listless world, or so we are told.

A number of poems which all begin with the line “since you have left” (*zi jun zhi chu yi* 自君之出矣) depict the lovesickness that the abandoned woman suffers. The line “since you

⁴⁵³ Lu, *Wei shi*, 3.376.

⁴⁵⁴ Xiaofei Tian has an insightful discussion on the presence and absence of a woman’s make-up and the moral ramifications of applying make-up. She argues that applying make-up is a social behavior. When a woman applies make-up, it is always implied that there is the *other*, and we need to consider this behavior in a field of relations. When a woman stops adorning herself, she is cut off from the community to which she is connected only through the man whom she applies make-up for. When she adorns herself despite the absence of the husband, her behavior suddenly becomes morally ambiguous, because she is trying to please someone other than her husband. Therefore, the wanderer’s wife in the poem “Green, Green is the Grass by the River” who is beautifully made up while her wanderer husband is away is a troubling character for the orthodox-minded readers and critics. Tian, “Configuring the Feminine: Gender and Literary Transvestitism in the Southern Dynasties Poetry,” 101.

have left” is taken from one of Xu Gan’s 徐幹 (170-217) poems “Chamber Thoughts” (*Shi si* 室思):

| | |
|---|--------|
| Since you have left, | 自君之出矣。 |
| the bright mirror has darkened, no longer polished. | 明鏡暗不治。 |
| Thinking of you is like flowing water, | 思君如流水。 |
| when will it come to an end? ⁴⁵⁵ | 何有窮已時。 |

In this poem, the ever-running water is the metaphor for a woman’s incessant yearning for her absent lover. From the Liu-Song onward, poets started to imitate these four lines, and gradually “since you have left” developed into an independent *yuefu* title to which new poems were composed throughout the rest of the imperial history. Later works tried to outdo the original by coming up with the most ingenious ways of describing the abandoned woman’s feelings. For example, a poet drew a perfect parallel between the longing woman and a burning candle:

| | |
|--|--------|
| I am thinking of you, like a bright candle, | 思君如明燭。 |
| the heart is burnt, with tears held back. ⁴⁵⁶ | 煎心且銜淚。 |

The abandoned woman in poetry suffers a great deal of anxiety and fear. She cannot help but think that big cities are filled with metropolitan beauties, and the man she loves must be easily distracted and seduced, and soon forgets about her. Sometimes it is the fickleness of human nature, especially that of the man, that keeps her worried. She urges the man to stay faithful.

⁴⁵⁵ Lu, *Wei shi*, 3.377.

⁴⁵⁶ Lu, *Chen shi*, 9.2608.

| | |
|--|--------|
| Everyone can begin well, | 人靡不有初。 |
| and I hope you can bring it to a good end. ⁴⁵⁷ | 想君能終之。 |
| It has been years since we parted, | 別來歷年歲。 |
| how can I still expect your old love for me? | 舊恩何可期。 |
| Chasing the new and forgetting the old, | 重新而忘故。 |
| is something a gentleman reproaches and criticizes. ⁴⁵⁸ | 君子所尤譏。 |

Sometimes the husband will reassure her of his loyalty. The group of four poems that Lu Yun 陸雲 (262-303) wrote on behalf of his friend Gu Rong 顧榮 (d. 312) and his wife is a good example of it. The southerner Gu Rong, along with Lu Ji 陸機 (261-303) and Lu Yun, moved to the northern capital Luoyang when the Western Jin subjugated their home state Wu, and left his wife behind in the south. “Gu Rong” sent back a poem, telling his wife how much he missed her beautiful form and soft voice. And “the wife” replied:

| | |
|---|--------|
| Faraway, you have travelled; | 悠悠君行邁。 |
| lonely, I live alone. | 粲粲妾獨止。 |
| How can mountains and rivers be crossed! | 山河安可踰。 |
| a long road of ten thousand <i>li</i> separates us! | 永路隔萬里。 |
| The capital abounds with beautiful women, | 京師多妖冶。 |
| glamorous are the daughters of the city folks. | 粲粲都人子。 |

⁴⁵⁷ The opening couplet is from a verse in the “Great Odes” (*Daya* 大雅) of the *Shi jing*: There is none who does not have a beginning, but rarely does one last to the end 靡不有初，鮮克有終, *Maoshi zhushu*, 25.641a.

⁴⁵⁸ Lu, *Wei shi*, 3.377.

| | |
|--|--------|
| They walk elegantly, their slender waists sway, | 雅步嫋纖腰。 |
| with charming smiles their white teeth show. | 巧笑發皓齒。 |
| The fine beauties are truly worthy of praise, | 佳麗良可美。 |
| How am I, aged and lowly, worth to be remembered? ⁴⁵⁹ | 衰賤焉足紀。 |

Understanding her concerns, “Gu Rong” wrote back to ensure that he would keep his promise and would not betray her.

| | |
|--|--------|
| My deep love for you was formed in the past, | 隆愛結在昔。 |
| and my oath pierces through the three luminosities. ⁴⁶⁰ | 信誓貫三靈。 |
| I hold a heart as sturdy as metal and rock, | 秉心金石固。 |
| how would I slip and fall victim to the custom? | 豈從時俗傾。 |
| I vow not to look at those beautiful eyes, | 美目逝不顧。 |
| and those slender waists are supple in vain. | 纖腰徒盈盈。 |
| How can I express my innermost feelings? | 何用結中欸。 |
| I look up and point to the North Star. ⁴⁶¹ | 仰指北辰星。 |

But his sweet words could not rid her of the anxieties and worries. The woman left behind felt insecure.

| | |
|---|--------|
| Having floated in the ocean it is hard to be content with just any water; | 浮海難為水。 |
| having roamed in the forest it is difficult to be happy with just any garden. | 遊林難為觀。 |

⁴⁵⁹ Lu, *Jin shi*, 6. 718.

⁴⁶⁰ *Sanling* 三靈, “three luminosities,” are the sun, the moon and the stars.

⁴⁶¹ Lu, *Jin shi*, 6. 718.

With regards to looks one appreciates youthfulness,
morning blossoms fear the day getting late.⁴⁶²

容色貴及時。
朝華忌日晏。

She goes on to imagine in great detail the irresistible beauties in the capital and concludes in despair that he would certainly forget about his oath and go after those women. She fears that what awaits her is the eventual abandonment.

You will cast aside the North Star,
and ask for the dazzling dark dragon.⁴⁶³
The day is growing late, what else can I say?
When the flower falls, it is bound to be despised.⁴⁶⁴

棄置北辰星。
問此玄龍煥。
時暮復何言。
華落理必賤。

Another source of anxiety is the brevity of youth and beauty. The woman knows it so well that she constantly worries about losing her own youthful looks. She fears that once she passes her prime, she will be left with very little to keep the man around, even when he eventually comes home. The female beauty is like the delicate flower. Once fallen, no one appreciates it any more.

What she thinks about in the day, she dreams of it at night. Indeed, only in dreams can she meet him and receive temporary relief from her never-ending worries and cares. But the sense of emptiness after the dream is even harder to endure, leaving her sleepless for the rest of

⁴⁶² Lu, *Jin shi*, 6. 718.

⁴⁶³ According to the *Wen xuan* commentary, the dark dragon refers to the beauties in the capital. Xiao, *Wen xuan*, 25.1165. The North Star symbolizes constancy, and is a common way of swearing an oath. This couplet means that the husband will forget his promise, and inquire about other beautiful women.

⁴⁶⁴ Lu, *Jin shi*, 6.718.

the night. The unbearable longing is occasionally relieved by letters or gifts—a roll of silks, a zither, or a piece of jade on which words of longings are carved—sent from the man and delivered by his fellow traveler. The occasional gift giving is what keeps her going.

She often replies to the letters, and occasionally initiates the epistolary communication with the distant husband. But sometimes, she is discouraged by the thought that he might have already betrayed her. In one of Yan Jun's 顏竣 (d. 459) poems, such a scenario is depicted: when spring comes, the lovesick woman is thinking about sending a letter to her man, who has been away from home for three years. In the letter, she is going to show him her chastity (*zhenjie* 貞節), the only thing she claims to possess in her secluded chamber. When she prepares the paper for the letter, she becomes hesitant. She cannot help but think that he might have already made new acquaintances a thousand miles away. Three years of separation must have changed his heart, she suspects.⁴⁶⁵

Sometimes the woman is really tired of the infinite waiting, and wants the man to just give up his pursuits and come home. She says she would be content with a simple life with him. Wu Maiyuan's 吳邁遠 (d. 474) "Constant Longing" (*Chang xiangsi* 長相思) starts with a woman's conversation with a fatigued traveler who comes to her door for food and shelter one morning. When she finds out that he is from the northern frontier where her husband is supposed to be roaming, she entrusts him a letter to her husband, in which she expresses her longings and loneliness. She asks the traveler to tell her man:

⁴⁶⁵ Yan Jun 顏竣, "Yinsi guyi shi" 淫思古意詩. In Lu, *Song shi*, 6.1242. Yan Jun is Yan Yanzhi's 顏延之 (384-456) son.

| | |
|--|--------|
| When you see him, I wish that you would tell him this: | 一見願道意。 |
| “The monarch’s gates have nine layers.” ⁴⁶⁶ | 君門已九關。 |
| Yu Qing gave up the premier’s seal, | 虞卿棄相印。 |
| and carried his umbrella for the sake of his good friend. ⁴⁶⁷ | 擔簦為同歡。 |
| The frost comes early in my darkened chamber, | 閨陰欲早霜。 |
| what has kept you lingering on the road?” ⁴⁶⁸ | 何事空盤桓。 |

Maybe the wife does not simply urge her husband to give up his pursuits of fame and glory, but she is worried that something else might have been keeping him from returning home, such as another woman. “Gu Rong’s wife” suspects such, even after Gu has reassured her of his loyalty. Qiu Chi’s 丘遲 (464-508) poem in the voice of a disenchanting wife can also be read as an inter-text for Wu’s poem. In Qiu’s poem, the wife is left at home when the husband accepts an appointment in the capital and finds out that he is enjoying the company of beautiful women in the city.

“A Reply to Palace Attendant Xu’s ‘A Poem Presented to the Wife on Behalf of Someone’” (*Da Xu shizhong wei ren zeng fu shi* 答徐侍中為人贈婦詩):

⁴⁶⁶ That is, it is hard to seek advancement in court.

⁴⁶⁷ Yu Qing 虞卿 (3rd century BCE) was a Warring States 戰國 (475 BCE-221 BCE) figure. He was still a peasant wearing grass sandals and carrying a bamboo hat (*niejue dandeng* 躡屨擔簦) when he succeeded in persuading King Xiaocheng of Zhao 趙孝成王 (d. 245BCE). He was immediately awarded gold and jade and then appointed Senior Minister (*shangqing* 上卿), the highest category of officials serving the king. Later, he gave up his premier’s seal (*xiangyin* 相印) for the sake of his friend Wei Qi 魏齊 (3rd century BCE). Sima, *Shi ji*, 79.2416. This line means that Yu Qing gave up his political career and went back to the life of a poor man who wore grass sandals and carried a bamboo hat while traveling hard on the road, all for the sake of his good friend.

⁴⁶⁸ Lu, *Song shi*, 10.1319.

| | |
|---|--------|
| My husband made a promise, | 丈夫吐然諾。 |
| he accepted an appointment and left home. | 受命本遺家。 |
| I, who shared poverty with him, am thus abandoned, ⁴⁶⁹ | 糟糠且棄置。 |
| and my disheveled hair is like tangled hemp. | 蓬首亂如麻。 |
| I learned that the traveler in Luoyang ⁴⁷⁰ | 側聞洛陽客。 |
| has a lofty carriage covered by a golden canopy. | 金蓋翼高車。 |
| After having an audience with the emperor he returns home, | 謁帝時來下。 |
| and the daylight must not be wasted. | 光景不可奢。 |
| The secluded chamber is open, | 幽房一洞啟。 |
| and is filled with young beauties. | 二八盡芳華。 |
| Some silk dresses are short, some long, | 羅裙有長短。 |
| none of the black coiffures hang to the side. ⁴⁷¹ | 翠鬢無低斜。 |
| Long eyebrows stretch on jade faces, | 長眉橫玉臉。 |
| light silk [sleeves] are rolled up on white wrists. | 皓腕卷輕紗。 |
| Together, you watch butterflies resting on the well, | 俱看依井蝶。 |
| and pick the flowers falling off the eaves. | 共取落簷花。 |

⁴⁶⁹ *Zaokang* 糟糠, coarse food of the poor, became the synonym for the wife who shares poverty with her husband. Emperor Guangwu of Han 漢光武帝 (5BCE-57CE, r. 25-57) intended to marry his newly widowed sister Grand Princess of Huyang 湖陽長公主 (b. 18BCE) to his court official Song Hong 宋弘 (ca. 40). Song Hong refused, saying, “Friends from when one was poor should not be forgotten, and wives who shared poverty should not be divorced 貧賤之知不可忘, 糟糠之妻不下堂.” Fan, *Hou Han shu*, 26.905.

⁴⁷⁰ The traveler in the capital city Luoyang is the woman’s husband.

⁴⁷¹ This means that the hair of the girls is perfectly arranged.

Why speak of the sufferings at the frontier?

何言征戍苦。

I hold my knees and sigh in vain.⁴⁷²

抱膝空咨嗟。

Palace Attendant Xu, to whose poem Qiu Chi replies, wrote a poem on behalf of a man to his wife, and showed his poem to Qiu Chi. Qiu Chi replied to Xu's poem in the voice of the abandoned wife. Xu's original poem is no longer extant. Qiu Chi's reply poem may be read as a parody of this genre of poetry on abandoned women. The generic convention is that the man is away from home, either fighting in the frontier or seeking office in the capital, and the wife is faithfully waiting for him to return. No doubts should be raised about his prolonged absence. However, this wife here is disappointed and disillusioned.

To sum up, the separation between the left-home wife and her traveling husband is long and far. The bond between them is only delicately maintained, through a few words or an occasional gift. The woman is very much confined to her own quarter, a lifeless world. She pines away in endless anticipation and fear. Her whole existence revolves around the man who is missing from her life and only so rarely reciprocates her feelings.

Such is the image of the abandoned woman conveyed time and again in the poetry of abandonment written by male poets. But as Tian has persuasively argued in her dissertation, "it is problematic to construct an unified identity of the Southern Dynasties women as an oppressed, suffering victim of male-chauvinism," and it is wrong to take "passivity and submissiveness" as

⁴⁷² Lu, *Liang shi*, 5.1603.

“the essence of the woman” in the romantic verses of the *Yutai xinyong*.⁴⁷³ There is another side of her that is often suppressed or even purposefully erased by orthodox-minded male poets, and that side of her surfaces from time to time, which Tian calls the image of the wanderer’s wife going “astray.”

In her discussion of the “two archetypal versions of the wanderer’s wife” (*dangzi fu* 蕩子婦, or *dangfu* 蕩婦)—“one faithful and devoted to her absent husband, turning haggard and negligent of her appearance for his sake” (i.e., the wife in the *Shi jing* poem “Ever Since My Love Went East” (*Zi bo zhi dong* 自伯之東), and “another radiantly adorned and morally ambiguous, her feeling toward the absent husband being resentment rather than longing” (i.e., the wife in the Old Poem “Green, Green is the Grass by the River” (*Qingqing hepan cao* 青青河畔草)⁴⁷⁴—Tian demonstrates how the wife in the Old Poem “resists any moralizing or political allegorizing relished by the traditional orthodox Confucian scholars.”⁴⁷⁵ That is, not all women pine away in the absence of their husbands. Not only that, but some even pose a threat to the patriarchal order when they imply that they would not be able to keep to the empty bed. The portrait of the abandoned woman as wasting away, as delineated in Section 5, should thus be read with this other side of her image in mind.

⁴⁷³ Tian, “Configuring the Feminine: Gender and Literary Transvestitism in the Southern Dynasties Poetry,” 77.

⁴⁷⁴ Tian, “Configuring the Feminine: Gender and Literary Transvestitism in the Southern Dynasties Poetry,” 101.

⁴⁷⁵ Tian, “Configuring the Feminine: Gender and Literary Transvestitism in the Southern Dynasties Poetry,” 101.

III. Concluding Remark

The representation of the divorced woman is very much affected by the particular genre in which she is depicted. Our knowledge of her is never complete should we try to understand her only through one genre. Historical and literary writings paint the divorced woman in distinctive settings. In historical writings, she is closely tied to the man who divorces her, to his extended family, as well as to her own birth family. She plays a supporting role in historical accounts of her divorce, and her *raison d'être* in history is to bring the character of her ex-husband into high relief. That being said, we can learn things about her that we normally do not see in poetry.

There is a turn to the inner when it comes to her representation in poetry. The divorced woman is no longer surrounded by families of his or her own, nor is she placed before the gaze of the public in the event of her divorce. She is abandoned, isolated, and interiorized. Being the only actor in the divorce scene, she is given a distinct poetic voice, though whether that voice is genuinely hers is another matter. Depending on the particular poetic genre she is in, the timbre of her voice varies from infuriation, to melancholy, or to disenchantment. She is sometimes presented as defiant, but it is not because of the backup of her birth family, but because of her detachment from the man who used to possess her.

Chapter 4 The Jealous Wife

The sixth-century tale of adultery, betrayal and vengeance, which is introduced at the very beginning of the dissertation, reveals the gap between orthodox prescriptions on divorce and the actual practice of it in early medieval China. As is shown in the preceding chapters, the discrepancy between orthodox ideals of womanhood and social reality extended well into areas of female ethics and marriage life. Of the Seven Conditions for a legitimate divorce, the charge of jealousy is particularly interesting: jealousy was presented as a serious problem prevalent in early medieval Chinese societies; yet extant records show that jealous wives were rarely divorced. The discussion on female jealousy in this chapter thus serves to epitomize the general message that this dissertation aims to convey: contending discourses on womanhood existed in early medieval societies, from orthodox ideals promulgated by states and their leading scholars, to the perceptions of the general public, and to women's own attitudes.

Sexual jealousy was considered primarily a female trait, and a very undesirable one, for the better part of the Chinese imperial history. Jealousy and women often went hand in hand, hence the commonplace expression of “jealous women” (*dufu* 妒婦).⁴⁷⁶ Much ink had been spilled on women's jealousy. We find talks of female jealousy across dynastic histories, poetry, anecdotal and fictional writings, scholarly treatises, medical, legal and admonitory texts—

⁴⁷⁶ There is one occurrence of the compound “jealous men” (*dunan* 妒男) in the extant early medieval Chinese texts. In Wang Fu's criticism of jealousy, he exclaims: “The state is not short of jealous men, just like families are not short of jealous women 夫國不乏於妒男也, 猶家不乏於妒女也.” See Wang, *Qianfu lun jian jiaozheng*, 44.

especially those admonitions written specifically for a female readership.⁴⁷⁷ Jealous women were also portrayed in pictures to teach moral lessons.⁴⁷⁸ Discourses on female jealousy were so pervasive that late imperial scholars felt compelled to defend women against the charge of jealousy. In his essay, “On the Origin of Jealousy” (*Yuan du* 原妒), Gong Wei 龔煒 (1704-after 1769) argued that male infidelity was the cause of female jealousy, and that women acting jealously in order to curb their philandering husbands should be forgiven.⁴⁷⁹ Along the same line, Yu Zhengxie 俞正燮 (1775-1840) argued that jealousy was not a intrinsically female vice.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁷ Daoist and Buddhist texts also talk about jealousy, but jealousy in religious context is not as gender-specific as that in historical, poetic, or medical texts. For example, in a work *The Secret Formula for Nurturing Life* (*Yangsheng yaojue* 養生要訣), attributed to Laozi 老子 and preserved in the *Taiping yulan*, jealousy (*jidu* 疾妒) is considered one of the Six Harms (*liuhai* 六害) that one ought to get rid of in order to nurture one’s life. See Yan, *Quan shanggu sandai wen*, 16.113-2. The Daoist practitioner Yan Zun 嚴遵 of the Western Han had a motto (*zuoyou ming* 座右銘) in which one line reads: “Jealousy is the disaster that destroys one’s person 嫉妒者，亡軀之害。” See Yan, *Quan Han wen* 全漢文, 42.360-1. In his *Essentials for Observing the Buddhist Law* (*Feng fa yao* 奉法要), Chi Chao 郗超 (336-377) urged people to rid themselves of jealousy: “The so-called *ji* means to act jealously. When one sees another’s goodness and virtue, one should respond to it with happiness, and one should not harbor competitive and jealous thought 所謂嫉者，謂妬忌也。見人之善，見人有德，皆當代之歡喜，不得有爭競憎嫉之心。” See Yan, *Quan Jin wen*, 110.2090-1.

Admonitory texts aimed at a whole clan or an entire family rather than women alone also tend to take jealousy as a human attribute, not a female-specific one. For example, one of the dying words that the Xianbei 鮮卑 aristocrat Yuan He 源賀 (403-479) had for his children is “not to be jealous” (*wu jidu* 毋嫉妒). See Yuan He, *Last Instructions to My Children* (*Yiling chi zhuzi* 遺令敕諸子), in Yan, *Quan Hou Wei wen* 全後魏文, 27.3647-2.

⁴⁷⁸ According to Cao Zhi, licentious men and jealous women (*yinfu dufu* 淫夫妬婦) were depicted on paintings as negative examples not to be emulated by viewers. See Cao Zhi, *Encomium to Painting, With a Preface* (*Hua zan bing xu* 畫贊並序), in Yan, *Quan sanguo wen*, 17.1145-2.

⁴⁷⁹ Gong Wei, *Chao lin bi tan* 巢林筆談 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 219.

⁴⁸⁰ Yu Zhengxie, in his article entitled “On Jealousy Being Not a Vice in Women” (*Du fei nüren e de lun* 妒非女人惡德論), argued that “jealousy in a gentleman should be considered a vice, but to regard jealousy in a woman a vice is not correct 妒在士君子為惡德，謂女人妒為惡德者，非通論也。 He contended that female jealousy was a natural thing, because women were forced by circumstance into

Indeed, jealousy was not a women-specific emotion, and Chinese women were not the only ones to be vulnerable to it.⁴⁸¹ Why, then, was jealousy perceived largely as a female attribute in traditional China?⁴⁸² How were jealous women portrayed in historical and poetic writings?

This chapter begins with an introduction of the perception and representation of the emotion of jealousy in early medieval China. Through an examination of jealousy in classical scholarship and medical texts, two areas where female jealousy was most explicitly discussed, I will demonstrate that sexual jealousy in early medieval China was understood primarily as a female emotion. The chapter then proceeds to explore historical and poetic representations of jealous women. Through a sampling of a wide range of prose writings, I will show how jealous women were unsparingly mocked, derided, criticized, and even demonized. The poetic representation of jealousy is somewhat different. Unlike the near silence on the subject in historical writings, male sexual jealousy was depicted in poetry. More important, although jealousy was also treated in poetry as a negative emotion that required denial, women were often

jealousy. He said that if the husband bought a concubine and his wife showed no jealous feelings, it was because she was indifferent to him. And indifference would cause the family to collapse 夫買妾而妻不妒，則是愒也。愒則家道壞矣。Yu Zhengxie, *Guisi leigao* 癸巳類稿 (Beijing: Beijing Ai ru sheng shu zi hua ji shu yan jiu zhong xin 北京愛如生數字化技術研究中心, 2009), *juan* 13.

For a detailed study of the phenomenon of jealous women in the late imperial period, see Yenna Wu, *The Chinese Virago: A Literary Theme* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).

⁴⁸¹ Edward Mark Sanders, for instance, wrote on jealousy in classical Athens, entitled *Envy and Jealousy in Classical Athens, A Socio-psychological Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁴⁸² Jealous women were usually named, and the list of jealous women throughout the imperial history runs very long. For a partial list of the infamous jealous women, see Xie Zhaozhe 謝肇淛 (1567-1624), *Wu zazu* 五雜俎, 8.487-91, in *Xuxiu Siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 vol. 1130 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002). However, jealous men remained mostly nameless. They were often represented in terms of a character type. In other words, whereas jealous women were identifiable through their names, jealous men were often referred to by their group identity and therefore lacked individuality.

given a voice to defend the charge of jealousy against them. The chapter ends with an anecdote in which sexual jealousy acquired a nickname, ironically, after an exceedingly jealous *man* of the Tang dynasty.

I. Jealous: A Gendered Emotion

Female Jealousy of Looks Versus Male Jealousy of Talents

In modern philosophical and psychological discourses, jealousy and envy are considered two distinct emotions. Jealousy “involves three or more independent parties,” and is a case where “some third party seems to be getting from some second party something that the first party wants for him or herself,”⁴⁸³ whereas envy is “a two-party case where one person has something that another person doesn’t have but would very much like to have.”⁴⁸⁴ Put differently, the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* has the following statement:

Both envy and jealousy are three-place relations; but this superficial similarity conceals an important difference. Jealousy involves three parties, the subject, the rival, and the beloved; and the jealous person’s real locus of concern is the beloved—the person whose affection he is losing or fears losing—not his rival. Whereas envy is a two party relation, with a third relatum that is a good (albeit a good that could be a particular person’s affections); and the envious person’s locus of concern is the rival.⁴⁸⁵

The distinction between jealousy and envy, however, was rarely observed in traditional China. The frequently expressed emotion was jealousy, not envy. Both men and women

⁴⁸³ Daniel M. Farrell, “Jealousy,” *The Philosophical Review* 89. 4 (1980.10): 529.

⁴⁸⁴ Farrell, “Jealousy,” 531.

⁴⁸⁵ Justin D’Arms, “Envy,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edward N. Zalta ed., URL =<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2013/entries/envy/>, Winter 2013 Edition.

experienced jealousy, but they were jealous of different things. Men were usually jealous of others' talents, whereas women were jealous of others' looks. This gendered view of the emotion of jealousy first found its expression in a passage from the early Western Han 西漢 (206 BCE-9 CE) scholar and political advisor Zou Yang 鄒陽 (d. 120 BCE). When Zou was staying in the princely establishment of Liu Wu 劉武 (d. 144 BCE), Filial Prince of Liang 梁孝王, he became the target of jealousy of other retainers of the prince, and was subsequently thrown into jail. In prison, Zou Yang composed a lengthy letter on jealousy and presented it to the prince. In the letter, Zou Yang wrote the following famous lines:

Whether a woman is beautiful or not, she encounters jealousy as soon as she enters the palace. Whether a man is worthy or not, he encounters envy as soon as he enters the court.⁴⁸⁶

女無美惡，入宮見妒；士無賢不肖，入朝見嫉。

The parallel between palace ladies and court officials indicates that the kind of emotion that officials experienced in court was not different from what ladies experienced in the palace, and that it was the emotion of jealousy, not envy, even though I translate *ji* 嫉 into “envy” in order to reflect the different wording in the original Chinese text. Zou Yang's slanderers might be envious about him and wished to have Zou's talents, but their “real locus of concern” was the prince. Thus one may say that they were more jealous of Zou, and desired to oust him from the princely court so that they could exclusively enjoy the attention and favor of the prince.

The analogy between a jealous woman and a jealous minister is a longstanding one in the

⁴⁸⁶ Sima, *Shi ji*, 83.2473.

Chinese culture. The polygamous family structure mirrors the political system in which a ruler is courted by all his male ministers. Because of the observed structural similarity between a family and a state, the head of a household, that is the husband, is often compared to the ruler of a state. Likewise, the women in a household are often compared to the ministers in a state. Shen Buhai 申不害 (ca. 385-337 BCE), the legalist bureaucrat of the state of Han 韓 during the Warring States 戰國 (475-221 BCE) period, may have been one of the first to draw this parallel:

If one woman controls the husband, all other women will revolt. If one minister monopolizes the lord, all other ministers will be blocked off. Thus it is not difficult for a jealous wife to destroy a home, and it is not difficult for a treacherous minister to destroy a state.⁴⁸⁷

夫一婦擅夫。眾婦皆亂。一臣專君。羣臣皆蔽。故妬妻不難破家也。而亂臣不難破國也。

The words *shan* 擅 and *zhuan* 專 are indicators of the desire to monopolize the husband for wives and the ruler for ministers. The imperial or princely favor, or the love and affection of the husband, is what really matters, the “locus of concern.” It is something that the jealous person shares with the person who suffers from jealousy. It is not something that one party has and the other does not have. One’s looks or talents are means of getting what one desires, and one’s goal is to keep that which one desires as long and as exclusively as possible. This is jealousy, and both men and women are subject to it.

However, the distinction between the kinds of jealousy men and women encountered was strenuously maintained. The stimuli for male and female jealousy were distinguished. Men were

⁴⁸⁷ Yan, *Quan shanggu sandai wen*, 4.32b.

driven to jealousy by others' talents, and women by others' looks. The boundaries of male and female jealousy were clearly demarcated. Men encountered jealousy in court and women at home or, for imperial ladies, in the inner palace. In their commentaries to the *Shi jing* and the *Songs of the South* (*Chu ci* 楚辭), we see how classical scholars tried to maintain the distinction between political male jealousy and sexual female jealousy. In his commentary to Qu Yuan's 屈原 (340-278 BCE) *Encountering Sorrow* (*Li sao* 離騷), in which Qu Yuan, a Chu 楚 court official describes how he is victimized by other jealous officials, the Han scholar Wang Yi 王逸 (89-158) defined the meanings of *du* 妒 and *ji* 嫉 as such:

To harm a worthy man is called *ji*, and to harm a beautiful woman is called *du*.⁴⁸⁸

害賢為嫉，害色為妒。

In his commentary to the *Shi jing* poem "Small stars" (*Xiaoxing* 小星), Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 made a similar distinction between these two types of jealousy:⁴⁸⁹

[If one's jealousy is caused] by another's looks, then it is called *du*. [If one's jealousy is caused] by another's [worthy] conduct, then it is called *ji*.⁴⁹⁰

以色曰妒，以行曰忌。

In his commentary to the *Shi jing* poem "Grasshoppers" (*Zhong si* 螽斯), the Tang scholar Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574-648) maintained that *du* 妒/妬 was to be jealous of someone's looks (*se* 色

⁴⁸⁸ Wang Yi 王逸 (ca. 89-158), "Qu Ping *Li sao jing* 屈平離騷經," 32.1491, in Xiao, *Wen xuan*.

⁴⁸⁹ According to the Mao school commentary to the *Shi jing*, "Xiaoxing" is a poem that praises wives who are free of jealous behavior and whose kindness reaches to the inferior concubines as they present [concubines] to their husbands 夫人無妬忌之行，惠及賤妾，進禦於君. See *Maoshi zhengyi*, 1.63b.

⁴⁹⁰ *Maoshi zhengyi*, 1.63b.

), *ji* 忌 was to be jealous of someone's [worthy] conduct or abilities (*xing* 行), and *ji* 嫉 was to be jealous of either looks or talents. In addition, *ji* 嫉 also indicates, according to Kong, the existence of the emotion of hatred, so *ji* 嫉 was a more intense emotion than *du* 妒/妬 or *ji* 忌 alone. However, Kong Yingda added, people of later ages used *du* to denote jealousy of not only looks but also talents (*xing* 行), which was why expressions such as *duxian jineng* 妒賢嫉能 were seen.⁴⁹¹

In the minds of classical commentators, *du* 妒 was reserved to express women's jealousy of other women's beauty and *ji* 嫉/忌 was reserved to express men's jealousy of other men's talents. These two types of jealousy should not overlap with each other. Men would not be jealous of other men's looks, just like women would not be jealous of other women's talents. Another implication of this distinction is that men exercise their jealousy in the public domain, whereas women exercise their jealousy in the private sphere. The emotion of jealousy is not only gendered but also spatially delineated. The two sexes of the human species experience different types of jealousy under different circumstances.

Needless to say, this neat division is largely based on classical commentators' extremely normative views of the roles of men and women. The occurrences of the compound *jidu* 嫉妒 in extant early medieval writings demonstrate that the distinction between *du* and *ji* was never as neatly maintained as the commentators would like to see. The compound phrase *jidu* was used to

⁴⁹¹ According to the Mao school commentary to the *Shi jing*, the "Zhong si" is a poem that praises those imperial consorts who are free of jealousy and therefore are able to give birth as prolifically as the grasshoppers do. See *Maoshi zhengyi*, 1.35b.

denote the jealous feelings of both men and women. Wang Fu, for example, used the phrase *jidu* to describe men's jealousy of another's talent.⁴⁹² Female jealousy was often designated as *jidu* as well.⁴⁹³ Nevertheless, the gendered perception of jealousy still stands, that is, men jealous of another's talent and female jealous of another's appearance.

Jealousy Being Inherent in Women: A Pathological View of Jealousy

The medical texts from the early medieval period seem to suggest that jealousy was specific to women who were often the targeted patients for the treatment of this negative emotion. In explaining the necessity of the existence of separate prescriptions for women, the Tang dynasty medical specialist Sun Simiao 孫思邈 (581?-682) pointed out that it was not only due to “pregnancy, childbirth, and vaginal flooding” that women had to endure, but also due to the various intense emotions that women were said to possess, among which was jealousy. These intense emotions also subjected women twice as easily to illness as men. Sun explained:

Nevertheless, women's cravings and desires exceed men's, and they contract illness at twice the rate of men. In addition, they are imbued with affection and passion, love and hatred, envy and jealousy, and worry and rancor, which are lodged firmly in them. Since they are unable to control their emotions by themselves, the roots of their disorders are

⁴⁹² “Even sages and great worthies from the antiquity could not rid themselves of jealousy, let alone people of the middle ages 上聖大賢猶不能自免於嫉妒，則又況乎中世之人哉。” See Wang, *Qianfu lun jian jiaozheng*, 1.40.

⁴⁹³ In the section on marriage (*jia qu* 嫁娶), Ban Gu claimed that the reason that younger sisters and nieces (*zhidi* 侄娣) were chosen as concubines to accompany the bride to her husband's state was because sisters and nieces would be certain not to act jealously. See Chen Li 陳立, ed., *Baihu tong shuzheng* 白虎通疏證 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1994), 470. In the section on remarriage (*hou qu* 後娶) of the *Yanshi jiaxun*, Yan Zhitui claimed that women naturally harbored jealous thought 婦人懷嫉妒之情. See Yan, *Yanshi jiaxun jijie*, 1.49.

deep and it is difficult to obtain a cure in their treatment.⁴⁹⁴

然而女人嗜欲多於丈夫。感病倍於男子。加以慈戀愛憎嫉妬憂恚。染著堅牢。情不自抑。所以為病根深。療之難差。

Sun Simiao inherited the medical knowledge accumulated throughout the early medieval period, so his view likely reflected the medical understanding of jealousy in periods prior to his.

Although men presumably had the same range of emotions, it was believed that it was women who were more severely affected by these emotions, and thus much more prone to illnesses caused by these emotions. When it came to treating jealousy, it seems that male patients were not in the mind of those who designed recipes. Why was prescribing cure for jealousy also a gendered practice?

Recipes for curing jealousy are first found in early Han texts. The *Classic of Mountains and Oceans* (*Shanhai jing* 山海經), a collection of early texts of imaginary cosmology, claims that there is a type of tree that can cure jealousy.⁴⁹⁵ The tree, *yumu* 楡木, is said to grow in a legendary locale Taishi shan 泰室山 with leaves similar to pear leaves but with red veins.⁴⁹⁶ The

⁴⁹⁴ Translation by Sabine Wilms, in her “‘Ten Times More Difficult to Treat,’ Female Bodies in Medical Texts from Early Imperial China,” *Nan Nü* 7.2 (2005): 197. See also Jen-der Lee’s discussion of the Japanese medical text *Ishinpo* 醫心方 in which she translated this passage as well. Jen-der Lee, “*Ishinpo* and its Excerpts from *Chanjing*: A Japanese Medical Text as a Source for Chinese Women’s History,” in Clara Wing-chung Ho, ed., *Overt and Covert Treasures: Essays on the Sources for Chinese Women’s History* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2012), 185.

⁴⁹⁵ Various parts of the *Shanhai jing* already existed since the 4th century BCE, but the current form did not come into being until the early Han dynasty. Richard E. Strassberg, *A Chinese Bestiary: Strange Creatures from the Guideways Through Mountains and Seas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 3.

⁴⁹⁶ Yuan Ke 袁珂, ed., *Shanhai jing jiaozhu* 山海經校註 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980), 5.147.

Shanhai jing also claims that consuming an androgynous fox-like animal called *lei* 類,⁴⁹⁷ or an owl-like bird with a white head called Yellow Bird (*huangniao* 黃鳥), can cure jealousy as well.⁴⁹⁸ A late Tang text “Stopping Jealousy” (*Zhidu* 止妒), attributed to a certain Yang Kui 楊夔 (fl. 900) and preserved by the *Wenyuan yinghua* 文苑英華, instantiates the *Shanhai jing*’s bird recipe with an early medieval tale of jealousy.⁴⁹⁹ Be it a tree, a beast or a bird, the *Shanhai jing* recipes do not seem to have been intended for female consumption only. In fact, Yang Kui’s text makes explicit that the bird recipe could treat male jealousy as well. The reason that the recipe was never tried on men was because of a Buddhist no-killing precept that Emperor Wu decided to observe. Yang Kui’s “Zhidu” reads:

When Emperor Wu of the Liang (464-549, r. 502-549) conquered the Qi (479-502), he took over the Qi’s entire inner palace, and obtained more than ten palace ladies who were all pleasing to the eye. In no time, Empress Chi (548-499) noticed [Emperor Wu’s interest in these women], and stopped and suppressed his every move. Forced to suppress his deep resentment [toward Empress Chi], Emperor Wu almost developed an illness.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁷ Yuan, *Shanhai jing jiaozhu*, 1.5.

Strassberg translated the entry of *lei* as such: “There is a beast here whose form resembles a wildcat with a mane. It is called the Lei and is both male and female. Eating it will cure jealousy.” He commented on this entry: “Jealousy was considered a particular problem among Chinese women in traditional China’s polygamous society. The ability of the Lei to prevent jealousy appears to be connected to its hermaphroditism. The Chinese were particularly fascinated by such animals, for the presence of both yin and yang natures suggested not only non-dependence and personal autonomy but also exceptional fertility.” Strassberg, *A Chinese Bestiary: Strange Creatures from the Guideways Through Mountains and Seas*, 86.

⁴⁹⁸ Yuan, *Shanhai jing jiaozhu*, 3.91.

⁴⁹⁹ Yang Kui, “Zhidu” 止妒, 378.1931b, in Li Fang 李昉 (925-996) et al., comp., *Wenyuan yinghua* 文苑英華 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1966). The *Wenyuan yinghua* is a late tenth-century imperial compilation of literary writings from the Liang dynasty through the Five Dynasties 五代 (907-960).

⁵⁰⁰ In a Ming 明 (1368-1644) version of this text, *ao qi* 拗其 is replaced by *di shen* 帝甚, which makes the line read more smoothly: the emperor was quite resentful. See Cao An 曹安 (fl. 1444), *Lanyan changyu*

One of his attendants who understood the situation offered a suggestion: “I once read the *Shanhai jing*, in which it says that the oriole, when taken as a meal, is a cure for jealousy, and makes one stop acting jealously.⁵⁰¹ Why doesn’t Your Majesty give it a try?” Emperor Wu followed his suggestion. After Empress Chi ate the oriole meal, her jealousy was reduced by half. Emperor Wu marveled at this recipe. That person once again suggested: “I wish that Your Majesty will widely bestow this delicacy on your officials. It will make the untalented not jealous of the talented, those with selfish motives not jealous of those who serve the public, the impure ones not jealous of the pure ones, and the corrupt officials not jealous of the honest officials. [The cure] will rid [the men] of immoral conduct and make them better than ever before, for they will all know how to reform their hearts.⁵⁰² In addition, it is one way of aiding moral cultivation [of the people].” The emperor strongly agreed with what he said, and was about to order the

讜言長語, in Ji Yun 紀昀 (1724-1805) et al., eds., *Qinding Siku quanshu* 欽定四庫全書 (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1983-1986), 5.238.

⁵⁰¹ *Canggeng* is oriole, and it may not be the Yellow Bird described in the *Shanhai jing*. The Yellow Bird is supposed to resemble an owl and has a white head 其狀如梟而白首, which is very different from an oriole.

The Owl Soup (*xiaogeng* 梟羹), a dish bestowed upon ministers by the Han emperors on the Duanwu 端午 day (i.e. the fifth day of the fifth month), was also considered a recipe for curing jealousy. See Chen Jie 陳階 (17th c.), comp., *Rishe pian* 日涉篇, in Yiwen yinshuguan 藝文印書館, ed., *Suishi xisu ziliao huibian* 歲時習俗資料彙編 (Taipei: Yinwen yinshuguan, 1970), 5.616. The connection made by the Ming scholar Chen Jie between the Han imperial dish *xiaogeng*, intended to free the empire of the vicious owls (*e niao* 惡鳥), and the Stopping Jealousy Soup (*zhidu geng* 止妒羹), may have been inspired by the owl-like Yellow Bird recipe recorded in the *Shanhai jing*. However, the popular understanding of the *zhidu geng* during the Ming and the Qing dynasties was that it was made of orioles (*canggeng*).

The Qing commentator Hao Yixing 郝懿行 (1757-1825) suspected that the equation between the Yellow Bird and the oriole was first made by Guo Pu 郭璞 (276-324) in his commentary to the *Erya* 爾雅. Hao disputed this connection, and claimed that the Yellow Bird in the *Shanhai jing* was in fact the siskin (*huangque* 黃雀). Yet, Qu Huiqing 曲慧青 disagreed with Hao Yixing and argued that the Yellow Bird in the *Shanhai jing* should be a type of bird that resembles an owl. See Qu Huiqing, “Canggeng zhidu bian” 倉庚止妒辨, *Ming Qing xiaoshuo yanjiu* 明清小說研究 3 (2002): 239-242.

In any case, it remains unclear the exact nature of the (probably mythical) Yellow Bird in the *Shanhai jing*, but as late as the 10th century, this *Shanhai jing* recipe for jealousy was already understood to be made of orioles, and this oriole soup was widely popular in the Ming and Qing tales of jealous women.

⁵⁰² The Ming version contains a few textual variants in this line, and the line reads: “It makes them rid their evils and overcome their envies; therefore they would all know that they should reform their hearts 俾其去惡勝忌, 而皆知革心.” Cao, *Lanyan changyu*, 5.238. Once again, the Ming version seems to make better sense than the *Wenyuan yinghua* version.

Supervisor of Forests to catch the birds far and wide. At the time, the Buddhist Canons were highly revered, and killing was prohibited. Because of this, this proposal was set aside.⁵⁰³

梁武平齊。盡有其內。獲侍兒十餘輩。頗娛於目。俄為郗后所察。動止皆有隔抑。拗其憤恚。殆欲成疹。左右識其情者進言曰。臣嘗讀山海經云。以鶻鷓為膳。可以療其事。使不忌。陛下盍試諸。梁武從之。郗茹之後。妒減殆半。帝愈神其事。左右復言曰。願陛下廣羞諸以遍賜群臣。使不才者無妒於有才。挾私者不妒於奉公。濁者不妒其清。貪者不忌其廉。俾其惡去勝忌前，皆知革心。亦助化之一端也。帝深然其言。將詔虞人廣捕之。會方崇內典。誠於血生。其議遂寢。

Although Empress Chi, Emperor Wu's first and only principal wife, is remembered as a jealous woman in history, this story of her acting jealously toward the Qi palace ladies and her subsequent treatment by the oriole soup is surely anachronistic.⁵⁰⁴ And a dish made of orioles for curing jealousy is dubious at best, even though it claims to be first recorded in the classic *Shanhai jing*. Yet, the effect of the recipe is not the point of Yang's writing. Indeed, the story is not so much about female jealousy as about male jealousy. In Yang's opinion, it is the incompetent, impure, selfish and corrupt male officials who needed the recipe more than

⁵⁰³ Li, *Wenyuan yinghua*, 378.1931b.

⁵⁰⁴ Chi Hui 郗徽 (468-99), died in Xiao Yan's 蕭衍—later Emperor Wu of Liang—official residence in Xiangyang 襄陽 (in present day Hubei 湖北 province) while Xiao served as the Regional Inspector of Yongzhou 雍州刺史 for the Qi dynasty. She was conferred the title of empress posthumously only after Xiao Yan was enthroned in 502. Chi Hui could not have witnessed Xiao's conquest of the Qi and could not possibly have been jealous of the Qi palace ladies. However, Chi Hui was known for her jealous temperament as early as in the seventh century. Even though the *Liang shu* says nothing about her jealous disposition, her biography in the *Nan shi* recounts that she was “extremely jealous” (*ku du ji* 酷妬忌) and treated Xiao's other concubines very cruelly. After she died, she was transformed into a dragon residing in a deep well in the inner palace, manifested herself in front of Xiao Yan and spoke to him in his dreams. As a result of her posthumous interventions, Xiao Yan never established any of his consorts to be his empress. See Li, *Nan shi*, 12.338-9. See also Xiaofei Tian's discussion of Chi Hui in her *Beacon Fire and Shooting Star: The Literary Culture of the Liang (502-557)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 15-6.

Empress Chi.⁵⁰⁵ But interestingly, the plan to distribute the recipe to Emperor Wu's male officials stopped short. The female patient was cured, albeit partly, but the male patients did not even get to be treated.

However, the extant recipes preserved in the early and early medieval medical texts seem to suggest that the intended recipients of the medicine for jealousy were women and women alone. The *Huainan's Art of Ten Thousand Transformations* (*Huainan wanbi shu* 淮南萬畢術) claims that eating pills made of monkeygrass (*mendong* 門冬), red-stalked millet (*chishu* 赤黍), and Job's-tears (*yiyi* 薏苡) can stop women from acting jealously 令婦人不妬.⁵⁰⁶ Two recipes from the *Prescriptions for Fulfilling Wishes* (*Ruyi fang* 如意方) and the *Classic for Prolonging Life* (*Yanling jing* 延齡經) are clearly prescribed to jealous women.⁵⁰⁷ “The Art of Stopping Jealousy” (*Zhidu shu* 止妒術) in the *Ruyi fang* states:

⁵⁰⁵ The Ming scholar Yang Shen 楊慎 (1488-1559) wrote a satirical pseudo-biography of *canggeng*-bird entitled “The Biography of An Oriole” (*Canggeng zhuan* 倉庚傳). The oriole is personified as a transmitter of the ancient Zhou rites (*zhouzhi* 周制) and the teachings of King Wen 文王 (1152-1056 BCE). It blames Emperor Wu of Liang, who ignored the ancient rites and indulged in sensual pleasure, for causing Empress Chi's jealousy. It claims that it is not that women were not sly and depraved, but if they were tightly controlled by the king's regulations, they could not do much with their jealousy 豈伊無險陂，王制鱗之，妒亦何能為。See Tao Ting 陶珽 (*jinshi* 進士 in 1610), comp., *Shuofu xu* 說郛續 (Ming edition), 43.1-3.

⁵⁰⁶ Li, *Taiping yulan*, 842.3893-1. The *Huainan wanbi shu* was allegedly compiled by Liu An 劉安 (179-122 BCE), Prince of Huainan 淮南王, and his retainers, and was a book about the transformations of myriad things. The original work was long lost, but some sections were preserved in later works. The bibliographic treatise of the *History of Sui* (*Sui shu* 隋書), however, lists a book entitled *Huainan wanbi jing* 淮南萬畢經 as being produced in the Liang dynasty. See Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580-643) et al., eds., *Sui shu* (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1980), 34.1038.

⁵⁰⁷ The *Ruyi fang* is listed as a ten-volume work without an author in the bibliographic treatise of the *Sui shu*, see Wei, *Sui shu*, 34.1043. In the *Nan shi*, however, the *Ruyi fang* is included in Emperor Jianwen's

One may give fourteen grains of Job's-tears to [her] to swallow. Another recipe: wrap a toad in a sanitary belt, store the whole thing in an urn, close it, and bury the urn at the left side of the privy.⁵⁰⁸ She will then stop controlling her husband.⁵⁰⁹

可以牡薏苡二七枚與吞之，又方：其月布裹蝦蟆一枚，盛著瓮中，蓋之，埋廁左則不用夫。

“The Prescription for Curing Women’s Terrible Jealousy” (*Liao nu e du fang* 療奴惡妒方) in the

Yanling jing states:

Take the soil from under her husband’s feet, burn it and mix it into alcohol, and have her drink it. Even if her husband takes a hundred women, she would not have a word [of objection].⁵¹⁰

取夫腳下土燒，安酒中與服之，取百女亦無言。

These three recipes undoubtedly were targeted at female jealousy, and could not possibly have been intended for male consumption. Some of the ingredients are gendered items: a woman’s sanitary belt for one recipe and dirt underneath one’s husband’s feet for another. The

簡文帝 (503-551, r. 549-551) literary corpus. See Li, *Nan shi*, 8.233. The latter attribution in the *Nan shi* may very well have been false. The *Ruyi fang* as a whole is no longer extant, but thirty-seven of its entries are preserved in the Japanese medical work *Ishinpo*, which was compiled by Tamba Yasuyori 丹波康賴 (912-995) in 984. See Tamba Yasuyori, *Ishinpo*, eds., Zhao Mingshan 趙明山 et al. (Shenyang: Liaoning kexue jishu chubanshe, 1996).

No information about the author and the nature of the *Yanling jing* can be found. *Ishinpo* contains a total of three entries from the *Yanling jing*.

⁵⁰⁸ Women’s sanitary belts, or menstrual blood (*yueshui* 月水), turn out to be a very common medical ingredient in traditional Chinese medicine. See Jen-der Lee, “Han Tang zhijian yifang zhong de jijian furen yu nüti wei yao 漢唐之間醫方中的忌見婦人與女體為藥,” *Xin shixue* 新史學 13.4 (2002): 1-35.

⁵⁰⁹ Tamba, *Ishinpo*, 1082.

⁵¹⁰ Tamba, *Ishinpo*, 1082.

anticipated result of the recipes is that a woman would stop intervening in her husband's affairs with other women.

Talks about curing jealousy are abundant in the late imperial period and the kind of jealousy that needs to be cured is always female jealousy. Jia Baoyu 賈寶玉, the male protagonist in the *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Honglou meng* 紅樓夢), was seeking “a recipe to treat women's jealousy (*tie nüren de dubing fangzi* 貼女人的妒病方子)” when he was accompanied by a quack whose plasters were well known among the elite in the capital. When so asked, Wang, Master of Plasters 王一貼, said that he did not have such a recipe, nor had he ever heard of such a thing. Baoyu was disappointed, so Wang quickly added the following comments:

I have never come across any plaster that cures jealousy, but there is a soup that may cure it. However, it is slow [acting]. It does not have an immediate effect.⁵¹¹

貼妒的膏藥倒沒經過，倒有一種湯藥或者可醫，只是慢些兒，不能立竿見影的效驗。

Baoyu was curious about this soup recipe and asked Wang how it worked. Wang replied:

This recipe is called A Soup to Cure Jealousy.⁵¹² Take one premium autumn pear, two *qian* of rock candy, one *qian* of dried orange peel, three bowls of water, and [cook

⁵¹¹ Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 (ca. 1715-ca. 1763) and Gao E 高鶚 (ca. 1738-ca. 1815), *Honglou meng jiaozhu* 紅樓夢校註, annotated by Feng Qiyong 馮其庸 (1924-) (Taipei: Liren shuju, 1984), 1277.

⁵¹² One of the 17th-century plays is entitled *A Soup to Cure Jealousy* (*Liaodu geng* 療妒羹). It was written by Wu Bing 吳炳 (*Jinshi* in 1619) and enjoyed quite some popularity for a while. This play may very well have been the source of this joke.

everything together until] the pear is done.⁵¹³ Eat this pear soup early in the morning everyday, and after having enough of it [the disease] should be cured.⁵¹⁴

這叫做『療妒湯』：用極好的秋梨一個，二錢冰糖，一錢陳皮，水三碗，梨熟為度，每日清早吃這麼一個梨，吃來吃去就好了。

Baoyu was suspicious of the recipe, and Wang said:

If one dose is not enough, take ten doses. If it doesn't take effect today, eat it again tomorrow. If it doesn't take effect this year, continue to eat it next year. In any case, these three ingredients exert a restorative influence on the lungs and stimulate the appetite, and do no harm to the body. [The pear] is sweet. It helps to relieve a cough and is tasty. After having taken [the pear] for more than a hundred years, one dies anyway. After one dies, how can one still be jealous? By then, [the recipe] will have its desired effect.⁵¹⁵

一劑不效吃十劑，今日不效明日再吃，今年不效吃到明年。橫豎這三味藥都是潤肺開胃不傷人的，甜絲絲的，又止咳嗽，又好吃。吃過一百歲，人橫豎是要死的，死了還妒什麼！那時就見效了。

By now, Baoyu realized that Wang was just joking with him. Not only was he kidding about this particular recipe for treating women's jealousy, but Wang candidly admitted that his whole business of curing with plasters was deceptive (*lian gaoyao yeshi jia de* 連膏藥也是假的). He confessed that if his plasters were as effective as they were claimed to be, he would have become an immortal himself and would not have to make a living selling plasters. The cure for jealousy is imaginary, and in the imagination, it is women, not men, who should and could be cured.

⁵¹³ *Qian* is a traditional Chinese medicine measurement word. One *qian* roughly equals to three grams.

⁵¹⁴ Cao and Gao, *Honglou meng jiaozhu*, 1277.

⁵¹⁵ Cao and Gao, *Honglou meng jiaozhu*, 1277.

II. The Historical and Poetical Representation of Jealousy

Jealous women suffered an unfavorable portrayal in a wide spectrum of writings, including letters, memorials, family instructions, and especially in dynastic histories.⁵¹⁶ Jealous women were often ridiculed, criticized and even demonized in these writings. In the following pages, I will exemplify the negative depiction of jealous women with a sampling of such writings.

A Husband's Letter Bashing His Jealous Wife: An Archetype

One of the first tirades against a jealous wife comes from the early Eastern Han figure Feng Yan.⁵¹⁷ Feng's long-winded letter denouncing his wife Ren 任氏 and justifying his divorce from her became an archetype for vernacular diatribes against lazy wives in later times.⁵¹⁸ The letter, addressed to his brother-in-law Ren Wuda 任武達, was first quoted in the early Tang

⁵¹⁶ Depictions of cruel crimes committed by jealous women abound in biographies of imperial consorts. Some crimes are so gruesome that it is hard to believe the veracity of the accounts. Empress Lü Zhi 呂雉 (241-180 BCE), for example, turned her husband's concubine Lady Qi 戚夫人 (d. 194 BCE) into a "Human Pig" (*renzhi* 人彘). See Ban, *Han shu*, 97a.3938. The biography of Liu Qu 劉去 (d. 70 BCE), Prince of Guangchuan 廣川王, is filled with horrid tales of crimes committed by the highly suspicious Liu Qu himself and his manipulative and extremely jealous consort Yangcheng Zhaoxin 陽城昭信. See Ban, *Han shu*, 53.2428-33.

These tales of cruelty may very well be fiction, and may not be taken as historical facts. For the growth of these tales that add details with every retelling, see Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush, Writing Women of Imperial China*, 82-5.

⁵¹⁷ For an introduction of Feng Yan's life and works, see Knechtges and Chang, eds., *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide Vol. 1*, 229-34.

⁵¹⁸ The vernacular diatribes against lazy wives started as early as the Tang, such as the Dunhuang 敦煌 text *Yaqia xinfu* 齟齬新婦, see Pan Chonggui 潘重規, ed., *Dunhuang bianwen ji xinshu* 敦煌變文集新書 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1994), 7.1197.

commentary to the fifth-century official history *Hou Han shu* in which Feng enjoyed an independent biography.⁵¹⁹ Feng Yan started the letter with an evocation of the time-honored institution of concubinage sanctioned by ancient sages, and followed this up with an accusation of his wife's jealousy, which Feng Yan claimed had caused his family to fall apart.

Human nature [bestowed by] Heaven and Earth includes contentment and anger; the conjugal relation includes the principles of separation and union. It is in the rites of the ancient sages that gentlemen ought to have both wives and concubines. Even for men from smaller and humbler clans, they want to exceed [the number of wives or concubines] that the rites prescribe. Now that I am getting old and my years are coming to an end, my resentment will [come with me] to the Yellow Spring. Encountering jealousy, my family has collapsed and is destroyed.⁵²⁰

天地之性。人有喜怒。夫婦之道。義有離合。先聖之禮。士有妻妾。雖宗之眇微。尚欲踰制。年衰歲暮。恨入黃泉。遭遇嫉妬。家道崩壞。

The charge of Ren's jealousy rests solely on the fact that Ren prohibited her husband from taking concubines. Although we only have Feng Yan's side of the story, the following two facts, volunteered by Feng himself in the letter, make one wonder whether such a charge against Ren was reasonable. First of all, since Ren, now Feng's second wife, was a mother/stepmother of five children (*wu zi zhi mu* 五子之母), at least two of which (Jiang 姜 and Bao 豹) were boys, it

⁵¹⁹ The letter does not read very smoothly and may contain some semantically incoherent passages, and I suspect that it might have suffered corruption during the long history of textual transmission.

This letter was partly translated by Dull, in his "Marriage and Divorce in Han China: A Glimpse at 'Pre-Confucian' Society," in Buxbaum, ed., *Chinese Family Law and Social Change: in Historical and Comparative Perspective*, 58-9.

Eva Yuen-wah Chung included a discussion and a full translation of this letter in her study of Han letters, see "A Study of the *Shu* (Letters) in the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220)" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 1982), 310-6, 511-8. Chung's discussion and translation of the letter contain a number of misunderstandings of Feng Yan's marriage life and misreadings of the Chinese texts.

⁵²⁰ My translation is based on Dull's with significant modifications.

might not have been a crime for Ren to disallow concubines at home.⁵²¹ After all, concubines were supposedly taken primarily to ensure that the bloodline of the family would be continued. Secondly, Feng Yan might not have been able to afford concubines at this point of his life—he was dismissed from office to stay at home (*fei yu jia* 廢于家), and lived in poverty. We know that in Han times taking a wife or buying a concubine could be costly, and Feng mentioned twice in this letter that his family was impoverished (*jia pin* 家貧).⁵²² Thus it could not have been unreasonable for Ren to forbid Feng from taking concubines. So to say that Ren was jealous because she would not allow concubines, and thus divorce her on this ground, might not have been convincing to Ren’s brother, the recipient of this letter.⁵²³ Feng thus felt the need to document his “utterly disastrous” domestic life, hoping to convince his brother-in-law that his decision to divorce Ren was justified. Feng therefore continued his letter with an enumeration of a long list of Ren’s offenses that seemed to have been utterly at odds with a woman’s proper conduct.

⁵²¹ Jiang and Bao were sons from Feng Yan’s first wife whom Feng divorced when Bao was twelve *sui*. Fan, *Hou Han shu*, 28a.1004.

⁵²² In his “Poetic Exposition on Making My Aspirations Known” (*Xianzhi fu* 顯志賦), to be discussed later in the main text, Feng Yan also mentioned a few times that he lived in poverty. Feng Yan stated that after he was dismissed from office, “his assets yearly have been reduced, and his living situation daily has been impoverished 財產歲狹, 居處日貧.” See Knechtges and Chang, eds., *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide Vol. 1*, 231.

⁵²³ Feng Yan had another letter exchanged with Ren Wuda, “A Letter to Reply Ren Wuda” (*Da Ren Wuda shu* 答任武達書), of which only one line is preserved in Li Shan’s commentary to Bao Zhao’s *yuefu* poem “Song of White Hair” (*Baitou yin* 白頭吟) in the *Wen xuan*: “How can I dare not to make clear my intentions of the past 敢不露陳宿昔之意?” One cannot be certain when and why this letter was sent, but it is not unlikely that this reply came after the divorce letter, and that it was meant to respond to Ren Wuda’s questioning of Feng Yan’s decision to divorce his sister.

As a mother of our five children she is still worthy of being in the family. [But] for the past five years, increasingly she has taken white to be black and wrong to be right. She fabricates things from beginning to end and falsely gives rise to things from head to tail. When someone is free of offenses and crimes, she vilifies that person in great clamor. Disorder has not been sent down by Heaven, but it has been produced by women... In drinking and eating she goes beyond the proper proportions, and then she would [behave as if she were the ancient despots] Jie and Zhou. Bedroom intimacies are broadcast far and wide. With staring eyes and gesturing hands she considers “there is” to be “there is not.” ... On entering the door she goes to bed; our children are not reared. [Regarding] embroidery and weaving, she has none of the skills. Our family is impoverished and without slaves; it is that of a poor man and wife... We have only one maidservant whom you, Wuda, have seen. On her head there are no hairpins or ointments; her face is without rouge or powder. Her body is not hidden from view; her hands and feet are covered with dirt. [My wife] shows no leniency regarding [the maid servant’s] destitution; she does not take into consideration her feelings. She leaps up to the rafters, shouting loudly, and crying out as if entering Hades... She is vociferous, and I cannot bear to listen to her. She is harsh and cruel to this servant girl who has escaped death only by a hair’s breath. For half a year, her bloody pus flowed profusely. After the servant girl was injured, Jiang, throughout [the girl’s incapacitation] pounded the grain and prepared the food. Bao also had to suffer from [walking on muddy paths], and my heart is truly saddened. Silk gauze and grain are scattered about [the house]; the winter clothing is not patched. She sits upright fomenting disorder, and not one thread is strung. ...

五子之母。足尚在門。五年已來。日甚歲劇。以白為黑。以非為是。造作端末。妄生首尾。無罪無辜。讒口嗷嗷。亂匪降天。生自婦人。... 醉飽過差。輒為桀紂。房中調戲。布散海外。張目抵掌。以有為無。... 入門着牀。繼嗣不育。紡績織紵。了無女工。家貧無僮。賤為匹夫。... 唯一婢。武達所見。頭無釵澤。面無脂粉。形骸不蔽。手足抱土。不原其窮。不揆其情。跳梁大叫。呼若入冥。... 訥訥籍籍。不可聽聞。暴虐此婢。不死如髮。半年之間。膿血橫流。婢病之後。姜竟春炊。豹又觸冒泥塗。心為愴然。縑穀放散。冬衣不補。端坐化亂。一縷不貫。...

At the end of the letter, Feng Yan declared to his brother-in-law that he must divorce his wife in order to restore peace and repose within the family and turn the family misfortune around. He confessed that he had long thought of divorcing her but could not have done so sooner, because his children were still small and there were not enough hands at home 計婦當去

久矣，念兒曹小，家無它使。⁵²⁴ Now he regretted it greatly because he eventually realized that his wife “not only lacked the wifely Way but also motherly deportment 既無婦道，又無母儀。” He blamed his wife for his failure in officialdom and claimed that he had to resign himself from the world and retreat to seclusion.

If Feng Yan’s description of his wife is reliable, which we have no way of knowing, Ren was a terrible wife and an awful mother in more ways than just being jealous—she was a liar and a tale-teller; she bullied everyone in the household; she cared little about raising children; she was lazy and terrible at womanly crafts... Indeed, Ren was accused of many offenses. She was good for nothing but was the sole source of disorder and disaster at home. Although it might not have been a justified accusation, jealousy counted as only one of Ren’s many flaws, and was one of a number of reasons that propelled Feng Yan to divorce her.

Even though jealousy did not feature much in her husband’s denunciation of her, Ren had somewhat become an archetype of a jealous wife. Later literary works on female jealousy often paid tribute to Feng Yan’s divorce letter to his brother-in-law. When we discuss the poetic representation of jealousy in *fu* writings, we will see how Zhang Zuan 張纘 (499-549), a Liang dynasty writer, made multiple allusions to Feng Yan’s letter in his “Poetic Exposition on Jealous Women” (*Dufu fu* 妒婦賦). Also, probably due to the preservation of this letter in the commentary to a dynastic history, Feng Yan is remembered as someone who suffered from a

⁵²⁴ This seems to be in contradiction to what Feng Yan had complained about Ren. Feng Yan portrayed Ren as a good-for-nothing type of wife, who did not perform any of the wifely and motherly tasks. Yet here Feng said that he could not divorce her sooner because he needed her help at home.

jealous wife. Liu Xiaobiao 劉孝標 (462-521), for example, stated that one of the three things that he shared with Feng Yan was that “Jingtong [i.e., Feng Yan] had a jealous wife and he had to personally draw water and pound rice, and I have a shrew and my family is beset by difficulties 敬通有忌妻, 至於身操井臼; 余有悍室, 亦令家道輻軻.”⁵²⁵

If we compare this letter with the “Poetic Exposition on Making My Aspirations Known” (*Xianzhi fu* 顯志賦), for which Feng Yan is best known, we will see some interesting similarities and contradictions. Both pieces of writings were made to channel Feng Yan’s frustrations: one for those in his private life and the other for those in his public life. In both pieces, Feng Yan spoke of his political failure and his life as a farmer at an old age. Yet, these two pieces of writings reveal Feng Yan’s contradictory thoughts on how he ended up as a farmer and how he felt about this enforced livelihood as a farmer. From these points of similarity and contradiction, we may infer how jealous women were appropriated as the scapegoats for the political failure of their husbands.

Feng Yan was a talented man from a once illustrious family, but he did not fare well in his political career. In 27, when Emperor Guangwu 光武帝 (r. 25-57) founded the Eastern Han, he resented that Feng Yan did not surrender sooner from the enemy camp and did not immediately appoint him a post. The next year Feng was given a minor post as the Magistrate of

⁵²⁵ Liu Xiaobiao was a famous writer and is best known for his annotations to *A New Account of the Tales of the World* (*Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語), see Yao, *Liang shu*, 50.707.

According to Feng Yan’s own letter, it was his sons, not himself, who had to personally perform domestic chores such as drawing water and pounding rice.

Quyang 曲陽令, which turned out to be the last post he had held. Due to his various transgressions as well as slander by his political rivals, Feng Yan was disallowed to enter the court and was eventually removed from his office. He retired to his home in Xinfeng 新豐 (near the old capital city Chang'an), and lived a secluded life as a farmer. Frustrated, Feng Yan composed the “Xianzhi fu.” He eventually died in poverty.

In this long autobiographical *fu* Feng Yan recounted the misfortunes and hardships that he experienced in life, and the frustration and shame of not having been recognized by his ruler. He described his life of plowing and sowing with his wife and children 率妻子而耕耘兮, and expressed the “delights of living in reclusion in the countryside, a theme that became more popular after the Han.”⁵²⁶

Feng Yan was a frustrated official. The failure in the political career forced him out of the government and into reclusion in poverty. In his “Xianzhi fu,” Feng Yan clearly contributed his isolated life in the countryside to his failure in officialdom. Yet in his letter to his brother-in-law, he claimed that his decision of retreat was solely due to the problems at home caused by his jealous wife. He said:

Because of the trouble at home, I have decided to cast away my hat and gown, and retreat to the mountains and the wilderness. I have cut my connections with friends and closed myself off from the official world. I lock myself up in the house, and focus my mind on

⁵²⁶ Knechtges and Chang, eds., *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide Vol. 1*, 233. My translation of the Chinese lines:

Dwelling in the clear and quiet to cultivate my aims, 處清靜以養志兮，
is truly what my heart delights in. 實吾心之所樂。

farming. It is only for getting food and clothing. How do I dare to think about fame and power?

衍以室家紛然之故。捐棄衣冠。側身山野。絕交游之路。杜仕宦之門。闔門不出。心專耕耘。以求衣食。何敢有功名之路哉。

Ren, Feng Yan's wife, was clearly figured as the scapegoat for Feng's political failure.

This rhetoric of blaming men's political failure on their wives' jealousy was being appropriated in Cao Pi's "Admonitions for the Inner Quarter" (*Nei jie* 內誡), in which Cao contributed the demise of his political rivals largely to the faults of their jealous wives.⁵²⁷

An Admonition Against Jealous Women

The magnitude of destruction a jealous wife was capable of bringing about was believed to multiply when she was associated with a powerful man. This concern might have propelled Cao Pi, the first emperor of the Cao-Wei dynasty, to write the "Nei jie," an admonition against female jealousy.⁵²⁸ In the admonition, Cao Pi argued that the collapse of the remote Three Dynasties was caused by women, and more recently the demise of his political rivals Yuan Shu and his older brother Yuan Shao 袁紹 (d. 202) was brought about largely by their jealous wives. He warned men in power, himself included, to be cautious about jealous women.

The collapse of the Three Dynasties was all brought about by women. That is why the *Classic of Poetry* criticizes bewitching wives and the *Book of Documents* warns against

⁵²⁷ Seductive/charming women belonged to another category of women who often bore the condemnation for the downfall of the men who were infatuated by them.

⁵²⁸ The "Nei jie" is one of the essays included in Cao Pi's famous treatises *Normative Disquisitions* (*Dian luan* 典論), which was put together around 220, and survives only in fragments. The translation of the title *Dian lun* is David R. Knechtges', in Knechtges and Chang, eds., *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide Vol. 1*, 78.

crafty women. All these are recorded in the canons. Recently there are plenty of similar events. If these things happen to petty men donned in plain clothes, the fault would not be serious enough as to corrupt the governance and disturb the customs. As for the two Yuans, they acquired their reputation undeservedly. As courageous men of the world, Shu lost his power and Shao was destroyed—in both cases this was caused by women. Those who run a state should indeed be careful about it. For this reason I am recording this, in hope of admonishing the posterity. Thus I am making the “Admonition for the Inner Quarter.”⁵²⁹

三代之亡。由乎婦人。故詩刺豔妻。書誡哲婦。斯已著在篇籍矣。近事之若此者眾。或在布衣細人。其失不足以敗政亂俗。至于二袁。過竊聲名。一世豪士。而術以之失。紹以之滅。斯有國者所宜慎也。是以錄之。庶以為誡于後。作內誡。

The record that Cao Pi spoke of making is made up of stories of jealous men and women from the Warring States period and more recently from his own time, particularly of Yuan Shu's and Yuan Shao's jealous wives who plotted and killed other women in their respective households.⁵³⁰ Cao Pi imputed Yuans' failure partly to their jealous wives.

Yuan Shao's wife Lady Liu was quite jealous and suspicious. As soon as Shao died, even before he was interred she killed all five of his favorite concubines. She believed that the dead had consciousness, and they would meet Yuan Shao in the underworld, so she shaved their heads and blackened their faces so as to disfigure them. She became jealous of the dead and disfigured the corpses; alas, that the behavior of a wicked woman could go thus far! Her younger son Yuan Shang, moreover, killed the entire families of the dead. He obsequiously pleased his wicked mother, and despised his deceased father. He practiced cruelty and paid no attention to the principle of right and wrong. It is appropriate that he was defeated. Yuan Shao listened to his wife and planned on establishing Shang as his heir. But he was not decisive enough to make it happen in a timely manner. After his death his two sons were fighting to be the head of the domain. They caused their whole clan to be wiped out and their domain to be ruined. When my father was pacifying the Ji prefecture, he stationed in Ye, and resided in Yuan Shao's residence.⁵³¹ I was able to set my foot in Yuan Shao's courtyard, enter his halls, roam in

⁵²⁹ Yan, *Quan sanguo wen*, 8.1094b.

⁵³⁰ The ancient jealous people include Longyang 龍陽, the male favorite of the King of Wei 魏王 (d. 243 BCE), and Zheng Xiu 鄭袖, the favorite consort of the King Huai of Chu 楚懷王 (r. 328-299 BCE)

⁵³¹ Ye 鄴 (in present day Hebei 河北 and Henan 河南) was the prefectural seat for Ji 冀 which was controlled by the warlord Yuan Shao.

his towers, and sleep in his bedroom. The buildings did not fall, and the stairs were undisturbed. However, all of the sudden someone with a different surname moved in and occupied it. Even though Yuan Shao himself was unwise, his failure was also brought about by his wicked wife.⁵³²

袁紹妻劉氏甚妒忌。紹死。僵尸未殯。寵妾五人。妻盡殺之。以為死者有知。當復見紹于地下。乃髡頭墨面。以毀其形。追妒亡魂。戮及死人。惡婦之為。一至是哉。其少子尚。又為盡殺死者之家。媚說惡母。蔑死先父。行暴逆。忘大義。滅其宜矣。紹聽順妻意。欲以尚為嗣。又不時決定。身死而二子爭國。舉宗塗地。社稷為墟。上定冀州屯鄴。舍紹之第。余親涉其庭。登其堂。遊其閣。寢其房。棟宇未墮。陛除自若。忽然而他姓處之。紹雖蔽乎。亦由惡婦。

Whether Cao Pi's "Nei jie" had any real impact on his own wives is hard to know, but certain histories depict Lady Zhen 甄氏 (183-221), a beautiful woman first married to Yuan Shao's son Yuan Xi 袁熙 (176-207) and then taken by Cao Pi to be his wife, as a model of wifely virtues who practiced non-jealousy at home.⁵³³ Yet, Lady Zhen was ordered by Cao Pi to

⁵³² Yan, *Quan sanguo wen*, 8.1094-5.

⁵³³ Accounts of Lady Zhen as a non-jealous and virtuous woman come from the *Wei shu* 魏書, a history of the Cao-Wei dynasty written collectively by Wang Shen 王沈, Xun Yi 荀顛 (d. 274) and Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210-263). The *Wei shu* depicts Lady Zhen in a very positive light. In one account, Lady Zhen is said to have been so virtuous and free of jealousy that she urged Cao Pi's favorite concubines to do better and consoled those who fell out of favor. The *Wei shu* states that Lady Zhen uttered the following words: "I wish that you would widely seek out virtuous and refined women, so as to multiply your offspring 所願廣求淑媛, 以豐繼嗣." The *Wei shu* is no longer extant, but some of its fragments are preserved as quotations in Pei Songzhi's commentary to Chen Shou's *Sanguo zhi*. The *Wei shu* is regarded as a much less truthful account of the history of the Cao-Wei than Chen Shou's *Sanguo zhi*, for it speaks with favor for the period of history that it covers. For example, Pei Songzhi suspects that "the goodness in Empress Bian's and Empress Zhen's speeches and conduct that [the *Wei shu*] praises is hard to be taken as truthful accounts 其稱卞甄諸后言行之善, 皆難以實論." Lady Zhen was ordered to die by Cao Pi when she acted jealously and resentfully toward his new favorite consorts. See Chen, *Sanguo zhi*, 5.160.

For more information on Lady Zhen, see Robert Joe Cutter and William Gordon Crowell, trans. with introduction, *Empresses and Consorts: Selections from Chen Shou's Records of the Three States with Pei Songzhi's Commentary* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999). See also Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, *The Red Brush, Writing Women of Imperial China*, 85-91.

die the year after Cao Pi assumed the throne, arguably due to her jealous reaction to his favoring Guo Nüwang 郭女王 (184-235), who later became Empress Guo 甄后之死, 由后之寵也.⁵³⁴

Although Cao Pi's stated intention of making this "Nei jie" was to warn men in power to be cautious of jealous women, another veiled (and maybe the truer) motive—to ridicule and condemn Lady Liu and her like—may be detected. Given the fact that both Yuan Shao and Cao Cao considered establishing their younger sons to be their heirs, Cao Pi, the older son of Cao Cao, was understandably sensitive to a similar contestation for the title of heir apparent within the Yuan's household. Like his own mother Empress Bian 卞太后 (161-230) who loved her younger son Cao Zhi the most, Lady Liu was in favor of her younger son Yuan Shang and aggressively persuaded her husband to establish Yuan Shang as his heir.⁵³⁵ Cao Pi's portrayal of Lady Liu's jealous and cruel behavior might very well have been tainted by his distaste toward people like her. In another source, a quotation of Cao Pi's *Dian lun* in Pei Songzhi's commentary to Chen Shou's *Sanguo zhi*, the account of Lady Liu's jealousy and cruelty, cited earlier in the "Nei jie," was preceded with a comparison between Liu's two sons and her effort of securing the title of heir apparent for her younger son.

Yuan Tan was older and beneficent; Yuan Shang was younger and handsome. Yuan Shao's wife Lady Liu favored Yuan Shang, and praised his talents a few times. Yuan Shao also marveled at Shang's look, and thought about establishing him as his heir. Before it was made known to the public Yuan Shao died. Liu was extremely jealous. As soon as Shao died, even before he was interred she killed all five of his favorite

⁵³⁴ Chen, *Sanguo zhi*, 5.164.

⁵³⁵ "Cao Zhi, Lord of Dong'e, was the youngest son of Empress Bian. She loved him the most 東阿王植, 太后少子, 最愛之." Chen, *Sanguo zhi*, 5.157.

concubines. She believed that the dead had consciousness, and they would meet Yuan Shao in the underworld, so she shaved their heads and blackened their faces so as to disfigure them. Yuan Shang, more over, killed the entire families of the dead.⁵³⁶

譚長而惠，尚少而美。紹妻劉氏愛尚，數稱其才，紹亦奇其貌，欲以為後，未顯而紹死。劉氏性酷妒，紹死，僵尸未殯，寵妾五人，劉盡殺之。以為死者有知，當復見紹於地下，乃髡頭墨面以毀其形。尚又為盡殺死者之家。

It is very tempting to read the Cao brothers' struggle for the title of heir apparent into Cao Pi's account of Lady Liu and her role in her sons' contention for the throne. Can Pi's depiction of Liu is the only source by which we can judge Liu's character. Liu might or might not have been a jealous and cruel woman, but it is very likely that she was appropriated by Cao Pi to vent his veiled condemnation of those who threatened his position as the crown prince. Jealousy was condemned in Cao Pi's "Nei jie," probably not because it was a wicked female temperament, but because it was a site where Cao Pi could lodge his criticism of those who had opposed him politically.

A Memorial Rejecting Marriage Alliance with a Princess

Although there was a long tradition of depicting the extremely jealous temperament of the noblewomen, especially the imperial daughters, the situation seemed to have gone out of control in the fifth and sixth century. It is said that the princesses throughout the Liu-Song dynasty were all so extremely jealous 宋世諸主莫不嚴妬 that it greatly concerned Emperor Ming of Song 宋明帝 (439-472, r. 465-472).⁵³⁷ When Jiang Xiao 江勳 (452-495), an aristocrat whose maternal grandfather was Emperor Wen of Song 宋文帝 (407-453, r. 424-453), was asked

⁵³⁶ Chen, *Sanguo zhi*, 6.201.

⁵³⁷ Shen, *Song shu*, 41.1290; Li, *Nan shi*, 23.619.

to marry one of the princesses, Emperor Ming had someone pen a memorial on Jiang's behalf to reject the marriage proposal. Allegedly, Emperor Ming did so in order to teach the jealous princesses a lesson. The *Nan shi* reports that when the emperor showed the memorial to the princesses, they all laughed about it 并為戲笑.⁵³⁸ The “Memorial on Behalf of Jiang Xiao to Reject Marriage with a Princess” (*Wei Jiang Xiao rang shang gongzhu biao* 為江敦讓尚公主表) has been traditionally attributed to Yu Tongzhi 虞通之 (fl.ca. 453), an intimate courtier of Emperor Ming.

The lengthy and hilarious memorial starts with the misfortunes and hardships that a list of aristocrats since the Western Jin onward had experienced after they were made to marry princesses. These “unfortunate” imperial sons-in-law include some well-known and powerful political figures such as Wang Dun 王敦 (266-324) and Huan Wen 桓溫 (312-373). As powerful

⁵³⁸ Li, *Nan shi*, 23.621.

Shen Yue's *Song shu*, however, has a somewhat different account of the effect of the emperor showing this letter. According to the *Song shu*, upon reading “Jiang's” memorial, Liu Yingyuan 劉英媛 (5th c.), Grand Princess of Linchuan 臨川長公主 who was an older sister of Emperor Ming of Song, sent in a memorial entitled “A Memorial Submitted to Request a Return to the Wang Family” (*Shangbiao qi huanshen Wang zu* 上表乞還身王族), and pled to be sent back to her ex-husband Wang Zao's 王藻 family. It is said that Liu Yingyuan was very jealous. In 465, when she found out that Wang Zao was having an affair with a maidservant, she slandered Wang to the then emperor Liu Ziyue 劉子業 (449-465, r. 464-465), later known as the Former Deposed Emperor 前廢帝. Her husband was thus put in prison and subsequently died there. She then divorced herself from the Wang family. But after having read “Jiang's” memorial, Liu Yingyuan immediately made a request to Emperor Ming of Song to be returned to her ex-husband's home in order to care for her young son, and her request was granted by Emperor Ming.

The *Nan shi*'s account states that “Jiang's” memorial was laughed at by the princesses, and that although Liu Yingyuan did make a request to be returned to her former husband's family, her request was not made until later during the reign of Yuanhui 元徽 (473-477), and her request was approved by Liu Yu 劉昱 (463-477, r. 473-477), known as the Latter Deposed Emperor 后廢帝.

as they were in the public realm, these men are all said to have yielded to their princess wives. The memorial goes on to describe how miserable it would be to have a princess wife—the husband would be tightly controlled by his wife and surrounded by watchful eyes; he would be lectured by old servants about the advantages of having a jealous wife; he would not be allowed to keep good-looking maidservants around; nor would he be permitted to socialize with friends and family; he would be summoned to see his wife at odd hours, and he would have to take whatever his wife said as infallible law. All the personal inconveniences of marrying a princess aside, what makes the matter worse is a greater danger of having one’s bloodline cut off as a result of marrying a jealous and domineering princess:

The virtue of grasshoppers is that they bring offspring to multiply.⁵³⁹ Exclusive and jealous conduct impedes the proliferation of descendants. Thus those who marry princesses often end up having their lineages extinguished, and imperial sons-in-law unavoidably meet with trouble and blame. I’m simply too ordinary and weak to bear this.⁵⁴⁰

夫螽斯之德。實致克昌。專妒之行。有妨繁衍。是以尚主之門。往往絕嗣。駙馬之身。通離釁咎。以臣凡弱。何以克堪。

To conclude the memorial, “Jiang Xiao” pled to be exempted from marrying the said princess. If his plea were not to be granted, he would, much like Feng Yan, have to resign himself to the wilderness.

⁵³⁹ *Zhong si*, grasshopper, is a reference to the “*Zhong si*” verse in the *Shi jing*.

⁵⁴⁰ Shen, *Song shu*, 41.1292.

If the imperial favor [of allowing me not to marry the princess] is hard to descend on me, and my petition is not granted, I would tattoo my skin and cut my hair, and flee into the mountains or exile myself on the ocean.⁵⁴¹

若恩詔難降。披請不申。便當刊膚翦髮。投山竄海。

The memorial is playful in nature, but it contains a certain degree of truth in its playfulness, or so the opinion of the Yuan dynasty scholar Ma Duanlin. Ma said, “although the ‘Memorial to Reject a Marriage’ recorded in Wang Dan’s biography in the *Southern Histories* is words for joking and laughing, it also reflects the social reality of the time.”⁵⁴²

While attempting to curtail jealousy among imperial daughters, Emperor Ming also intervened in the domestic affairs of some of his ministers and had their jealous wives humiliated, punished, and even executed. According to the *Song shu*, Emperor Ming executed the wife of Yuan Tao, a magistrate of Hushu (in present day Nanjing) for her jealousy 湖熟令袁慆妻以妒忌賜死。⁵⁴³ The *Nan Qi shu* recounts another two stories of Emperor Ming killing or punishing his ministers’ jealous wives.

Emperor [Ming] abhorred jealous women. He favored Rong Yanyuan, Right Assistant Director of Imperial Secretariat, for his skill in chess.⁵⁴⁴ Rong’s wife was jealous, and she injured his face. The emperor said: “How about I settle with her for you?” Yanyuan immediately responded: “I am at Your Majesty’s disposal!” That evening, [the emperor]

⁵⁴¹ Shen, *Song shu*, 41.1292.

⁵⁴² Ma, *Wenxian tongkao*, 258.2043b.

⁵⁴³ Shen, *Song shu*, 41.1290.

⁵⁴⁴ Rong Yanyuan is sometimes recorded as Lao Yanyuan 勞彥遠, see Li, *Nan shi*, 47.1180, or Luo Yanyuan 羅彥遠, see Xiao, *Nan Qi shu*, 34.612.

sent poison [to the wife] and killed her.⁵⁴⁵ [Liu] Xiu's (fl. 486) wife Wang was also jealous, which the emperor heard about. He bestowed concubines on Xiu. He then ordered to have Wang flogged twenty strokes, have Xiu open up a small shop at the back of his residence and have Wang personally sell brooms and soap sticks as a way of humiliating her.⁵⁴⁶

帝憎婦人妬，尚書右丞榮彥遠以善碁見親，婦妬傷其面，帝曰：「我為卿治之，何如？」彥遠率爾應曰：「聽聖旨。」其夕，遂賜藥殺其妻。休妻王氏亦妬，帝聞之，賜休妾，敕與王氏二十杖。令休於宅後開小店，使王氏親賣掃帚皂莢以辱之。

A Compilation to Caricature Jealous Women

In order to educate and reform jealous women in the south, Emperor Ming also commissioned the compilation of *A Record of the Jealous* (*Du ji* 妒記), which was put together by Yu Tongzhi, the ghost writer of the memorial discussed above.⁵⁴⁷ The *Du ji* is a two-volume

⁵⁴⁵ It is interesting to compare this story with a couple of early Tang tales of jealous wives in which these wives chose to drink the allegedly poisonous wine in order not to accept the beautiful concubines bestowed upon their husbands by Emperor Taizong of Tang 唐太宗 (598-649, r. 626-649). As it turns out in both stories, the wives did not die from the drinks as they were not lethal (one of which being vinegar). The emperor was awed by the resolution in the wives, and gave up on reforming his officials' jealous wives. The first story concerns Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 (579-648) and his wife who responded to the emperor with the following words: this humble wife would rather act jealously and be killed (*qie ning du er si* 妾寧妬而死) than not act jealously and be allowed to live (*bu du er sheng* 不妬而生). This story was originally recorded in the *Guoshi yizuan* 國史異纂, compiled by Liu Su 劉餗 (8th c.). The other story concerns Ren Gui 任瓌 (d. 629), Minister of War (*Bingbu shangshu* 兵部尚書), and his wife who would rather die than see her husband have multiple concubines. Ren's story was first recorded in the *Chaoye qianzai* 朝野僉載, written by Zhang Zhuo 張鷟 (658-730). Both stories are preserved by the *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記, see Li Fang 李昉 (925-996) et al., *Taiping guangji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), 272.2145.

⁵⁴⁶ Xiao, *Nan Qi shu*, 34.612.

⁵⁴⁷ The *Du ji* is also known as *A Record of Jealous Women* (*Dufu ji* 妒婦記). See Shen, *Song shu*, 41.1290, see also, Li, *Nan shi*, 23.619. In the bibliographic chapter of the *Sui shu*, *Du ji* is transcribed as 妬記, see Wei, *Sui shu*, 33.978. According to both the *Jiu Tang shu* and the *Xin Tang shu*, Yu Tongzhi authored another four-volume work entitled *A Record of Empresses and Consorts* (*Houfei ji* 后妃記). See Liu, *Jiu Tang shu*, 46.2006, and Ouyang, *Xin Tang shu*, 58.1486.

work.⁵⁴⁸ It survived through the Tang dynasty, but by the Song dynasty the work had largely disappeared. It seems that Yu Tongzhi started a sub-genre of “documenting” jealous women as sequels and supplements to the *Du ji* were being compiled in the Tang and the Song dynasties.⁵⁴⁹

Fragments of the *Du ji* have survived in quotations, first in Liu Xiaobiao’s commentary to the *Shishuo xinyu*, and then in the early Tang and early Song encyclopedic works *Yiwen leiju* and *Taiping yulan*. There are altogether seven accounts from Yu Tongzhi’s original *Du ji* that are still extant to this day.⁵⁵⁰ These accounts have been collected by Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881-1936) in his *Gu xiaoshuo gouchen* 古小說鉤沈.⁵⁵¹

The jealous women are portrayed in the *Du ji* as unreasonably violent. Three of the seven jealous women in the *Du ji* are the wives of the most powerful Eastern Jin political figures Wang Dao, Xie An and Huan Wen. The identity of the other four jealous women cannot be ascertained, but it is clear that they are of lower social status than the wives of these three political figures. Whatever their social standing might have been, these jealous women are depicted as ferocious

⁵⁴⁸ Wei, *Sui shu*, 33.978.

⁵⁴⁹ The Tang Prime Minister Wang Fangqing 王方慶 (d. 702) compiled a five-volume work entitled *A Sequel to the Record of the Jealous* (*Xu Du ji* 續妬記). See Ouyang, *Xin Tang shu*, 58.1487. A certain Song figure Wang Ji 王績 is said to have compiled an eight-volume work entitled *A Supplement to the Record of the Jealous* (*Bu Du ji* 補妒記). See Tuotuo 脫脫 (1313-1355) et al., *Song shi* 宋史 (Taipei: Dingwen shugu, 1980), 206.5230.

⁵⁵⁰ Carolyn Ford studied the different versions of some of the seven accounts. See Carolyn Ford, “The Afterlife of a Lost Book—*Du ji* (*The Record of Jealous Women*) Fifth Century [sic].” In Daria, *Reading China: Fiction, History and the Dynamics of Discourse: Essays in Honour of Professor Glen Dudbridge*, 170-99.

⁵⁵¹ Lu Xun, *Gu xiaoshuo gouchen* 古小說鉤沈 (Hong Kong: Xinyi chubanshe, 1967).

when it comes to dealing with their rivals. For example, Wang Dao's wife Lady Cao forbade her husband from having concubines. When she found out accidentally from her maidservant that her husband had set up separate residences for his concubines and their children, she was infuriated and led a group of twenty people, all armed with kitchen knives, to the houses of the concubines:

Upon hearing it, Lady Cao was greatly shocked and infuriated. She immediately asked to prepare her carriage and personally led a search party of twenty male and female servants, each having a kitchen knife in hand. Lord Wang also hastily ordered his carriage and flew out of the gate. He was very worried about the speed of the ox, so he grabbed the carriage bar with his left hand and held the tail of his whisk with his right hand, aiding the ox-driver by hitting the ox with the stem of the whisk.⁵⁵² He galloped forth in a great hurry, only to barely make it there first.⁵⁵³

曹氏聞，驚愕大恚。命車駕，將黃門及婢二十人，人持食刀，自出尋討。王公亦遽命駕，飛轡出門，猶患牛遲。乃以左手攀車蘭，右手捉塵尾，以柄助御者打牛，狼狽奔馳，劣得先至。

Huan Wen's wife Grand Princess of Nankang 南康長公主 reacted just like Lady Cao when she discovered the presence of Lady Li 李氏, Huan Wen's newly acquired concubine and daughter of the defeated Shu 蜀 ruler Li Shi 李勢 (d. 361): "She drew a knife, led a group of several dozens of maidservants and marched to Li's residence, intending to slash her 拔刀率數十婢往李所，因欲斫之."⁵⁵⁴ Not only were these jealous women portrayed as being brutal toward the

⁵⁵² The whisk (*zhuwei* 塵尾) is something that pure conversationists (*qingtan jia* 清談家) always carried on their person, and Wang Dao is particularly known for carrying a whisk with a handle of white jade 白玉柄塵尾 which was indistinguishable from his pale-skinned hand.

⁵⁵³ Liu, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 829. Liu Yiqing, *A New Account of Tales of the World*, translated with introduction and notes by Richard B. Mather (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 2002).

⁵⁵⁴ Ouyang, *Yiwen leiju*, 18.325

concubines, but they were sometimes depicted as being incredibly violent to their husbands as well. The unidentified jealous women in the *Du ji* either beat or flogged their husbands mercilessly.

The historical or fictional characters in the *Du ji* were portrayed to have shown a savage fervor that borders on the extreme. It makes one wonder how truthful these accounts of the jealous women in the *Du ji* could be, and how readers of the time would have reacted to these accounts. We know that when Emperor Ming showed the memorial Yu Tongzhi penned for Jiang Xiao to the allegedly exceedingly jealous Liu-Song princesses, they all laughed at it. Yu's *Du ji* might have received just the same kinds of reaction from the princesses, or women in general at the time.

A Memorial Denouncing the Jealous Wives and Requesting the Reinstatement of Concubinage

Punishing jealous women, sometimes very severely, might have been Emperor Ming's personal idiosyncrasy, as we will find out that the general view on jealous women was not quite in line with that of this southern emperor. We are told that jealous women were tolerated in the north. In fact, northern women were even encouraged by parents and relatives to exercise this emotion in their married life. In his memorial to Emperor Xiaojing 孝靜帝 (524-551, r. 534-550), Yuan Xiaoyou 元孝友 (d. 551), a member of the Eastern Wei 東魏 (534-550) royal family, stated that parents taught their daughters to be jealous and relatives urged women to act jealous. It seems that Yuan Xiaoyou was troubled by the fact that women were so jealous and controlling that they managed to, in Jen-der Lee's terms, turn a nominal monogamy into a real monogamy.

It has been a long time since our great dynasty suddenly abandoned this practice.⁵⁵⁵ Generals and ministers often marry princesses; noblemen marry the clanswomen of the empresses. They do not take concubines, and have grown used to this situation. How lucky it is for women to be born in this era. Across the court no man has concubines and throughout the world men only have one wife. If men are made to strengthen their resolution and marry more women, their family fortune would dwindle and they would meet with hard luck, and their friends and relatives would ridicule and blame them.⁵⁵⁶

而聖朝忽棄此數。由來漸久。將相多尚公主。王侯娶后族。故無妾媵。習以為常。婦人多幸。生逢今世。舉朝略是無妾。天下殆皆一妻。設令人彊志廣娶。則家道離索。身事迍遭。內外親知。共相嗤怪。

Yuan Xiaoyou then suggested a restoration of the institution of concubinage according to the ancient regulations, and urged men to fill up their harem with the right number of concubines:

Within a year, men should have their harem filled up with the proper number of concubines. If they fail to do so, or if they treat concubines improperly and subsequently cause their wives to be jealous and abusive towards the concubines, then they should be stripped off their official posts. If their wives could not give birth to sons, yet forbid their husbands from taking concubines, then the husbands should voluntarily cut themselves off from their wives and prohibit their wives from participating in ancestral worships. They should accuse their wives of lacking filial piety, and divorce and send them away.⁵⁵⁷

限以一周。悉令充數。若不充數。及待妾非禮。使妻妬。加捶撻。免所居官。其妻無子而不娶妾。斯則自絕。無以血食祖父。請科不孝之罪。離遣其妻。

Yuan Xiaoyou's concerns were certainly not unprecedented. As early as in the Han dynasty, scholars such as Wang Ji and Ying Shao already criticized this phenomenon of wives overpowering their husbands.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵⁵ That is, concubinage.

⁵⁵⁶ Wei, *Wei shu*, 18.423.

⁵⁵⁷ Wei, *Wei shu*, 18.423-4.

⁵⁵⁸ See Page 52-3.

The views on jealous women covered thus far are largely critical, no matter whether the criticism was carried out in a playful or serious manner. Men blamed their jealous wives for disorders at home and beyond. Family instructions condemned women's jealous behavior. Memorials were submitted to the throne to deter women's jealous temperament. Sarcastic compilations were commissioned to ridicule jealous women. However, this critical view on jealous women was not the only perspective on female jealousy. Although women's voice on this issue was often muted, occasionally we get a glimpse of it from stories of jealous women. The general view of female jealousy can also be glimpsed from certain stories and criticism of the jealous women.

A Different Voice

We know very little about women's view on jealousy as their voices were generally muted, but one story in the *Du ji*, designed to mock female jealousy, offers us a rare opportunity to see what the female perspective on jealousy might have been. The story concerns Xie An's wife Lady Liu. The story goes like this:

Lady Liu, the wife of Xie An, did not allow him to keep concubines. Since Xie loved music and entertainment, he was quite of the mind to have some singing girls in his household. His nephews knew this, and they came to see Lady Liu. During their talk they quoted *Shi jing* poems such as *Guan ju* and *Zhong si*, praising the virtue of harboring no jealousy. Lady Liu understood their intention, and asked them who had composed these poems. They answered it was the Duke of Zhou. Lady Liu said, "The Duke of Zhou was a man, and so he wrote such stuff; if one had Madame Zhou compose poetry, there surely would not have been such words!"⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁵⁹ This story originated in the *Du ji* and got to be preserved because it was quoted in Liu Xiaobiao's commentary to the *Shishuo xinyu*. See Liu, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 694. English translation by Xiaofei Tian, in her "Configuring the Feminine: Gender and Literary Transvestitism in the Southern Dynasties Poetry," 213.

謝太傅劉夫人，不令公有別房。公既深好聲樂，後遂頗欲立妓妾。兄子外生等微達此旨，共問訊劉夫人，因方便稱關雎螽斯有不忌之德。夫人知以諷己，乃問：『誰撰此詩？』答云：『周公。』夫人曰：『周公是男子，相為爾，若使周姥撰詩，當無此也。』

Although the authenticity of the story is up for debate, it is likely that such a perspective on jealousy did exist at Xie An's time.⁵⁶⁰ But despite the allegedly great opposition from his wife, Xie An is known to have kept singing girls (*xuji* 畜妓) with whom he publicly roamed the Eastern Mountain (*dongshan* 東山).⁵⁶¹

It is worth noting that Lady Liu, depicted as a jealous woman in the *Du ji*, was featured in the accounts of the worthy ladies (*xianyuan* 賢媛) in the *Shishuo xinyu*, an anecdotal collection compiled about twenty years prior to the *Du ji*. Such is also the case for the aforementioned Grand Princess of Nankang, wife of Huan Wen. The overlapping of Lady Liu and Grand Princess of Nankang in the *Shishuo xinyu* and the *Du ji* bespeaks the fact that certain behavior

Interestingly, a very similar story is recorded in a Song 宋 (960-1279) anecdotal collection *A Record of A Drunken Man's Talks* (*Zuiweng tanlu* 醉翁談錄) by Luo Ye 羅燁 (13th c.). Lady Zhao, wife of a certain Mr. Yang was so jealous that Yang's concubines were afraid of being close to Yang. One day Yang kept reciting a few verses from the *Shi jing*, saying that the gist of those poems is non-jealousy. Lady Zhao asked Yang who wrote those poems, Yang replied: "The Duke of Zhou." His wife responded: "No wonder they were made by Duke of Zhou. If Madame Zhou were to write them, she would by no means have written such things 怪得是周公做，若是周婆做時，斷不如此說也。"

⁵⁶⁰ Yu Jiayi, for example, challenges the veracity of this story. He says that that no one ever claims that Duke of Zhou 周公 authored the *Shi jing* poems "Guan ju" 關雎 and "Zhong si" 螽斯, and that people in the Xie family should not have made such groundless utterances. In addition, Yu Jiayi claims that Lady Liu was as lofty a figure, if not more, as her older brother Liu Tan 劉惔 (ca.305-340), and it is hard to believe that she would have made an absurd statement like the one in the story. Yu Jiayi suspects that the story was fabricated by Lady Liu's contemporaries in order to mock her jealous temperament. See Liu, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 694.

⁵⁶¹ Liu, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 403.

that was interpreted as jealousy by some could be understood as virtue by others, depending on whose opinion it was and when the opinion was formed.

Not only did women perceive jealousy differently from the critical views that I have introduced in the previous pages, but also people at the time seemed to have been lenient toward jealous women. Gan Bao 干寶 (d. 336), an Eastern Jin historian who was a generation older than Lady Liu, said that Western Jin women had no regard for the vice of jealousy 不拘妬忌之惡, and that “jealous women were not punished by their fathers and brothers, nor were they condemned by society 父兄弗之罪也, 天下莫之非也.”⁵⁶² Furthermore, as we learn from Ge Hong, their contemporaries admired the behavior of these women, and the public followed the trends that these women set 轉相高尚, 習非成俗.⁵⁶³ Gan Bao and Ge Hong might have disapproved of the behavior of the Western Jin women, but their opinions did not necessarily represent the view of female jealousy in society.

Yuan Xiaoyou’s memorial, cited above, reveals that the general view in northern China on jealous women was indeed very far from the critical opinion to which we are often exposed in historical writings. Yuan Xiaoyou reported that jealousy was considered a womanly virtue, and women were groomed in this practice.

People nowadays lack the standard principles. When parents marry their daughter, they teach her to be jealous. When aunts meet their niece, they urge her to be controlling. To

⁵⁶² Fang, *Jin shu*, 5.136.

⁵⁶³ Yang Mingzhao 楊明照, *Baopu zi waipian jiaojian* 抱朴子外篇校箋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991), 618.

be able to control one's husband is considered a wifely virtue; to be capable of jealousy is regarded as a womanly task.⁵⁶⁴

凡今之人。通無準節。父母嫁女。則教之以妬。姑姊逢迎。必相勸以忌。持制夫為婦德。以能妬為女工。

A wife of a Northern Wei prince, who did not act jealously, was reportedly scolded and beaten by her mother-in-law Lady Gao 高:

[Lady Gao] flogged her son's consort Lady Liu several dozens strokes, and said: "You are from an eminent family, and your family's status matches ours. What are you afraid of? Why did you not check upon your husband? Women are all jealous! Why are you alone not?" Liu smiled and accepted the punishment without uttering a single word.⁵⁶⁵

又杖其妃劉氏數十。云新婦大家女。門戶匹敵。何所畏也。而不檢校夫婿。婦人皆妬。獨不妬也。劉笑而受罰。卒無所言。

Lady Gao blamed the fall of her once-powerful son partly on his wife's un-jealous temperament, which, in Lady Gao's view, had led to her son's illicit affair with his cousin's wife, and his eventual downfall.

⁵⁶⁴ Wei, *Wei shu*, 18.423.

⁵⁶⁵ Wei, *Wei shu*, 21a.563. Yuan Xiang 元詳 (476-504), the younger brother of Emperor Xiaowen of the Northern Wei, was falsely accused of attempted rebellion during his nephew's reign. When Yuan Xiang was put in prison, he was not as concerned with the false accusation as his illicit affair with his cousin's wife Lady Gao, a Korean woman. The illicit liaison, Yuan Xiang believed, was what really had led him to the imprisonment. When he confessed to his mother Lady Gao in prison about his illicit affair with the Korean woman, his mother was infuriated and severely scolded Yuan Xiang:

You have a wife, concubines and maidservants at home. They are all young and beautiful as flowers. Why on earth would you all of the sudden had illicit affairs with that Korean slave and brought to yourself such a crime! If I get my hands on that Korean woman, I'll eat her alive!

汝自有妻妾侍婢，少盛如花，何忽共許高麗婢姦通，令致此罪。我得高麗，當噉其肉。

She then heavily flogged Yuan Xiang on his back and legs for more than one hundred times. She also scolded and beat his wife Lady Liu for not having kept a tight rein on Yuan Xiang. Lady Liu was the daughter of Liu Chang, a Liu-Song prince who fled the south and defected to the Northern Wei in 465.

Jealousy was regarded by certain people as a wicked conduct, a bad character and a vice (*e de* 惡德). But this was not the only view on jealousy and jealous women. The institution of concubinage must have played a role in propelling families and friends to encourage women to exercise this emotion in marriage. And society at large might have approved of female jealousy, at least to a certain degree.

Probably due to the mixed views on jealousy and jealous women, we rarely see women being divorced due to their jealous temperament, even though jealousy was listed as one of the Seven Conditions (sometimes the top one) for a legitimate divorce.⁵⁶⁶ In the extant early medieval writings I have encountered very few cases in which jealousy was cited as the reason of a divorce.⁵⁶⁷ The arguably first recorded case of divorce on the grounds of jealousy concerns Feng Yan's second wife Lady Ren. Even though Feng Yan opened his letter with the accusation of her being a jealous woman, his lengthy letter contains a long list of Lady Ren's un-wifely and un-motherly conduct, and jealousy should be considered only one of the many reasons that led Feng to divorce Lady Ren. Slightly more common, the severe consequences brought about by her jealous temperament would result in a woman's divorce. For instance, the powerful Cao-Wei

⁵⁶⁶ “Of the Seven Conditions under which a woman could be divorced, jealousy is right on top 七去之道，妒正為首。” Liu Xiang, *Lienü zhuan* 列女傳 (Taipei: Taiwan zhonghua shuju, 1981), 2.37.

⁵⁶⁷ One, and probably the only one definite example of divorce due to jealousy from the end of the Western Han dynasty concerns Wang Zhengjun's 王政君 (77 BCE-13 CE) mother Lady Li. Wang Zhengjun was an aunt of the famous usurper Wang Mang 王莽 (45 BCE-23 CE) and wife of Emperor Yuan of Han 漢元帝 (76-33 BCE, r. 49-33 BCE). Lady Li, the principal wife of Wang Zhengjun's father Wang Jin 王禁 (d. 42 BCE), is said to have been divorced because of her jealousy (*yi du qu* 以妬去). She was then married to another man named Gou Bing 苟賓. See Ban, *Han shu*, 98.4015. Exactly what kind of jealous behavior had led to Lady Li's divorce remains unknown.

minister and famous calligrapher Zhong You divorced Lady Sun because she, driven by jealousy, attempted to poison Zhong's favorite concubine Zhang Changpu when Zhang was pregnant with Zhong Hui.⁵⁶⁸ But even cases like this are not common in historical accounts of jealous women.

The Voice of Jealous Women in Poetry

Women were usually voiceless on the issue of jealousy in historical writings. Except for the aforementioned Lady Liu in the *Du ji*, the defensive voice from women was rarely heard. However, women were given a chance to express their opinions in poetry, especially in the poetry of the Liang dynasty. At least in two extant Liang poems we hear the female personae defending themselves against the charge of jealousy.

The female personae in the two Liang poems are the famous historical figures Empress Chen 陳皇后 (mid 2nd c. BCE) and Lady Ban 班婕妤 (48 BCE-2 CE), both of whom were once favored by their rulers but eventually fell out of the imperial favor. Empress Chen was the cousin of Liu Che 劉徹 (157-87 BCE), later Emperor Wu of Han. Indebted to her mother's support in securing the throne, Emperor Wu initially indulged Chen. After she was established as the empress, she grew arrogant and was cruel to Emperor Wu's other consorts, thus causing the relationship between her and the emperor to go sour. The fact that she did not bear a son after ten years of marriage made the matter worse. She was eventually stripped of her title and banished to live in the Tall Gate Palace (*Changmen Gong* 長門宮). The official charges against Empress

⁵⁶⁸ See discussion of this case on Page 108 and 109.

Chen were that she could not bear a son, and that she employed witches and practiced sorcery in the palace.⁵⁶⁹ Yet in the memory of late generations, she was abandoned because she acted jealously toward Emperor Wu's new favorites. This perception appeared as early as in the famous work, "Poetic Exposition on the Tall Gate Palace" (*Changmen fu* 長門賦), allegedly composed by the renowned *fu* writer Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (179-117 BCE). Legend has it that the disgraced Empress Chen hired Sima Xiangru to write this *fu*, with the hope of winning back the emperor's love.⁵⁷⁰ Yet, the Liang dynasty poet Fei Chang 費昶 (fl. 510) viewed this historical figure in a rather different light.⁵⁷¹ He had "Empress Chen" defend the charge of jealousy in his poem, which reads:

Fei Chang, "I Have Someone on My Mind" (*you suosi* 有所思):

⁵⁶⁹ Chen's life events are recorded in the biography of Empress Wei Zifu 衛子夫 (d. 91 BCE) in the *Shi ji*, see Sima, *Shi ji*, 49.1979-80. Chen enjoys an independent biography in the *Han shu*, see Ban, *Han shu*, 97.3948.

⁵⁷⁰ The *fu* is translated in full by David R. Knechtges, with annotation. See David R. Knechtges and Xiao Tong, *Wen xuan or Selections of Refined Literature, Volume III* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014), 159-165.

In another article, Knechtges discusses the controversy over the authorship of both the preface and the *fu* itself, see David Knechtges, "Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju's 'Tall Gate Palace Rhapsody,'" *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 41 (1981): 47-64. Due to the fact that the "Tall Gate Palace" appears in a relatively late source (i.e. the *Wen xuan*), scholars have been reluctant to accept Sima Xiangru as the true author of the work. Knechtges agrees with the existing scholarship that the preface is an obvious forgery. There is one obvious anachronism—the posthumous title "Filial Emperor of Wu" 孝武帝 could not have been known to Sima Xiangru as he died before the emperor, and there is a discrepancy regarding Chen's life story between the preface and Chen's biography in the *Han shu*, that is, she did not regain the imperial favor as it is claimed in the preface. Although the preface may well have come from a later hand (Knechtges suspects that it is a Six Dynasties forgery), Knechtges contends "one need not to say the same about the *fu* itself." Knechtges, "Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju's 'Tall Gate Palace Rhapsody,'" 51.

⁵⁷¹ Fei Chang was known for his *yuefu* poems and was highly regarded by Emperor Wu of Liang who rewarded him ten rolls of silk for his literary achievement. See Li, *Nan shi*, 72.1795.

| | |
|---|--------|
| Crows are going to rest in the Upper Forest Park, ⁵⁷² | 上林烏欲棲， |
| The day is about to end in the Tall Gate Palace. | 長門日行暮。 |
| Sadly, the person I am longing for is out of sight. | 所思鬱不見， |
| In vain, I recall the footsteps on the red stairs. ⁵⁷³ | 空想丹墀步。 |
| When the curtain moved, I thought it was you coming. | 簾動意君來， |
| The sound of thunder resembles your carriage passing by. ⁵⁷⁴ | 雷聲似車度。 |
| The beautiful woman from the north, | 北方佳麗子， |

⁵⁷² Shanglin, Upper Forest Park, was the imperial park of Emperor Wu of Han. In this couplet, Shanglin may be identified with the space in which the Han emperor resides; it is set up as an opposite of Changmen, Tall Gate Palace, where the deposed empress now stays.

The *Wuqi qu* 烏棲曲 was a popular *yuefu* title to which sensual romantic verses were written by poets around Fei Chang's time. The theme of these *yuefu* poems is often the pleasure of lovemaking, the regret of the brevity of the night, and the sorrow of separation between lovers at the break of the dawn.

The time when the crows hide away and rest (*wuqi* 烏棲) is the time when the sun sets and the night starts, and in this poem, the night fun enjoyed by Emperor Wu and his new favorite in the Upper Forest Park begins. This is contrasted with the loneliness suffered by the heroine who is confined to the Tall Gate Palace.

⁵⁷³ Red stairs (*danchi* 丹墀) is an allusion to Ban Jieyu's "Poetic Exposition on Self-lament" (*Zidao fu* 自悼賦):

| | |
|---|--------|
| I look down over the vermeil pavement, | 俯視兮丹墀， |
| Recall where my lord's sandals used to tread. | 思君兮履綦。 |

See Ban, *Han shu*, 97a.3987. Knechtges's translation, see Knechtges, "Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju's 'Tall Gate Palace Rhapsody,'" 60.

⁵⁷⁴ It is a reference to Sima Xiangru's "Poetic Exposition on the Tall Gate Palace." The lines read:

| | |
|--|----------|
| The droning din of thunder begins to resound; | 雷殷殷而響起兮， |
| It reminds me of the rumbling of my lord's carriage. | 聲象君之車音。 |

Knechtges's translation, see Knechtges, "Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju's 'Tall Gate Palace Rhapsody,'" 51.

So charming, can make heads turn.⁵⁷⁵

窈窕能迴顧。

It is you, my lord, who is infatuated and led astray,

夫君自迷惑，

It is not that my heart is filled with jealousy.⁵⁷⁶

非為妾心妬。

Contrary to the conventional view that regarded Empress Chen as a jealous woman, the male poet Fei Chang gave the disgraced empress a chance to defend herself: that she was not jealous, and that the emperor was tempted and abandoned her.⁵⁷⁷

Liu Lingxian 劉令嫻 (fl. 524), a well-known Liang dynasty female poet, also voiced her view on the issue of female jealousy. The persona in Liu's poem is the famous Lady Ban who was slandered by Emperor Chen's 漢成帝 (51-7 BCE, r. 33-7 BCE) new favorite Zhao Feiyan 趙飛燕 (32-1 BCE). In the official histories, Lady Ban, anticipating more slander from Zhao, requested to move to the Eternal Trust Palace (*Changxin gong* 長信宮) to wait on the emperor's mother and live out the rest of her life in peace and security. Lady Ban was portrayed in historical writings as a virtuous palace lady who exhorted the emperor to be a worthy ruler whenever possible. But Liu Lingxian's poem suggests that Lady Ban's request to move into the Eternal Trust Palace had been interpreted as a jealous reaction to the increasingly exclusive favor

⁵⁷⁵ The beautiful woman from north alludes to the state-toppling beauty Lady Li 李夫人 who, after being praised so highly in her brother's song "Beifang you jiarren" 北方有佳人, became Emperor Wu's new favorite. Yet, in historical reality, it was Empress Wei 衛思后 (d. 91 BCE) who was Empress Chen's rival. See Lu, *Han shi*, 1.102. See also Ban, *Han shu*, 97a.3951.

⁵⁷⁶ Lu, *Liang shi*, 27.2081-2.

⁵⁷⁷ Although Empress Chen's biography in the *Han shu* makes no mentioning of her jealous temperament, the preface to the "Poetic Exposition on the Tall Gate Palace," included in the *Wen xuan*, states explicitly that she was "quite jealous" (*po du* 頗妒). But as discussed earlier the preface was likely from a much later hand.

that Zhao received from the emperor. In the poem, the female poet gave Lady Ban a voice to explain and defend herself: that her request had nothing to do with her being jealous of Zhao's famed slender waist.

Liu Lingxian, "A Matching Poem on the Resentment of Lady Ban" (*He Jieyu yuan shi* 和婕妤怨詩):

| | |
|---|--------|
| At sunset the Ying Gate is closed, | 日落應門閉， |
| all sorts of melancholy thoughts and longing arise in my heart. | 愁思百端生。 |
| Moreover the Palace of Zhaoyang is near, | 況復昭陽近， |
| And wind carries over the sound of music and singing. | 風傳歌吹聲。 |
| I shall never resent the loss of my lord's favor, | 寵移終不恨， |
| Yet to slander and wrong me—that's so ruthless! | 讒枉太無情。 |
| I only want to contend for what is right, | 只言爭分理， |
| Not that I envy the dancer's light waist. ⁵⁷⁸ | 非妬舞腰輕。 |

Liu Lingxian was the younger sister of the renowned Liang dynasty poet Liu Xiaochuo 劉孝綽 (fl. 525).⁵⁷⁹ This poem, as Xiaofei Tian points out, was written to match Liu Xiaochuo's poem "The Resentment of Lady Ban" (*Ban jieyu yuan* 班婕妤怨). Writing on the same topic, "the two poems deploy notably similar terminology and wording in the former half; but as they continue, Liu Lingxian, who speak as Lady Ban in her poem, departs not only from her brother but from

⁵⁷⁸ Translation by Tian, "Configuring the Feminine: Gender and Literary Transvestitism in the Southern Dynasties Poetry," 213-6. Also translated in Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush, Writing Women of Imperial China*, 149.

⁵⁷⁹ For an introduction and discussion of Liu Lingxian, see Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush, Writing Women of Imperial China*, 146-53.

all male poets who had composed poetry on the same topic, and enacts a voice that differentiates significantly and strikingly from that of the female persona as presented by the renowned court poet Liu Xiaochuo.⁵⁸⁰

In her insightful analysis of Liu Lingxian's creation of the image of Lady Ban that "subverts the established codifications of Lady Ban's resentment," Tian points out that Lady Ban in Liu's poem "cared not so much for the emperor's fickle affection as her own image," and her image in Liu's poem is very different indeed from the one "invariably described as sad and forlorn because of her royal lover's neglect in most contemporary male poets' representation." This Lady Ban in Liu Lingxian's poem "shows an unforgettably strong, independent and spirited character," and one manifestation of her character, in my view, is her protest against the wrongful charge of jealousy.⁵⁸¹

One interesting aspect of the poetic representation of jealousy is that in poetry, we come across husbands who got jealous of their wives. This possibility, however, is not revealed to us in historical representation of sexual jealousy. In the following old *yuefu* poem, the husband, seeing his wife mending the clothes for the wandering travelers who might have been lodging at their home, became suspicious and jealous.

"Prelude to a Ballad" (*Yange xing* 豔歌行):

⁵⁸⁰ Tian, "Configuring the Feminine: Gender and Literary Transvestitism in the Southern Dynasties Poetry," 214.

⁵⁸¹ Tian, "Configuring the Feminine: Gender and Literary Transvestitism in the Southern Dynasties Poetry," 216-7.

| | |
|--|--------|
| Flying are the swallows in front of the hall, | 翩翩堂前燕， |
| hidden in winter and reappearing in summer. | 冬藏夏來見。 |
| There were brothers, two or three, | 兄弟兩三人， |
| drifting about in a foreign land. | 流蕩在他鄉。 |
| Who will mend our old clothes? | 故衣誰當補， |
| Who will make for us new clothes? | 新衣誰當綻。 |
| How fortunate that we have this kind hostess, ⁵⁸² | 賴得賢主人， |
| she took hold of [the old clothes] and repaired them for us. | 覽取為吾綻。 |
| Her husband came in through the door, | 夫壻從門來， |
| leaning on the northwestern [door] he cast a glance at her. | 斜柯西北眇。 |
| “Just don’t look askance at me yet,” she said to him, | 語卿且勿眇， |
| “When the water is clear, the stones will naturally show.” | 水清石自見。 |
| The stones shown are truly many, | 石見何壘壘， |
| yet traveling afar is not as good as going back home. ⁵⁸³ | 遠行不如歸。 |

It is a case where male jealousy was not displayed in the court, as was often the case, or so we are told; but it was exhibited in the intimate domestic space. Also, in this case, what the man experienced is clearly the sexual jealousy that is normally reserved for women, not the political jealousy that is almost exclusively associated with men. Another poem, composed by a Liang dynasty poet Xiao Guan 蕭綸 (519-551), shows the supposedly presence of a man’s jealousy of his charming wife.

⁵⁸² Here the hostess is described as *xian*, worthy, an adjective that is often used to describe a worthy man.

⁵⁸³ Lu, *Han shi*, 9.273. Wu, *Yutai xinyong jianzhu*, 13-14.

Xiao Guan, “On Seeing a Concubine” (*Jian jiren shi* 見姬人詩).⁵⁸⁴

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| Spring has come; it is no longer distant. | 春來不復賒， |
| Entering the park, I stop my carriage. | 入苑駐行車。 |
| The make-up trend has been different lately, | 比來粧點異， |
| Women nowadays comb their hair to the side. | 今世撥鬢斜。 |
| She lowers her fan to catch the shadow of the tree, | 卻扇承枝影， |
| and hold up [a corner of] her robe to receive the fallen blossoms. | 舒衫受落花。 |
| “My wild husband doesn’t get jealous of me, | 狂夫不妬妾 |
| so I can go home late as I please.” ⁵⁸⁵ | 隨意晚還家。 |

The husband who is absent in this poem is supposed to be jealous of his wife, as she is so charming and trendy that she could stop traffic. The woman’s provocative statement at the end of the poem about the lack of a jealous reaction from her husband implies that such an emotion could have existed.

Finally, let me end this section with a brief discussion of the “Poetic Exposition on Jealous Women” (*Dufu fu* 妒婦賦), composed by yet another Liang dynasty literary figure Zhang Zuan. This *fu* exhibits a marked difference between *shi* poetry and *fu* writings on the issue of jealousy.

Zhang Zuan, “Poetic Exposition on Jealous Women” (*Dufu fu* 妒婦賦).⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸⁴ The early medieval usage of *jiren* 姬人 only appears in the extant poems written by the Liang and the Chen 陳 (557-589) poets.

⁵⁸⁵ Lu, *Liang shi*, 24.2029.

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| Women's complaints are without limit. | 惟婦怨之無極， |
| Is there a place where there is no such a thing? | 羌于何而弗有。 |
| Some fabricate the head and create the tail, ⁵⁸⁷ | 或造端而構末， |
| and all have foul language in their mouths. ⁵⁸⁸ | 皆莠言之在口。 |
| Their resentment is born from love, | 常因情以起恨， |
| They pass on others' words, and take them wrong. | 每傳聲而妄受。 |
| Suddenly they eavesdrop from behind a curtain, ⁵⁸⁹ | 乍隔帳而窺屏， |
| or sometimes steal a look through a window. ⁵⁹⁰ | 或覘牕而瞰牖。 |

⁵⁸⁶ This “Dufu fu” appears to be incomplete. The earliest source of this *fu* is the *Yiwen leiju*. Although “Dufu fu” seems like a generic *fu* title, no other “Dufu fu” can be found.

⁵⁸⁷ This line alludes to Feng Yan's letter to his brother-in-law in which he accused his wife of fabricating things out of the thin air.

⁵⁸⁸ A reference to a *Shi jing* verse: good words come from his mouth, and bad words come from his mouth too 好言自口，莠言自口. See *Maoshi zhengyi*, 12. 397b.

⁵⁸⁹ This may refer to Xie An's wife Lady Liu. According to the *Shishuo xinyu*, Lady Liu “curtained off her female attendants, and had them come out in front and perform music and dancing. She let Hsieh (i.e. Xie An) watch them momentarily and then lowered the curtains. When Hsieh sought to have them opened again, Lady Liu said: ‘I fear it might damage your abundant virtue.’ 謝公夫人幃諸婢，使在前作伎，使太傅暫見，便下幃。太傅索更開，夫人云：恐傷盛德。” Translation by Mather, *A New Account of Tales of the World*, 378.

⁵⁹⁰ The jealous woman who peeps through a window (*chan chuang* 覘牕) may refer to Wang Dao's 王導 (276-339) jealous wife Lady Cao 曹夫人 who accidentally caught a glimpse through a finely wrought window 青疏臺 of a few dashing young men who turned out to be, much to her astonishment, her husband's sons from his secret concubines. Lady Cao's story is recorded in the *Du ji*, and is quoted in the *Shishuo xinyu*. See Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 (403-444), Liu, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 829. “Peeking through the window” (*kan you* 瞰牖) may refer to the story of Liu Qu, and his consorts Yangcheng Zhaoxin and Tao Wangqing 陶望卿. Yangcheng Zhaoxin was extremely jealous and brutal. In order to eliminate her rival Tao Wangqing, she slandered her to Liu Qu and falsely accused Tao Wangqing of stealthily peeping at the guards through the southern window (*nanhu kui langli* 南戶窺郎吏). Not given a chance to defend herself, Tao was violently slaughtered by Liu Qu and Yangcheng Zhaoxin. Ban, *Han shu*, 53.2429.

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| As for domestic furies breaking out over minor disappointments, | 若夫室怒小憾， |
| and [wife and husband] quarreling over small talk, | 反目私言。 |
| If small annoyances cannot be tolerated, | 不忍細忿， |
| they will all be turned into great hatred. | 皆成大寃。 |
| The hidden intimacies of the boudoir, | 閨房之所隱私， |
| or words said on the bed mat, | 牀第之所討論， |
| will all be divulged in the morning, | 咸一朝之發洩， |
| and fill up the whole world with clamor. ⁵⁹¹ | 滿四海之囂喧。 |

| | |
|--|---------|
| If one accidentally rubs the jealous women the wrong way, | 忽有逆其妬鱗， |
| and violates their taboos, | 犯其忌制， |
| they will go through fire and water, | 赴湯蹈火， |
| and roll up their sleeves and glower at you. | 瞋目攘袂。 |
| Some may abandon properties and set their homes on fire. | 或弃產而焚家， |
| Some may throw away their sons and harm their husbands. ⁵⁹² | 或投兒而害壻。 |

Zhang Zuan, style name Boxu 伯緒, married Emperor Wu's daughter Princess of Fuyang 富陽公主 (6th c.) when he was only eleven *sui*. He was well known for his literary achievement

⁵⁹¹ These four lines are transformed from Feng Yan's description of his wife Ren.

⁵⁹² Ouyang, *Yiwen leiju*, 35.616.

One account in the *Du ji* states that a jealous woman Yu 庾氏 killed two children just because her husband Xun 荀 once traveled at night and did not sleep at home. Of the extant seven accounts of jealous women in the *Du ji*, more than half of it depicts jealous wives who physically abused their husbands.

in the Liang and the Northern Wei. His second son Zhang Xi 張希 also married an imperial daughter, Princess of Haiyan 海鹽公主 (6th c.), who was the daughter of Emperor Jianwen 簡文帝 (503-551, r. 549-551). Zhang's "Dufu fu" might or might not have been inspired by his real experience as the spouse of a princess.

The view on jealous women in this *fu* is reproachful. It seems to be consistent with the critical attitude of jealousy in historical accounts introduced in the preceding section. The tone of this piece of writing appears to be sarcastic. It may be because that Zhang Zuan's *fu* followed the literary precedents of the prose writings on jealousy, particularly Feng Yan's letter and Yu Tongzhi's *Du ji*.

The Male Jealousy: A Coda

Although we rarely see the representation of male sexual jealousy in writings, apart from the two poems discussed above, we believe that such an emotion did exist, even within the system of polygamy. By way of concluding this chapter, I will introduce a story from the Tang dynasty about male sexual jealousy. Li Yi 李益 (746-829), a famous Tang poet, was known for his compulsive jealous reaction toward his wives and concubines. His obsessive behavior resembled that of the jealous wives in the *Du ji* who exercised a tight grip of their husbands:

At a young age [Li Yi] suffered from obsessive behavior, and was unreasonably suspicious and jealous. He guarded and confined his wives and concubines to such a degree that it was considered harsh and cruel. There were rumors that he scattered ash [on

the floor] and kept doors locked.⁵⁹³ Because of that, his contemporaries dubbed excessive jealousy Li Yi's Disease. As a result, Li Yi could not get promoted for a long time, while his class of people had all occupied prominent positions.⁵⁹⁴

然少有癡病，而多猜忌，防閑妻妾，過為苛酷，而有散灰扃戶之譚聞於時，故時謂妬癡為「李益疾」；以是久之不調，而流輩皆居顯位。

Here is the irony: sexual jealousy had been perceived as a predominantly female emotion, but thanks to Li Yi's excessive jealous behavior, jealousy is linked to a man, and its epithet bears a man's name.⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹³ Scattering ash on the floor in order to see if the womenfolk in his household had stepped out of their confinement.

⁵⁹⁴ Liu, *Jiu Tang shu*, 137.3771.

⁵⁹⁵ Li Yi is the male protagonist in the famous Tang *chuanqi* 傳奇 “Huo Xiaoyu's Story” (*Huo Xiaoyu zhuan* 霍小玉傳). Li Yi betrays his commitment to his lover Huo Xiaoyu, and thus is haunted by Huo's vengeful ghost after she dies of lovesickness. Huo's “supernatural intervention” in Li's relationship with his women at home drives him crazy. He “comes to distrust the fidelity of his wives and concubines; he casts them out, kills them, or terrorizes them.” For a wonderful discussion of “Huo Xiaoyu's Story” within the context of the Tang romance culture, see Stephen Owen, *The End of the Chinese “Middle Ages”*: *Essays in Mid-Tang Literary Culture* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), 135-48, and Owen's translation of “Huo Xiaoyu's Story,” see *ibid.*, 178-91.

Conclusion

This dissertation project was conceived at the time when a new interpretation of the marriage law in Mainland China was issued in late 2011, subsequently triggering a heated discussion across the country about how women would be adversely impacted, especially during the process of divorce, by this new interpretation. I was intrigued by the strong reactions from women. And as a student of early medieval Chinese literature and culture, I was wondering what I could find out about divorce and the divorced woman in early medieval China and whether our knowledge of the past would help enlighten the current controversy. Under what circumstances could a man divorce his wife? What was it like to be a divorced woman? How were the divorced woman perceived by society? I went into the research with these preliminary questions, and decided on a two-part structure of the dissertation—a cultural study of divorce in early medieval China and a literary study of the divorced woman as represented in early medieval Chinese writings.

A comparison between the rites, norms and regulations prescribed for women in ritual Classics and women's lived experiences as recounted in historical writings shows a greater discrepancy between norm and practice in the early medieval period than in later periods. Normative prescriptions were generally not followed by women of this period, and women enjoyed a more relaxed social and familial environment than their late imperial counterparts. The gap between norm and practice was extended into many areas of familial and social life, including marriage and divorce. As early as the late Han, the Seven Conditions (*qichu*) and the Three Prohibitions (*sanbuqu*) were already specified in classical ritual texts as the guiding

principles for a proper divorce. But an examination of the actual divorce cases reveals that neither the Seven Conditions nor the Three Prohibitions were seriously invoked when divorce took place. Divorce happened to people from all levels of society, could be initiated by both men and women, for reasons going outside the Seven Conditions and the Three Prohibitions. Divorce was certainly not regarded as a social taboo.

The unstable social and political environment that characterizes the early medieval period gave rise to some ritual deviations and even anomalies, among which was the two-principal-wives (*liangdi*) phenomenon. Debates and discussions on this marital predicament anchored on the issue of divorce, that is, how should the marital status of the two wives be defined, and should one of them be considered a divorced woman? A thorny case of a sixth-century *liangdi* dilemma is studied, and this case study shows that during the long divide between north and south, the contestation for the title and status of the principal wife within the domestic sphere could very well be understood as a contention for cultural supremacy and political legitimacy between northern and southern elite.

Generally speaking, divorced women were not stigmatized in early medieval China, and remarriage was an acceptable recourse for them. However, they suffered a rather unfavorable portrayal in male-authored writings. Though historians were not hostile to the divorced woman, they were indifferent to her sufferings. The divorced woman was often used as a prop for illuminating the character of the man who divorced her. Depending on how her ex-husband should be portrayed, her image in historical writings varied greatly, from passively accepting the unfair treatment of divorce to aggressively protesting it. The divorced woman played an important role in historical accounts of her divorce, but her *raison d'être* in history was to bring

the character of her ex-husband into high relief. The problematic attitude toward her can be more strongly felt in the poetic representation of her. Male poets may appear to be sympathetic to her pains and agonies, but they were particular about the emotional ramifications of the divorced woman, and deemed only certain sentiments, emotions and feelings in her that were appropriate in the realm of poetry.

The representation of the divorced woman was also affected by the particular genres in which she was depicted. Our knowledge of her is incomplete should we only see her in one genre or one form of writing. Historical and literary writings situate the divorced woman in distinctive settings. In historical writings, she was closely tied to her ex-husband, to his extended family, as well as to her own birth family. That is to say, the divorced woman in historical accounts is placed in a field of social relations.

However, there was a turn to the inner when it comes to her representation in poetry. The divorced woman was no longer surrounded by his or her own families, nor was she placed before the public in the event of her divorce. She was abandoned, isolated and interiorized. Being the only actor in the divorce scene, she was given a distinct poetic voice, though whether that voice was genuinely hers is another matter. Depending on the particular poetic genre she was in, the timbre of her voice varied from infuriation, melancholy, to disenchantment. She was sometimes presented as defiant, but it was not because of the backing of her birth family, as was often the case in historical accounts of her, but because of her removal and detachment from the man who used to possess her. The ways in which the divorced woman was depicted in early medieval writings not only reflect the mindset of her creators, but also manifest the constraints imposed by individual forms of writings in which she was portrayed.

The dissertation ends with a chapter on female sexual jealousy and the figure of the jealous wife. Through an examination of jealousy in classical scholarship and medical texts, I have demonstrated that sexual jealousy in early medieval China was perceived primarily as a female emotion. A sampling of a wide range of prose writings on jealous women shows how they were unsparingly mocked, derided, criticized, and even demonized. Although in poetry jealousy was also treated as a negative emotion that required denial, women were often given a voice to defend the charge of jealousy against them. Representations of the jealous wife once again highlight the constraints different forms of writings imposed on the subject matter.

This last chapter at first seems irrelevant to the overall theme of divorce and the divorced woman, except that jealousy was considered one of the Seven Conditions for divorcing a woman and a jealous woman could be rightfully repudiated. Yet, just like the other six conditions, jealousy was rarely cited as a reason for divorce and jealous women were seldom seen divorced. The study of the jealous wife thus serves as a supplementary example for illustrating the discrepancy between normative ethics on divorce and its deviations in practice. Moreover, the competing discourses on female sexual jealousy and the conflicting representations of the jealous wife echo nicely with the discourses on divorce and the representation of the divorced woman.

When I talked to people about my dissertation project, the questions I received frequently were: Was there such a thing as divorce in ancient China? Could women divorce men? ... It is my hope that my dissertation has answered more than these straightforward “yes or no” questions, and that it has contributed to the under-studied topic of divorce and the divorced woman in early medieval China, and to a deeper understanding of some of the social, cultural

and literary trends that have been brought to light through the lens of divorce and the divorced woman.

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