



# “Treat Them Like Your Own Daughters”: Sexual Assault Prevention Training in an Eighteenth-Century Chinese Conduct-of-Life Manual

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# “Treat Them Like Your Own Daughters”: Sexual Assault Prevention Training in an Eighteenth-Century Chinese Conduct-of-Life Manual

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## Introduction

China in the 17th through 19th centuries witnessed an extraordinary flowering of interest in the details of what it might mean to live a moral life. The Buddhist-Confucian-Daoist syncretic tradition (*sanjiao yiguan* 三教一貫 or *sanjiao heyi* 三教合一) provided rich intellectual resources for thinking about morality in practice. With the *Taishang ganying pian* 太上感應篇 (*The Treatise of the Most Exalted One on Action and Retribution*) as its flagship text,<sup>1</sup> *sanjiao* syncretism in popular reception developed a remarkable textual and print culture, resulting in the publication of a vast array of tracts, exempla collections, novels, polemics, poetry anthologies, commentaries on sacred texts, and conduct-of-life manuals. “Morality books” (*shanshu* 善書), as these texts are generally known, were arguably one of the greatest publishing sensations of the 18th and 19th centuries,<sup>2</sup> and their popularity has continued up to the present day: *shanshu* remain a feature of popular social debate and moral practice in Taiwan and are enjoying a renaissance on the mainland.<sup>3</sup>

The text translated below, a short morality book essay from 1765 titled “Staying Away from Sexual Sin” (“*Jie xieyin*” 戒邪淫), is an example of what I term an “itemized list.” Addressed to a wealthy male reader, it enumerates seven kinds of women a man might encounter in his everyday life. In the sexual economy of late imperial China, these seven types of women were all groups potentially available to a man of money and status; he could force or seduce them into sexual relations with impunity, or at least with little fear of legal or social consequences for himself.

For the women, however, this was not the case. If they were coerced or seduced into illicit sexual relations, their prospects were not bright. Potential consequences included humiliation at marriage for women previously thought to be virgins, loss of status and community recognition for widows, and the destruction of marriage prospects for young female servants.<sup>4</sup>

The goal of the itemized list, then, is to urge the practice of *male* sexual restraint: because women face severe consequences, it is the man’s duty to restrain himself. A stereotypical portrayal of popular moral thought in late imperial China would undoubtedly emphasize the notion of “karmic retribution” (*baoying* 報應—crudely put, doing well for doing good, and doing badly for doing evil).<sup>5</sup> However, careful reading reveals that the itemized list relies on a more sophisticated moral logic. While it is unafraid to remind the reader that karmic rewards and punishments are real and can be devastating, it combines this use of karmic incentives with an empathetic moral logic that invites the male reader to conduct the thought experiment of putting himself in the woman’s or her family’s shoes. The shock he gets when he realizes what her experience of sexual exploitation is like is a potent impetus for him to exercise self-restraint.

As the document translated below should make clear, the itemized list does not align perfectly with modern sensibilities. Even as it asks the man to think empathetically, it is deeply concerned with male honor and the preservation of a patriarchal family system, and it uses both of these as moral incentives just as it uses empathy. For example, in the list I translate below, the man is warned that visiting prostitutes will result in the ruin of his good name and the bankruptcy of his family. Nevertheless, I believe the lists should be recognized as testaments to a lively discourse about the limits of male sexual behavior, in need of stronger integration into our current understanding of gender and sexuality in pre-modern China, especially as these have been discussed in Western-language scholarship.<sup>6</sup> They are rich sources for thinking about gender relations and gendered male subjectivity, and seem to have especial relevance today, as societies around the world reckon with sexual assault, misconduct, harassment, and their consequences.

“Staying away from Sexual Sin” is taken from the *Xinzeng yuanti guanglei ji* 新增願體廣類集 (*A Compendium of Prayers for Happiness on a Wide Variety of Topics, New and Expanded Edition*),<sup>7</sup> a conduct-of-life manual in the collection of the Harvard-Yenching Library (HYL), compiled by a certain Li Zhonglin 李仲麟 from Fuchun 富春 (today subsumed into Hangzhou) in Zhejiang 浙江 province and published in 1765.<sup>8</sup> *Xinzeng*

*yuanti guanglei ji* is an intriguing hybrid of a more traditionally Confucian text on running a household, handling family relationships, and personal moral cultivation,<sup>9</sup> with a *shanshu* in the Confucian-Buddhist-Daoist syncretic tradition. It is an attractively printed book that suggests ownership by a well-to-do merchant or member of the local gentry and represents the increasing spread and influence of *shanshu* across 18th-century society. As the Yenching catalogue notes, the *Xinzen* *yuanti guanglei ji* appears to have been a widely read and imitated text, going through multiple editions (late-19th century editions are attested at Harvard and the Library of Congress).<sup>10</sup>

The Harvard-Yenching Library has a superb collection of morality books—especially ones primarily devoted to male sexual ethics—rivalled by few other institutions in the world. My translation below showcases one of these remarkable primary sources.

## Translation

### A note on the figures

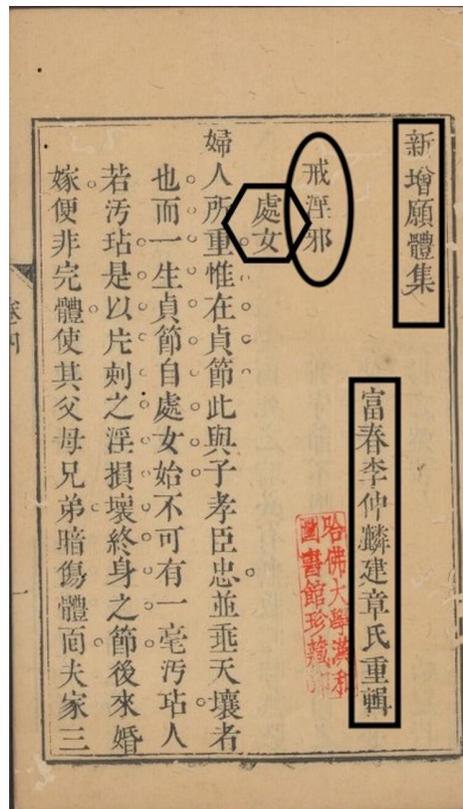


Figure 1. Beginning of the itemized list, with the work title, chapter title, and first item highlighted. Li Zhonglin, *Xinzen yuanti guanglei ji*, T 1681 4420, Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University.

These two figures allow us to see the itemized list in its material context. Figure 1 shows the opening of the list, printed in the vertical columns standard for a pre-20th century Chinese book. Reading top to bottom and right to left from the far top righthand corner of the image, I have marked the title, *Xinzeng yuanti ji*, and authorial attribution to Li Zhonglin with rectangular boxes, the title of the chapter (“Staying Away from Sexual Sin”) with an oval-shaped box, and the name of the first item on the list (“Virgins”) with a hexagon. A red stamp in additional Chinese characters, located in the lower righthand corner, denotes an item in the Yenching rare collection.

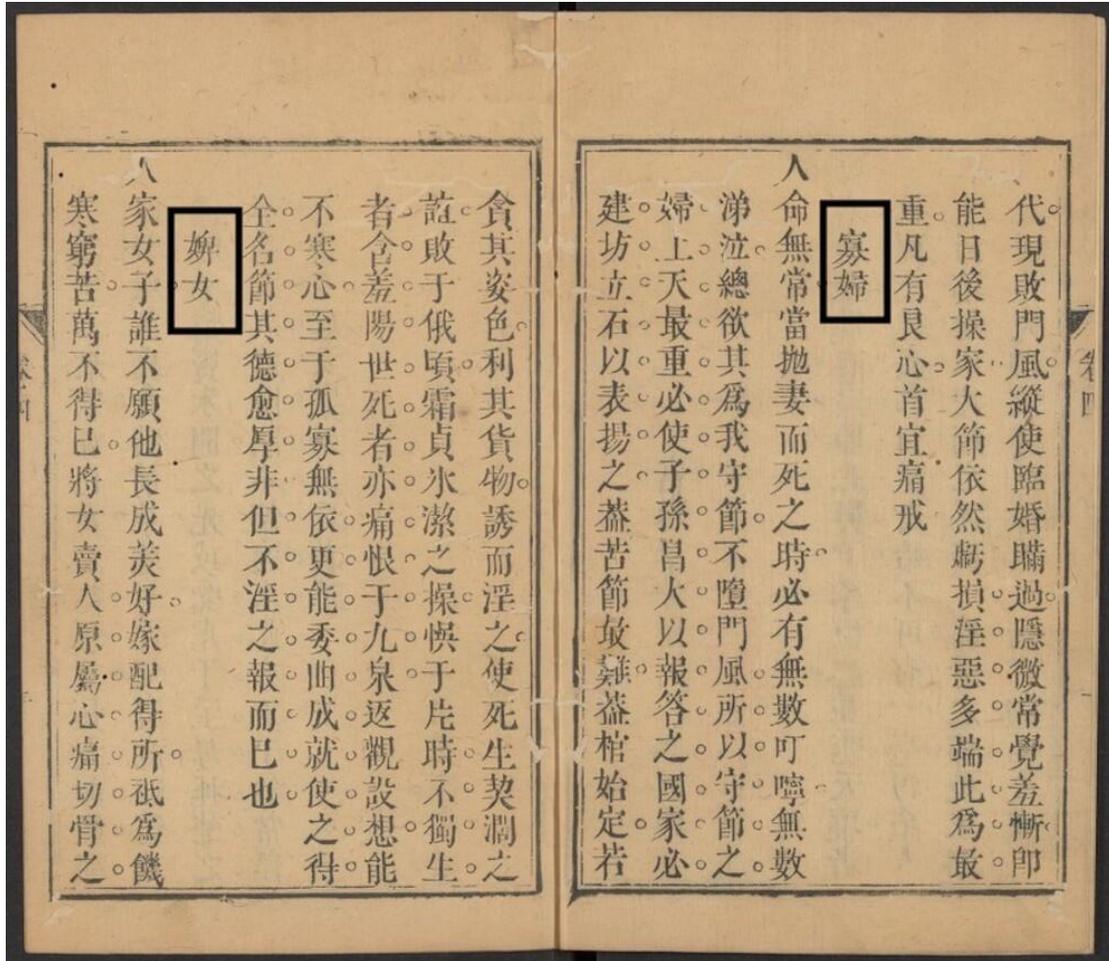


Figure 2. Full-page spread with the categories of “Widows” and “Indentured Maidservants” highlighted. Li Zhonglin, *Xinzeng yuanti guanglei ji*, T 1681 4420, Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University.

Figure 2 contains a full-page spread showing two categories from the list, the titles of which I have marked with rectangular boxes: from right to left, “Widows” and “Indentured Maidservants.” The headings are followed by blocks of text that are detailed discussions of various groups of women. These discussions are included in the complete translation of “Staying Away from Sexual Sin” (*Jie xieyin* 戒邪淫) below.

## Staying Away from Sexual Sin<sup>11</sup>

### *Virgins*

As for what is important for a woman—sexual integrity is the key. Just like filial piety is for sons and loyalty for ministers, this is a matter of the utmost importance. Her good name starts from the time she is a virgin, [which is why] she cannot have the slightest stain on her reputation. If someone sullies her [through having sex], this is destroying lifelong integrity through the sexual sin of a moment. Later, when she gets married, she will not be physically complete.<sup>12</sup> In the background her parents and brothers will lose face; in the foreground, three generations of her husband's family will see their good name dragged through the dirt. Even if she manages to get past the wedding night [without being exposed], she will always feel a secret shame. Assuming she can manage a household well in later life, her integrity has at base been compromised. Of all the many wicked deeds that result from lust, [having illicit sex with virgins] is the most serious. Any man with a conscience ought to treat it as the very first priority for absolute restraint.

### *Widows*

The lot of human beings is without any constancy. As a man is dying and leaving his wife behind, he is certain to have countless last exhortations, and countless tearful words of farewell. The main wish is that she will stay chaste in my memory, and not bring disgrace to the family's good name. This is why Heaven above views chaste widows with the highest regard and will ensure that their sons and grandsons flourish and succeed in order to reward them; this is why the state builds memorial arches [see Figures 3 and 4] and erects stele to honor them and make their example known.<sup>13</sup>



Figure 3. Memorial arch from Sichuan Province, in an early 20th-century photograph. Collection of the Arnold Arboretum Archives.



Figure 4. Detail of inscription. The top two characters read “By Imperial Edict”; the two large characters in the middle read “Chastity and Filial Piety”; and the text at the bottom: “An arch erected to honor Lady Gao, wife of the deceased gentleman scholar Chen Guoqiong.”

It is all because of how extremely hard it is to be a chaste widow. After the lid on her husband’s coffin is nailed in place, if there are men who lust after her good looks, or have their eyes on her material possessions and so seduce her into having sex with them, they are causing a loving relationship meant to last “in life and in death, when together and when apart”<sup>14</sup> to be destroyed in a split second; they are causing integrity like ice and frost to be lost in the twinkling of an eye. It is not just the partner still alive [the widow] who feels deep shame in the land of the living; her dead husband also is stung by regret among the nine springs.<sup>15</sup> If you reflect on the matter and look at it from [the woman’s] angle,<sup>16</sup> how could you not feel sick at heart with dread?<sup>17</sup> But as for the man able to help a widow, all alone and without anyone to rely on, to reach her goal and live out her life

with a good name for sexual integrity, his virtue is even greater, and his karmic reward will not merely be what he would get for not sexually harassing her.

### *Indentured Maidservants*<sup>18</sup>

Families with daughters—which one of them does not wish for their daughters to grow up into beautiful and happy women, and find a fine match in marriage? It is only when hunger and cold and all the other hardships of poverty force their hand that they sell their daughters as indentured servants. It causes them bitter pain at heart. He who is the girls' master should treat them like his own daughters. Once they have grown up, he must arrange for them suitable marriages at once. But if he takes advantage of the fact that they are completely at his mercy and around him every day to give loose rein to his lustful desires, some of the girls will be forced into sex before they have even reached puberty, while others will suffer abuse from the beatings of a jealous mistress. Moreover, they suffer long confinement in the women's quarters, and their master doesn't allow them to get married.<sup>19</sup> [Sexually assaulting an indentured maidservant] is also more serious than run-of-the-mill sexual sin and should be treated as the first priority for restraint, along with virgins and widows.

### *Servant Women*

Your male servants are your adopted sons and their wives your adopted daughters. Although your lots in life are different—master and servant—your relationship should be marked with the gracious regard between a father and son. Remarkable stories of upstanding servants rescuing their masters in time of trouble [are many] from both past and present;<sup>20</sup> this is all because the masters had moved their servants through kindness and straight dealing. However, today lustful fellows, when they hire servants, are sure first to give the men's wives a look-over. They put the women in a compromising situation, and the result is certain to be illicit sex. There are even mothers and daughters who both suffer this humiliation, and mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law alike with damaged sexual integrity. Even if the women can temporarily bear it in silence, they are sure to harbor anger and shame their whole lives. Give it a thought: if I don't deal straight with people, how can I expect them to repay me [in time of need] out of a sense of debt owed? If I take the lead in ruining household order, [the servants] will be certain to get up to trouble themselves. All kinds of domestic chaos come from this kind of behavior; all kinds of scandals arise because of it.

### *Wet-Nurses*

Wealthy and powerful families, when they have infant sons and daughters, are sure to hire wet-nurses. They are further certain to hire wet-nurses who are young and healthy-looking, expecting that they will have more breast milk to nurse the children with. The wet-nurse abandons her own children and devotes herself to my infant. How could I think

that my infant is an excuse to pollute her sexual integrity? Moreover, she lives in my house, while her husband keeps watch in an empty cottage. In his mind is the constant fear that his wife will lose her chastity, but because of poverty and hardship, all he can do is force himself to bear it. He weathers long nights in the depressing chill [of an empty bed], ashamed and filled with frustrated regret. I respectfully exhort the people of this age: you must be absolutely sure not to sexually harass wet-nurses. Instead, you must pay them excellent salaries and send them home at regular intervals so that husband and wife can be often together. [In so doing], you will achieve a reputation as a man of virtue, and your “hidden merit” will be great indeed.<sup>21</sup> Your sons and daughters will be certain to flourish.

*The Wives and Daughters of Other Men*<sup>22</sup>

The world is full of shady things, but seduction, we can say, starts with the man. How could there be places in the world without women? Those lustful and crooked rascals [have lots of strategies]: some get to know women through various social and family connections, compulsively finding ways to see them; others run into or hear of them unexpectedly in their local neighborhood. One always ought to treat the woman with the courtesy and restraint required by the rites and should not even in the tiniest way allow one’s heart to skip a beat. If lustful thoughts suddenly arise due to a chance encounter, there will be plans and schemes [to seduce the woman] and a hundred different sprouts of wickedness will emerge as a [consequence]. You will be sure to end up in disaster before you know it and drag your family’s good name through the dirt. Even if punishment in the upper world seems slightly delayed, punishment in the lower one is certain to come at once. You still have time [to prevent yourselves from getting into this kind of situation] by admonishing each other [to stick to the straight and narrow], and thus may perhaps be able to protect your wives and children [from karmic disaster].

*Prostitutes*<sup>23</sup>

Prostitutes are a loose-moraled and base bunch. What sexual integrity could you possibly say they have? Don’t you know that the upstanding man guards his moral character [with the same carefulness] as though he were holding a vessel made of precious jade? Although the prostitute doesn’t lose anything, I lose a great deal. Furthermore, when those ladies move men with their seductive charms—at best you end up wasting all your family’s money, and at worst you get infected with their poison and grow sick.<sup>24</sup> This is truly falling into a deep pit of fire.<sup>25</sup> You absolutely cannot get near them.

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## Notes

I am grateful to Mitch Nakaue and Riley Spieler for the patient and painstaking editorial surgery they performed on an essay with unusually headache-inspiring footnotes and bilingual formatting; to Sharon Li-Shiuan Yang and Ma Xiaohe of the Harvard-Yenching Library for their assistance in the review process; and most of all to Annie Wang, keeper of rare books at the Yenching, without whose generosity, indefatigable energy, and love of the materials she guards, this work would have been impossible.

<sup>1</sup> The author of the *Ganying pian* is unknown, as is the specific date of its composition. The best scholarship dates the emergence of the text in its present form to the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127); see Vincent Goossaert, *Livres de Morale Révélés par les Dieux* (Paris: Les Belle Lettres, 2012), 1–4 and Cynthia Brokaw, *Ledgers of Merit and Demerit: Social Change and Moral Order in Late Imperial China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 36–43. For the Chinese text, please refer to the following magnificent 18th-century copy with illustrations, commentary and a Manchu translation held at the Harvard-Yenching Library (HYL): Xu Zuanzeng 許纘曾 ed., *Taishang ganying pian tushuo* 太上感應篇圖說 [An Illustrated Exposition of the Treatise of the Most Exalted One on Action and Retribution] (Beijing (?), 1757), [https://iif.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:53690243\\$1i](https://iif.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:53690243$1i).

<sup>2</sup> For Western-language work on morality books, see Brokaw, *Ledgers of Merit and Demerit*, the first chapter of Vincent Goossaert and David Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), and Vincent Goossaert, *Livres de Morale Révélés par les Dieux*. For some idea of the scale of morality book publishing in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (when we first start having reliable data), see Wang Chien-chuan, “Morality Book Publishing and Popular Religion in Modern China: A Discussion Centered on Morality Book Publishers in Shanghai” in *Religious Publishing and Print Culture in Modern China*, eds. Philip Clart and Gregory Adam Scott (Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 233–264.

<sup>3</sup> For a nuanced look at morality books in modern Taiwan, see Philip Clart, “Chinese Tradition and Taiwanese Modernity: Morality Books as Social Commentary and Critique,” in *Religion in Modern Taiwan: Tradition and Innovation in a Changing Society*, ed. Philip Clart and Charles B. Jones (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), 84–97.

<sup>4</sup> There is a huge literature on the stakes of virginity and chastity in pre-modern China. As in other pre-modern societies, for a Chinese woman virginity before and until marriage was regarded as a *sine qua non* of a “normal,” socially acceptable life. It apparently was a folk custom in some regions of China to display to the assembled relatives on the wedding night a cloth soaked with the blood of first intercourse. See Keith McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists: Sexuality and Male-Female Relations in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 23. For a comparative perspective, see Michael Rosenberg, *Signs of Virginity: Testing Virgins and Making Men in Late Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018). Janet Theiss, *Disgraceful Matters: The Politics of Chastity in Eighteenth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) gives an idea of how politicized female sexual “virtue” had become by the 18th century.

<sup>5</sup> For thoughtful discussion of stereotypes and realities in the use of *baoying* in moral thought, see Maria Franca Sibau, *Reading for the Moral: Exemplarity and the Confucian Moral Imagination in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Short Fiction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018), 22–24. A classic essay on the idea of “retribution” but also of “social reciprocity” at play in this word and its cognates across Chinese intellectual and cultural history is Lien-Sheng Yang, “The Concept of *Pao* as a Basis for Social Relations in China” in *Chinese Thought and Institutions*, ed. John K. Fairbank (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 291–309. The best discussion of the intellectual ferment of the 17th century that set the stage for all subsequent discussion of “karmic retribution” is Wu Zhen 吳震, *Mingmo Qingchu quanshan yundong sixiang*

yanjiu 明末清初勸善運動思想研究 [*Studies in the Intellectual Development of the Late Ming and Early Qing Morality Movement*] (Taipei: Taida chuban zhongxin, 2005), 1–175.

<sup>6</sup> Western-language scholarship has paid very little attention to sexual ethics, gender, and masculinity as presented in the morality book; the only relevant piece of which I am aware is Vincent Goossaert, “La sexualité dans les livres de morale chinois,” in *Normes religieuses et genre: mutations, résistances et reconfigurations, XIXe-XXIe siècle*, ed. Florence Rochefort and Maria Eleonora Sanna (Paris: Armand Colin, 2013), 37–46. Chinese-language scholarship has made better use of *shanshu*. A good place to start is Wang Hongtai’s 王鴻泰 thorough and thoughtful extended article “Qingdou chukai: Ming-Qing shiren de yixing qingyuan yu qingse yishi de fazhan” 情竇初開：明清士人的異性情緣與情色意識的發展 [“Beginning to Feel the Itch of Love: Women, Romance, and Sexuality in the Life Histories of Ming-Qing Literati”], *Xin shixue* 新史學 [*New History*] 26.3 (2015): 1–76.

<sup>7</sup> Li Zhonglin 李仲麟, *Xinzheng yuanti guanglei ji* 新增願體廣類集, 4 vols. (Hangzhou: Publisher not specified, 1765), T 1681 4420, Harvard-Yenching Library, <http://id.lib.harvard.edu/alma/990080884090203941/catalog>. I am grateful to Dr. Wang Chien-chuan for his kind assistance with making sense of this title.

<sup>8</sup> We know nothing more about Li than where he came from; see Shen Jin 沈津 ed., *Meiguo Hafo daxue Hafo Yanjing tushuguan cang zhongwen shanben shuzhi* 美國哈佛大學哈佛燕京圖書館藏中文善本書志 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2011), vol. 3, 1150, <http://id.lib.harvard.edu/alma/990127643290203941/catalog>.

<sup>9</sup> HYL has an unusually fine collection of these books as well; for a representative 18th-century example in the more distinctly “Confucian” tradition, see Wang Zhifu 王之鈇, ed., *Yanxing huizuan* 言行彙纂 [*A Compendium of Exemplary Words and Deeds*] (Place of publication not specified: Huaiyin tang, 1734), [https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:53234518\\$1j](https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:53234518$1j). For a much shorter “Confucian” conduct-of-life manual quite similar to *Xinzheng yuanti guanglei ji*, see Qu Chenglin 屈成霖 ed., *Xishi bian* 習是編 [*A Daily Regimen of Moral Practice*] (Place of publication not specified: Yuzan tang, 1748), [https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:53236589\\$1j](https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:53236589$1j).

<sup>10</sup> Shen, 1151. For the late 19th-century Harvard copy, see <http://id.lib.harvard.edu/alma/990077333580203941/catalog>. For the Library of Congress copy, see <https://lccn.loc.gov/ltf58000664>.

<sup>11</sup> *Xinzheng yuanti guanglei ji*, [juan 4, 1a–4b](#).

<sup>12</sup> “Not . . . physically complete” refers to the woman’s lack of physiological virginity, which will be exposed on her official wedding night. Earlier in the *Yuanti guanglei ji* there is a fascinating essay pointing out that there are many completely innocent ways a woman’s hymen can be broken—excessive physical exertion, for example—and attributing marital discord to prurient wedding-night interest in the hymen from the husband and his relatives. Li, *Xinzheng yuanti guanglei ji*, [juan 1, 10a–b \(seq. 16–17\)](#).

<sup>13</sup> A widow who had stayed chaste after the death of her husband was eligible for formal recognition from the Qing state in the form of a memorial arch, as shown in figures 3 and 4. The seminal study on this practice is Mark Elvin, “Female Virtue and the State,” *Past and Present* 104 (August 1984): 111–52. The magnificent memorial arch in Figures 3 and 4 was issued by the government sometime in 18th or 19th centuries to commemorate Lady Gao, widow of a certain Chen Guoqiong. The photograph was taken in Qiongzhou 邛州 (today Qionglai City), Sichuan Province, between 1907 and 1909 by the British naturalist and explorer Ernest Henry Wilson, who was in China to hunt for botanical specimens. Its current location is the Arnold Arboretum Archive: <http://id.lib.harvard.edu/images/olvwork177709/catalog>.

<sup>14</sup> The standard description of a harmonious marriage bond; an allusion to the poem “The Drums are Being Struck” (“*Jigu*” 擊鼓), in the ancient Confucian classic, *The Book of Songs*. For an inspired English translation, see Arthur Waley, *The Book of Songs: The Ancient Chinese Classic of Poetry* (New York: Grove Press, 1998), 27–28. For the original Chinese, linked here is the text of the poem with commentary from a late 18th-century edition at HYL: “*Jigu*” 擊鼓, in *Xuegeng Wujing* 學耕五經 [*Xuegeng Edition of the Five Classics*] (Suzhou: Lüyin tang, 1784–1795), *juan 2*, vol. 7: 5a–7a, [https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:15859145\\$503i](https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:15859145$503i).

<sup>15</sup> “Nine springs”: a common phrase for the underworld, the place where the soul wanders until the infernal court, basing itself off the soul’s karmic records, decides its next reincarnation.

<sup>16</sup> The phrase *fanguan shexiang* 反觀設想 invites the reader to conduct an empathetic thought experiment. The verb *fanguan* “reflect on” invites the reader to introspection, while *shexiang* “imagine, conceive of imaginatively” asks him to put himself in the shoes of the widow and her family.

<sup>17</sup> The sense seems to be that the empathetic thought experiment makes the man realize the seriousness of sexually assaulting a widow. He is then filled with fear at the karmic consequences of the deed for himself, as the following lines make clear.

<sup>18</sup> Class of young, nubile women indentured out to wealthy families. The historian Matthew Sommer refers to them as “domestic female slaves” to highlight their legal status. Matthew Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 46 and note.

<sup>19</sup> Under Qing-dynasty law, the owner of indentured servants was legally required to find suitable marriage partners for them by the time they reached maturity, between 15 to 20 years old (Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society*, 50–52). The text here suggests that once the master has had sex with a young female indentured servant, he will be lazy about arranging her proper marriage, and thus she will remain “confined in the women’s quarters”—sexually repressed—stuck in his house with uncertain, liminal status and an unpredictable sex life.

<sup>20</sup> Those wishing to get a sampling of this kind of story in wide popular circulation can consult the relevant set of exempla, collected under the heading “The Karmic Rewards and Punishments for Good and Bad Behavior From Servants” 婢僕善惡之報, in the influential 17th century morality book edited by Yan Maoyou 顏茂猷, *Diji lu* 迪吉錄 [*Record of Attaining Blessedness*] (Place of publication not specified; 1631 1st ed.), *juan 5*, vol. 18: 93a–98a. The Gest Collection at Princeton University Library holds a copy of the first edition, while HYL owns a later edition, tentatively dated to the mid-18th century; the section on karmic rewards and punishments for servants is at [seq. 454–459](#) in the Harvard edition. For a discussion of historical developments surrounding moral thought and master-servant relations, see Brokaw, *Ledgers*, 178–187.

<sup>21</sup> A person’s tally of good deeds kept by the gods and spirits, and the currency of the karmic economy, dictating rewards—such as the flourishing of descendants mentioned here—or punishments. One of the most popular *shanshu* texts from later imperial China is the *Wenchang dijun yinshi wen* 文昌帝君陰騭文 [*Tract on Hidden Merit Revealed by the Wenchang Thearch*]; modern edition in Tang Dachao 唐大潮 ed., *Quanshanshu zhuyi* 勸善書注譯 [*Morality Books Translated into Modern Chinese with Notes*] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2004), 53–59. For an English translation, see Terry F. Kleeman, “The Tract on the Hidden Administration,” in *Religions of China in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996), 70–71.

<sup>22</sup> This is a literal translation; perhaps better would be “women in general.”

<sup>23</sup> In comparison with entries from parallel lists, this entry on prostitutes is unusual for the aggressive strength of its language. Other lists adopt a more empathetic approach, reminding readers that prostitutes are “also somebody’s daughter.”

<sup>24</sup> Prostitutes were commonly described as having “poison” (*du* 毒), what we might call “germs” or “sexually transmitted diseases,” such as the real threat of syphilis. On syphilis in pre-20th-century China, see He Bian, “Tufuling/China Root: A Novel Cure for Syphilis and Mercurial Poisoning as Presented in Li Shizhen’s *Compedium of Materia Medica*,” *Harvard Library Bulletin* (2021), <https://nrs.harvard.edu/URN-3:HUL.INSTREPOS:37368734>.

<sup>25</sup> This can either be understood to refer directly to the Buddhist hell, or as a hyperbolic metaphor for the crisis caused in the man’s life by associating with prostitutes.