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The Moral and Metaphysical Ubiquity of *Xiao* (Filiality) in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction

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Orthodox Passions: Narrating Filial Love During the High Qing, by Lintao Qi. by Maram Epstein. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2019. Pp. 370. $68.00 (hardcover).

Reading for the Moral: Exemplarity and the Confucian Moral Imagination in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Short Fiction, by Maria Franca Sibau. Albany: SUNY Press, 2018. Pp. xii + 231. $85.00 (hardcover); $25.95 (paperback).

Intimate Memory: Gender and Mourning in Late Imperial China, by Martin Huang. Albany: SUNY Press, 2018. Pp. vii + 224. $25.95 (paperback).

The concept of filiality (*xiao* 孝) is a ubiquitous notion in Chinese discourse that harks back to the bronze age, was invoked in such texts as the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (The Zuo commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals), and was enshrined and codified as a cardinal virtue by Confucius and Mencius. Copious Sinological scholarship on it in English has been published in the postwar period in the disciplines of anthropology, intellectual and cultural history, gender studies, philosophy, sociology, and, to a lesser extent, in literary studies.[1] Despite this, it was not until Donald Holzman's succinct yet

[1] One of the first books that placed filiality, or more precisely filial piety, at the centerpiece of its study was Francis L. K. Hsu, *Under the Ancestors' Shadow: Chinese Culture and Personality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948). Maurice Freedman followed with *Lineage Organization in Southeastern China* (London: Athlone, 1958). A number of works in the 1970s and early 1980s surveyed the impact of political change in China on kinship and filiality, including Norma Diamond, "Collectivization, Kinship, and the Status of Rural China," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 7.1 (1975): 25-32; Elizabeth Johnson, "Households and Lineages in a Chinese Urban Village," Ph. D. diss., Cornell University, 1976; William Parrish and Martin Whyte, *Village and Family in Contemporary China* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1978); and Judith Stacey, *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983). Anthropology and Sociology usually rely on case studies conducted in person, and

pivotal 1998 article that filiality was framed, as Holzman termed it, as "an absolute, a metaphysical entity, something to be so exalted in [the minds of Chinese] that it becomes difficult for us of another culture to appreciate it today."[2] Indeed, perhaps by virtue of the ubiquity of filiality in Chinese discourse, its exact nature is often taken for granted—assumed, as if we all already know what it means. Its eminence in Chinese society and letters is implicit, though unexamined. Before Holzman, even the most thorough scholarly treatments of filiality in English-language scholarship have treated filiality as a social phenomenon, as something that informs behavior and human relationships, rather than as a philosophical concept that underwrites East Asian ontological reality, the place of humans in the terrestrial world, and their relationship with the realm beyond, the celestial world. Holzman's precise tracing of the concept in a wide variety of pre-Qin texts allows him to conclude that filiality pervaded many of the assorted "hundred schools of philosophy" in Early China and cannot be claimed as part of the singular domain of any one school. He demonstrates how it is invoked in literary and historical texts alike. He also outlines how the *Classic of Filiality* (*Xiaojing* 孝經) emerged as one of the most influential texts of the Han dynasty, a guidebook for the personal conduct of public officials among other things. But it is particularly Holzman's homing in on one special quality of filiality—the ability to provoke extreme acts on the part of people wishing to demonstrate their filial bonds, usually to their parents—that he reaches the conclusion that there is something extraordinarily powerful about filiality that leaves an indelible impression on the collective psyche of Chinese people, something so immensely potent that one could view filiality as the primary constituent in subject formation in premodern China. It is with this elevated standing that filiality enjoys that Holzman closes his article.

Both before and after Holzman's discussion of filiality, there have been many detailed explorations of the notion. In the past 25 years, systematic studies of filiality have increased significantly in number. This is true for the premodern periods and, in anthropology and sociology, true for the modern period as well. The study of filiality in late imperial China has been particularly fruitful.[3] This review focuses on three

therefore Taiwan was fertile ground for fieldwork on social groups of Chinese heritage if not on China per se. Two of the most important were these: Mei-chun Tang, *Urban Chinese Families* (Taibei: National Taiwan University Press, 1978), and Margery Wolf, *Women and Family in Rural Taiwan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972).

[2] Donald Holzman, "The Place of Filiality in Ancient China," *JAOS* 118.2 (1998): 185-199; the quotation occurs on p. 185.

[3] Some of the most notable of these are: Beverly Bossler, *Powerful Relations: Kinship, Status, and the State in Sung China (960-1279)* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1998); Miranda Brown, *The Politics of Mourning in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007); Katherine Carlitz, "Shrines Governing-Class Identity, and the Cult of Widow Fidelity in Mid-Ming Jiangnan," *Journal of Asian Studies* 56.3 (1997): 612-640; Richard Davis, "Chaste and Filial Women in the Historical Writings of Ouyang Xiu," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 121.2 (2001): 204-218; Patricia Ebrey and Bonnie Smith, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period* (Berkeley: University of

recent books for which filiality is either the central object of investigation or a major component. All three feature analyses of late imperial Chinese fiction, local gazetteers, memorials, or poetry.

Maram Epstein's *Orthodox Passions: Narrating Filial Love during the High Qing* advances a radical new interpretation of filiality by marshalling careful readings of an assortment of late imperial gazetteers, fictional works, and other documents to suggest that our understanding of this important concept has been impaired by the tendentiousness of May Fourth intellectuals who sought to slay filiality and its overburdening ideological domination of Chinese thinking.[4] Instead, Epstein argues that the move to locate filiality in opposition to feelings or emotions (*qing* 情) was essentially an invention of the early modern intellectuals who wished, not solely to abandon filiality, but to extricate themselves from its burden and the legitimating discourse it underwrote for such things as arranged marriages and a tepid ability to develop a truly individual sense of selfhood, the hallmark of the modern mind. Epstein seeks to resituate the notion of filiality unequivocally within the ambit of *qing* and hence understands it as an "orthodox passion," one could say, or even as a form of love: filial love. Despite some concerns with her thesis, I believe we must take seriously Epstein's contention and its attempt to reinterpret filiality, to rediscover its true nature, as she would say. Maria Franca Sibau's tightly focused inquiry into late imperial vernacular fiction, especially some collections that have received less attention than the *Three Words* 三言 and the *Slapping the Table in Amazement* 拍案驚奇 anthologies of *huaben* 話本 narratives, details how works in *Exemplary Words for the World* 型世言 and *Bell in the Still Night* 清夜鐘 employ themes of morality, including but not restricted to filiality, as "organizing principle[s]" (5) for the stories. The first two main chapters, about a third of the book, are devoted to fictional works that personify filiality. The other chapters emphasize other virtues that are consistent with filiality. Although filiality is not exactly central to its thesis, Martin Huang's *Intimate Memory: Gender and Mourning in Late Imperial China*, it nevertheless highlights for us the curious but apparently bountiful examples in late imperial China of men who mourned the women in their lives: mothers, wives, concubines, and even sisters. His book illustrates that what has mainly been deemed to be the province of conventional ritual behavior that sustains patriarchal gender roles, the mourning of parents and the implicit veneration of ancestors, had

California Press, 1993); Li Guo, *Women's Tanci Fiction and Early Twentieth-Century China* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2015), and her second book, *Writing Gender in Early Modern Chinese Women's Tanci Fiction* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2021); Ying Hu, "How Can a Daughter Glorify the Family Name? Filiality and Women's Rights in the Late Qing." *Nan Nü* 11 (2009): 234-269; and Keith Knapp, *Selfless Offspring: Filial Children and Social Order in Early Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai**'i** Press, 2005).

[4] See Kristin Stapleton, "Generational and Cultural Fissures in the May Fourth Movement: Wu Yu (1872-1949) and the Politics of Family Reform," 131-150 in Kai-Wing Chow et al, eds., *Beyond the May Fourth Paradigm: In Search of Chinese Modernity* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), for an examination of the foundations of anti-filiality thinking in the May Fourth Era.

increasingly become infused with all sorts of heartfelt tributes to women by men. Moreover, over the sequence of these memorials, the aperture for what would be considered laudable conduct by women, i.e., demonstrations of Confucian virtue, was widened appreciably so that women were devoutly remembered for all sorts of admirable reasons that might or might not have to do with conventional exemplarity. This exemplarity probably supported, rather than opposed, typical views associated with filiality; nevertheless, the sheer proliferation of these texts clearly indicates that social discourse was becoming more diverse and more open to a multiplicity of behaviors that merited commendation and veneration. I will summarize each of these books in the ensuing paragraphs and conclude with a few thoughts on the continued importance of filiality, the significance of these books in the growing corpus of scholarship on the topic, and what they suggest for further research.

Maram Epstein's reimagination of filiality in terms of feelings and emotions is carried over six main chapters, the first of which adumbrates her argument. The second provides an overview of filiality that underscores the ways in which it is connected to emotions. Chapters Three through Six are careful readings of a variety of texts, including biographies of filial sons and daughters found in local gazetteers (Chapters Three and Four); a rereading of *The Story of the Stone* 石頭記 or *Dream of the Red Chamber* 紅樓夢 that reveals how filiality as a sentiment in the emotional tapestry of this great Qing-dynasty novel is actually suppressed (Chapter Five); and a reading of mourning records found in autobiographical essays and chronological biographies (*nianpu* 年譜) that demonstrates how mourning was a central trope in the discursive creation of subjectivities that, under scrutiny, exhibit profound "affective and ethical interiority" (7). Throughout the book, Epstein gradually builds the argument that "filial narratives increasingly focus on the affective power of filial piety" (8).

Chapter One takes aim at one of the salient traits of Chinese fiction studies of the past several decades: that the gradual emergence of "the cult of *qing*" stood as a counterpoint to relationships based on duty, obligation, and servitude. Beginning this chapter with a brief summary of the story "The Nativity Room" by the prominent early-Qing writer Li Yu 李漁, Epstein relates how this circuitous narrative of a lost son eventually and unwittingly reunited with both his biological father and mother melds the themes of familial devotion and the ritual deference of filiality. It is "essential to the meaning of the story" (12) that the adoptive son is portrayed as freely choosing filial piety rather than having it imposed on him because of a biological relationship. In time, however, the elder and younger man discover that they actually are the biological father and son depicted at the outset. The fact that when the two meet in the middle of the story they have no idea that they are biologically related is the basis for presenting their bond as a choice. Filiality is here not, as in the eyes of May Fourth intellectuals, a mechanism through which the will and identity of children are systematically subverted, creating subjects that are weak and dependent on others. Epstein detects a new, hybrid form of selfhood wherein "rather than emphasizing the self as autonomous, the concept of intersubjectivity focuses on the self as an evolving construct generated

through coparticipation in social interactions" (18). The emphasis on intersubjectivity is crucial to the formation of the self as solitary being and as social actor—a vessel of thoughts and feelings, yet one that fully realizes its subjectivity through the relationship with parents. Later in the chapter, Epstein briefly discusses some texts that will be returned to in later chapters. She examines *Six Records of a Floating Life* 浮生六記 not in terms of the conjugal bond per se, the common interpretive emphasis of most scholars, but instead with attention to the depiction of the couple's devotion to their parents, ultimately concluding that romantic love and filial love must be understood in this text as intertconnected, but that affection toward children holds no place in the work. Epstein also reassesses two other major narratives of the Qing: *Flowers in the Mirror* 鏡花緣 and *A Tale of Heroic Lovers* 兒女英雄傳. Both works are described as reversing conventional gender roles. She shows that in the latter novel the only way to fully account for the various forms of human devotion is by "invoking the language of the *Classic of Filial Piety*" (29) because the *Classic* elides the differences between romantic love, filiality, and loyalty to the ruler.

The second chapter offers a useful overview of a healthy quantity of the English-language scholarship on filiality with particular emphasis on the way in which filiality is interwoven with emotions. Epstein acknowledges that filiality is complicit with state-sponsored efforts to instil social conformity and promote biological reproduction through a heteronormative, patriarchal family and kinship structure. At the same time, reflecting back upon texts such as *The Analects* of Confucius and *Mencius*, she asserts that a deeply "interiorized" emotion was intertwined with filial allegiance beginning with the founding fathers of Confucianism (49). Epstein stresses the fact that the two orthodox master texts of Confucian philosophy, *The Analects* and *Mencius*, define filial conduct in terms of feelings and expressions of love. She probes Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucian treatise on family rituals[5] and dissects some of the narratives found in Buddhist texts to indicate that Chinese texts conducted a balancing act between ritual protocols of filiality on the one hand and the formation of affective bonds on the other. In the course of this chapter, Epstein draws upon many recent analyses of filiality by such scholars as Susan Mann and Yu-Yin Cheng, Alan Cole, Miranda Brown, Keith Knapp, Lü Miaofen (Lu Miaw-fen), Michael Szonyi, Norman Kutcher, and Kai-wing Chow.[6] These two chapters prepare the reader for the close readings that follow.

[5] On this text, see Patricia Buckley Ebrey, ed. and trans., *Chu Hsi's Family Rituals*: *A Twelfth-Century Chinese Manual for the Performance of Cappings, Weddings, Funerals, and Ancestral Rites* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

[6] See the works mentioned in footnote 3 above, and: Kai-wing Chow, *The Rise of Confucian Ritualism in Late Imperial China: Ethics, Classics, and Lineage Discourse* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); Alan Cole, *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Susan Mann and Yu-Yin Cheng, eds., *Under Confucian Eyes: Writing on Gender in Chinese History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Norman Kutcher, *Mourning in Late Imperial China: Filial Piety and the State* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Lü Miaofen 呂妙芬, *Xiao zhi tianxia: 'Xiaojing' yu jinshi Zhongguo de zhengzhi yu*

Epstein's third chapter, on local gazetteers 地方誌 (or sometimes 志), demonstrates that at the local level in China and among ordinary people, the narrative visibility of filiality increased over the course of about one hundred years. There was also much variance in the depiction of filiality in the local gazetteers: as the state placed more emphasis on filiality and pressed it into the service of public control over the people, the parameters of what stood for filial conduct were significantly loosened over time. What she finds in her reading of local gazetteers is that while the state attempted to limit and dictate what would count for appropriate filial acts, in these narratives emerged a high degree of unusually passionate expressions of loving care. Individuals recorded in the gazetteers would often act spontaneously in response to the challenges confronting them, motivated by affective urges as they dispensed with conventional ritual. Martyrdom demonstrated this most vividly. Among popular forms of martyrdom were the practice of cutting off pieces of flesh to nourish one's parents (this could even involve slicing off sections of the liver or other internal organs) and suicide for the sake of an ideal or as an expression of grief. Such extreme acts show us that filial behavior had gone far beyond the original acts of propriety such as attention to funeral protocol, sincere feelings of grief, or fulfilling the imperative to beget children. The gazetteers are replete with examples of extreme acts of filial devotion. The variety of the acts and the regional disparities among common practices substantiate Epstein's point about the diversity of moral thought in imperial China. In some of the texts, Epstein notes that among men of lower social brackets the notion that arduous academic training aimed at passing the examinations so one could become a scholar or a scholar-official was not necessarily seen as filial on par with extreme acts such as searching for a father who had abandoned the family for months at a time.

Although gazetteers are understood to be recordings of real local events, narrative technique is evident in the way local stories are conveyed. The regional variety in these testimonials corresponds to a historical evolution. Over time, the gazetteers tended less and less to underscore the moral and public value of filial acts and increasingly to display them as acts of individual creative expression. Toward the late Qing dynasty a shift can be seen to more liberal representations of women who no longer adopted their husband's family as the exclusive recipient of filial behavior. Tales of women expressing filial devotion to their own natal families became more and more frequent. How filiality became a means of empowerment for daughters in the late Qing is the highlight of Chapter Four. In it, Epstein sets the stage for an exposition of late-imperial gazetteer texts as well as *tanci* 彈詞 chantefables and women's script writing 女書 by first reviewing some classic works in which women figure prominently: Liu Xiang's 劉向 *Accounts of Outstanding Women* 列女傳, *Admonitions for Women* 女誡, and the medieval *Classic of Filiality for Women* 女孝經 shape the historical context for the late-

wenhua 孝治天下:《孝經》與近世中國的政治與文化 (Ruling all under heaven with filial piety: *Xiaojing* and the politics and culture of late imperial China, Taipei: Linking, 2011); and Michael Szonyi, *Practicing Kinship: Lineage and Descent in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

imperial texts on which Epstein focuses her attention. Texts of the late Qing feature women in an array of contexts making a variety of choices. There is a sense in these works that, whatever the subject matter, women are able to employ more agency in their choices than ever before. In some cases, biographies of faithful maidens emphasize conflict with their natal families as well as solitude and loneliness. In others, filial daughters opt out of marriage in order to remain in their natal homes. Region had much to do with how the stories unfolded. Epstein found, for example, that in the Jiangnan region 江南, polygynous households were common and that they could honor the uterine bloodline over the patriline. Daughters of women who did not beget any sons frequently would take on the role of chief mourner in commemorating their natal parents. The number of chaste daughter narratives circulating in the Jiangnan area reflected more permissive labor laws, an upsurge in the practice of delayed-transfer marriages, as well as expressions of sisterhood (similar to the *jianghu* 江湖 "brotherhood" model). Economically speaking, Epstein speculates that some examples of the practice of chaste womanhood among daughters was the result of an effort to economize: families may not have had the means to garner an adequate dowry. The practice of this form of virtuous conduct was so widespread by the late Qing that there no longer was an imperative to justify their decision to remain unmarried.

Having laid the social groundwork for a consideration of literary texts, Epstein turns in Chapter Five to a discussion of five important novels of the Qing: *The Story of the Stone*, *The Scholars* 儒林外史, *The Light at the Crossroads* 歧路燈, *A Country Codger's Words of Exposure* 野叟曝言, and *The Later Dream of the Red Chamber* 後紅樓夢. She concludes that the four less-known works privilege filial piety as the centerpiece of the central affective bond that structures the family in each work but that *The Story of the Stone* omits references to the kinds of overflowing filial emotions that pervade the other works. Through an intricate disposition of all these works Epstein reaches the conclusion that the general readership seemed to be dissatisfied with the representation of emotions and relationships in the master-narrative that is *Stone*. The others all rewrite the depiction of sentimental values by recentering the narratives on the theme of filiality. At almost 60 pages, this chapter is a significant intervention into English-language studies of the classic late imperial novel and *The Story of the Stone* in its own literary context. Epstein's pinpointing of key features such as the fact that little emotion is exhibited in the instances where an elder in the novel dies contrasts starkly with the way similar situations are portrayed in the other novels. Epstein's ability in this chapter to identify an idiosyncrasy in a canonical text and then weave together an argument based on the collective readings of the others is a tour de force of intertextual analysis.

Epstein's sixth and final chapter is a powerful rejoinder to the notion, voiced by scholars such as CT Hsia and many others, that the self in premodern Chinese fiction lacks the deep affective interiority that sets it apart—and backward—vis-à-vis the modern self and modern narrative. She avers that on the contrary it is the manner of expression, a circumstance in which great emotional control and rhetorical reticence were required of mourners, that typifies the way affective interiority is communicated

in subtle and muted ways. Careful perusal of mourning records reveal that private emotions indeed were revealed publicly but that they had to be done in ritually encoded ways in which mourners negotiated the conflict between expressions of genuine grief and sentiment on the one hand and ritual prescriptions on the other. Returning to the contention she voiced at the beginning of the book, she reasserts that (a) we need to recognize filial sentiment as a primary form of emotion in late imperial China, and that (b) filiality is a favored site of subjective self-expression. In order to delineate how the ritual encoding of emotional interiority works in this material, Epstein traces rhetorical continuities in the writings of a diverse set of intellectuals including Li Zhi 李贄, Yan Yuan 顏元, Li Gong 李塨, and Lin Shu 林紓. These four intellectuals span the late-Ming and Qing periods. One of the fascinating case studies in this chapter shows how a major intellectual such as Lin Shu displaced his grief onto other relatives because of the taboo of directly expressing his emotional loss. The news of Lin's elder brother's demise came in the form of a letter. Lin Shu translated the letter's content into a poem to give to his mother, then traveled to retrieve the body. He lavished praise on the brother's exemplary behavior and ultimate sacrifice while making no direct reference to his own emotions. Through this third-party rendition, he was able to verbalize the affection while maintaining a subdued demeanor himself. An anatomy of similar episodes in the lives of the other intellectuals is offered by Epstein as testimony to the fact that emotional interiority was real, but it was revealed principally through oblique means.

Maria Franca Sibau's book on two neglected collections of *huaben* fiction, *Exemplary Words for the World* and *Bell in the Still Night,* emerges as an interesting contrast to the work of Epstein. For Sibau, a correction to the scholarship is certainly needed, but it does not involve *qing* per se. Rather, she fixes upon morality as a narrative device, as a means by which texts are shaped and the arc of the stories is drawn. She endeavors to "bring morality into sharper focus by arguing that the idea of 'conventional morality' itself must be more rigorously unpacked and historicized" (4). She also contemplates the way morality works in selecting and ordering the two anthologies at the center of her study. *Exemplary Words*, she observes, is shaped into two distinct halves, with the first twenty stories being exemplary tales and the second half being cautionary, like many of the more famous *huaben* in the *Three Words* and *Slapping the Table* collections. Sibau is most interested in the first group of stories, those that relate positive tales of people who are worthy of praise in the eyes of the author, editor, and commentators. Sibau also ventures to say that although the presence of karmic retribution (*bao* 報) saturates these tales, it is not their sole governing feature. Rather, she posits that "stories in *Exemplary Words* and *Bell in the Still Night* represent a new direction in depicting virtue as its own reward" (24). Finally, she sees the stories as delivering to the reader interesting, complicated, and "untidy" (26) accounts of the tensions between "textbook morality" and everyday life, as opposed to stale recitations of the mechanistic determinism of retribution. This tension is what makes these stories worth reading, as the lives of the subjects in these stories are played out before us in front of the

underlying moral codes and retribution rather than as predictable choreographies of what should happen in life.

The first two main chapters of Sibau's book are of particular interest to this review article, because they directly address two aspects of the theme of filiality: "filial quest" narratives, in which protagonists embark on journeys to search for a lost father, and "filial dilemma" narratives, in which protagonists confront serious quandaries that have social implications as well as ramifications for the relationship between parents and children. Sibau suggests that the search for a lost or wayward father inspired by the filial motivation to restore the family to its whole form is a relatively new phenomenon in Chinese letters. She discusses the phenomenon in two versions of the story of Wang Yuan, one appearing in *Exemplary Words* and the other in a later collection entitled *Stones Nod Their Heads* 石點頭. The context for these narratives within the overall historical milieu of the mid-16th century Ming dynasty is set by the Great Rite Controversy 大禮議, in which the Jiajing Emperor (r. 1521-1567) refused, despite pressure from court officials, to undergo a posthumous adoption whereby the preceding emperor, his cousin, would through ritual means be installed after the fact as his father, whick would have preserved the integrity of the patriline as the line of imperial succession. His refusal is enmeshed with Ming-era intellectual debates that sought to redefine filiality and other virtues as more closely aligned with *qing*. Sibau mentions that the influence of Buddhism was felt in this realignment. The other major phenomenon of the day that caused controversy was "flesh-slicing" 割股 which had been increasing over time and celebrated in biographies. Despite its glorification, the practice was prohibited under the Hongwu emperor (r. 1368-1398) and others after him. Sibau adds that in the fictional realm many stories portrayed families not just as biological units but as social bonds with many permutations. Adoption was not uncommon in the fabrication of extended family relations, which recalls the Great Rite Controversy mentioned above. Ritual practices could be used to circumvent the necessity for familial bonds to be consanguine in nature. Nevertheless, in the *Exemplary Words* collection, filial piety stories involved biological families and adoption as a theme was virtually absent.

The story of Wang Yuan scouring the empire in search of his father exemplifies the range of narrative possibilities for the fictionalization of the filial quest. In the first version, Wang Yuan is obsessed with the search and undaunted by numerous false leads and other setbacks. In the second version, the search for the father is more than simply a desperate attempt to restore the family to its previous whole; it is a struggle by Wang Yuan to establish his own identity. In the second version, in Sibau's words, "the absence of the father takes on deeper, almost existential connotations" (36). With the emphasis on profound consternation to the point of making the protagonist seem "imbecilic" 癡, Sibau finds that the second text can only be understood in terms of *qing* (here defined as passion, feelings, and emotion). She sees these highly dramatized aspects of the human psyche as leading to a "newly valorized … authentic source of self, including one's moral self" (40). She also contrasts the role of the father in the two

versions: in the former he appears to be a victim of the social system, and the latter depicts him as a weak persona who deserves some of the blame for his own disappearance. The former story gives more attention to the social situation; the latter, to the characters as individuals.

Sibau's second chapter on filiality draws our attention to three stories in which the protagonists must face serious dilemmas, choices between two unpalatable options. Curiously, in all three predicaments, there is not much in the way of internal agonizing over the proper course of action that the characters should take. Rather, the choices are staged, they are "externalized and dramatized" as part of the action instead of percolating out of inner torment (49). The first story involves a conflict between the merchant Zhou Yulun's mother and his wife. While the conflict between mothers and wives and the clashing interests and obligations of the son constitutes an archetypal narrative in Chinese discourse, in this version filiality and loyalty to the wife are both ensconced in a mercantile milieu where commodity value affects the outcome. At a critical juncture in the narrative, where the husband cashiers his wife for his mother's sake, a voice of morality enters the text and praises him for his filial behavior. It turns out that filiality can be profitable. The story ends up both validating a traditional Confucian imperative and portraying Zhou Yulun as a savvy businessman. Elsewhere, extreme acts of filiality are dramatized in the form of filial murders. In one story, Cui Jian avenges his tormented mother by killing his father's concubine and later volunteering the fact that he did the deed. Cui and others like him are exonerated in these tales. How is it that murder could be officially condoned under the heading of filiality? The homicide is presented as a form of sudden and uncontrollable rage, a crime of passion, which once again provides a link between filiality and *qing*. Another story, "Wang Shiming, the Filial Avenger," likewise presents extreme filial behavior. The nephew of Wang Liang kills his uncle and, despite intervention by members of the clan, the dead man's son, Wang Shiming, eventually murders his cousin, the perpetrator. Wang Shiming then turns himself in and, despite the fact that the court offers to mitigate his sentence on filial grounds, attempts to kill himself, ultimately achieving his goal through starvation. Sibau sees this case as illustrating three forms of justice: justice as ritual duty; justice as meted out by the courts; and justice as convenient arbitration (63). A third version of the story, found in Ling Mengchu's 凌夢初 *Slapping the Table* collection, foregrounds the son's adamant opposition to the autopsy of his father's corpse. Sibau finishes the chapter by extending the strong sentiments toward the paternal body to some observations about the representation of the female body in these vernacular texts. She finds that extreme bodily sacrifice in service of filiality is almost always mapped onto the bodies of women. This is especially true in the cases of flesh-slicing.

The other four chapters of Sibau's book are consistent with but do not notably pertain to the issue of filiality with which this review is primarily concerned. Chapter Three considers several stories of political loyalty 忠. The stories often avoid portraying political duty as being at odds with filial obligations, electing instead to highlight the

harmonious relationship between loyalty and filiality. Yet loyalty becomes a contentious issue in both intra and inter-dynastic transitions. In Chapter Four, Sibau offers readings of four stories of heroic women 烈女. Some involve chastity or filial behavior, but all explore the repercussions of extreme moral choices, usually suicide. In the story "Injustice to Tang Guimei," a woman is married to the son of a lascivious widow. When Tang Guimei's husband dies, the mother-in-law attempts to marry her to her own secret lover. Guimei refuses, is sued for unfilial behavior, and refuses to defend herself in order to protect the dissolute mother-in-law—an unusual display of filial devotion. Guimei's eventual suicide forces the court to restore justice on her behalf with Guimei held up as both chaste and filial. It is a hollow ending for an exemplary woman. Chapter Five features stories of brotherly love 悌 that also fit harmoniously into the overall context of filiality. The sixth and final chapter examines narratives of the complicated nature of friendship 友. Many of the stories recount chivalric exploits of generosity, friends who would do the extraordinary for their soulmate. But these narratives almost always involve an ultimate "reharmonization or reincorporation of friendship [into] the structure of kinship and family" (139). In these instances, the relationships informed by political loyalty, female heroism, brotherly love, and friendship are presented to the reader as functioning in accord with the overriding moral ideal of filiality.

Martin Huang's book highlights Ming and Qing men's accounts of mourning for their wives and/or concubines. Elegiac works (*daowang* 悼亡) comprise an abundant body of poetic texts in traditional Chinese literature. But in this study the author is primarily interested in prose texts. Huang is especially interested in the "special dynamic between the autobiographical 'self' and the biographical 'other,' often dramatized in such an intimate act of personal remembrance" (5), and the question of "how a grieving husband tried to construct the life narrative of his spouse(s) based on his personal memories, a task much more likely to be accomplished in various biographical and memorial genres of prose" (5). The book has eight main chapters, an introduction, and an epilogue. The first chapter lays out the overall argument for the book, that a "secularizing" trend in intimate memory can be observed in the late imperial era. Chapter Two recounts how the survivor's guilt of a husband compelled him to plumb the depths of his memories of his late wife, rethinking the meaning of what a virtuous wife is, and causing him to question many dimensions of the traditional Confucian prescriptions for women. The following chapter considers female hagiographies by grieving husbands who elevate them to the status of female Confucian exemplars in the mold of the female chastity martyr 烈女. Chapter Four, focusing on *Six Records of a Floating Life,* provides an interesting opportunity for comparison with Maram Epstein's analysis of the same work. Chapter Five compares Jiang Tan's narrative *Fragments of Memory under the Autumn Lamp* 秋燈瑣憶 with Jiang's elegiac poems. The matter of how concubines are mourned is the topic of Chapter Six. The following chapter steps back and reflects on the self-consciousness of elegy writers at a time when good *daowang* writers became known as luminaries of cultural

sophistication. Finally, in the last main chapter, the topic of men's eulogies for their deceased married sisters provides a different perspective on exemplary womanly qualities. Although the book does not explicitly take up the theme of filiality narrowly defined, the spectre of filiality looms just over the horizon of the entire book, since all family relationships are tied to filiality.

Writing epitaphs for deceased family members, especially fathers, were traditionally the responsibility of sons and showcased their ability to express their heartfelt sense of filiality. According to Martin Huang, the expectation was that the son would enlist someone of high social standing to compose the eulogy and to articulate it in a ritualized manner (15). It was far less common for a deceased woman to be the subject of an elegy and it usually meant that her husband or son had mustered strong justification and undergone careful scrutiny in order to do it. This stands to reason in a patriarchal society where men were at the center of social reproduction and where women, while they played the central role in biological reproduction, were considered marginal to the social processes of reproduction. Memorials were part of a sacred set of rituals that enshrined the dead as ancestors and the living as custodians of their memory until they too entered the realm of ancestors upon death. But the practice of writing such memorials began to change in the early 16th century, according to Huang, when such sacred activities became "secularized" or removed from the rarefied spiritual confines of Confucian ritual. Women could now be mourned publicly and in writing, and they could be remembered for more than just being epitomes of Confucian virtues. They could be revered for their personal talents, for their companionship, and for admirable aspects of their personalities as well as the fine things they had done in life. It is within the context of this broader sense of exemplarity wherein "wifely virtue" was not solely an offshoot of model Confucian behavior that women were fondly remembered for their intellects, their literary talents, and their physical beauty (19).

Noting this broadening trend in both the subjects of memorials and in the criteria for what could be conveyed in such memorials, Martin Huang has sought to survey in detail various such memorials to women, a type of record for the most part unprecedented in Chinese discourse. He describes these memorials as demonstrations of "intimate memory," personal and detailed accounts of what men most missed about their beloved wives or concubines (or even sisters). Huang adds that these elegies were often replete with contradictions, that they contained utterances of profound emotional loss and guilt and hovered on the border between what was and was not considered normative Confucian biographical convention. The challenge was how to mourn women in a sincere way without flagrantly running against the grain of Confucian propriety. In the introductory chapter, Huang outlines the various forms that such memorials could take, such as epitaphs 墓誌銘, typically composed of a prose essay followed by a brief verse; the biographical sketch 性狀, a work that was by definition a draft that would be utilized later for more vaunted and permanent forms of memorial; and the "sacrificial litany" 祭文, a form of elegiac writing that a husband normally would write and then read at a sacrificial ceremony in honor of the deceased (32). The

new subject for writing did require some expansion of genres, and in the 16th century the Neo-Confucian intellectual Wang Shenzhong 王慎中 came up with a genre-bending form he called "words of remembrance" 憶語 that was more lax in style and permitted the author to describe his wife as a complex person, a distinctive individual who was not the stereotypical model of Confucian virtue. Writers who employed the *yiyu* form rather than biographical sketches or epitaphs were not beholden to the constraints of Confucian biographical conventions (34).

In Chapter Two, Huang describes how powerful feelings of guilt compelled surviving husbands to delve deeply into the memories of their late wives. They often gave voice to guilt over the jealousy a wife might have been obliged to feel toward a concubine or the anger and frustration of being abused by a mother-in-law. This guilt became a motivating force, Huang argues, that gave men permission to indulge their wives in memorial, overlook faults, and lament the reasons the loss of a wife might be considered particularly poignant and painful. Some such laments, such as one written by Zhu Bangxian 朱邦憲, painted the picture of an unhappy situation in which hardship was born by his wife; his guilt could finally be expressed in the elegy (40). In some cases, such as that of You Tong 尤侗, the bereavement he felt engendered such a strong sense of guilt that it turned him into a more understanding husband after the fact (50). Huang isolates two writers for discussion in Chapter Three to show how in their grief some husbands would embark on hagiographical enterprises on behalf of their deceased wives that memorialized how they were extraordinary paragons of virtue, usually Confucian virtue. Huang argues that the emergence of these Confucian hagiographies for deceased wives opened up space for the eulogists of more ordinary women, because with simple biography available to subjects who did not rise to the level of exemplarity there was now a special form of writing, the hagiography, that could be specifically appropriated for extraordinary female exemplars (55). Huang further argues that the irony of hagiographical texts was that they were limited to talking only about the particularly exemplary aspects of the individual's biography, which often made for scant, even boring, biographies. All sorts of endearing facts from their lives could adorn the more informal biographies of those less glorious in life.

In Chapters Four and Five, Huang focuses on examples of pure literature, the famous homage by Shen Fu 沈復 entitled *Six Records of a Floating Life* and the poetic elegies of Jiang Tan 蔣坦. As Huang sees it, *Six Records* is the most sophisticated and complex work of intimate memory written in premodern China. Huang is particularly interested in the way Shen Fu crafts the narrative in relation to his "own past selves" (95-96) and his attempts to come to terms with his doubts over his own masculinity as well as feelings of failure at having become a marginal Confucian intellectual as opposed to a powerful scholar-official. Huang argues that one cannot separate the empathetic depiction of the wife from his own emasculation or from the impoverished lifestyle he was forced to lead after the demise of his career. Huang also unveils through close reading the latent resentment that Shen Fu harbored for his father for insisting he pursue a career that Shen Fu did not want. Finally, Huang proposes that Shen Fu's

"deep love for his wife Yun must be related to her unique capacity to caress his injured male ego" (95). Thus, Shen Fu's *daowang* was actually a "double grieving" (96): he mourned the death of his wife, and he lamented his own failure and his wrecked professional career. Jiang Tan, younger than Shen Fu, left us a prose memoir entitled *Fragments of Memory under the Autumn Lamp* as well as a fulsome set of *daowang* poems. The two can be read against each other. The prose work contains an interesting gender reversal in which, instead of the woman bemoaning her beloved husband who was off on an extended trip (perhaps on business, but who knows?), in Jiang's piece it is the man feeling abandoned by his wife who has returned for an extended stay with her natal family. This reversal of traditional rhetorical roles is met with a further emasculating fact: that Jiang has repeatedly failed to pass the civil-service examinations. Jiang Tan wrote eighty elegiac poems, many of which centered on the uneasy relationship he had with his in-laws and the attendant family tension. He revealed in his poetry his feelings of inferiority and the perceived superiority complex his wife's family heaped upon him.

In the last three chapters, Huang demonstrates how writers of elegies in late imperial China had moved far beyond the confines of ritual and sacred writing that was the mainstay of earlier dynasties. In Chapter Six, Huang examines some examples of men who lament their concubines, a gesture that probably was viewed as beneath the dignity of the elegy genre in earlier times. But works like Mao Xiang's 冒襄 show that these sorts of *daowang* could be highly moving expressions of sorrow and nostalgia, in which the authors wrote straight from the heart and did not fear opprobrium for unorthodox behavior or attitudes. Mao Xiang's mourning for his deceased concubine Dong Xiaowan dwells not on her "wifely virtues" but on her unique companionship, implicit understanding of Mao, and other tender details of their relationship—a nearly completely modern work in content. As *daowang* works ventured into unanticipated and unfathomable territory such as that described in the middle chapters of Huang's book, it also showed a sense of itself as a literary form rather than one singularly of personal grief and intimate remembrance. *Daowang* had become a marketable, collectible, and circulating type of literary work. Some writers would maintain their sincere loyalty to their subjects, but others would actively seek literary fame based on this once sacred genre of writing. This led to the emergence of the "elegiac master," such as Qu Dajun 屈大均 of the early Qing. The spectacle of men becoming famous for their intimate memoirs is a bit troubling and could use some further theorizing in subsequent scholarship. To what extent was the lament for a wife, concubine, or lover a true act of devotion, and to what extent could it have been marketed in the proto-capitalist environment of China? This is a question that deserves an answer. The final chapter on the mourning of sisters might actually take unconventionality in the opposite direction. This topic had little to do with the career-building of ambitious men. Writing about a deceased sister gave men one of the rarest of opportunities: how to view events and circumstances through the eyes of a woman. Brothers could give voice to the grievances that their sisters, like other women, held within and that only men

could express in writing. For example, an unhappy marriage might be considered a subject a woman would avoid speaking about, but after her death an eloquent brother might be her channel for discursive avenging. An interesting epilogue at the end of the book briefly notes the female scholar and poet Wang Duan who wrote an elegiac memory of herself. This type of writing obviously presages many more examples from the era of modern Chinese literature.

These three books represent the best recent scholarship on late imperial Chinese fiction, gazetteers, poetry, and other genres that in their intersections demonstrate that filiality, mourning, kinship relations, and expressions thereof were on the one hand subject to a powerful orthodox tradition in the history of Chinese letters, but on the other was also supremely dynamic, often intimate and tender, and changing at all times. Maram Epstein's book proffers a new reading of filiality that reverses the May Fourth verdict and invites us to view filiality as tightly associated with affect, in stark contrast to the modern view that pits filiality against emotion in a Manichean battle. Maria Franca Sibau looks at filiality and other aspects of Confucian moral ideals as inspiration for the shaping of late imperial short fiction. Martin Huang's careful reading of various forms of intimate remembrance explores the uncharted territory of late imperial narratives of familial relations. Taken together, the three books advance our understanding of human relations in Chinese discourse and remind us that such relations and their representations are always dynamic.

The three books also join a growing bibliography of studies connected to what I call the grammar of filiality. The grammar of filiality is not simply "filial piety" or a basic payment of obeisance to parents, consanguine elders, and ancestors. The grammar of filiality is an underlying logic that prescribes and proscribes behavior and thinking in premodern Chinese society and culture. We need to view filiality in all its complexity: a constitutive principle of subject development; a code for ethical conduct within a particular philosophical and religious frame of reference; and a legitimating discourse for patriarchal and hierarchical social formation that marginalized women and caused great damage to many more. Filiality pervades modern Chinese fiction, as it does late imperial writing. But the status of filiality is not the same across the board. In some cases, it is the utmost in human exploitation and cruelty; in other cases, it provides the blueprint for kindness between one individual and another. Taking filiality as the kernel of the underlying logic of Chinese culture suggests a vast range of further investigations, particularly in modern Chinese literature and cinema.