

**Layered Performativity in *New Songs from the Jade Terrace (Yutai xinyong)*:  
A Discussion on the Compilation, Poems on Female Entertainers, and the Potential Female  
Readership of the Anthology**

by

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### Abstract

The *Yutai xinyong* is traditionally thought of as a poetry anthology on women that was compiled by a male compiler and intended for male literati readers to read. This study proposes and examines another possibility: the *Yutai xinyong* was probably compiled for the Southern Dynasties palace ladies to read. Without foreseeing their poems on female entertainers would be selected into an anthology for palace ladies to read, the *Yutai xinyong* poets wrote these poems for a different purpose. While male poets, as spectators, composed poems depicting the performance that they had just watched, they did not seek an accurate portrayal of the female entertainers but rather a performative representation which presented poets themselves to their potential spectators — emperor and princes. After these poems on female entertainers recirculated back to the potential female readers in the Southern Dynasties, the compositions of the possible contemporary female reader-poets indicate that their poems on women are not only influenced by the works written by male poets but also attempt to present another poetic performance to reconstruct the female image created by male poets.

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### Conventions

I have used Wu Zhaoyi 吳兆宜 and Cheng Yan's 程琰 edition of *Yutai xinyong jianzhu* 玉臺新詠箋注. For the translations of the excerpts from the *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 and the quotations from the *Lunyu* 論語, I have cited Richard B. Mather and Burton Watson's translations respectively. As for the preface of the *Yutai xinyong* and the anthologized poems discussed in this thesis, I provide my own annotated translations. In addition to hard-copy books, I have also used materials from two databases: Scripta Sinica and Chinese Text Project in this draft version.

## Chapter One

### Introduction

*New Songs from the Jade Terrace* (*Yutai xinyong* 玉臺新詠) is a poetry anthology said to have been compiled by Xu Ling 徐陵 (507-583) in the Southern Dynasties. As the title indicates, this anthology mainly collects the so-called new songs, that is, lyrics and poems composed during its contemporary Southern Dynasties period. As most of these anthologized Southern Dynasties compositions are palace-style poetry — which is a popular poetry genre focusing on depicting beautiful women and scenery in the Southern Dynasties, the *Yutai xinyong* is generally regarded as a representative anthology of palace-style poetry. However, an exclusive collection of palace-style genre may not be a proper definition for the *Yutai xinyong*, since three out of ten chapters in the anthology actually are poems composed by pre-Southern Dynasties poets. And a more proper and comprehensive summary of the content of the *Yutai xinyong* comes from Ji Rongshu's 紀容舒 (1685-1764) writing in his *Collation of New Songs from the Jade Terrace* (*Yutai xinyong kaoyi* 玉臺新詠考異): “all the anthologized works contain words about skirts and rouge powder that can be used for composing love poetry; those non-love poems anthologized in the book must also have words and lines concerning boudoir. 蓋此集所錄, 皆裙裾脂粉之詞, 可備豔體之用. 其非豔體而見收者, 亦必篇中字句有涉閨幃.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, this actually is a collection that devotes almost entirely to poems on women and love.

### The Compiler

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<sup>1</sup> Ji Rongshu 紀容舒, *Yutai xinyong kaoyi* 玉臺新詠考異 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), juan 9.

It has commonly been accepted that Xu Ling was the compiler of the anthology. Xu Ling was the son of a Liang official, Xu Chi 徐摛 (472-549). Because of Xu Chi's extraordinary morality and literary competence, Emperor Wu of Liang 梁武帝 selected him as the advisor accompanying the young Prince Jin'an, Xiao Gang 蕭綱 (503-551, later Emperor Jianwen of Liang 梁簡文帝). Xu Chi became a loyal follower of Xiao Gang and a senior member of the prince's literary salon in the next few decades. And Xu Chi was also thought to be the inventor and proponent of palace-style poetry, as his biography in *Nanshi* 南史 writes: "Xu Chi's literature style was so special, the whole spring bureau (residence of heir apparent) emulated it. The name of palace-style started from this. 摛文體既別, 春坊盡學之, 宮體之號, 自斯而始."<sup>2</sup>

According to Xu Ling's biography in the *Chenshu* 陳書, he was already renowned for his great erudition and literary talent at a young age. Xiao Gang took Xu Ling with him as advisor when he stationed in border area, Yongzhou 雍州. After Xiao Gang became heir apparent in 531, Xu Ling was appointed as "Scholar at the Eastern Palace" (Donggong xueshi 東宮學士) and later took the position of "Common-duty Cavalier Attendant in Ordinary" (Tongzhi sanqi changshi 通直散騎常侍). In 548, Xu Ling was sent to the Northern Wei as the envoy of the Liang. He was detained in the north until 555, two years before the fall of the Liang. Soon after returning to the south, Xu Ling joined the "rebellion" against Emperor Wu of Chen 陳武帝 who was then a

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<sup>2</sup> Li Yanshou 李延壽, *Nanshi* 南史 62.1521. Scripta Sinica.



powerful general controlling the Liang court. But he was forgiven by Emperor Wu of Chen and the latter promoted him to a couple of high official posts after the founding of the Chen Dynasty.<sup>3</sup>

Both *Nanshi* and *Chenshu* record Xu Ling's literary talent and his cultural participation: when Xiao Gang was heir apparent, he compiled *Record of the Discourse at the Hall of Forever Spring* (*Changchun dian yiji* 長春殿義記) and Xu Ling was asked to write the preface for the book; while still staying at the Eastern Palace as heir apparent, the last emperor of Chen 陳後主 often ordered Xu Ling to give lectures on the Pancavimsati Sahasrika Prajnaparamita sutra 大品般若經 and Xu Ling was undefeatable in all the debates with famous monks; moreover, according to the official histories, almost all the important government and military documents and imperial edicts in the Chen Dynasty were composed by Xu Ling; every time when there was a new writing by Xu Ling coming out, people would collect and recite it; and the writings of Xu Ling were even circulated to the Northern Dynasties, although most of them were dispersed during the wars.<sup>4</sup>

However, neither *Nanshi* nor *Chenshu* mentions Xu Ling's connection with the *Yutai xinyong* despite the fact that Yao Cha 姚察, the chief compiler of the *Chenshu*, was Xu Ling's colleague and friend. The earliest major historical record that attribute the compilation of the *Yutai xinyong* to Xu Ling is the bibliography of the *Suishu* 隋書 (comp.656). In his influential *Yutai xinyong yanjiu* 玉臺新詠研究, the contemporary scholar Liu Yuejin 劉躍進 agrees with the attribution of the compilership to Xu Ling and his reasons for this are: the *Nanshi*, the *Chenshu*,

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<sup>3</sup> Yao Silian 姚思廉, *Chenshu* 陳書, 26.325-334. Scripta Sinica.

<sup>4</sup> *Nanshi* 南史 62.1525; Yao Silian, *Chenshu*, 26.334, 335. Scripta Sinica.

and the *Suishu* were all compiled at the beginning of the Tang Dynasty; although the *Suishu* is the earliest major historical record that mentions Xu Ling's compilation of the *Yutai xinyong*, it does not necessarily mean that the record in the *Suishu* is a less credential one that made up by later generations; meanwhile, the *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚, a literature anthology compiled in the early Tang, also says that the *Yutai xinyong* was compiled by Xu Ling; and the editor of the *Yiwen leiju*, Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢, was almost 20 when Xu Ling passed away - which made it possible for him to get some contemporary information on Xu Ling's literary production; the reason for the *Yutai xinyong* not be mentioned in the *Nanshi* and the *Chenshu* might be that the *Yutai xinyong* was an anthology circulating in a small circle at the time.<sup>5</sup> Until recently, Liu Yuejin's confirmation of Xu Ling's compilership of the *Yutai xinyong* has been accepted by the mainstream Chinese scholarship on the anthology.

### **Chinese and Western Scholarship on *Yutai xinyong***

As the *Yutai xinyong* includes a large number of palace-style poems, most contemporary Chinese scholars still consider it a collection that reflects the sensual and decadent cultural life of the male literati in the Southern Dynasties. And such view on the *Yutai xinyong* mainly originates from a record in the *Datang xinyu* 大唐新語: "when Emperor Jianwen of Liang was heir apparent, he liked composing love poetry; literati throughout the realm converted to this type of composition and it gradually became a popular genre, known as 'palace-style poetry'; in his later years, Emperor Jianwen changed his style of writing but it was already too late [to turn around his reputation as a palace-style poet]; thus, he ordered Xu Ling to compile *Yutai xinyong* to grant

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<sup>5</sup> Liu Yuejin 劉躍進, *Yutai xinyong yanjiu* 玉臺新詠研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), 90.

the genre a degree of respectability. 梁簡文帝為太子, 好作艷詩, 境內化之, 浸以成俗, 謂之宮體. 晚年改作, 追之不及, 乃令徐陵撰玉臺集, 以大其體.”<sup>6</sup> This piece of record in the *Datang xinyu* is almost the only extant early source about the purpose of the *Yutai xinyong*'s compilation other than the preface of the *Yutai xinyong* itself, and this is also why most Chinese scholars take it as an essential evidence for defining the nature of the *Yutai xinyong* and the poems included in the anthology. However, recent studies point out that the original *Datang xinyu* was probably already lost in circulation a long time ago, and the work called the *Datang xinyu* that is circulating nowadays is actually a work written and compiled by Ming literati,<sup>7</sup> which has already put the credibility of the historical records in the *Datang xinyu* in doubt. Moreover, this record of Emperor Jianwen and the *Yutai xinyong*'s compilation is included in the chapter of “Righteousness and Integrity” (Gongzhi 公直) in *Datang xinyu* and it is placed side by side with the anecdote of Emperor Taizong of Tang being exhorted to not compose love poetry.<sup>8</sup> In other words, Emperor Jianwen is used as an example of contrast to show the extraordinary morality of Emperor Taizong, which makes the association of the *Yutai xinyong* with Emperor Jianwen in the *Datang xinyu* a further dubious assumption.

Meanwhile, major Western scholarship on the *Yutai xinyong* is also within the framework of examining the cultural and literary taste of male literati — but from different aspects other

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<sup>6</sup> Liu Su 劉肅, *Datang xinyu* 大唐新語 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 3.28.

<sup>7</sup> Wu Guanwen 吳冠文, “Guanyu jinben *Datang xinyu* zhenwei wenti” 關於今本《大唐新語》真偽問題 and “Zaitan jinben *Datang xinyu* zhenwei wenti” 再談今本《大唐新語》真偽問題, in *Yutai xinyong xinlun* 玉臺新詠新論, ed. Zhang Peiheng 章培恆 and Chen Guanghong 陳廣宏 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2012), 121-55.

<sup>8</sup> Liu Su, *Datang xinyu*, 3.28.

than sensuality and decadence. According to Anne Birrell, the purpose of compiling the *Yutai xinyong* is a resistance to imposing Confucian didactic values on literature work while the compiler and the targeted readers of the anthology hold the idea of pursuing art for art's sake. As the subject of such artistic depiction, women in the anthology, especially those ones in the poems composed from late third century to sixth century, are tended to be given "a courtly treatment," focused on their graceful and elegant manners and precious jewelry. Moreover, those women also suffer the so-called "obligatory melancholy" in the style of courtly love and their lavish clothes and accessories are implicit presentation of eroticism.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, Paul Rouzer proposes that there is a long tradition of male literati lamenting through a female voice in Chinese literature and the poems in the *Yutai xinyong* are just confirmation and variations of such "canonized lament." In the particular case of the *Yutai xinyong*, those poems of lament in a female voice also involve voyeurism and competition. The female protagonist in the poem, possibly together with the intimacy between her male lover and her, arouses the erotic voyeurism. Meanwhile, there is also an implicit competition between the poet himself and the female protagonist as well as between the poet and his colleagues for substituting the female protagonist within the poem, as the relationship between the female protagonist and her lover also resembles the relationship between the ruler and his ministers. As a result, women in the poems are both the object of desire for the poets and the one that the poets desire to be. And it is poetry that articulates these complex feelings and intentions of the poets.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Anne, Birrell, *New Songs from a Jade Terrace: An Anthology of Early Chinese Love Poetry*, Rev.ed. (England: Penguin, 1986), 1-28.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Rouzer, *Articulated Ladies: Gender and the Male Community in Early Chinese Texts* (Cambridge, MA. : Harvard University Press, 2001), 117-56.

Meanwhile, David Knechtges also points out that the *Yutai xinyong* “represents the avant garde of Liang dynasty taste” which is different from Pei Ziyue 裴子野 and Xiao Tong’s tastes, two popular contemporary literature styles. While Pei Ziyue advocated the conservative Confucian literature ideas and intended to restore the ancient way, Xiao Tong, the compiler of *Wenxuan* 文選, took a moderate attitude towards literature and suggested that literature should combine aesthetic pleasure and classical cultural values. But the *Yutai xinyong* and its anthologized palace-style poetry associated with Xiao Gang’s literary group seemed to propose that literature, especially poetry, “need[s] not always be sober and serious and that it can be used to provide pleasure and entertainment during idle moments.”<sup>11</sup>

However, in the *Beacon Fire and Shooting Star*, Tian Xiaofei comments on Birrell and Rouzer’s take on the *Yutai xinyong* and she points out: the courtly love nature of palace-style poetry proposed by Birrell is just European romanticization of literary and cultural life in the Southern Dynasties; as for Rouzer’s male taking a female lament voice, it seems to fit the literary tradition in the pre-Southern Dynasties period; but its applicability will be in doubt when another important factor is put into consideration - some of those poets in the *Yutai xinyong* are powerful rulers or princes like Emperor Wu of Liang and his son, Xiao Tong 蕭統 who have no need to make the so-called female lament to express their desire of gaining the favor of the ruler. In the meantime, Tian Xiaofei also suggests that the so-called three different literary schools or groups in the Liang period might be an arbitrary “imagined rivalry.” In fact, there was a shared vision of

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<sup>11</sup> David R. Knechtges, “Culling the Weeds and Selecting Prime Blossoms: the Anthology in Early Medieval China,” in *Culture and Power in the Reconstruction of the Chinese Realm, 200-600*, ed. Scott Pearce, Audrey Spiro, and Patricia Ebrey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 200-241.

what constituted of fine literature in the Liang literary world and a number of the Liang literati actually participated in different literary groups at the same time. And Tian Xiaofei further proposes the question: why can't scholars consider the *Yutai xinyong* as an anthology compiling for palace ladies, especially when Xu Ling himself already clearly states such purpose in the preface of the anthology and Six Dynasties is also the time period that saw the compilation of a number of works of "instructions to women."<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, Tian Xiaofei just makes a brief comment on scholarships on the *Yutai xinyong* in her book and does not further examine those noticeable issues that she raises.

Zhang Peiheng 章培恆, a leading scholar of Six Dynasties literature in mainland China, seeks to look at the compilation of the *Yutai xinyong* from an alternative perspective. The preface clearly indicates that the anthology was commissioned by palace ladies and compiled for those ladies to read. Zhang Peiheng points out that it was always a rigid taboo for court officials to be in association with palace ladies in ancient China, which would usually lead to death penalty. Thus, according to Zhang, it would have been almost impossible for Xu Ling, an official serving at the court, to attribute the compilation of the anthology to the request of a palace lady if there was no actual commission from the inner palace. Zhang Peiheng suggests that Zhang Lihua 張麗華, the most favored concubine of the last ruler of Chen, was the real compiler of the *Yutai xinyong* by analyzing the preface of the anthology and the family background and life events of Zhang Lihua. At the same time, evidence like Xu Ling sometimes is called by his literary title Xiaomu 孝穆 in the *Yutai xinyong* also indicates that Xu Ling probably was not the compiler of

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<sup>12</sup> Tian Xiaofei, *Beacon Fire and Shooting Star: The Literary Cultural of the Liang (502-557)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 125-44, 186-92.

the anthology or at least not the only one.<sup>13</sup> In another article supplementing his argument on Zhang Lihua's compilation of the *Yutai xinyong*, Zhang Peiheng presents some new findings of the historical records on the compiler of the *Yutai xinyong*: although the *Suishu* is the earliest major historical record that mentions Xu Ling's compilership of the *Yutai xinyong* in accordance to the finish time of the main body of the *Suishu*, *jingji zhi* 經籍志, the particular section that talks about the *Yutai xinyong* was actually finished in the middle and late Tang Dynasty; as the *Yiwen leiju* was compiled in the early Tang (624), it is hard to say that the editors of the *jingji zhi* did not attribute the *Yutai xinyong* to Xu Ling according to the information from the *Yiwen leiju*; furthermore, a record in the *Xianglian ji* 香奩集 from the late Tang period might suggest that Xu Ling might not be the compiler of the *Yutai xinyong*.<sup>14</sup>

A number of Zhang Peiheng's articles on the compilership of the *Yutai xinyong* indeed shed light on the research of the anthology by examining it from the perspective of female editorship, despite the fact that Zhang Peiheng insists that it was a particular palace lady, Zhang Lihua, who compiled the anthology - which seems to lack solid foundation.

### **Approaches and Overview of Chapters**

While my research on the *Yutai xinyong* will continue to explore the anthology on the track of female involvement, the focus will be placed on the dynamic interaction among the possible female readership, the male poet's construction of those anthologized poems on women

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<sup>13</sup> Zhang Peiheng 章培恒, "Yutai xinyong wei Zhang Lihua suo zhuanlu kao" 玉台新咏为张丽华所撰录考, *Wenxue pinglun*, no.2 (2004).

<sup>14</sup> Wu Guanwen 吴冠文, and Zhang Peiheng 章培恒, "Yutai xinyong zhuanren taolun de jige yiliu wenti" 玉台新咏撰人讨论的几个遗留问题, *Fudan xuebao*, no.3 (2011).

and the reception of the contemporary Southern Dynasties female readers. As facing very limited extant sources on the compilation and female readership of the *Yutai xinyong*, this study attempts to combine the fragmental cultural and historical evidence with the analysis of the primary literary texts, the preface of the *Yutai xinyong* and its anthologized poems, to complement one another so as to piece back together the flow path of the *Yutai xinyong*'s compilation, composition, and readership in its contemporary Southern Dynasties.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter One firstly presents the social ethos of women in the Six Dynasties by examining the images of women within major Six Dynasties historical and cultural accounts and discusses the issues regarding palace education in the Southern Dynasties through extant sources and researches. While it was the ethos of the time in general for women to have various talents in the Six Dynasties, increasingly more women being included in the early Southern Dynasties historical works are the ones with wisdom and intelligence and the attention gradually shifts to women, especially aristocratic and palace women, with literary competence since the middle of the Southern Dynasties. As the Southern Dynasties rulers attached more importance to the education of palace ladies, a large number of imperial ladies with exquisite literary skills were recorded in the dynastic histories of the Southern Dynasties and it was also a common practice of the time for scholar officials to compile works for women to read with the content of stories and poems on women. Under such social and cultural environment, the *Yutai xinyong*, a poetry collection on women, was compiled. Therefore, this chapter then carefully analyzes the preface of the *Yutai xinyong*, where the compiler also clearly states that the anthology is compiled for palace ladies to read, as well as the



taboo between court official and palace ladies, which makes the compiler's claim in the preface less likely a metaphorical fabrication.

Chapter Two, “‘His Composition’: Poems on Female Entertainers by Male Poets,” discusses the purpose of the Southern Dynasties male poets' compositions on women in the *Yutai xinyong* by looking at the anthologized poems on female entertainers — a popularly adopted theme in the *Yutai xinyong*, the similarity and connection between the female entertainers and the male literati at the court in the Southern Dynasties, and the power and the role of literary competence at that time. Although the *Yutai xinyong* was probably composed as a poetry collection for the education of palace ladies, the poems included in the anthology were not written for such purpose. Most of those poems on female entertainers were composed at the royal banquet. During the banquet, the patron and literati guests usually watched the female entertainers' performance at first and then composed poems on the performance that they just watched. To some extent, the role of these male literati guests at the Southern Dynasties' royal banquet is similar to that of the female music entertainers — they are both the ones entertaining the patron. Thus, a male poet does not seek a realistic depiction of the female entertainer in his poem but rather constructs a synthesized female protagonist that consists of both the image of the female entertainer and the poet himself so as to convey his own personal, social, and political expressions. And his poetic composition on the female entertainer's performance actually presents another performance at the banquet. By elaborately reconstructing and depicting the female protagonist in his poetic performance to express his inner thoughts, the poet also demonstrates his literary competence which is an essential tool of communicating and excelling in the Southern Dynasties court.

Indeed, this chapter is based on and relates to Paul Rouzer's research in *Articulated Ladies*. But although some of the *Yutai xinyong* poems on women that Rouzer discusses might be compositions on female entertainers, he is mostly focused on the canonized female lament as well as the erotic voyeurism and neglects the possible performative aspect within those poems. Also, Rouzer's discussion on the male poets' homosocial relation that is constructed and conveyed by the female voice in the *Yutai xinyong* poems is just the literati desiring the patron's favor or the competition between literati colleagues. But as Tian Xiamfei points out, there are also a large number of poems on women that are written by royal patrons in the Southern Dynasties and these patrons have no need to use the female lament to gain anyone's favor. And this aspect of the purpose of the royal patrons' composition on poems on women will be discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Three attempts to investigate the potential contemporary female readers' reception of these poems on female entertainers anthologized in the *Yutai xinyong*, since the potential female readers, the Liang and Chen palace ladies, probably understood and received these poems differently from the male poets who compose them. But unfortunately, there were very limited extant sources on the literary activities of the palace ladies at that time and almost no writing by the Liang and Chen palace ladies has survived, which makes it impossible to trace the contemporary female readers' reception of these anthologized poems directly. Thus, this chapter turns attention to look at the anthologized poems on female entertainers or women written by Shen Manyuan and Liu Lingxian who were female relatives of two major *Yutai xinyong* male poets. As it is very likely that these two Southern Dynasties female poets have read the poems composed by their male family members, a comparison between their poems and their male

relatives' works included in the *Yutai xinyong* also can indirectly reflect how the potential female readers in the Southern Dynasties may receive these anthologized poems.

Although the *Yutai xinyong* is generally regarded as a poetry collection that presents the love and sexual desire of the male poets, the preface to the *Yutai xinyong*, the content of the anthologized poems, and the historical and cultural traditions of the Six Dynasties all suggest that this seemingly male-oriented anthology might be intended for female audience. However, the actual poems included in this anthology intended for female readers were composed by male poets for different purposes other than for female audience to read. When composing these poems on women or female entertainers, most male poets take the female voice to express their own inner thoughts so as to serve various personal, political, and social purposes. Thus, in these poems on women by male literati, the poet creates a performative representation of the female protagonist which presented poets themselves to their readers --- patrons or literati colleagues. As these men's writings on women are selected by the compiler of the *Yutai xinyong* and recirculated back to aristocratic women and palace ladies at the time, they then serves as the model for those women's expression in writing. But while the poems written by the contemporary Southern Dynasties female poets are similar or corresponding to that of their male counterparts in terms of the style, the themes, and the subject matters, the female poets also strengthen and touch on certain other aspects like the moral integrity, the inner psychological states of the female protagonist, and the desire for transgressing the pre-defined feminine role.

In such layers of emulation, the Southern Dynasties male poets compose poems on female entertainers after watching their music performance; and the female reader-poets read as well as is influenced by these compositions on women and then write their own poems on women by

adopting the similar style and themes. Each layer of the emulation actually is also a poetic performance based on the previous layer.

## Chapter Two

### The Preface of *Yutai xinyong* And the Social and Cultural Context

The Six Dynasties was an era that esteemed aristocratic women with various talents. Although conventional female virtues like chastity and modesty were still valued, it was those women with unusual talents and abilities that had their biographies and stories left in historical accounts of that period. Indeed, this might be a result of the limitation of extant sources when those accounts were composed as well as the personal preference of the compilers.<sup>15</sup> But it should also be kept in mind that most compilers of those historical works of the Six Dynasties were the ones who lived through that period, although the works themselves were compiled in the following dynasties. To some extent, those compilers's value and selection of materials also reflects the ethos of women in that period. Therefore, the first half of the chapter will be devoted to reviewing and analyzing the images of women within major Six Dynasties historical and cultural accounts like the section of “Worthy Ladies (Xianyuan 賢媛)” in *A New Account of the Tales of the World* (*Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語), the section of “Biography of Exemplary Ladies (Lienü zhuan 列女傳) in the *Jinshu* 晉書, and biographies and pieces of information of women in the *Songshu* 宋書, the *Liangshu* 梁書, and the *Chenshu* 陳書. The second half of the chapter will turn to look at the preface of the *Yutai xinyong* with an emphasis on the epitomes of palace ladies as well as their daily activities depicted in the preface, and these aspects of the preface will also be examined together with the extant sources and researches on palace education in the Southern

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<sup>15</sup> Wang Anyu 王安宇, “Tang xiu zhengshi lienüzhuan zhong de yilei - qianxi *Jinshu* lienüzhuan dui you shijian de caizhi nvxing de baoyang” 唐修正史《列女傳》中的異類- 淺析晉書·列女傳對有識見的才智女性的褒揚, *Dalian daxue xuebao* 大連大學學報 35, no.2 (2014), 45-6.

Dynasties. From a broader historical and social background to relatively specific portrayal in the preface, this chapter intends to trace and picture the potential female readers of the *Yutai xinyong*.

### **The Image and Ethos of Women in the Six Dynasties**

The *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 is an anecdote collection compiled by Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 (403-444), a kinsman of the Liu Song imperial family, and the collection contains anecdotes and character sketches that present the cultural attitudes and social practices from the Han through the Wei and Jin periods. The chapter of the “Xianyuan” in the *Shishuo xinyu* records women with various different characteristics: extraordinary physical beauty, outstanding personal talents, exceptional moral qualities, keen political sensibilities, and so forth. The following are a few exemplary excerpts:

王司徒婦，鍾氏女，太傅曾孫，亦有俊才女德。鍾、郝為娣姒，雅相親重。鍾不以貴陵郝，郝亦不以賤下鍾。東海家內，則郝夫人之法。京陵家內，範鍾夫人之禮。

Wang Hun’s wife, Chung Yen, was the great-granddaughter of the grand tutor, Chung Yu, and in her own right possessed outstanding ability and womanly virtue. Lady Chung and Lady Hao, as the wives respectively of the elder and younger Wang brothers, Wang Hun and Wang Chan, always treated each with affectionate respect. Lady Chung did not, because of her noble origin, act condescendingly toward Lady Hao, nor did Lady Hao, because of her lowly origin, act obsequiously toward Lady Chung. Within the household of Wang Chan’s son, Wang Ch’eng, they followed the rules of Lady Hao, and within the household of Wang Hun they took as their model the etiquette of Lady Chung.

漢元帝宮人既多，乃令畫工圖之，欲有呼者，輒披圖召之。其中常者，皆行貨賂。王明君姿容甚麗，志不苟求，工遂毀為其狀。後匈奴來和，求美女於漢帝，帝以明君充行。既召見而惜之。但名字已去，不欲中改，於是遂行。

Since the palace women of the Han Emperor Yüan (Liu Shih) were numerous, he ordered an artist to make portraits of them, so that whenever he wanted to call one, he could always summon her according to her portrait. The ordinary ones among them all bribed the artist, but Wang Ch’iang, whose face and figure were very beautiful, was resolved not to seek favors by unfair means, and as a result the artist disfigured her appearance in her portrait. Later the Hsiung-nu came on a peace mission, seeking a lovely lady from the

Han emperor. The emperor felt that Wang Ch'iang would fulfill the qualifications to go, but after having summoned her for an interview, was loathe to let her go. However, her name had already been sent on, and he did not wish to change in mid-course, so in the end she went.

許允為晉景王所誅，門生走入告其婦。婦正在機中，神色不變，曰：蚤知爾耳！門人欲藏其兒，婦曰：無豫諸兒事。後徙居墓所，景王遣鍾會看之，若才流及父，當收。兒以咨母。母曰：汝等雖佳，才具不多，率胸懷與語，便無所憂。不須極哀，會止便止。又可少問朝事。兒從之。會反以狀對，卒免。

When Hsü Yün was punished by Prince Ching (Ssu-ma Shih), his servants went in to tell his wife (Lady Juan), who was just then at her weaving. Her spirit and facial expression showed no change. She only said, "I knew it was so, long ago." The servants wanted to hide Yün's sons (Ch'i and Meng), but his wife said, "It doesn't concern the sons." Later she moved to the neighbourhood of Yün's tomb. Prince Ching dispatched Chung Hui to visit the boys. If the level of their ability came up to that of their father, he was to apprehend them. The sons consulted with their mother about it, and she said, "Even though you two are fine boys, your ability and endowment are not excessive. If you speak out frankly with him whatever is in your hearts and thoughts, you'll have nothing to worry about. It's not necessary to show extreme grief, either; stop at whatever point Hui stops. Beyond that you might ask a few questions about affairs at court." The sons followed her advice. After Hui returned he reported the circumstances (to Prince Chiang), and in the end they were spared.<sup>16</sup>

While the character “賢” is translated as worthy, it actually means being worthy by one's virtue and capabilities. A virtuous official who is capable in dealing with state affairs or a scholar who carries enormous moral qualities is often called as “賢臣” or “賢士.” When the character is used to describe women, it usually refers to women who are good at managing the affairs in the house and follow conventional female virtues. However, the definition of “賢” in the chapter of the “Xianyuan” seems to be different from the conventional one. Although the chapter of the

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<sup>16</sup> Liu Yiqing 劉義慶, *Shishuo xinyu xiaojian* 世說新語校箋, ed. Yang Yong 楊勇 (Taipei: Zhengwen shuju, 2000), 19.606, 607, 611, 618; Liu Yiqing 劉義慶, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu* 世說新語, trans. Richard B. Mather (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007) 19.501, 503, 507, 509, 515, 517.

“Xianyuan” includes stories like Madam Hao and Madam Zhong as sisters-in-law getting along with each other harmoniously so as to indicate the importance of traditional qualities of women, more than half of the anecdotes within this chapter are about women with a variety of other talents and qualities.

In the story of Wang Mingjun, she had not only extraordinary beauty but also exceptional virtue. And her virtue presented in the story goes beyond conventional female virtues such as chastity, modesty, gentleness, and obedience. Instead of giving up her integrity to bribe the court painter, Wang Mingjun would rather choose to lose the chance of attending emperor and ended up with being sent to the barbarian land of Xiongnu. This almost sounds like those stories of righteousness ministers sticking to their integrity and being banished to a remote land.

As for the wife of Xu Yun, she appeared in the anecdote as a calm and capable mother when facing family disaster — Xu Yun being executed. In addition to her composure and wisdom in dealing with the crisis, she also demonstrated extraordinary political sensibility: she foresaw that there was no immediate danger to her sons right after Xu Yun’s execution; she moved the family to live near Xu Yun’s tomb, presumably somewhere in the suburb, so as to stay away from the center of politics; when King Jing sent Zhong Hui to visit them, she clearly detected the king’s intention and instructed her sons how to behave probably; and she even told the sons to what degree they should show their grief — showing moderate amount of grief that makes them act normal and nature but not excessive sorrow that will let the king suspect they may want to revenge for their father’s death one day. As a woman staying in the house, Xu Yun’s wife led the family to tide over a dangerous period by her accurate judgement of political trends at the time.



Just as the chapter of the “Xianyuan” in the *Shishuo xinyu* presents more than a dozen of admirable examples of women with exceptional talent, intelligence and moral strength, the same thing can be seen in the chapter of the “Lienü zhuan” in the *Jinshu* 晉書. And most Jin Dynasty women recorded in the “Xianyuan” also appears in the “Lienü zhuan.” Nevertheless, there are still subtle differences in terms of the selection and depiction of women between the “Xianyuan” and the “Lienü zhuan.” Compared with the “Xianyuan” in the *Shishuo xinyu*, the “Lienü zhuan” — other than recording women following conventional virtues— focuses more on the intelligence of women, especially their literary talent.

In the first place, a number of intelligent and highly literate women in the Jin period that do not appear in the “Xianyuan” are included in the “Lienü zhuan” in the *Jinshu*. For instance, the sisters of Liu E 劉娥 and Liu Ying 劉英. Both sisters were imperial concubines of Liu Cong 劉聰. Liu E’s biography in “Lienü zhuan” depicts her as “幼而聰慧，晝營女工，夜誦書籍，傳母恆止之，娥敦習彌厲。每與諸兄論經義，理趣超遠，諸兄深以嘆服。She had been bright and intelligent since childhood. She was doing women’s work during the day while reading books at night. Nanny always dissuaded her from doing so, but she studied even harder. Every time when she was discussing the argumentation of classics with her brothers, her thoughts and taste were outstanding and all the brothers admired her deeply.” As for Liu E’s elder sister, Liu Ying, “she was also smart and had great learning. Her writing was acute and insightful while she knew state affairs really well, which exceeded Liu E 亦聰敏涉學，而文詞機辯，曉達政事，過於娥..”<sup>17</sup> And the story of Lady Xuanwen Jun 宣文君 is also written in the “Lienü zhuan.”

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<sup>17</sup> Fang Xuanling 房玄齡, *Jinshu* 晉書, 96.2519, 2520. Scripta Sinica.

Xuanwen Jun's father passed on their family learning, *Rites of Zhou* 周官, to her. Despite the turbulent war time, she carried all the books her father passed on to her and kept reciting and studying them. Meanwhile, she also taught her son, Wei Cheng 韋逞, classics every night while working for a living during the day. Wei Cheng later became a chancellor of Former Qin, and Xuanwen Jun was appointed to give instructions on *Rites of Zhou* for more than a hundred scholar-officials in the court.<sup>18</sup>

For those women whose biographies appear in both the “Xianyuan” and the “Lienü zhuan,” their biographies in the “Lienü zhuan” often add supplementary parts that aim at presenting the intelligence and literary competence of the female protagonists. A typical example of this is the difference of the biographies of Xie Daoyun 謝道蘊 in these two books.

The “Xianyuan” in the *Shishuo xinyu* only includes a brief anecdote of Xie Daoyun:

王凝之謝夫人既往王氏，大薄凝之。既還謝家，意大不說。太傅慰釋之曰：“王郎，逸少之子，人材亦不惡，汝何以恨乃爾？”答曰：“一門叔父，則有阿大、中郎。群從兄弟，則有封、胡、遏、末。不意天壤之中，乃有王郎！”

After Madam Xie, the wife of Wang Ningzhi, married to the Wang family, she scorned Ningzhi a lot. When she went back to the Xie family, she was very displeased. The Grand Mentor (Xie An) comforted her by saying: “The Young Gentleman Wang is the son of Yishao, and his virtue and learning are not bad either. Why don't you like him?” Xie Daoyun replied: “Among the uncles of our family, there are [outstanding people like] big

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<sup>18</sup> *Jinshu* 晉書, 96. 2521, 2522.

uncle and middle uncle.<sup>19</sup> Among my brothers, there are Feng, Hu, Jie, and Mo.<sup>20</sup> I never expected, between heaven and earth, there is person like that Young Gentleman Wang!”<sup>21</sup>

But within the “Lienü zhuan” in the *Jinshu*, the biography of Xie Daoyun starts with a story showing her literary talent before narrating the anecdote of her contempt for her husband, Wang Ningzhi:

王凝之妻謝氏，字道韞，安西將軍奕之女也。聰識有才辯。叔父安嘗問：“毛詩何句最佳？”道韞稱：“吉甫作頌，穆如清風。仲山甫永懷，以慰其心。”安謂有雅人深致。又嘗內集，俄而雪驟下，安曰：“何所似也？”安兄子朗曰：“散鹽空中差可擬。”道韞曰：“未若柳絮因風起。”安大悅。

The wife of Wang Ningzhi was Madam Xie. Her literary name was Daoyun, and she was the daughter of Xie Yi, the General of Pacifying the West. She was brilliant and quick-witted. Her uncle Xie An once asked her: “Which line of *Mao Poetry* is the best?” Daoyun answered: “When Yin Jifu composes an ode, it is as tranquil as gentle breeze. And Zhongshan Fu writes ‘poems expressing the thoughts’ so as to console his own heart.” Xie An called her as an elegant person with profound taste. Once in a family gathering-together, the snow suddenly fell. Xie An asked: “What does this looklike?” The son of Xie An’s brother, Xie Lang said: “Scattering salts over the sky is rather similar.” Daoyun replies: “It is not as good as willow catkin being blowed by wind.” Xie An was very pleased.<sup>22</sup>

Meanwhile, the “Lienü zhuan” also includes the anecdote that Xie Daoyun gave advice to Wang Ningzhi’s brother, Wang Xianzhi 王獻之, behind the curtain when he could not defend himself in an argument with the guests. When heard her husband and sons had been killed by Sun En 孫恩, Xie Daoyun acted calm and composed and saved the life of her grandson. Later Prefecture Chief,

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<sup>19</sup> Big Brother probably refers to Xie An’s cousin, Xie Shang 謝尚. Middle brother refers to either Xie An’s younger brother Xie Wan 謝萬 or his elder brother Xie Ju 謝據.

<sup>20</sup> Feng, Hu, Jie, Mo are nicknames for Xie Shao 謝韶, Xie Lang 謝朗, Xie Xuan 謝玄, Xie Yuan 謝淵 respectively.

<sup>21</sup> *Shishuo xinyu xiaojian*, 19. 626-7.

<sup>22</sup> *Jinshu* 晉書, 96. 2516.

Liu Liu 劉柳, visited her for her renowned reputation. Her behavior was described as lofty and graceful while her speech was elegant and refined.<sup>23</sup> Within the “Xianyuan” in the *Shishuo xinyu*, Xie Daoyun is just presented as an outrageous aristocratic lady who dared to show her dissatisfaction at her husband because her husband was not as excellent as her maternal male family members. But in the “Lienü zhuan,” Xie Daoyun was not just a woman coming from an outstanding family but also the one who possessed extraordinary wisdom and literary competence that even surpassed some of her accomplished male relatives.

While the *Shishuo xinyu* is an anthology compiled by or under the auspices of Liu Yiqing during the early to middle Song Dynasty and reflects the cultural ethos of Han to Jin period, *Jinshu* was compiled in the early Tang and manifests the values of the middle and late Southern Dynasties. The edition of the *Jinshu* that is recognized as the official dynastic history of the Jin Dynasty nowadays was compiled and edited by Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 and other contemporary scholars. According to Ran Zhaode’s 冉昭德 article on the compilations of Jin dynastic history and recompilation of the *Jinshu* in the Tang Dynasty, there were already dozens of extant compilations of Jin dynastic history at the time that Emperor Taizong of Tang commissioned Fang Xuanling to recompile the *Jinshu*. Fang Xuanling and his team eventually chose Zang Rongxu’s 臧榮緒 edition as the basis version for this recompilation project, and Zang Rongru was a Southern Dynasties scholar who lived through the Song and Qi.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, one of major groups of scholars that participated the recompilation of the *Jinshu* leading by Fang Xuanling

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 96. 2516, 2517.

<sup>24</sup> Ran Zhaode 冉昭德, “Guanyu Jinshi de zhuan shu yu tang xiu jinshu zhuanren wenti” 關於晉史的撰述與唐修晉書撰人問題, *Xibei daxue xuebao* 西北大學學報, no.4 (1957), 71-5.

were from the former Southern Dynasties aristocratic families such as Chu Suiliang 褚遂良 and Xu Jingzong 許敬宗.<sup>25</sup> As a result, much of the cultural and social ideology of the Southern Dynasties are unavoidably imbedded in the *Jinshu*, especially within the biographies of historical figures.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the *Jinshu*'s tendency of including more intelligent women and depicting women's intelligence and literary competence in more detail can also be seen as a social and cultural atmosphere in the Southern Dynasties that encouraged women to be literate and intelligent or at least idealized upper-class women with these qualities.

Such encouraging social and cultural atmosphere for literate and educated women can also be seen in the dynastic histories of the Southern Dynasties. Although the official dynastic histories of the Southern Dynasties do not contain a chapter specially dedicated to the biographies of women like the "Lienü zhuan" in the *Jinshu*, the ethos of women in the Southern Dynasties can still be perceived through the mentions of relevant women within the biographies of male historical figures as well as the biographies of imperial consorts and concubines.

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<sup>25</sup> Li Peidong 李培棟, "Jinshu yanjiu" 《晉書》研究(上), *Shanghai shifan xueyuan xuebao* 上海師範大學學報, no.2 (1984), 69.

<sup>26</sup> Wu Zhuzhu 吳鈺鈺, "Jinshu de bianshu shijian, zuozhe ji yuqi youguan de jige wenti" 《晉書》的編書時間, 作者及與其有關的幾個問題, *Fujian xuekan* 福建學刊, no.3 (1992), 61.

In addition to highly literate and intelligent women appearing in male historical figures' biographies now and then,<sup>27</sup> what is noticeable in the dynastic histories of the Southern Dynasties is a group of imperial ladies with exquisite literary skills. Some of them could even match with their male counterparts, especially imperial ladies in the Liang and Chen Dynasties.<sup>28</sup> According to the *Liangshu*, “Empress Xi 郗皇后, the consort of Emperor Wu, was bright and intelligent since childhood; she was good at clerical script and read history books 后幼而明慧，善隸書，讀史傳。” Another consort of Emperor Wu, Imperial Concubine Ding 丁貴嬪 who gave birth to Xiao Tong and Xiao Gang 蕭綱, was said to master numerous Buddhist sutras and was especially adept at *Vimalakirti Sutra*, and she was also the wirepuller of almost all those compilations of sutras commissioned by Emperor Wu.<sup>29</sup> In the *Chenshu*, it is recorded that Empress Zhang 章皇后, the consort of the founding emperor of Chen, “was skillful at literature and mathematics and she could recite *The Book of Songs* and *Lyrics of Chu* 后善書計，能誦詩及楚辭。” Empress

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<sup>27</sup> E.g., in the *Nanqi shu*, Wang Rong's 王融 mother was said to be “a sincere and smart woman who taught Wang Rong classics. 惇敏婦人也。教融書學。” Within the eulogy for the mother of Wang Sengbian 王僧辯, Madam Wei, in the *Liangshu*, it describes Madam Wei as “reading and viewing books and paintings while studying and discussing poetry and prose 書畫鏡覽，辭章討論。” The biography of Xie Zhen 謝貞 in the *Chenshu* records that his mother, Madam Wang, taught him *The Analects* and *Classic of Filial Piety* 孝經. Xiao Zixian 蕭子顯, *Nanqi shu* 南齊書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), 47.817; Yao Silian 姚思廉, *Liangshu* 梁書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), 45.631; Yao Silian 姚思廉, *Chenshu* 陳書, 32.426, *Scripts Sinica*.

<sup>28</sup> Despite the fact that the biographies of imperial consorts and concubines are usually filled with generalized formula of eulogizing or moral criticism, the distinctive characteristic of the Southern Dynasties imperial ladies is still noticeable within these seemingly generalized biographies.

<sup>29</sup> *Liangshu* 梁書, 7.157, 161.

Shen 潘皇后 was depicted as “clever and insightful and gifted with extraordinary memories. She not only widely read classics and histories but also excelled at writing 聰敏彊記, 涉獵經史, 工書翰;” after the death of the last emperor of Chen, she herself wrote an eulogy for him. And the last emperor of Chen also appointed those palace ladies with literary competence as “Lady Secretary 女學士.” Every time when there was a banquet, Lady Secretaries were invited to compose poems together with literati guests.<sup>30</sup>

The *Shishuo xinyu*, the *Jinshu*, and the official dynastic histories of the Southern Dynasties respectively are an anecdote collection on people in Han, Wei, Jin Dynasty written by an early Southern Dynasties literati, the history of Jin Dynasty compiled by a literati in the early and mid Southern Dynasties and reedited by late Southern Dynasties scholar officials, and the dynastic histories of the Southern Dynasties mainly edited by the late Southern Dynasties literati. In accordance with the anecdotes and historical records on women in these works, a broad picture of aristocratic women in the Six Dynasties as well as the transition of the ethos of women in this period can both been seen. While it was the ethos of the time in general for women to have various talents in the Six Dynasties, the women who drew the attention of the historians and literati in the early and mid Southern Dynasties were those ones distinguished themselves by their extraordinary wisdom and intelligence. Since the middle of the Southern Dynasties, there were increasingly more aristocratic women and palace ladies with particular competence in literary skills that were recorded in historical works. Thus, the ethos of women in the Six Dynasties saw

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<sup>30</sup> *Chenshu* 陳書, 7.126, 130, 132.

the transition of women being praised by various different talents and virtues to highly literary women gradually being valued the most.

### **The Education of Palace Ladies and *furen ji* Works**

The reasons for having such a group of palace ladies with exquisite literary skills in the Southern Dynasties are not just the influence and continuation of the tradition of educated aristocratic women in the Six Dynasties in general. It may also result from the Southern Dynasties rulers' attaching more importance to the education of palace ladies. Within the biography of Empress Pei 裴皇后 in the *Nanqi shu*, a story of Han Lanying is attached:

吳郡韓藺英，婦人有文辭。宋孝武世，獻中興賦，被賞入宮。〔宋〕明帝世，用為宮中職僚。世祖以為博士，教六宮書學，以其年老多識，呼為「韓公」。

Han Lanying from Prefecture of Wu was a lady excelling in writing. During the reign of Xiaowu Emperor of Song, she presented *Rhapsody on Restoration* and was rewarded by entering the palace. During the reign of Emperor Ming of Song, she was appointed as an official in the palace. The Founding Emperor of Qi conferred Han Lanying the title of Erudite and asked her to teach palace women writing and learning. As she was advanced in age and extremely knowledgeable, people called her Lord Han.<sup>31</sup>

Also, Zhang Shuai's 張率 biography mentions that "[Emperor Wu of Liang] ordered Zhang Shuai to copy histories and compile twenty-some stories on women, which were a hundred volumes in total. And he had them transcribed by skilled calligraphers like Wang Shen from Langye and Fan Huaiyue and Chu Xun from Wu Prefecture in order to distribute them to palace ladies 使抄乙部書，又使撰婦人事二十餘條，勒成百卷，使工書人琅邪王深、吳郡范懷約、褚洵等繕寫，以給後宮."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *Nanqi shu* 南齊書, 20.392.

<sup>32</sup> *Liangshu* 梁書, 33.475.



Zhang Shuai's compilation for the education of palace ladies was not a single case of the Southern Dynasties literati officials' compiling literature collections for women. In fact, historical records indicates that at least a number of *furen ji* 婦人集 ("Collection on Women") like this were produced in that period. Xu Mian 徐勉, a high ranking official and renowned literatus in the court of Emperor Wu of Liang, also compiled a *furen ji* in ten volumes.<sup>33</sup> And according to "Bibliographical Treatise" (Jingji zhi 經籍志) in the *Suishu* 隋書, during the Southern Dynasties, there were *Furen ji* in thirty volumes compiled by Yin Chun 殷淳, other three *Furen ji* by anonymous authors in twenty, eleven, and two volumes respectively, and *Zawen* 雜文 ("Mischievous Writing") in sixteen volumes which is specially notified that it was written for women.<sup>34</sup> These *furen ji* works are listed all together within "Jingji zhi 經籍志," but only *Zawen* in sixteen volumes has an annotation stating it was written for women. And the reason of this is: it probably was already a common sense at the time that a work with a title like *furen ji* was supposed to be written for women, so it is unnecessary to further state whom these *furen ji* works were written for; while *Zawen* in sixteen volumes does not have a typical *furen ji* title, the editor then added an annotation to indicate its potential readers.<sup>35</sup>

Although none of these works listed above has survived till nowadays, their content can still be perceived by the excerpts embedded in other works as well as a few subtle clues left in historical records. As the above mentioned quotation in Zhang Shuai's biography in the *Liangshu*,

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 25.387.

<sup>34</sup> Wei Zheng 魏徵, *Suishu* 隋書, 35. 1082. Scripta Sinica.

<sup>35</sup> Xu Yunhe 許雲和, "Nanchao gongjiao yu Yutai xinyong" 南朝宮教與玉臺新詠, *Wenxian* 文獻, no.3 (1997), 20.

the work compiled for palace ladies to read, which Emperor Wu commissioned him to compile, consists of histories and stories on women. Also, within Liu Xiaobiao's 劉孝標 annotation of "Worthy Ladies" in the *Shishuo xinyu*, his quotations of stories on women often start with "*furen ji* says 婦人集曰" or "*furen ji* records 婦人集載."<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, the *furen ji* work compiled by Yin Chun is recorded as the name of *Furen ji* 婦人集 in "Bibliographical Treatise" in the *Suishu* but the name of the work is changed to *Furen shiji* 婦人詩集 in *Comprehensive Treatises* (*Tongzhi* 通志) and is categorized under the section of "Poetry Collective Works" (*Shi zongji* 詩總集); and another *Furen shiji* compiled by Yan Jun 顏竣, a literati official in the Liu Song Dynasty, is also listed side by side with Yin Chun's work in the same section in the *Tongzhi*.<sup>37</sup> Both the record of these two *Furen shiji* and the name change of Yin Chun's *furen ji* work indicate that poetry or, to be exact, poetry on women is the content of the Southern Dynasties *furen ji* works as well.

### The Preface of *Yutai xinyong* and the Intention of Compilation

As it was not a rare practice for the Southern Dynasties literati to compile *furen ji* works with the content of poetry and stories on women for female readers, the preface of Xu Ling's *Yutai xinyong*, from many aspects, also manifests that the *Yutai xinyong* probably was also compiled as a *furen ji* work for palace ladies to read.

玉臺新詠序<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>37</sup> Zheng Qiao 鄭樵, *Tongzhi* 通志 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 2000), 70.825.

<sup>38</sup> Xu Ling 徐陵, *Yutai xinyong jianzhu* 玉臺新詠箋注, edited by Wu Zhaoyi 吳兆宜 and Cheng Yan 程琰 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 11-13.

“The Preface of the *Yutai xinyong*”

夫凌雲概日，由余之所未窺；千戶萬門，張衡之所曾賦。周王璧台之上，漢帝金屋之中，玉樹以珊瑚作枝，珠簾以玳瑁爲押。其中有麗人焉。其人也，五陵豪族，充選掖庭；四姓良家，馳名永巷。亦有穎川，新市，河間，觀津，本號嬌娥，曾名巧笑。楚王宮里，無不推其細腰；衛國佳人，俱言訝其纖手。閱詩敦禮，豈東鄰之自媒；婉約風流，異西施之被教。弟兄協律，生小學歌；少長河陽，由來能舞。琵琶新曲，無待石崇；箜篌雜引，非關曹植。傳鼓瑟於楊家，得吹簫於秦女。

[The palaces] reach the clouds, those which You Yu has never even glimpsed;<sup>39</sup> thousands upon thousands of doors that Zhang Heng has written about in his rhapsody.<sup>40</sup> On the rampart terraces the Zhou kings and in the golden chamber of the Han emperor,<sup>41</sup> the branches of the jade trees are made with corals; the beaded curtains are made of turtle shells; Inside there are fair ladies. These ladies are from the powerful families of “Five Cemeteries” that have been selected into the imperial harem,<sup>42</sup> the ones coming from the prominent families of “Four Surnames” and who are well-known in the wing lane [of the palace].<sup>43</sup> Also, there are the ones from Yingchuan, Xinshi, Hejian, and Guanjin,<sup>44</sup> and the

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<sup>39</sup> You Yu once visited the Qin state as the envoy of the king of “Western Barbarian” 西戎. In order to persuade You Yu to stay and serve for the Qin, Duke Mu of Qin took him to see magnificent palaces to show him the power of the Qin.

<sup>40</sup> In Zhang Heng’s “Xijing fu” 西京賦, he uses the phrase “門千戶萬” to describe the magnificence of the palaces in Chang’an.

<sup>41</sup> During the Zhou dynasties, both the Zhou kings and the regional rulers were fond of the high terraces. Many high terraces were commissioned by the kings and dukes at that time, and the kings and dukes often competed with each other for the height of the terrace which is also a symbol of power. The golden chamber of the Han emperor refers to the story that Emperor Wu of Han promised to build a golden house for Empress Chen if he could marry her.

<sup>42</sup> “Five Cemeteries” refer to the cemeteries of Emperor Gao, Emperor Hui, Emperor Jing, Emperor Wu, and Emperor Zhao of the Han Dynasty. Every time the cemetery of a deceased Han emperor was built, the imperial relatives and wealthy families were ordered to move to the area (the practice was discontinued since the reign of Emperor Yuan of the Han). Thus, “Five Cemeteries” later became a designation for powerful and wealthy families.

<sup>43</sup> Since the Han Dynasty, people often liked to group the most powerful four families at the time as “Four Surnames,” The so-called “Four Surnames” in every generation was all different, and it later also became a general reference to the renowned families.

<sup>44</sup> Yingchuan, Xinshi, Hejian, and Guanjin were all famous for their beautiful women in the Han Dynasty, and many Han empresses and consorts were from these places.

ones whom used to be called “Delicate Maid” and the ones whom was once named “Radiant Smile.” In the palace of the kings of the Chu, no one does not praise their slender waists; the beautiful women in the Kingdom of Wei are all surprised by their fair and delicate hands.<sup>45</sup> They read poetry and follow the rites. How could the maid of the neighbor to the east, who proposed herself for love match, be compared with them?<sup>46</sup> They are [naturally] lovely and graceful, charming and amorous — different from Xishi who had been taught etiquette and manners.<sup>47</sup> Either they have brothers, who [are able to] harmonize the tones of music, and, since childhood, learned to sing; or they grew up at [a place like] the house of Princess Heyang and are always skillful at dancing.<sup>48</sup> [They play] new songs on the pipa and do not have to wait for [the praise from] Shi Chong.<sup>49</sup> [They perform] various melodies on the konghou and [these melodies] have nothing to do with Cao Zhi.<sup>50</sup> They have inherited the skill of playing the zither from the Yang family and have learnt to play flute from the Qin girl.<sup>51</sup>

至若寵聞長樂，陳後知而不平；畫出天仙，闕氏覽而遙妬。至如東鄰巧笑，來侍寢于更衣；西子微顰，得橫陳於甲帳。陪游馭娑，騁纖腰於結風；長樂鴛鴦，奏新聲於度曲。妝鳴蟬之薄鬢，照墮馬之垂鬟。反插金鈿，橫抽寶樹。南都石黛，最發雙蛾；北地燕

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<sup>45</sup> As the kings in the Chu state favored women with slender waists, ladies in the palace of the Chu all strived to achieve slender waists and some of them even ended with dying from hunger. The consort of the Duke Zhuang of the Wei, 庄姜, was said to have extremely fair and delicate hands which is also depicted in ode entitled “Shuoren” 碩人 in *The Book of the Songs*.

<sup>46</sup> In Song Yu’s 宋玉 “Dengtuzi haose fu” 登徒子好色賦, he depicts a beautiful woman, a neighbor to the east, who peeped at the persona over the wall for three years.

<sup>47</sup> Before Xishi was sent to the state of Wu, the king of Yue had her trained in various musical skills and etiquettes.

<sup>48</sup> Having brothers who are able to harmonize the tones refers to Lady Li whose brother is Li Yannian 李延年. Growing up at the house of Princess Heyang refers to Zhao Feiyan 趙飛燕.

<sup>49</sup> In his “Wang Zhaojun ci” 王昭君辭, Shi Chong praises the pipa songs that were played by Princess Wusun 烏孫公主 (Liu Xijun 劉細君) when she was on her way to Wusun.

<sup>50</sup> There were a number of *yuefu* lyrics called “Konghou yin” 箏篴引 at that time, and Cao Zhi’s “Konghou yin” was the most famous one in the Six Dynasties period.

<sup>51</sup> Yang Yun 楊惲 was an official in the Western Han Dynasty. His family was originally from the state of Qin and he can sing the Qin songs. His wife was from the state of Zhao and was good at playing zither. For the Qin girl, it refers to Nongyu 弄玉, the daughter of the Duke Mu of Qin. Nongyu was so skillful at playing flute that the sound of her flute sounded like the singing of the phoenix. In the end, she flew away to the sky with the phoenix.

脂，偏開兩靨。亦有嶺上仙童，分丸魏帝；腰中寶鳳，授曆軒轅。金星將婺女爭華，麝月與嫦娥競爽。驚鸞冶袖，時飄韓椽之香；飛燕長裾，宜結陳王之珮。雖非圖畫，入甘泉而不分；言異神仙，戲陽臺而無別。真可謂傾國傾城，無對無雙者也。

If the favour [that these ladies receive] were heard at the Palace of Eternal Joy, Empress Chen would not be appeased by knowing it.<sup>52</sup> [They are alike] the goddesses from a painting, so that Yanzhi would be jealous from afar if she were to see them.<sup>53</sup> They could be as the maid of Dongling with her radiant smile or as [Lady Wei Zifu] who got to serve the emperor when she helped him change his clothes. They are as Xishi, slightly knitting her eyebrows,<sup>54</sup> or like the beauties lying within the tent [of Emperor Wu of Han]. Accompanying [the emperor] to tour in the Palace of Sasuo, together they sway their slender waists to *The Song of Tying the Wind*; in the Palace of Eternal Joy and the Hall of Mandarin Duck, they sing and perform new tunes according to the score. They style their hair, thinly to their temples, like that of the crying cicada; drooping hair is rolled into buns, as if falling from a horse. Golden hairpins are placed from bottom to top while “jewellery tree” sprouts horizontally.<sup>55</sup> The graphite from “Southern Capital” highlights their moth brows. The rouge from “Northern Land” blooms on the side of their cheeks. Also, there is the immortal boy giving [these ladies] elixir pills that were received by the emperor of the Wei.<sup>56</sup> The phoenixes embroidered on their waistline are the ones passing

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<sup>52</sup> Palace of Eternal Joy was the palace for Empress Dowager in the Han Dynasty. As Empress Chen was raised by Empress Dowager Dou, she was growing up in Palace of Eternal Joy.

<sup>53</sup> Yanzhi is the title for the consort of Xiongnu king. When Emperor Gao of Han once was besieged by Xiongnu troops, Chen Ping 陳平 took a painting of a beautiful woman to see Yanzhi and told her that Emperor Gao decided to send this woman to Xiongnu king to seek truce. Yanzhi was afraid of losing Xiongnu king's favor and, thus, persuaded the king to withdraw the troops.

<sup>54</sup> As Xishi had heart disease, she often suffered from chest pains. And people found that she was even more attractive when she knitted her eyebrows because of pain.

<sup>55</sup> “Jewellery tree” refers to a particular type of hair accessory called *buyao* 步搖. It has a larger base piece with many smaller tree branch-like pieces attached on it (*Hou Hanshu* 後漢書, 110.3676).

<sup>56</sup> In his “Zhe Yangliu xing” 折楊柳行, Cao Pi 曹丕 writes that the personal is given a elixir pill by an immortal boy and then his body becomes light enough to fly as roaming immortals.

on music to Yellow Emperor.<sup>57</sup> The slender of the golden stars [on their faces] compete with that of the star of Girl Mansion; the musky moon [on their faces] contends with Chang'e for brightness.<sup>58</sup> Their dazzling sleeves are flying as if the startled luan-birds while the incense of Han Shou is wafting now and then;<sup>59</sup> their long dresses are like flying swallows and the jade of Prince of Chen is perfect for tying to [their dresses].<sup>60</sup> Although not [the lady] on the painting, no one would tell the difference if they were in the Palace of Sweet Spring;<sup>61</sup> although not the goddess, there would be no difference if they were playing on the Terrace of Sunlit.<sup>62</sup> It may be said that [their beauty] can ruin a city and overthrow a state,<sup>63</sup> while they are unrivalled and unparalleled.

加以天時開朗，逸思雕華，妙解文章，尤工詩賦。瑠璃硯匣，終日隨身；翡翠筆牀，無時離手。清文滿篋，非惟芍藥之花；新制連篇，寧止蒲萄之樹。九日登高，時有緣情之作；萬年公主，非無累德之辭。其佳麗也如彼，其才情也如此。

Also, their nature is obliging, their thoughts are graceful and elegant. They expound proses exquisitely and are especially skillful at poetry and rhapsody. All day long they carry glaze ink-stone boxes with them; the emerald brush stands are never out of their hands. Pure and refined writings fill in the chest, which are not just of peony flower, but

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<sup>57</sup> In order to create musical system, Yellow Emperor ordered Ling Lun 伶倫 to construct bamboo pipes that can capture the singing of the phoenix.

<sup>58</sup> Golden stars and musky moon in this sentence refer to the star and moon shape face decoration; a number of Southern Dynasties poems on women mention this type of face decoration, which seems to be the makeup fashion of the time (Huang Wei, "Jinxing Sheyue zhi shenme," 94-5).

<sup>59</sup> Han Shou had an affair with Jia Wu 賈午, the daughter of Jia Chong 賈充, in secret, and Jia Wu gave Han Shou a special incense which was actually the emperor's gift to Jia Chong. When Jia Chong discovered the affair, he married his daughter to Han Shou.

<sup>60</sup> Princess of Chen refers to Cao Zhi. In his "Luoshen fu" 洛神賦, the persona presents his jade girdle to the goddess as the pledge of love.

<sup>61</sup> After Mandam Li passed away, Emperor Wu of Han ordered her portrait to be painted and hung in the Palace of Sweet Spring (*Hanshu* 漢書, 97.3951).

<sup>62</sup> In Song Yu's 高唐賦, the goddess tells Chu king that she lives at the Terrace of Sunlit.

<sup>63</sup> In Li Yannian's "Geshi" 歌詩, he depicts the female protagonist as "一顧傾人城，再顧傾人國 (One glance, a man's city would be toppled. Another glance, his kingdom would fall.)"

of new works which are produced one after another and are not limited to the grape tree.<sup>64</sup> Climbing a high mountain on the the ninth day [of the ninth month], they always write compositions to express their emotions;<sup>65</sup> [if it was at the time of] Princess Wannian, they would not fail to compose a work that is full of virtue.<sup>66</sup> Their outstanding beauty is like that (of the above-mentioned) while their brilliant talent is like this.

既而椒宮宛轉，柘館陰岑，絳鶴晨嚴，銅蠡晝靜。三星未夕，不事懷衾；五日猶賒，誰能理曲。優游少託，寂寞多閑。厭長樂之疏鍾，勞中宮之緩箭。織腰無力，怯南陽之搗衣；生長深宮，笑扶風之織錦。雖複投壺玉女，爲觀盡於百驍；爭博齊姬，心賞窮於六箸。無怡神於暇景，惟屬意於新詩。庶得代彼皋蘇，微蠲愁疾。

Soon [they found that] the palace [painted by the pigment of] paper seeds is twisty and meandering and the mansions built with arbor are deep and serene. [The palace gates are painted with] crimson cranes are shut tightly in the morning while the bronze bases [of the door handles] are silent during the day. Before the “Triple Stars” appear at night, the ladies cannot carry the quilt [to serve the emperor].<sup>67</sup> Even a five-day [wait] is still too long, how could they [concentrate] to practice music. They live in a life of leisure but lack company; they have much free time but are lonely. They weary of the scattered ringing of the bell, which comes from the Palace of Eternal Joy; the arms of the clock in the Central Palace worry them as time moves slowly. As their slender waists are powerless, they fear to be like the girls of Nanyang whom beat and wash clothes; as they live in the deep palace, they laugh at the lady from Fufeng waving the brocade.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, they are like the

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<sup>64</sup> In the poem “Zhen Wei” 溱洧 from *Book of Songs*, peony flower is used as a token of love. In the poem “Nanyuan feng meiren” 南苑逢美人 by He Sicheng 何思澄 (included in *Yutai xinyong*, the grapevine is used as a metaphor to depict the belt of the dress worn by the personal.

<sup>65</sup> In ancient China, it was a custom to hike, drink, and compose poetry on the ninth day of the ninth month.

<sup>66</sup> When Princess Wannian passed away, Zuo Fen composed a graceful eulogy for her under the commission of the emperor (*Jinshu*, 31.962).

<sup>67</sup> According to “Choumo” 綢繆 and “Xiaoxing” 小星 in *Book of Songs* respectively, the night that has “Triple Stars” on the sky is the time to meet with lover while the action of carrying the quilt refers to serving the ruler.

<sup>68</sup> Beating clothes to wash is often used as an imagery of women longing for their lovers afar in classic poetry, and Xie Tiao 謝朓 writes about a girl from Nanyang are beating clothes at night while longing for her lover in his “Qiuye” 秋夜 (included in *Yutai xinyong*); the lady from Fufeng refers to Lady Su who wrote palindrome poem to express her longing toward her husband, Dou Tao 竇滔.

Jade Maiden playing pitch-pot and end the game by hitting the target hundreds of times;<sup>69</sup> or they are like the ladies from the Qi state who all try to play the chess but exhaust their minds over the chessboard.<sup>70</sup> None [of these activities] refresh their spirit during their free time, they prefer only new poems. Let me find the *gaosu* wood for them to slightly relieve them of their distress.<sup>71</sup>

但往世名篇，當今巧製，分諸麟閣，散在鴻都。不籍篇章，無由披覽。於是燃脂暝寫，弄筆晨書，撰錄豔歌，凡爲十卷。曾無忝與雅頌，亦靡濫於風人。涇渭之間，若斯而已。於是麗以金箱，裝之寶軸。三臺妙跡，龍伸蠖屈之書；五色花箋，河北膠東之紙。高樓紅粉，仍定魯魚之文；辟惡生香，聊防羽陵之蠹。靈飛六甲，高擅玉函；鴻烈仙方，長推丹枕。

But all the famous works of the past and ingenious productions of these days are scattered in the Pavilion of Unicorn and the Gate of Hongdu.<sup>72</sup> If these writings are not collected, there is no way [for the ladies of the palace] to read them. Thus, I light a candle to write at night. In the morning, I play (write) with the pen and compose; I compile and copy down these love songs, which are all together ten volumes. [Although these songs] do not match the Odes and Hymns or [their styles], they are still the popular styles that the poets [of *Shijing* often adopt]. The differences [with the poems in the past] and the scales of these poems are just like this. Thereupon, [this poetry collection] is made beautiful within a golden chest and bound with a jewelled shaft. The exquisite calligraphy [in the collection] is like the one from Cai Yong — the handwriting is expended as a dragon and swirled like a worm;<sup>73</sup> the patterned papers are of five colors and are from Jiaodong area in Hebei. Rouge and powder in the high towers, thus, are used to revise the character *lu* or *yu* in the

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<sup>69</sup> The Jade Maidens are the companions of the goddesses on Kunlun 崑崙, and the King Father of the East liked playing the game of pitch-pot with a Jade Maiden.

<sup>70</sup> Linzi 臨淄, the capital of the Qi state, once was a wealthy and prosperous city. It was said that the residents of Linzi all had the leisure to play the flute, lute, zither, watch cockfights and dog races, and play chess and soccer.

<sup>71</sup> *Gaosu* wood is said to contain sweet nectar. Whoever drinks it will not feel hungry anymore and all the worries of the person will be gone as well.

<sup>72</sup> Both the Pavilion of Unicorn and the Gate of Hongdu are the locations of imperial libraries in the Han Dynasty.

<sup>73</sup> 三臺 originally refers to *shangshu* 尚書, *yushi* 御史, *yezhe* 謁者. But it refers to Cai Yong 蔡邕 in this case. Cai Yong was a highly-recognized calligrapher at that time and once he was appointed for these three positions one after another within three days (*Hou Hanshu*, 60.2005).



writing;<sup>74</sup> the fragrance of rue expels miasma and prevents the worms of Yuling. [This collection is as if] “The Flying Spirits of the Six *Jia*” occupying the jade book alone;<sup>75</sup> [or, it is as if] the immortal prescriptions of Honglie being stored inside the red pillow.<sup>76</sup>

至如青牛帳裏，餘曲既終；朱鳥窗前，新妝已竟。方當開茲縹帙，散此緇繩。永對翫於書帷，長循環於纖手。豈如鄧學《春秋》，儒者之功難習；寶專黃老，金丹之術不成。因勝西蜀豪家，託情窮於魯殿；東儲甲觀，流詠止于洞蕭。變彼諸姬，聊同棄日。猗歎彤管，無或譏焉。

Inside the curtain of the Cyan Ox, the last songs have ended;<sup>77</sup> in front of the window of “Vermillion Birds,” new makeup has already been applied [to the ladies].<sup>78</sup> It is time for [the palace ladies] to open these azure volumes and unlace their silk ribbons. They enjoy this book for a long time and the book is always circulated among their slender hands. It is nothing similar to Empress Deng studying *The Spring and Autumn Annals*, even though the learning of Confucius is hard to command. Or Empress Dou focused on the Yellow Emperor and Laozi and failed at the art of making the golden elixirs. And this collection surpasses [the deeds of] the powerful family of Western Shu which projected all the sentiment into the Hall of Lu;<sup>79</sup> The Prime Tower of the heir apparent only kept [the

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<sup>74</sup> As the character *lu* 魯 and *yu* 魚 looks similar, they are often mistaken. So 定魯魚 means proofreading and revising.

<sup>75</sup> According to *Han wudi neizhuan* 漢武帝內傳, Lady Shangyuan 上元夫人 taught Emperor Wu “The Method the Flying Spirits of the Six *Jia*” and the method was written on a jade book with eight colors.

<sup>76</sup> The immortal prescriptions of Honglie refers to *Huainan zi* 淮南子, since the book is also called *Huainan honglie* 淮南鴻烈 and filled with Daoist ideologies.

<sup>77</sup> Cyan ox originally refers to Laozi 老子 who is said to ride on a cyan ox to depart from Han’gu Pass. Later it is also used to refer to immortals in general.

<sup>78</sup> “Vermillion Birds” are seven stars in the south. Thus, the window of “Vermillion Birds” means the window facing the south.

<sup>79</sup> Liu Yan 劉琰, a high rank official in Western Shu, had dozens of singing girls in his house and these singing girls were taught to recite “Lu lingguang dian fu” 魯靈光殿賦 (*San’guo zhi* 三國志, 40.1001).

palace ladies] reciting “The Rhapsody on Bamboo Flute.”<sup>80</sup> These fair ladies pass the time [with this poetry collection]. Oh, the Red Brush probably will not ridicule them!<sup>81</sup>

The preface starts with describing the setting of the inner palace by mentioning You Yu’s visit to the Qin palaces and Zhang Heng’s rhapsody on the Han palaces. The deeds of You Yu and Zhang Heng can be seen as literati’s physical or literary venture into the inner palace, which echoes with deeds of the compiler of the *Yutai xinyong* and some of the poets being selected into the collection — compiling a poetry anthology dedicated to palace ladies and writing poems on palace ladies. When the compiler turns to introduce and depict these palace ladies, he, however, stresses the ownership of these ladies belongs to the ruler by stating that these ladies are living on the Rampart Terrace of Zhou king and in the Golden Chamber of Han emperor. Thus, the compiler clarifies himself and sets up the tone of the compilation as a literary venture into the inner palace with no offence right from the beginning of the preface.

Then the preface presents a detailed portrayal of the beautiful women 麗人 within the inner palace. These are a group of women with fair look, gentle disposition, and extraordinary musical skills, and they try to find different ways to idle away their time while waiting for the call of the emperor. This juxtaposes with the poems included in the *Yutai Xinyong*, since “abandoned lady” longing for her lover and gorgeous-looking female music entertainer are two dominant themes in the *Yutai Xinyong* poems. And almost all the allegorical motifs and imagery that are used to describe palace ladies in the preface frequently appear in the anthologized poems as well.

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<sup>80</sup> The Prime Tower was the name of heir apparent’s palace in the Han Dynasty. When Emperor Yuan of Han was still heir apparent, he ordered the ladies in his palace to recite Wang Bao’s 王褒 “Dongxiao fu” 洞簫賦 (*Hanshu*, 64.2829).

<sup>81</sup> The Red Brush refers to women historians in ancient time, as they used red-tube brush to record history.

These allegorical motifs and imagery include: “Delicate Maid,” “Radiant Smile,” slender waist in the Chu palace, delicate hands of the Wei state, the maid of Dongling, Xishi, Lady Li, Zhao Feiyan, the Qin girl playing flute, Empress Chen in the Palace of Eternal Joy, Wei Zifu changing clothes for Emperor Wu, swinging the slender waist, hair temple in the style crying cicada, hair bun of falling from the saddle, moth brows, rouge blooming on the side of their cheeks, the flying of the sleeves, the wafting of the fragrance, dress as if flying swallows, lady on the painting in the Palace of Sweet Spring, and the goddess on the Terrace of Sunlit. While the middle of the second paragraph in the preface depicts the palace ladies as music entertainers, the depiction focuses on their makeup, adornment, and the motion of clothes — which is also a commonly used means of expression in poems on female entertainers anthologized in the *Yutai Xinyong*. To some extent, the depiction of “beautiful women” in the preface is a summary of the epitomes of women in those anthologized poems.

After depicting their gorgeous look and musical talents, the compiler indicates that these palace ladies also have exquisite literate skills. Even though they are good at those common entertainments of idling time like playing pitch-pot and chess, they still prefer reading new poems to pass time when facing the quiet and boring life in the palace. And that is why the compiler composes this poetry collection which is intended to “slightly relieve their distress.” According to Xu Yunhe’s study of the preface, the parallel between reading new poems and playing pitch-pot and chess in the preface shows that the *Yutai xinyong*, as a poetry collection for palace ladies to read, functions as a pacifier, like the behaviour of gambling and chess-playing discussed in *The Analects*. Within the “Yanghuo” 陽貨, Confucius says “Stuff yourself with food all day, never give your mind anything to do, and you’re a problem! There’s chess, isn’t there? There’s weiqi,

isn't there?— wiser at least to busy yourself with these.” 飽食終日，無所用心，難矣哉！不有博奕者乎？為之猶賢乎已。And Xing Bing's 刑昺 commentary in the *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經注疏 further explains: “For those ones who stuff themselves with food all day and have nothing to entertain themselves, it is easy for the lust to grow up. Therefore, Confucius instructs them and says: ‘Are there not people gambling and playing chess for entertainment?’ Even if they do these things, it is still better than doing nothing. Confucius wants them to take these things as entertainment and, thus, they will not grow their mind for lust.” 夫子為其飽食之之，無所據樂，善生淫欲，故教之曰：“不有博奕之戲者乎？”若其為之猶勝乎止也，欲令據此為樂，則不生淫欲也。 If gambling and playing chess are acceptable means of preventing the growth of lust in Confucianism, then reading poetry, despite love poetry, is surely an acceptable solution as well or even a better one. Moreover, such parallel and comparison between poetry and gambling and chess-playing was not initiated by Xu Ling. It has already existed as early as Emperor Wen of Han. While Emperor Wen were criticized by officials for spending too much time on composing poetry with literati like Wang Bao 王褒 and Zhang Ziqiao 張子僑, he replied by quoting Confucius words: “Are there not people gambling and playing chess? These are better than [doing nothing].” Also, Xiao Tong 蕭統, Zhong Rong 鍾嶸, Liu Xie 劉勰 Shen Yue 沈約 all express similar argument in terms of the function of literature, which indicates that it was a common thought in the Southern Dynasties.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, the parallel between reading new poems and playing pitch-pot and chess in the preface of the *Yutai xinyong* states that the compilation of

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<sup>82</sup> Xu Yunhe, “Nanchao gongjiao yu *Yutai xinyong*,” 24-5; The translation of the excerpt from the “Yanghuo” is Burton Watson’s translation: Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 124.

this poetry collection not only aims at catering to a group of highly literary palace women's wishes for new poetry readings but also functions as a pacifier for the palace ladies' boring life in the inner palace so as to prevent their "distress" 愁疾 from turning to something morally disastrous.

Following the intention of compilation, the preface then talks about how the anthology is compiled and how the book itself is adorned. The compiler collects and selects poems from various works located in different places, and the anthology is hand-copied by excellent calligraphers of the time and adorned with exquisite decorations. What is noticeable in this paragraph are the lines "Rouge and powder in the high towers, thus, are used to revise character *lu* or *yu* in the writing" and "[it is as if ] the immortal prescriptions of Honglie being stored inside the red pillow." While the line of "rouge and powder in the high towers" indicates that there are palace ladies coordinating with the compiler and participating in the editing of the anthology, the line of "the immortal prescriptions of Honglie" shows that the work is favoured and cherished by the palace ladies so much that they store it in the pillow — as if treating precious immortal prescriptions. Although some scholars propose that palace ladies in these two lines or the female personas in the preface in general can be an allegorical usage referring to the male compiler himself or male poets included in the anthology,<sup>83</sup> a careful look at the rites in ancient Chinese court and inner palace will deny such hypothesis. As mentioned earlier in the introduction, Zhang Peiheng points out that it was always a rigid taboo for court officials to be in association with palace ladies in ancient China, which would usually lead to death penalty.<sup>84</sup> Within the "Junchen"

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<sup>83</sup> e.g. Paul Rouzer, *Articulated Ladies*, 117-56.

<sup>84</sup> Zhang Peiheng, "Yutai xinyong wei Zhang Lihua suo zhuanlu kao."

君臣 in the *Guanzi* 管子, it clearly states that “The inner palace and the outside should not be connected.....all the ministers and their families should have no association with the inner palace” 中外不通.....而諸臣子弟無宮中之交.<sup>85</sup> In *Zhouli* 周禮, it also says that “when anything in the inner palace has to be conveyed to the officials outside, Shifu will be the one in the charge” 凡內事有達于外官者, 世婦掌之.<sup>86</sup> And there were also examples of the Southern Dynasties officials paying severe price for associating with the inner palace. For instance, Guo Ju 郭舉, an official during the reign of Emperor Zhang of Liu Song, was executed on the spot when being seen to communicate with someone in the inner palace.<sup>87</sup> Thus, as Zhang Peiheng claims, it was almost impossible for Xu Ling, the attributed compiler who was an official in the court, to allegorically attribute the compilation and editing of the anthology to a palace lady. Even if he indeed needed to apply such female allegorical metaphors in the preface, he could safely choose women with any other identity rather than bear the high risk of being severely punished to choose to use palace ladies. So if the compiler dares to clearly states that there are palace ladies participating in the editing of the work and the work itself will be cherished by the palace ladies and stored in their pillows, it is most likely to be a realistic record and true description.

In addition, the line of “ the immortal prescriptions of Honglie being stored inside the red pillow” also echoes with the last line of previous paragraph — “Let me find the *gaosu* wood for them to slightly relieve their distress.” This poetry collection is as if the immortal prescription

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<sup>85</sup> Guan Zhong 管仲, *Guanzi* 管子. 31.539. Scripta Sinica.

<sup>86</sup> *Zhouli* 周禮, “Shifu” 世婦, 34, Scripta Sinica; Shifu 世婦 in this context refers to female officials in charge of curfew and rites in the inner palace.

<sup>87</sup> Shen Yue 沈約, *Songshu* 宋書, 39.1239. Scripta Sinica.

that relieves those palace ladies' distress. While having this anthology in their hands, they are no longer the ones wearying of the scattered ringing of the bell or the ones worrying the watch going slowly. Instead, they spend the time on reading and circulating this poetry collection on women and love after the banquet night or makeup morning. In the end, the compiler also contrasts the reading of love poetry collection with other women's palace education and literary activities in the past. He indicates the shortcoming of Empress Deng's studying Confucianism and Empress Dou's focusing on Daoism as well as points out the limited poems recited by women in the house of Liu Yan and Emperor Yuan. As Rouzer suggests, what the compiler means is "conventional Confucian and Taoist preoccupations are perhaps too weighty and ideal to task the 'practical' lady."<sup>88</sup> Then the compiler concludes the preface with the speculation that palace ladies' reading the *Yutai xinyong* is a palace education activity that probably will not be criticized by historians. Although he does not explicitly declare the *Yutai xinyong* surpasses all the above mentioned women's education methods, a statement of superiority of the anthology can already be perceived by that closing sentence. And having such a contrast and comparison between palace ladies' reading the *Yutai xinyong* and other women's education methods in the past at the very end of the preface also reaffirms that the *Yutai xinyong* is more likely to be an poetry anthology compiled for the purpose of palace ladies' education.

### **Coda**

Despite the fact that there are very limited extant sources regarding the Six Dynasties women and the biographies and stories of those women being included in the extant historical works may also be the result of the personal preference of the compilers, the ethos of women in

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<sup>88</sup> Rouzer, *Articulated Ladies*, 137.

that period can still, more or less, be perceived by these materials selected by compilers — most of whom had lived through that period themselves. While it was the ethos of the time in general for women to have various talents in the Six Dynasties, increasingly more women being included in the early Southern Dynasties historical works are the ones with wisdom and intelligence and the attention gradually shifts to women, especially aristocratic and palace women, with literary competence since the middle of the Southern Dynasties. Meanwhile, the Southern Dynasties rulers also attached more importance to the education of palace ladies and it was also a common practice of the time for scholar officials to compile *furen ji* works for women to read with the content of stories and poems on women. The *Yutai xinyong* was just compiled under such social and cultural environment, while the compiler himself, in the preface, also clearly states the purpose of the compilation as collecting a poetry anthology for palace ladies to read. And a careful analysis of the whole preface as well as the taboo between court official and palace ladies affirms that the *Yutai xinyong* was probably intended to be an poetry anthology for palace ladies to read at the time of its compilation.



### Chapter Three

#### “His Composition”: Poems on Female Entertainers by Male Poets

Although the *Yutai xinyong* was probably composed as a poetry collection for the education of palace ladies, the poems included in the anthology were not written for such purpose. In addition to a small number of poems attributed to women or anonymous poets, majority poems in the *Yutai xinyong* are poems on women written by male literati. And as the title, *New Songs from the Jade Terrace*, indicates, this is a poetry collection focuses on the so-called new songs, that is, lyrics composed during its contemporary Southern Dynasties period. Therefore, seven out of ten chapters in the *Yutai xinyong* are dedicated to the Southern Dynasties poems. A large number of these Southern Dynasties poems on women in the *Yutai xinyong* are categorized as the so-called palace-style poetry, which have been receiving criticism for their decadent nature from Tang Dynasty down to the twenty-first century among Chinese literati and scholars. However, are these Southern Dynasties male literati's poems on women indeed mischievous composition purely for the purpose of entertainment and leisure? Or, is the definition of decadent poetry is just an arbitrary judgment by the later generations, while these male literati's poems on women actually contains more complex purpose of composition and more profound underlying significance?

This chapter will explore such purpose of composition and underlying significance of these male literati's poems on women in the *Yutai xinyong* by examining a popularly adopted theme in the anthology — poems on female music entertainers. These poems are mainly about the dancers and singers performing in the court or at the residence of aristocrats, and quite a few of these poems belong to the category of the *yingling shi*, (應令詩, “poems written on

command”). The poets place great emphasis on the entertainers’ makeup, hair accessories, and ornaments on the clothes. Meanwhile, the dancing and singing skills of these music entertainers are another focus in the poems as well.

An example of these poems on female entertainers is as follows:

<p>詠歌姬<sup>89</sup> 江洪 寶鑷間珠花 分明靚妝點 薄鬢約微黃<sup>90</sup> 輕紅澹鉛臉 發言芳已馳 復加蘭蕙染 浮聲易傷嘆 沉唱安而險 孤轉忽徘徊 雙蛾乍舒斂 不持全示人 半用輕紗掩</p>	<p>Poem on a Singer Jiang Hong Jeweled hairpin divides pearl flowers. Clear and distinct, elaborate ornaments adorn her. Thin temples are painted with pale yellow. Light blush is tapped on her powdered face. Starting to talk, fragrance has already spread out. Besides, [the fragrant smell] is perfumed by orchid leaves. Her floating voice easily gives way to sad sighs. The low and deep singing is smooth but precarious. She, alone, turns back and all at once lingers. Pair of eyebrows suddenly relaxes and then knits. Not the whole of her is shown to the audience — she holds a piece of thin gauze to cover half of herself.</p>
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On the surface, this is just a poem with focused and detailed depiction of a singing girl. But when facing a Southern Dynasties palace-style poem on women like this one, the reader has to build up another world beyond what is described within the poem so as to approach the underlying significance of the poem. One alternative way to build up a world on top of the description in these poems, according to Anne Birrell, is to treat all those depictions of palatial scenery and court ladies as a “metonymic system”: Birrell points out that the reason why palace-

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<sup>89</sup> *Yutai xinyong jianzhu* 玉臺新詠箋注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 5.202-3. This poem has also been translated by Anne Birrell in *New Songs from a Jade Terrace* (page 148).

<sup>90</sup> 約微黃 or 約黃 refers to the ancient practice of painting patterns with yellow pigments on women’s face. It is also called 花黃, 額黃, 鵝黃, and 鴨黃.

style poets depict the palatial settings and women in very detail is to try to create a “surface reality;” and each of these detailed depictions contains its symbolic meaning while all the symbolic meanings together form a “metonymic system.”<sup>91</sup> In other words, the surface reality constructed by detailed and focused depictions in palace-style poetry actually intends to create another world of metonymic reality. Instead of being sensual and evocative metaphors, those detailed images of palaces and women actually are entry points to a sophisticated network of meanings. By deciphering and stringing these poetic images together, the ultimate underlying reality of the poem will then be revealed.

#### **At Banquet: Courtesan and / or Poet**

If trying to decode the metonymic system in these male literati’s poems on female entertainers, this exploration probably should start with examining the main characters within the poems. The entertainer herself is undoubtedly a main character in these poems. But, she is not the only one: the poet who observes and, of course, portrays the entertainer is another essential character and even the other protagonist. In fact, the poem is rather a poem about the poet’s observation and portrayal of an entertainer than a realistic depiction of the female entertainer. Thus, there is a gap or difference between the poet’s perception of the entertainer and the actual entertainer herself. In his *The Dance in Theory*, John Martin attributes peoples’ various perceptions towards dance and other performing arts to their various cultural and personal experiences, and he describes the process of understanding the performing art as a process of

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<sup>91</sup>Anne Birrell, *Games Poets Play* (Cambridge: McGuinness China Monographs, 2004), 3-4.

transforming the performance into an “assimilable stuff” in the spectator’s actual life.<sup>92</sup> Martin then further proposes that a conscious spectator will imitate the actor or the performer in his mind, which is given a terminology of “inner mimicry” by Martin. As a result, the spectator is no longer passively sitting there but actively participates in the performance; and the spectator somewhat forms a kind of synthesis with the performance as well as the performers.<sup>93</sup>

While Martin’s theory of dance is a highly conceptualized one which may apply to various spectators with diverse cultural and social background, Paul Rouzer’s exposition of the relation between the Southern Dynasties poets and the female protagonists in their poems narrows down the cultural and historical sphere of the spectators and pushes the discussion a step further. Rouzer thinks that most poems on female protagonists in Southern Dynasties represents a homosocial relation instead of a heterosexual relation between the poet and the female protagonist, since these kinds of poems were often composed in a public situation such as the banquet. As for that homosocial relation, Rouzer defines it as the relation between the rulers and their literati guests attending the banquet or the relation among those literati guests themselves.<sup>94</sup>

The the scene of the poetic composition at the banquet of the Southern Dynasties court can be sketched by piecing together by those fragmental records of palatial banquet and incidental mentions of banquet-related events in the official histories of the Southern Dynasties. At those banquets, emperor or prince together with literati poets first were watching the

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<sup>92</sup> John Joseph Martin, *The Dance in Theory* (Princeton, NJ : Princeton Book Co., 1989), 3-5; 23-4.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-23.

<sup>94</sup> Paul Rouzer, *Articulated Ladies: Gender and the Male Community in Early Chinese Texts* (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 2001), 11.

performance of the entertainers. In the latter part or the end of the banquet, the host and the guests started to compose poems as an amusement; the topics of their composition were often the music performance and the entertainers that they had just watched.<sup>95</sup>

In such imperial banquet setting, the role of the literati poets attending banquet and the entertainers performing at the banquet are somehow similar. Both the poets and the entertainers are the ones who provide pleasure for emperor during the banquet. A vivid example of how the role of poets in the court blurs with the role of entertainers is shown in the *Nanqi shu* 南齊書:

上曲宴群臣數人，各使效伎藝。褚淵彈琵琶，王僧虔彈琴，沈文季歌《子夜》，張敬兒舞，王敬則拍張。儉曰：“臣無所解，唯知誦書。”

When the emperor held a private banquet with several of his ministers, he asked the ministers to imitate courtesans' performing skills. Chu Yuan played pipa; Wang Sengqian played zither; Shen Wenji sang *The Song of Ziye*; Zhang Jing'er danced; Wang Jingze beat time for the performance. Wang Jian said: "I don't have any musical talent and the only thing I can do is reciting from books."<sup>96</sup>

Within this anecdote, every minister, except Wang Jian, demonstrates their musical competence, and they amuse the emperor just as what the court entertainers do. Although Wang Jian cannot play any instrument, his suggestion of replacing musical performance by reciting essays actually implies that a literati's literary competence corresponds to an entertainer's musical skill.

Moreover, there are also records of both the Southern Dynasties and pre-Southern Dynasties' literati scholars composing songs for music entertainers to sing. For instance, the

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<sup>95</sup> *Nanqi shu* 南齊書, 9.148-9; *Liangshu* 梁書, juan 8.166, 168, juan 35.512-3, juan 39.561-2, juan 41.582; *Chenshu* 陳書, 2.36.

<sup>96</sup> *Nanqi shu* 南齊書. 23.435. This story appears in Wang Jian's biography in the *Nanqi shu* and it may be an apocryphal anecdote. It is clearly set up to let Wang Jian distinguish himself as the serious statesmen, where the others are like court entertainers.

chapter on music in the *Nanqi shu* records that Jiang Yan 江淹 edited *ji geci* (妓歌詞, “Songs for Courtesans”) and literati in the house of Prince Jingling wrote a group of songs called *Yongping yuege* (永平樂歌, “Music Songs for Forever Peace”), while both Jiang Yan’s *ji geci* and *Yongping yuege* are indicated as songs intended to be performed at the imperial banquet.<sup>97</sup> Zhang Hua 張華 and Fu Xuan 傅玄 from the Jin Dynasty also composed a number of songs for dance and those songs were continued to be used at imperial banquet at least till the Qi Dynasty.<sup>98</sup> When courtesans sang and danced those songs at banquet, the literati guests were not just watching an entertaining music performance. Instead, they were listening and watching female courtesans who have been imprinted with literati’s own nature and are carrying out literati literary expression in a female voice.

### **The Power of Literary Competence**

While these literati attended imperial banquets and composed poems, their poetry composition is not simply an entertainment to liven up the atmosphere in the banquet. In fact, a Southern Dynasties court official’s literary skill, especially his poetic competence, also has something to do with his social status and career prospect. Quite a few literati biographies in the Southern Dynasties histories contain accounts in which their literary or poetic competence made them receive reward and career promotion.<sup>99</sup> And a record in the chapter of literature in the

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<sup>97</sup> *Nanqi shu* 南齊書, 11.196.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, 11.190-2.

<sup>99</sup> *Nanqi shu* 南齊書, juan 34.608, juan 41.730, juan 52.891, 894, 896, 906-7; *Liangshu* 梁書, juan 1.2, juan 8.165-6, juan 13.230, 233, 23.361, juan 27.402-4, 407, juan 33.469-71, 475, 480, 485, juan 41.582, 586, 591, juan 49.686-90, 693, 697-8; *Chenshu* 陳書, juan 16.223-6, juan 27.343-4, 348-9, juan 30.396-8, 400, juan 34. 454-6, 461-5, 469.

*Liangshu* even clearly states: all those literati officials with exquisite literary skill, who were introduced into the court of Emperor Wu, had received generous rewards from the emperor although their career promotion might not be at the exact same time.<sup>100</sup> Meanwhile, there are also cases of literary skills helping literati officials resume their official posts in the Southern Dynasties. One of the examples is Liu Xiaochuo 劉孝綽: Liu Xiaochuo was once dismissed from his post because of being reported to move into the new house with his concubine and leave his old mother at the old house; however, Liu Xiaochuo was still invited to attend palace banquets; once when Emperor Wu of Liang ordered literati to compose *jitian shi* (籍田詩 “Poem on the Plowing Ritual”), Liu’s work was the best among dozens of compositions; as a result, Emperor Wu granted him a new official post on the same day.<sup>101</sup> In Graham Sanders terms, a literati official’s literary and poetic competence was a means for him to “navigate” and “excel” in the elite society of the Southern Dynasties.<sup>102</sup>

In addition to showing off their literati skills for potential career promotion, attending and organizing literati banquets was also a way of building up a political network — both for the literati guests and the patron, since literary circle is also a political power circle. While the patron establishes his own literary circle in order to recruit loyal followers and consolidate his power, the literati within the circle compete with each other for the favour of the patron as well as build up friendship and political bonds with their colleague literati. For example, Prince Jingling of Qi,

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<sup>100</sup> *Liangshu* 梁書, 49.688.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.482.

<sup>102</sup> Graham Sanders, *Words Well Put: Visions of Poetic Competence in the Chinese Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 136-40.

Emperor Wu of Liang, and Emperor Wu's two sons — Xiao Gang and Xiao Tong all had their own literati circle. Emperor Wu of Liang and his literati circle is perhaps the best example of the dual functions of the literary circle for both literati and their patron. Emperor Wu used to be a member of the so-called *Jingling bayou* (竟陵八友, “Eight Friends of Jingling”). In this literary circle associated with Prince Jingling of Qi, Emperor Wu, who was still a scholar official at the time, also developed his own political connections. Those members of *Jingling bayou* like Shen Yue, Fan Yun 范雲, Ren Fang 任昉, Lu Chui 陸倕, who survived from the turbulent late years of the Qi Dynasty, all became Emperor Wu's loyal ministers in the new dynasty and, of course, guests at the new emperor's poetry banquet.<sup>103</sup> And the imperial patrons not only gathered literati officials for literary events like poetry composition at royal banquet but also participated in those cultural activities themselves. Sometimes poetry compositions at the banquet sometimes might start with the royal patron, since some titles of poems on female entertainers in the *Yutai xinyong* contain the words like *fenghe* (奉和, “respectfully match”), which indicates these poems corresponds to another poem writing by a person with superior status, presumably the royal patron. In fact, most of those Southern Dynasties royal patrons were excellent poets themselves. But unlike their literati guests, those royal patrons have no need to pursue anyone's favour by showing off his poetic competence. For a royal patron, demonstrating his literary and poetic competence in this kind of occasion is more a way of exchanging inner thoughts with his ministers as well as declaring his own superiority.

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<sup>103</sup> *Liangshu* 梁書, juan 13.230-1, 233-6, 242, juan 14.253-4, juan 27.401-3.



Since poetic competence is so important within the Southern Dynasties elite society, then the issue is how to demonstrate such competence to the ruler or how to demonstrate it in an elaborate way. And literati officials' poetry on female entertainers, in fact, is one of the most elaborate ways to show their talent in a public banquet. As mentioned above, the role between literati officials and female entertainers in the court are somehow similar and blurred. When a literati poet composes a poem on these female entertainers, he not only depicts the female entertainer but also portrays himself as that lady. In his poem, the poet and the female entertainer that he portrays form a synthetic unity. While a spectator's role is to participate in the performance in their mind by "inner mimicry" in accordance to John Martin's theory, the Southern Dynasties court poets execute the mimicry in reality by presenting another performance – his poem. And the female entertainers in the court are supposed to be exceedingly beautiful and have consummate musical skills. When the poet takes over the role of the female entertainer or shares the role with her in the poem, he also implicitly attributes the depiction of the entertainer's beauty and the skills in the poem to himself. While the entertainer's musical skill corresponds to the poet's literary competence, Rouzer also points out that the beauty of the entertainer and her resplendent ornament may be a counterpart of the poet's inner virtue.<sup>104</sup> In these poems on female entertainers, the poet ingeniously presents his own literary competence and inner virtue by depicting the entertainer's musical skill and elaborate ornaments, and his ability of convey such subtlety in the poem also reinforces his poetic competence in front of his patron and literati colleagues.

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<sup>104</sup> Rouzer, *Articulated Ladies*, 145. According to Rouzer, it is extremely hard to describe the inner virtue of a person and using the exterior beauty to represent a person's inner world may be the only proper solution.

## Her and His Performance

Let us turn back to the poems and start with the Jiang Hong's "Poem on a Singer," the one given at the beginning of this chapter.

Jeweled hairpin and pearled flowers are both fancy accessories, and they are well-arranged, with the layout of pearl flowers surrounding the central hairpin. The words "clear and distinct" at the beginning of the second line not only refers to the glamour of the lady but also implies the distinction between hairpin in the center and the pearl flowers surrounding it.<sup>105</sup> Such double layers of meaning contained in the words "clear and distinct" corresponds to the layout of the hairpin and flowers in the first line, which suggests a kind of hierarchy. And such hierarchal arrangement of the accessories may be a micro picture of the hierarchy of attendants at the court banquet in which the composition of this poem took place. The second couplet still focuses on the accessories and the makeup of the singer. But comparing with the fanciness and luxuriousness presented by the jeweled hairpin and pearled flowers in the first couplet, the words "thin temples," "pale yellow," and "light blush" in the second couplet all seem to have a sense of lightness and simplicity. As the ornament of the entertainer may be the representation of the poet's virtue, this kind of proper arrangement and juxtaposition of fanciness and simplicity is an appropriate metaphor for the nature of the poet. The third couplet is about the fragrance. The fragrance firstly comes out when the singer opens her mouth, and then the smell of orchid is added in. From the general fragrant smell at first to the smell of orchid leave in the following line, the fragrance of the singer undergoes a transformation. In Chinese literary tradition, the orchid is often used to represent literati's purity and loftiness. By depicting such a symbol of the

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<sup>105</sup> *Yutai xinyong jianzhu* 玉臺新詠箋注, 203.

literati, the poet also embeds the characteristics of literati into the female singer. From this point on, the poet starts to blur the role between himself and the singer and engage himself into his own poetic descriptive world.

Then, when the female singer shows off her superb vocal skill in the fourth couplet, it is no longer just the skill of the singer herself. The sweet voice of the singer demonstrates both the talent of the entertainer and that of the poet. In other words, the sweet voice in this couplet is produced by the synthesis of the poet and the singer. After this, the performance seems to end at the moment that the singer turns back. But the singer then starts to linger instead of leave the stage. She even knits her eyebrows, which may be an action of getting herself in the mood for the next song. In the last couplet the poet states that the singer is actually holding thin gauze to cover herself, which means the audience has not seen everything about the singer yet, even though the poet has given such a detailed depiction of the singer. In the meanwhile, the transparency of light gauze functions both as a prop to cover and a prop to reveal. Therefore, the singer's lingering together with her action of covering herself by light gauze indicates a kind of non-fulfillment in the end of the poem, which invites the audience and readers to further explore the identity and characteristics of the protagonist.

應令詠舞詩<sup>106</sup>

王訓

新粧本絕世。  
妙舞亦如仙。  
傾腰逐韻管。  
斂衽聽張絃。  
袖輕風易入。  
釵重步難前。

Poem on Dance, Composed under the Command

Wang Xun

The fresh makeup has already been incomparable;  
the spectacular dance is also like an immortal.  
Bend her waist to catch the melodious pipe;  
gather her lapels to listen to the tensed strings.  
Weightless sleeves, the wind goes through effortlessly;  
heavy hairpins, her steps can hardly move forward.

<sup>106</sup> *Yutai xinyong jianzhu* 玉臺新詠箋注, 8.370-1.

笑態千金重.	Her smiling face weighs thousands of gold.
衣香十里傳.	The fragrance of her clothes spreads ten miles afar.
時持比飛鷺.	Compare her with “the Flying Swallow,”
定當誰可憐.	it is clear who is more gentle and lovely.

Like the previous poem, this one also starts with praising the beautiful makeup of the female dancer. After complimenting the dancer as immortal goddess in the second line, the poet then depicts the motions of the dancer in detail in the following two couplets. Within each of these two couplets, the dancer alternates between motion and pause: after bending her waist to catch the tone of the pipe, she turns to listen to the sound of the string with attentive countenance; while she moves her sleeves weightlessly as if being blown by the wind at one moment, in the next heavy hairpins seem to make her hardly be able to move forward. On the surface, these alternations between motion and pause are just artistic depictions that shows the dynamics and varieties of the dancing movement. But it may actually be a metaphor for the switch of roles between the dancer and the audience. In the first pause in the fourth line of the poem, the female dancer’s action of listening to the music transforms her from a performer to an audience and blurs the role between the two — just as the literati poets, who are watching her performance, are also both audience and performers themselves. Moreover, the action of gathering one’s lapels in the fourth line is frequently found as a male action in ancient Chinese texts. While the protagonist dances as a female musical entertainer in the third line, she then pauses and gathers her lapels like a male scholar does when listening to the tensed strings. By endowing the female dancer with such male characteristics, the poet further synthesizes the female dancer with her male literati audience. And for the second pause in the sixth line, the dancer is hampered by the heavy hairpins. As discussed earlier, the ornamental accessories and clothes of the female entertainers in

these type of poems are often symbols of the inner virtue of the poet who synthesizes with the female entertainers. Thus, the movement hampered by the hairpins is not a flaw of the performance but a demonstration of the abundant virtue that the synthesized protagonist carries.

In the first line of the second last couplet, the poet describes the smile of the protagonist as weighing thousands of gold. The usage of depicting women's smile as weighing thousands of gold derives from "Qiyi" (七依, "Seven Reliances") by Cui Yin 崔駟 (?-92) from the Eastern Han Dynasty: "Contented by the wine with the accompany of music. There are beautiful women entering to serve at the banquet. They are so cheerful that smoothes out the countenance [of the guests]. A glance back worths millions. A smile worths thousands of gold. 酒酣樂中. 美人進以承宴. 調歡欣以解容. 迴顧百萬. 一笑千金."<sup>107</sup> By applying this allegory of thousands-of-gold smile in his poem, the poet not only presents a synthesized protagonist with extraordinary qualities in front of his patron at the banquet but also implies how his patron should reward someone with such qualities. The following line of the couplet is on the fragrance of the dancer's clothes spreading miles afar. Like the ornaments of the female entertainer, her fragrance is also a personal characteristics of the dancer that symbolizes the inner qualities of the synthesized protagonist. While the other ornaments like makeup and hair accessories are physically attached to the protagonist herself and the audience can only appreciate them from distance, the spread of the fragrance can be seen as an action of delivering that personal characteristics and inner qualities to the audience for a close examination and appreciation.

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<sup>107</sup> Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢, *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 57.1024. The original text of "Qiyi" has already lost. There are only excerpts surviving in the *Yiwen leiju* and the *Beitang shuchao* 北堂書抄.

After a series of depictions on the female dancer's appearance, dancing skills, the switch and blurring of the roles between the female dancer and the literati audience, and the subtle interaction between the synthesized protagonist and the audience, the poet then compares the protagonist with Zhao Feiyan, presumably the most gorgeous and skillful dancer of all time, which corresponds to the comparison and competition on poetry compositions among literati guests at the banquet. Furthermore, the poet not only sets up such comparison between the synthesized protagonist and other capable candidates, presumably, in the presence of his patron but also makes choice for his patron by the confident statement in the last line of the poem — “it is clear who is more gentle and lovely.”

### The Patron and “His Courtesans”

詠舞<sup>108</sup>

蕭綱

可憐初二八  
逐節似飛鴻  
懸勝河陽妓  
暗與淮南同  
入行看履進  
轉面望鬟空  
腕動茗華玉  
袖隨如意風  
上客何須起  
啼鳥曲未終

Poem on a Dance

Xiao Gang

So lovely, she is barely at the age of sixteen.  
Follow the tempo as if a flying swan goose.  
Far surpasses the courtesans from Heyang.  
Is inwardly the same as the ones from Huainan.  
Rejoin the row, they watch her shoes proceeding forward.  
Turn round, they gaze toward her bun in the empty air.  
Her wrists stir the Jade of Tiao and Hua,  
The sleeves flutter with the Wind of Ruyi.  
The honored guests: why are you getting up?  
“The Song of the Crow Crying” has not ended yet.

This is a poem by Xiao Gang who was one of those royal patrons in the Southern Dynasties that had his own literary circle. While he composed poems on female entertainers

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<sup>108</sup> *Yutai xinyong jianzhu* 玉臺新詠箋注, 7.297. This poem has also been translated by Anne Birrell in *New Songs from a Jade Terrace* (page 198).

together with his literati guests at the banquet and even used means of expressions as his guests, the message that is conveyed from his poem is somehow different from poems by his guests.

In the first couplet, the poet depicts the lovely young dance girl as a flying swan goose. The figure of the flying swan goose being used to depict musical performance derives from “Changdi fu” (長笛賦, “Rhapsody on Flute”) by Ma Rong 馬融: “Then listen to the sound for its correspondence to the shape. The shape is like water and also similar to flying swan goose. 爾乃聽聲類形, 狀似流水, 又象飛鴻.”<sup>109</sup> And Li Shan’s commentary on Ma Rong’s poem quotes a “Way of the Lute”: “the Tune of Boyi is like the sound of flying swan goose.” 琴道曰: 伯夷操, 似鴻雁之音.”<sup>110</sup> Therefore, by adopting the flying swan goose to portray the dance girl, Xiao Gang has already embedded the characteristics of literati official on this dancer girl. Then the poet compares the dancer girl with courtesans from Heyang and Huainan to show the exquisite dancing skills of the girl as well as to imply the competition for poetic competence among literati guests at the banquet. However, what truly makes this couplet interesting is the line on the dancer from Huainan. Huainan is regarded as a place producing excellent dancers due to Zhang Heng’s “Wufu” (舞賦, “Rhapsody on Dancer”): “there was once a traveler watching the dance in Huainan; it was so beautiful that he rhapsodizes.....昔客有觀舞於淮南者. 美而賦之曰.....”<sup>111</sup> In other words, despite the fact that the dancer of Huainan is a skillful performer herself, it is Zhang Heng’s poetic competence of being able to compose a spectacular rhapsody on the dance

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<sup>109</sup> Xiao Tong 蕭統, *Wenxuan* 文選, ed. Li Shan 李善 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 18.814.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ouyang Xun, *Yiwen leiju*. 43.770.

that establishes and spreads the fame of the dancer. By mentioning the dancer from Huainan in this line, Xiao Gang as a poet both compliments the skill of the dancer and declares his own literary excellence of presenting the dancer's exquisite skill in the poem.

The following two couplets present a detailed depiction on the choreography of the dancer. In the first of the two couplets, the dancer moves towards the audience at first as she proceeds forward. But she soon turns back and only leaves her hair bun for them to gaze at. While the dancer is seemingly approachable for the audience in the first line of the couplet, it actually proves to be just a false consciousness since the dancer's turning back rejects such approachability. Then, the other couplet portrays the arm movement of the dancer. As her wrists move, the jade of Tiao and Hua that she wears is dangling. The jade of Tiao and Hua refers to the story of King Jie of Xia and two of his favourite ladies. In order to stop King Jie of Xia's 夏桀 expedition against Shanmin 山民, The King of Shanmin presented two beautiful women, Wan 琬 and Yan 琰 to Jie. Jie ardently loved these two women. So he ordered their names to be engraved on jade as Tiao and Hua. Tiao refers to Wan and Hua refers to Yan.<sup>112</sup> As the dancer's sleeves move, they flutter with the wind of Ruyi. And the wind of Ruyi in the second line of this couplet refers to Wang Rong 王戎, one of the Zhulin qixian, (竹林七賢, "the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Groves"), who was good at dancing. Wang Rong liked to dance with Ruyi in his hand, which was

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<sup>112</sup> Pei Yin's 裴駟 commentary on *Shiji* 史記 by quoting Gu Pu's 郭璞 quotation of *Jizhong zhushu* 汲冢竹書. Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962) 117.3028.



called the Dance of Ruyi 如意舞 by later generations.<sup>113</sup> Unlike in the other poems by literati guests, where the ornamental accessories of the female entertainers are just symbols of the inner virtue of the literati poets themselves, the ornaments on the arms of the dancer in this couplet are given a different twist of meaning. Since the jade of Tiao and Hua allegorizes the affection of the ruler toward his ladies, the dancer's wearing the jade of Tiao and Hua not only indicates the patron's favour toward her but also implies that it was the favour of the patron that makes her shine. While the following line depicts the fluttering of the dancer's sleeves by the Wind of Ruyi, it reveals the hidden literati identity of this female protagonist.

The depiction of the actual performance seems to come to an end at this point. However, the last couplet of the poem clearly states that it is still not the end of the performance – because the song has not finished yet. This song can refer to not only the music performed by the entertainer but also the poem composed by the poet at the banquet. While the musical entertainment of the night may come to an end, the poetic composition among literati poets just starts. Or, the statement of “曲未終” also can be interpreted as: though the song produced by Xiao Gang himself comes to an end, there are still songs by other poets following it. The statement of “曲未終” in the last line of the poem, therefore, blurs the boundaries of the performance of the entertainer, the work of the poet, and the poems composed by poet's colleagues. Furthermore, this particular song performed by Xiao Gang and his literati guests is called *tiwu qu* (“The Song of the Crow Crying”). The origin of *tiwu* song is attributed to Liu

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<sup>113</sup> Liu Yiqing 劉義慶, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu* 世說新語箋疏, 23.748. Scripta Sinica.; Yu Xin 庾信, “Duijiu ge” 對酒歌 in Lu Qinli 陸欽立, *Xianqin Han Wei Jin Nanbei chao shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), 2347.

Yiqing 劉義慶, Prince Linchuan of Song. Liu Yiqing once showed his sympathy toward Liu Yikang 劉義康, a prince who was dismissed by Emperor Wen of Song, and Emperor Wen was upset by this. Liu Yiqing worried that he would be punished by the emperor. But his concubine, a courtesan, told him that he would obtain emperor's forgiveness the next day because she heard the crow crying at night. This prophecy indeed came true and Liu Yiqing was even promoted soon after this incident. Afterwards, Liu Yiqing composed the song of "Crow Crying at Night" 烏夜啼.<sup>114</sup> Thus, "The Song of the Crow Crying" is actually a song on the benevolence and special favour of the ruler. By calling the poems composed by his literati guests at the banquet as *tiwu* song, Xiao Gang subtly reaffirms the hierarchy between him and his literati guests as well as reminds the guests that the following poetic composition is an opportunity for them to gain his special favour.

As Xiao Gang calls upon his literati guests to continue "The Song of the Crow Crying," it may be assumed that they start to compose poems on this dancer one after another in the rest of the banquet. One of these poems on the same dancer is included in the *Yutai xinyong* and it is written by Xu Ling, the compiler of the anthology.

奉和詠舞 <sup>115</sup>	Respectfully Following "Poem on the Dance"
徐孝穆	Xu Xiaomu
十五屬平陽	At fifteen, she was owned by Princess Pingyang.
因來入建章	Thereupon she entered Jianzhang Palace.
主家能教舞	In master's house, she was talented at learning dancing.
城中且巧妝	Within the city, she can also paint exquisite makeup.

<sup>114</sup> Liu Xu 劉詢, *Jiu tangshu* 舊唐書 29.1065. Sinica Scripta.

<sup>115</sup> *Yutai xinyong jianzhu* 玉臺新詠箋注, 8.356. This poem has also been translated by Anne Birrell in *New Songs from a Jade Terrace* (page 226).

低鬟向綺席	Lower the hair bun that faces the brocade mats.
舉袖拂花黃	Raise the sleeves that caresses the yellow flower.
燭送窓邊影	Candlelight sends out her silhouette beside the window.
衫傳鉛裏香	Garment passes on the fragrance in the chest box.
當關好留客	Probably because she would like to detain the guests,
故作舞衣長	on purpose, her dancing clothes drag on the ground.

Like Xiao Gang's poem, this poem by Xu Ling also starts with mentioning the age of the dance girl. However, the female protagonist in Xiao Gang's poem is just a dance girl without any particular identity while the girl in this poem is associated with Wei Zifu. Wei Zifu was originally a courtesan in the house of Princess Pingyang and then was brought into the inner palace after serving Emperor Wu of Han once in the house of Princess Pingyang; also, her brother Wei Qing 衛青 was brought into the imperial palace to serve as royal guard and all of Wei Qing's promotions in his early years also corresponds with the elevation of Wei Zifu's status in the inner palace.<sup>116</sup> By identifying the dance girl with Wei Zifu in the first couplet, the poet conveys the message that the female protagonist is someone who gains extraordinary favour from the patron as well as implies that there is also male-official counterpart of this female figure.

The second couplet praises the talents of the protagonist — her dancing skill and her ability to paint exquisite makeup. And the word, exquisite makeup 巧妝, in this couplet may actually be a pun: while the female dancer is applying makeup on her face as a beautiful cover to attract her male audience, the male literati audience also uses her image as an exquisite disguise in their poems on her to present their own personal expressions. So the one who is capable of painting exquisite makeup is not just the female dancer but the poet himself as well, whereas the capability of ingeniously presenting himself by the image of female entertainer in poetic

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<sup>116</sup> *Shiji*, 49.1978-80.

composition is also a demonstration of a male literati guest's literary competence. Meanwhile, the first four lines of this poem all contain words that indicate the ownership of the protagonist. 屬平陽, 入建章, 主家, 城中 all indicate that the female protagonist belongs to her patron. While such emphasis on patron's ownership of the female protagonist echoes with the inapproachability of the dance girl depicted in Xiao Gang's original poem and reaffirms the hierarchy between the patron and the guests, it also implicitly presents the poet's own loyalty toward his princely patron, Xiao Gang.

In the following two lines, the protagonist approaches the brocade mats that the audience sit on and raises her sleeves in front of them to caress her yellow flower. The yellow flower refers to the ancient practice of painting flower pattern or pasting golden yellow paper cut into the shape of flower on women's forehead. Usually only the maids who had never married could paint the yellow flower on her forehead, since it is symbol of women's beauty, virginity, and virtue. As in Xiao Gang's poem the female protagonist raises her sleeves to flutter with the Wind of Ruyi which reveals her hidden literati identity, the protagonist in this poem by Xu Ling, on the other hand, raises the sleeves to caress her ornamental yellow flower to signify the inner virtue of the protagonist. Then, the silhouette of the protagonist is reflected on the window by the candlelight. According to Tian Xiaofei's study on the theme of candlelight in palace-style poetry, the candle creates both shadow and light. As the shadow is a sign of mystery and ambiguity, it blurs the boundary between metaphor and reality. And the fact that the shadow can be seen is ultimately because of the existence of the light, which is also an illumination in the darkness.<sup>117</sup> While the shadow on the window makes the identity of the protagonist ambiguous and blurring, the garment

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<sup>117</sup> Tian Xiaofei, *Beacon Fire and Shooting Star*, 241-52.

of the protagonist in the next line then reminds the audience of her presence as well as illuminates her identity and image — the garment passes on the fragrance in her chest box to the audience, which delivers qualities and virtues of the protagonist from the inside out.

At the end of Xiao Gang's poem, the poet asks the guests not to stand up because "The Song of the Crow Crying" has not ended yet. Likewise, in the last couplet of this poem by Xu Ling the protagonist drags her dancing clothes on the ground so as to detain the guests. Just as Xiao Gang leaves the song unfinished to let his literati guests to continue the performance, the protagonist in Xu Ling's poem also tries to make her audience to linger on and the action of dragging her dance clothes on the ground is as if passing the relay baton of this poetic performance to the next poet.

### **Coda**

These poems on female music entertainers written by the Southern Dynasties male poets are not just descriptive portrayals of the female entertainers. The role of the female courtesans in the court is somehow similar to that of the literati guests at the imperial banquet: providing either musical or literary entertainment. At banquet, literati guests together with their patron watch female courtesan's performance at first and then they compose poems on the female courtesan whose image in the poems, as a result of the inner mimicry of the poets, is constructed as a synthesized unity of herself and the male poets. While female courtesans pursue the favour and affection of her audience by showing her musical performance skill, her literati audience also tries to gain the favour of their patron by demonstration their literary skill in another performance at the banquet — poetic composition on music performers. On the other hand, patrons actively

participate in such poetic composition at the banquet as well, where their compositions serve as both reaffirmation of their superiority and communication with their literati ministers.

## Chapter Four

### “Her Response”: Female Readers’ Reception

When the Southern Dynasties male literati poets compose these *Yutai xinyong* poems on female entertainers at banquet, they are constructing their own performance in the poetic composition so as to serve for their own social and political purposes. However, the *Yutai xinyong* was probably a poetry collection compiled for the education of palace ladies at the time. And its potential female readers, the Liang and Chen palace ladies, probably understood and received these poems on female entertainers differently when reading them. Indeed, it is almost impossible to trace which palace ladies have read this anthology and consequently their reception of those poems, since the *Yutai xinyong* is not mentioned in the very limited extant sources on the literary activities of the Southern Dynasties palace ladies and no writing by the Liang and Chen palace ladies has survived except one single poem by Zhang Lihua. But fortunately a number of poems by women poets from literary families survive from that period and were also included in the *Yutai xinyong*. While there are totally thirty-five poems attributed to the Southern Dynasties female poets in the *Yutai xinyong*, half of them are written by two women — Shen Manyuan 沈滿願 and Liu Lingxian 劉令嫻 who were the granddaughter of Shen Yue and the sister of Liu Xiaochuo respectively.

On one hand, little is known about Shen Manyuan and Liu Lingxian other than their relation and interaction with their male family members. The extant historical records only show that Shen Manyuan married Fan Jing 范靖, the Western Expedition Officer of the Liang Dynasty; she left three-volume poetry collection, the *Shen Manyuan ji* 沈滿願集, which has already been

lost.<sup>118</sup> As for Liu Lingxian, she was married to Xu Fei 徐悱; upon the death of Xu Fei, Liu Lingxian composed a mournful and touching eulogy; while Xu Fei's father Xu Mian 徐勉 previously planned to write the eulogy himself, he gave up on writing it after reading Liu Lingxian's.<sup>119</sup> And Liu Lingxian and Xu Fei's poetry exchange also makes them the model of faithful love in later generations.<sup>120</sup> The bibliographical treatise of the *Suishu* says Liu Lingxian also left a three-volume poem collection, while the *Xin tangshu* 新唐書 records it as a six-volume one.<sup>121</sup> However, this collection has been lost as well.

On the other hand, Shen Yue and Liu Xiaochuo both have their own biography in *Liangshu* that comprehensively records not only their political life but also their literary achievement. As the leading poets of the time and the members of Emperor Wu's literary circle, Shen Yue and Liu Xiaochuo were frequent guests of palatial banquet and poetry gathering-together.<sup>122</sup> More than forty poems on women written by Shen Yue and thirteen poems by Liu Xiaochuo were included in the *Yutai xinyong*, and it is very likely that Shen Manyuan and Liu Lingxian have read these poems by their grandfather and brother. So despite the lack of extant sources on the direct female readers' reception of the *Yutai xinyong* poems, Shen Manyuan and

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<sup>118</sup> *Yutai xinyong jianzhu* 玉臺新詠箋注, 209; *Suishu* 隋書, 35. 1079.

<sup>119</sup> *Liangshu* 梁書, 33.484.

<sup>120</sup> Although *Yutai xinyong* includes two pairs of Liu Lingxian and Xu Fei's poems writing to each other, this chapter is not going to discuss these poems. The reason is: this chapter mainly focuses on examining female readers' reception of the image of female courtesans portrayed by male poets, whereas the poetry exchange between Liu and Xu is more about replying the other person and expressing love and longing between each other.

<sup>121</sup> Ouyang Xiu 欧阳修, *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書, 60.1597. *Scripta Sinica*

<sup>122</sup> *Liangshu*, 13.233-6, 33.480.



Liu Lingxian, who were exposed to the poetry of their male family members who happened to be major poets in the *Yutai xinyong*, can still be seen as indirect female readers of the anthology. Moreover, as discussed in chapter one, the content of the *Yutai xinyong* and other works compiled for palace education in the Southern Dynasties is usually stories and poems on women. In other words, these works may intend to use the image of women within the works as the exempla and epitomes for their potential female readers to emulate and self-reflect. While a majority of the women depicted in the *Yutai xinyong* poems are historical and fictional figures, the fact that Shen Manyuan and Liu Lingxian's poems are also included in the *Yutai xinyong* makes them and the image of women depicted in their poems vivid contemporary exemplars for the potential female readers at that time as well. Therefore, this chapter will examine poems by Shen Manyuan and Liu Lingxian in the *Yutai xinyong* in comparison with their male family members' poems in the anthology so as to see what possible messages that these male poets' poems on female music performers in the anthology convey to the potential female readers and how female readers receive and reconstruct them.

Like the female-voiced persona portrayed by male poet in the Southern Dynasties poetry, the female role in Japanese kabuki is also impersonated by male performer who is called *onnagata* 女形. While *onnagata* is traditionally thought of as the ideal female image constructed by male ideology, Katherine Mezur takes a further step to elucidate the issue in a new direction in her book, *Beautiful Boys/Outlaw Bodies: Devising Kabuki Feminine-Likeness*. According to Mezur, despite painting his face, hands, neck, and all the other skin areas that reveal to the audience with white powder, *onnagata* still leaves a thin line of unpainted skin between the painted white face and hairline or between the painted neckline and the collar of kimono. Such a

thin line of unpainted skin notifies and reminds the audience of the difference between the *onnagata*'s original gender and the gender that he impersonates. And instead of a presentation of a male-and female-relationship, the audience's awareness of the male body beneath the *onnagata*'s female gender performance creates a more ambiguous, mobile, and diverse relationship between the male and female roles on the stage — which is up to the interpretation of the audience in accordance with their own cultural and personal experiences. Nevertheless, no matter how diverse the gender relationship in kabuki created by *onnagata* is, the idealized feminine image that *onnagata* portrays still becomes the model of behaviour for Japanese women to imitate generation after generation since the Edo period.<sup>123</sup>

The male poets in the *Yutai xinyong* are similar to the case of kabuki *onnagata*: they take a female voice in their poems for various different political, social, and personal reasons, whereas the selection of their poems into an anthology for palace education makes the female image constructed by these male poets become the exemplars for the anthology's female readers to imitate. While there are few contemporary female poets who are also included in the *Yutai xinyong* and compose poetry in the similar way as their male counterparts, their poems not only set up more vivid exemplars for the potential female readers of the anthology to emulate but also reflect how women at the time receive the poetic female image constructed by the Southern Dynasties male poets. Furthermore, as Paul Rouzer suggests, the fact that these female poets also take a female voice in their poems is actually a transgression of “cross-gender” — “if speaking ‘as a woman’ is a male right, then the act of writing poetry can allow the woman to break out of

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<sup>123</sup> Katherine Mezur, *Beautiful Boys/Outlaw Bodies: Devising Kabuki Feminine-Likeness* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 1-15.

female restraints and reconfigure herself.”<sup>124</sup> And in certain cases, these *Yutai xinyong* female poets indeed take the advantage of this opportunity of woman speaking as a woman to reconstruct the popular female image portrayed by contemporary male poets. But although this process of reconstruction makes it possible for the female protagonists in these Southern Dynasties female poets’ works to transgress the conventional female image endowed by male-written poetry and social traditions, it is also noticeable that the reconstructed female image under the pen of these female poets, to some extent, actually reaffirms the image and value presented in male poets’ works and reemphasizes the importance of virtue and morality.

### ***Shen Yue vs. Shen Manyuan***

The follow are two poems on courtesan by Shen Yue and Shen Manyuan respectively.

詠簾 <sup>125</sup> 沈約 江南蕭管地 妙響發孫枝 殷勤寄玉指 含情舉復垂 雕梁再三繞 輕塵四五移 曲中有深意 丹誠君詎知	Poem on Flute Shen Yue Jiangnan, the land of bamboo flute and pipe. Beautiful sound emits from the tender branch. Deep affection is sent forth by jade fingers. Full of love, [her fingers] raise and then droop. Carved beam is winded around [by the sound] for three days. Light dust has been moved for four or five times. The song contains profound meaning. How could you know her sincere heart?
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This poem on flute by Shen Yue starts with depicting the beautiful sound of the flute and pipe and pointing out that the sound emits from the tender bamboo branch which is used to make the main body of the flute. But the jade fingers in the second couplet indicate that such beautiful

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<sup>124</sup> Rouzer, *Articulated Ladies*, 156.

<sup>125</sup> *Yutai xinyong jianzhu*, 5.190. This poem has also been translated by Anne Birrell in *New Songs from a Jade Terrace* (page 140).

music is actually produced by the gentle fingers of the female protagonist. Moreover, what is contained in these finger motions are deep affection and full love which will be further exemplified in the following couplet. Winding around the carved beam for three days in the fifth line refers to the singing of Han'e 韓娥: Han'e was a courtesan from the Han state and she made a living by singing on her way to the Qi state; it was said that the lingering sound of her singing could wind around the beam for three days.<sup>126</sup> As for the movement of the light dust in the sixth line, it refers to Yugong 虞公, a man from the Lu state whose singing was so clear and resounding that could even move the dust on the beam.<sup>127</sup> On the surface, this couplet uses the anecdotes of Han'e and Yugong to demonstrate the superb musical skill of the female protagonist. However, by paralleling a female singer's singing with a male singer's, it also seems to create a reciprocal dialog and exchange between male and female. While the second to last line in the poem reaffirms that it is not an ordinary musical performance but the one that contains profound underlying meaning, the last line laments that the audience may not sense the sincere heart of the female protagonist. Nevertheless, the poet's presentation of such lamentation, on the other hand, indicates that the poet is actually the one who knows the courtesan's sincere heart. Although the poem is titled "On Flute," the poet only starts with the depiction of the flute. He then extends to the female performer of the instrument and her inner thought and even claims a spot in her heart in the very end of the poem.

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<sup>126</sup> Liezi 列子, *Liezi jishi* 列子集釋, ed. Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (Hong Kong: Taiping shuju, 1965), 5.111.

<sup>127</sup> *Yiwen leiju*, 43.771.

戲蕭娘 <sup>128</sup>	Making Fun of Xiao Niang
范靖婦	Wife of Fan Jing
明珠翠羽帳	The curtain of bright pearl and kingfisher feather.
金薄綠綃帷	The blind of gold foil and emerald veil.
因風時暫舉	Because of the wind, they are lifted for the moment.
想像見芳姿	Within imagination, I see her graceful appearance.
清晨插步搖	In the morning, she puts buyao [in her hair].
向晚解羅衣	At dusk, she looses her gossamer clothes.
託意風流子	While entrusting her love to an elegant man,
佳情詎肯私	how could the loving affection be kept in secret.

While the wind is blowing the curtain of pearl and feather and lifting the golden blind and emerald veil, the persona sees the gorgeous appearance of the female protagonist, Xiao Niang - although just in his imagination. This is as if referring to the scene that Emperor Wu of Han was calling the soul of Lady Li: after the death of Lady Li, Emperor Wu longed for her so much that he asked one Shaoweng 少翁 to call her soul; under the illumination of the candlelight at night, Emperor Wu, from afar, saw a silhouette resembling Lady Li behind the curtains; he was so moved that composed a poem: “Is that her? Is that not her? I stand there and gaze. Why does she arrive so slowly and late? 是邪? 非耶? 立而望之, 偏何姍姍其來遲?”<sup>129</sup> As Emperor Wu could only gaze the silhouette of his deceased beloved lady from afar without getting any closer, setting a similar scene at the first half of this poem on Xiao Niang emphasizes the imaginative nature of this poem and the doubtful realness of the scenes depicted in the poem. Nonetheless, the persona’s visualization of Xiao Niang continues. The persona not only sees Xiao Niang adorning herself in the morning but also glimpsing her taking off clothes at night which shows the

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<sup>128</sup> *Yutai xinyong jianzhu*, 5.209. This poem has also been translated by Anne Birrell in *New Songs from a Jade Terrace* (page 151) and revised in her *Games Poets Play* (page 185).

<sup>129</sup> *Hanshu*, 97.3952.

irresistible desire between the female protagonist and her lover as well as leads the narration to an extremely intimate extent.

But unlike the mutual affection and love in Shen Yue's poem that are cherished and exchanged between male audience and the female courtesan without any concern or reservation, another voice intrudes in the last couplet of this poem by the female persona. And there are two alternative interpretations of the last couplet. Or, in fact, two different ways of interpreting the Chinese character *si* 私 in this context. In the *Yutai xinyong yizhu* 玉臺新詠譯注 annotated and translated into modern Chinese by Zhang Baoquan 張葆全, the author suggests that 私 means “in secret” and the last line of this poem can be understood as “how could the loving affection be allowed in secret?”<sup>130</sup> In other words, even if she indeed entrusts her love to a gentleman, she still should not cross the boundary of proper behaviour. The other way of interpreting the character 私 is “selfish,” and Anne Birrell translates the last line as “Surely perfect love can't bear to be selfish.”<sup>131</sup> Birrell also proposes that the female persona in this poem is a principle wife while Xiao Niang is a singer as well as the new mistress of her husband. Despite of the pain in her heart, the female persona still has to tolerate and accept the new mistress — because a principle wife is not supposed to be selfish and jealous when her husband takes new mistress in accordance to the traditional moral code at that time.<sup>132</sup> Although these two interpretations create two different plots, they both conclude the poem with moral admonition: the former admonishes Xiao

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<sup>130</sup> Zhang Baoquan 張葆全, *Yutai xinyong yizhu* 玉臺新詠譯注 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chuban she, 2007), 184.

<sup>131</sup> Birrell, *Games Poets Play*, 185.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 185-6.

Niang not to devote her body to her beloved gentleman in secret, while the latter is a self-comforting admonition to the female persona so as to remind herself that what happens between her husband and Xiao Niang is all normal in moral traditions.

Moon and lamp are two of a few limited sources of light at night in the ancient time, and Shen Yue and his granddaughter write on these two light sources respectively:

<p>詠月<sup>133</sup> 沈約 月華臨靜夜 夜靜滅氛埃 方暉竟戶入 圓影隙中來 高樓切思婦 西園遊上才 網軒映珠綴 應門照綠苔 洞房殊未曉 清光信悠哉</p>	<p>Poem on the Moon Shen Yue The lustre of the moon befalls the quiet night. The silence of the night extinguishes the dusty air. Square glow even shines into the door. Round shadow comes in from the gaps [of the window]. In the high tower, there is a lovesick lady. At the Western Garden, there are talented gentlemen. Lattice window illuminates the pearl strings. Front gate was lighted up on the green moss. In the deep chamber, it is still not the daybreak yet. The pure light lingers as it pleases.</p>
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The splendor of the moon shines at the quiet night. The night is so quiet that it even extinguishes the muddy air. The usage of the word, “extinguishes,” in the second line of the poem not only highlights the silence of the night but, more importantly, also presents an atmosphere of absolute stillness which probably contains Buddhist concept as well.<sup>134</sup> As “quietness,”

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<sup>133</sup> *Yutai xinyong jianzhu*, 5.188-9. This poem has also been translated by Anne Birrell in *New Songs from a Jade Terrace* (page 140).

<sup>134</sup> The Southern Dynasties saw prosperous development of Buddhism. Various Buddhist sutras were translated into Chinese and circulated among the literati circle at the time. It was also a common practice for literati poets to apply Buddhist thoughts and concepts into their poetic compositions.

“extinction,” and “purity” are essential mindsets for practicing the *dhyana* (meditation),<sup>135</sup> the atmosphere of extinction brought by the absolute silence at the night and the sense of purity brought by the splendor of the moon in the first couplet, to some extent, frame an ideal setting for Buddhist meditation. In such absolute quiet night, the moon comes into the house — but not its full glow though. The glow of the moon is obstructed by door and window and it is only able to penetrate into the house from the gaps or in the shape of the square door, which creates a sense of confinement. And who is confined in such space at night is the lovesick lady in the high tower, whereas the talented gentlemen are gathering together at the Western Garden at the same time. The gathering of the gentlemen contrasts the solitary image of the lady while the presumable joy and pleasure of the gentlemen’s party juxtaposes the sorrow of the lovesick lady. Also, the moon makes the lattice window overlay upon the pearl strings. The shape of lattice and the strings is as if bars and fence, which re-emphasize the isolation and confinement of the female protagonist. The gate was shined on by the green moss in the yard that sets off the desolation of the residence because of few visitors. As the day break still has not arrived, the moonlight lingers as it pleases in the deep chamber— as if a never-ending reminder to the female protagonist for her loneliness and sorrow. But on the other hand, in the second last couplet, the moonlight through the lattice window also illuminates the deep chamber and its glow lights up the desolate courtyard. And the pure moonlight and its pleasant lingering in the last line also reveals a sense of peace and enjoyment. Despite constructing and intensifying the loneliness of the female protagonist and her isolated residence, the moon, within this poem by Shen Yue, also seems to bring illumination and

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<sup>135</sup> *Vadrasamadhi Sutra*, quoted in *Buddhist Texts through the Ages*, ed. Edward Conze (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 276.



peace to the female protagonist — which echoes with the Buddhist meditation setting at the beginning of the poem.

<p>詠燈<sup>136</sup> 范靖婦 綺筵日已暮 羅幃月未歸 開花散鵠彩 含光出九微 風軒動丹焰 冰宇澹清暉 不吝輕蛾繞 惟恐曉蠅飛</p>	<p>Poem on Lamp Wife of Fan Jing On the embroidered [banquet] mats, the sun has already set. Beside the gossamer curtain, the moon has not returned yet. Blooming like flower, [the lamp flame] scatters the glow of crane. In the radiance, it comes from the Lamp of Jiuwei. The windy balustrade sways the cinnabar sparks. Chilly eaves dampen the pure splendor. It does not mind being surrounded by little moths but is just scared by the fluttering of the flies in the morning.</p>
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As it is the time of sunset, the magnificent banquet is also supposed to end and the venue switches from the public sphere to private one — beside the gossamer curtain of the boudoir. Meanwhile, what also changes is the degree of illumination: the sun has already set but the moon has not risen yet. Comparing with the splendor of the magnificent banquet in the ray of sunlight, the degree of illumination at this transitional stage of the day is dim and dusty, which also sets a gloomy tone for the rest of the poem. However, a lamp lights up the dim and dusty surrounding. Its flame scatters the glow of crane and its radiance is as if the Lamp of Jiuwei. While the crane is a symbol of purity and loftiness, the Lamp of Jiuwei is the lamp that is used to light up the hall when Emperor Wu of Han called up and meeting up with the immortals.<sup>137</sup> In other words, this lamp lighting up the boudoir is an unusually refined one which is embedded with pure and unsullied characteristics. But unfortunately the pure and unsullied glow of the lamp is threatened

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<sup>136</sup> *Yutai xinyong jianzhu*, 5.210. This poem has also been translated by Anne Birrell in *New Songs from a Jade Terrace* (page 151-2).

<sup>137</sup> Ban Gu 班固, attrib., *Han wudi neizhuan* 漢武帝內傳 (Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 2.

by the wind and chill. Its flame is swaying in the windy chamber and its splendor is gradually vanishing under the chilly eaves. And in the following couplet the persona further clearly states: it is nothing serious that some harmless little moths surround and dim the glow of the lamp, while the real threat is the fluttering of the flies, the dirty insects which are often used to allegorize villainous people, since they will tarnish the purity and loftiness of the lamp.

In the previous poem on moon composed by Shen Yue, the moonlight stresses the emptiness of the female voiced persona's residence and her loneliness but also illuminates and pacifies the mind of the persona. As for the radiance of the lamp in this poem by Shen Manyuan, it is also an accompaniment, comfort, and even allegory to the lonely persona in her dim and gloomy boudoir. However, the lonely and abandoned female-voice persona in Shen Yue's poem seems to finally find peace of mind from the moonlight at night while the persona in Shen Manyuan's poem, in the end, still cannot reconcile her mind to the loneliness and abandonment. And being left in the dim and gloomy boudoir alone is not a real concern for the female-voiced persona in Shen Manyuan's poem, for what she truly cares is being abandoned because of the mean slander and tricks of the villains — like the radiant lamp being surrounded by the flies. By allegorizing the female-voiced persona with the lamp and including her inner psychological world in the last couplet, Shen Manyuan's poem actually transfers the persona from a pathetic abandoned woman to a respectful heroine of great moral integrity who is suffering from calumny.

### ***Liu Xiaochuo vs. Liu Lingxian***

Like Shen Yue and his granddaughter, Shen Manyuan, Liu Xiaochuo and his sister, Liu Lingxian, also have composed poems on similar themes. The following are their two poems on the female persona listening to music:

夜聽妓賦得烏夜啼<sup>138</sup>

劉孝綽

鷓弦且輟弄<sup>139</sup>

鶴操暫停徽<sup>140</sup>

別有啼烏曲

東西相背飛

倡人怨獨守

蕩子遊未歸

若逢生離曲

長夜泣羅衣

Listening to Courtesans in the Night:  
a Poem Composed on the Assigned Topic of  
“Crow Cries in the Night”

Liu Xiaochuo

The strings of pheasant cease the tune for the present.

The Melody of Crane stops the note for the moment.

There is a special one, “The Song of Crow Crying”:

east and west, they are flying apart.

Courtesan grieves for keeping alone.

Wastrel roams and has not returned yet.

It is like hearing a song of parting-in-life,

Through the long night she sobs into her gossamer clothes.

In the late night, two other songs on separation, “The Tune of Pheasant” and “The Melody of Crane”, have already stopped, whereas the song that is playing at the moment is a special one named “The Song of Crow Crying.” Although “crying crow” is a commonly used motif and imagery in the Southern Dynasties poetry and a number of the *Yutai xinyong* poems are also titled as “The Song of Crow Crying,” these “crying crow” imagery and poems do not always signify the same meaning or refers to the same anecdote. Instead, the poet picks up one of various

<sup>138</sup> *Yutai xinyong jianzhu*, 8.332-3.

<sup>139</sup> 鷓弦 is the zither strings made from pheasant’s sinews. In some other editions of *Yutai xinyong*, the term 鷓弦 is replaced by 鷓雞 which is the name of an ancient tune. For example, in Zhang Heng’s “Nandu fu” 南都賦, he writes: “the widow sadly recites, the pheasant grievously sings 寡婦悲吟，鷓雞哀鳴。” And Li Shan’s annotation on “Nandu fu” in *Wenxuan* says: “The source of the Tune of the Widow is not clear: there was ‘The Tune of the Pheasant’ in the ancient ‘Songs of Harmony’ 寡婦曲未詳，古相和歌有鷓雞之曲。” Thus, it is very likely that 鷓弦 or 鷓雞 in this line refers to a song about separating with one’s partner.

<sup>140</sup> 鶴操 refers to another ancient tune called “Biehe cao” 別鶴操. It is said that “Biehe cao” was composed by Shangling muzi 商陵牧子 in the Zhou Dynasty. Shangling muzi’s wife did not get pregnant after getting married for five years, and Shangling’s father and brother decided to arrange another marriage for him. After hearing this, Shangling’s wife cried in the middle of the night and Shangling played “Biehe cao” on zither to mourn their separation. (Lu Qinli’s annotation of the Han poem “Biehe cao” in *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin nanbeichao shi*).

anecdotes, historical and mythological references, or just the general imagery of “crow crying” according to his specific expressional purpose in each poem. While “The Song of Crow Crying” being mentioned in another *Yutai xinyong* poem by Xiao Gang in Chapter 2 of this thesis refers to the anecdote of Liu Yiqing being forgiven by the emperor and shows the benevolence and special favour of the ruler towards the protagonist, the imagery of “crow crying” and birds flying apart in two directions in this poem are likely to just refer to a general parting song. And it is also possible that the poet refers to the sound of a real crow who cries for the separation with its partner, which then makes this song a special one compared with the strings of pheasant and The Melody of Crane.

While the first half of the poem presents the music playing at this very night, the second half of the poem turns to depict its potential listener --- the lonely courtesan in her chamber. This courtesan, alone, is longing for her lover who travels afar. On the surface, her situation is like the crying crow, which are both separating with their beloved one. But they also differ from each other in terms of the expected outcome of the separation. While the imagery of birds flying apart in two directions often symbolizes an eternal farewell in classical Chinese poetry, the state of the lonely courtesan’s roaming wastrel is “has not returned yet,” which implies the hope and expectation of eventually getting reunited with her lover. Moreover, such hope and expectation are also shown in the scenario created in the last couplet: the courtesan would cry with her gossamer clothes if she heard a song about parting in life, such as “The Song of Crow Crying.” Gossamer clothes 羅衣 is a conventional object appearing in Southern Dynasties love poems. It refers to either the beautiful clothes that the women wear or the clothes made by a woman for her partner or lover. In other words, it is either an object that enhances the beauty and attractiveness

of women in front of men or a token that delivers the love and affection of women to men. In either case, it is something that is used to form and increase the bond between a man and a woman. Therefore, the action of crying with gossamer clothes in the last line of the poem indicates the courtesan's mixed feelings which contains the sorrow of separation, the hope of keeping the love and the bond between her and her partner, and one's powerlessness toward the predictability of life and fate, whereas the cry of the crow earlier in the poem is replaced by the cry of the courtesan in the last line.

聽百舌<sup>141</sup>

徐悱妻刘氏  
庭樹旦新晴，  
臨鏡出雕楹。  
風吹桃李氣，  
過傳春鳥聲。  
靜寫山陽笛，  
全作洛濱笙。  
注意權留聽，  
誤令妝不成。

Hearing Thrushes

The Wife of Xu Fei, Madame Liu

The trees in the courtyard under newly cleared dawn,  
In front of the mirror, she emerges amongst carved beams.  
Wind blows the smell of peach and plum,  
the sound of spring birds is being passed on.  
As if quietly playing out the flute tune at sunny mountain,  
it all sounds like the reed pipe by the bank of the Luo River.  
Focusing on pleasantly lingering and listening,  
She accidentally leaves the makeup unfinished.

While the first couplet presents the scenes of the trees in the newly cleared morning and the carved columns in the residence of the protagonist, it also reveals the visual perspective of the protagonist: she sees these scenes inside her residence — either from the courtyard or in front of the mirror which is supposed to be situated in woman's bedroom. At the same time, the female protagonist is enjoying the fragrance of peach and plum as well as listening to the singing of the spring birds. However, the second couplet of the poem clearly indicates that it is the wind that blows the smell of peach and plum to her while the sound of the birds is also being passed on to

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<sup>141</sup> *Yutai xinyong jianzhu*, 6.261-2. This poem has also been translated by Wilt Idema and Beata Grant in *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China* (page 148).

her. In other words, although the protagonist is enjoying the smell and the sound of the nature, she is only able to stay inside the house and passively receive all of these.

As the title indicates, the particular spring birds that deliver the sound in this poem are called 百舌. It is a type of songbird whose vocal organ can produce various different elaborate bird songs, and this is also why it is named as 百舌 (hundreds of tongues). For the protagonist, the singing of these spring birds sounds like the flute at sunny mountain at first and then the reed pipe by the bank of the Luo River. The flute at sunny mountain derives from the story that Xiang Xiu 向秀 passed by the former residence of Ji Kang 嵇康 and heard the neighbour playing the flute, which made Xiang Xiu think of his deceased friend, Ji Kang.<sup>142</sup> As for the reed pipe by the Luo River, it refers to the immortal, Prince Qiao 王子喬, who wanders beside the Luo River and plays his reed pipe as if the singing of phoenix.<sup>143</sup> Thus, despite the fact that the protagonist is a woman who is physically staying inside her residence, the diverse musical singing of the birds makes it possible for her to undertake a spiritual journey across vast distance outside her boudoir — from the sunny hill to the Luo River. And she is so focused on listening to such pleasant musical sound and is so indulged in this spiritual journey that she even forgets to do her own makeup which is her supposed daily duty in the boudoir.

At the beginning of the poem, the poet presents the image of a woman staying in a restricted indoor space and doing feminine activity: she is facing the mirror, presumably doing her makeup. She just happens to hear the singing of the birds from the outside. Such singing not

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<sup>142</sup> *Jinshu*, 49.1375.

<sup>143</sup> Liu Xiang 劉向, *Liexian zhuan* 列仙傳 quoted in *Hou Hanshu*.

only brings her pleasant musical enjoyment but also spiritually transfers her from the indoor feminine sphere to the outdoor male's world. Nevertheless, no matter how much she indulges in such musical world and the transgression that it brings to her, the moment that she realizes she still has unfinished makeup to work on is also the moment that she has to return to her original indoor feminine sphere. In the "crow-crying" poem by Liu Xiaochuo, the music at the night only reminds the female protagonist of the sorrow of the separation while the mingling of her crying with the crying of the crow further stresses her powerlessness towards the unpredictable life and fate. As for the female protagonist in Liu Linagxian's poem, on the other hand, music provides her a possibility of transgressing her pre-defined role — although the transgression is eventually negated, since she eventually still has to return to her original sphere to fulfill her feminine role.

### **Coda**

While the Southern Dynasties male poets took the voice or image of the female courtesans in the poetry to present themselves and communicate with each other in political and social occasions, later their poems were included in the *Yutai xinyong*, an anthology intended to collect poems on women for palace ladies' education — as discussed in the previous chapters. Out of the male political and social context, what these poems present to their potential female readers are themes like female courtesan in love, the abandoned lovesick lady, and the lonely courtesan waiting for her beloved one to return. Although there is almost no extant source on the Southern Dynasties' palace ladies' reception of these poems on women, a comparison between Shen Manyuan and Liu Lingxian's poems and their male relatives' works included in the anthology also indirectly reflects how female readers at the time may receive these *Yutai xinyong* poems.

In the first pair of poems, the mutual affection and desire between the female protagonist and the male poet under the pen of Shen Yue turns to be the admonition to the female protagonist to take the proper moral code into account when she faces her beloved gentleman's romantic and sexual desire in Shen Manyuan's poem. In the second pair, Shen Yue and Shen Manyuan both depict an abandoned lady at night. But Shen Yue mainly focuses on the loneliness and isolation of the lady as well as how she finds peace in this circumstance, whereas Shen Manyuan's poem emphasizes the pure and lofty characteristics of the abandoned female protagonist and indicates that the real reason for her agony is because of being slandered. And in Liu Xiaochuo's "crow crying" poem, the "The Song of Crow Crying" reminds the courtesan of her separation with her lover as well as allegorizes her powerlessness toward the unpredictable fate. On the other hand, the music in Liu Lingxian's poem makes it possible for the female protagonist to escape from pre-defined feminine role and obligation even though it is just a temporary transgression. For the Southern Dynasties' male poets, their poems on female courtesans' performance is a poetic re-performance in the social gathering-together. And the female readers' reception and rewriting of these poems is then another re-performance. In their re-performance, female poets present similar themes, subject matters, and general depictions as their male counterparts. Nevertheless, the moral integrity is more strengthened in the works by female poets and the topic of transgressing the pre-defined feminine role and duties is also touched on by the female reader-poets.



## Chapter Five

### Conclusion

While it was the ethos of the time in general for women to have various talents in the Six Dynasties, the women who drew the attention of the historians and literati in the early and mid Southern Dynasties were those ones distinguished themselves by their extraordinary wisdom and intelligence. Since the middle of the Southern Dynasties, there were increasingly more aristocratic women and palace ladies with particular competence in literary skills that were recorded in historical works. Thus, the ethos of women in the Six Dynasties saw the transition of women being praised by various different talents and virtues to highly literary women gradually being valued the most. As it is noticeable that the dynastic histories of the Southern Dynasties record a large number of imperial ladies with exquisite literary skills, this is not just because of the tradition of educated aristocratic women in the Six Dynasties in general but also results from the Southern Dynasties rulers' attaching more importance to the education of palace ladies: there was the case of Han Lanying who was employed by the imperial court to palace women classics, and it was also a common practice of the time for scholar officials to compile *furen ji* works for women to read with the content of stories and poems on women.

Under such social and cultural environment, the *Yutai xinyong*, an anthology features poems on women from Han Dynasty to its contemporary Southern Dynasties, was compiled by Xu Ling, a renowned scholar official at that time. In the preface of the *Yutai xinyong*, the compiler clearly states that the anthology was compiled for palace ladies to read, explains why it is a proper reading material for palace ladies, compares it with other women's education methods in the past, and even mentions palace ladies' participation in the editing of the work. And the

strict taboo between court official and palace ladies also makes it less likely for the compiler to allegorically attribute the compilation and editing of the anthology to palace ladies. Based on all of these social, historical, and cultural backgrounds as well as the analysis of the preface, the *Yutai xinyong* was more likely to be an poetry anthology that was intended for palace ladies to read at the time of its compilation.

On the other hand, the poems included in the anthology were not originally written for the purpose of palace ladies' education. Majority poems in the *Yutai xinyong* are poems on women written by male literati in the Southern Dynasties. As poem on female music entertainer is a popularly adopted theme in the anthology, this thesis explores the purpose of composition and underlying significance of these male literati's poems on women in the *Yutai xinyong* through examining these poems on female courtesans included in the anthology. Most of these poems on female music entertainers were composed at the banquet of the Southern Dynasties court. In the setting of the imperial banquet, the role of the literati poets and the female entertainers, to some extent, were similar. They were both the ones who entertain the emperor and the royal patrons — the female entertainers provided music performance while the male poets amused their patrons by poetic compositions. In addition, poetic compositions at the imperial banquets were the means for male poets to demonstrate their literary competence so as to receive career promotion as well as other rewards and both literati guests and the patron also used the literati banquets as a way of building up political network. Therefore, when a literati poet composes a poem on these female entertainers, he not only depicts the performance of the female entertainer but also presents another performance – his own poem. In this poetic performance, the poet and the female entertainer that he portrays form a synthetic unity. And the male poets take the voice and the

image of the synthesized female protagonists as exquisite disguises to communicate with each other and present their own personal, social, and political expressions.

However, these Southern Dynasties male literati's poems on female entertainers were later selected into the *Yutai xinyong*, a poetry collection for the education of palace ladies at the time. And when the potential female readers of the anthology read these poems, they understood and received these poems on female entertainers differently. Despite lack of extant source on the Southern Dynasties' palace ladies' reception of these poems, a comparison between Shen Manyuan and Liu Lingxian's poems and their male relatives' works included in the *Yutai xinyong* also indirectly reflects how the potential female readers may receive these anthologized poems, since it is very likely that Shen Manyuan and Liu Lingxian have read the poems by their grandfather and brother. For the male literati poets, they watch the performance of the female courtesans and then present an imaginative and performative portrayal of the female protagonists in their poetic compositions. When these poems are passed on to their female readers, they read and rewrite these poems — which becomes another re-performance. In their re-performance, the Southern Dynasties female poets emulate the style, the themes, and the subject matters used by their male counterparts. But the moral integrity, the inner psychological states of the female protagonist, and the desire for transgressing the pre-defined feminine role are also strengthened or at least hinted in these re-performative compositions by the female reader-poets. And the compilation of the *Yutai xinyong*, the composition of the anthologized poems, and the potential female readers' reception of the poems together form a dynamic interaction that presents layers of performativity.

As there are very limited extant sources on the compilation of the *Yutai xinyong*, the education and the literary activities of the palace ladies in the Southern Dynasties, and the potential female readers' reception of the *Yutai xinyong*, this thesis tries to piece together all the relevant fragmental information from the historical records as well as gather up the broken clues by reasonable inference. Certain arguments and reasoning of this thesis surely could have been more thoroughly consolidated if more extant sources were available. But nonetheless, hope this thesis will shed light on or at least provide some alternative perspectives on the compilation, the poetry-composition, and reception of the *Yutai xinyong* as well as the palace culture in the Southern Dynasties in general.

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