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Mirroring the Wu School: Ma Shouzhen's Orchid Painting

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ABSTRACT

Ma Shouzhen (1548-1604), one of the most acclaimed courtesans at the Qinhuai pleasure quarters in the late-Ming period, is well-known for her orchid paintings in Chinese art history. This thesis explores the courtesan-painter's success in the courtesan world and in the male-dominated history of Chinese art, with its focus upon the artistic interactions between Ma Shouzhen and her lifelong lover Wang Zhideng (1535-1612), an exponent of the Wu School literati painting.

This thesis argues that it was Wang Zhideng in particular who played a crucial role in constructing the courtesan's image and position in history. Through Wang Zhideng's interventions, Ma Shouzhen played an intermediary role in the dissemination of art theory advocated by the Wu School artists. The acceptance and popularity of Ma Shouzhen's orchid works in the history of Chinese painting mirrors the prominent position of the Wu School in this field.

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INTRODUCTION

During the Chinese Spring Festival of 2009, I had the very good opportunity to participate as a gallery assistant in the exhibition of *Brilliant Strokes: Chinese Paintings from the Mactaggart Art Collection* by University of Alberta Museums. Spanning from the fifteenth century to the twentieth century, this large collection comprises a great number of masterpieces by prominent painters in history such as Shen Zhou 沈周 (1427-1509) and Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470-1559), the leading scholar artists in the fifteenth-sixteenth-century Jiangnan 江南 (Yangtze River delta) area. While marveling at the brilliant brushwork by those illustrious literati painters, I was intrigued by a long scroll of nine groups of orchids attributed to a Ming courtesan, Ma Shouzhen 馬守真 (1548-1604). Surprisingly, this fairly long orchid painting with its intricate composition and sophisticated painting techniques came from the hand of a courtesan in her teens.¹ More interestingly, Ka Bo Tsang, curator of Chinese painting at the Royal Ontario Museum, noted that the Indianapolis Museum of Art in the United States owns a compositionally identical version with the date of 1604, the year of Ma Shouzhen's death.² By observation of the unusual location of the inscription and the cursorily-cut ending in the Mactaggart

¹ This scroll bears an inscription with a 1566 date when the courtesan artist (b.1548) was eighteen years old.

² Ka Bo Tsang, *Brilliant Strokes: Chinese Paintings from the Mactaggart Art Collection* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Museums and University of Alberta Press, 2008), 11. For more discussion of the Mactaggart Collection scroll and the Indianapolis Museum scroll, see Marsha Weidner, et al., *Views from Jade Terrace: Chinese Women Artists 1300-1912* (Indianapolis and Rizzoli, NY: Museum of Art, 1988), 78-81.

Collection scroll, my doubts were raised immediately about the authenticity of Ma's orchid painting.

One of the most acclaimed courtesans of the Qinhuai River in the late Ming period, Ma Shouzhen was renowned for her orchid paintings in Chinese art history. Ma's orchid works gained great popularity during her lifetime, and a number of artistic works by her had been recorded in many important catalogues by Chinese scholars through the ages. Numerous paintings attributed to Ma are now in public and private collections around the world, probably one of the largest corpuses of work by a female painter in China, which naturally leads contemporary scholars to refer to Ma Shouzhen's painting when it comes to courtesan's art and culture. However, as James Cahill points out, many forgeries exist in Ma Shouzhen's painting.³ Truly, many questionable phenomena in Ma's paintings give rise to our suspicions of their authenticity, and call for caution before art historians take them seriously to plumb the courtesan's art.⁴

³ James Cahill, "The Painting of Liu Yin," in *Flowering in the Shadows: Women in the History of Chinese and Japanese Painting*, ed. Marsha Weidner (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 108.

⁴ For instance, the inscription of a double-outlined orchid painting by Ma recorded in Kong Shangren's 孔尚任 *Xiang jin bu* 享金簿 shares the very same poem with that on the painting in the Palace Museum in Beijing. Likewise, one of Ma's double-outlined orchid works illustrated in Li E's 厲鶚 anthologies of women calligraphers *Yutai shushi* 玉台書史 had an inscription almost identical to that on an apparently different painting in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Apart from the situation of different paintings with similar inscriptions, the Mactaggart Collection scroll and the Indianapolis Museum scroll present the reverse situation: a quite similar composition with different inscriptions. In addition, some works attributed to Ma Shouzhen are dated even before her birth or after her death: for example, one pictures of a twelve-leave album in the Soyeshima collection has an inscription with a 1613 date and a painting of Bamboos by a Rockery from the same collection bears a date of 1627. See Osvald Sirén, *Chinese Painting: Leading Masters and Principles*, Part II, vol. V (London: Lund Humphries and New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1958), 71-72; For an example of Ma's painting dated before her birth, see Li Shi, "A Study of the Entry on Ma Shouzhen's Scroll Painting Titled Molan Tu (Black Ink Orchids) in the Catalogue Shiju Baoji" in *Palace Museum Journal*, issue 4 (Beijing: Palace Museum, 2009), 50-63.

Authenticity will not be a main issue to be discussed in my thesis. However, it will indeed be a critical problem circumscribing my reading and leading to some distortions in my characterization of Ma Shouzhen's orchid painting. Therefore, I will select several reliable works of Ma Shouzhen for my study of the courtesan's art, especially from those scrutinized by rigorous and conscientious scholars in the seminal exhibition of *Views from Jade Terrace: Chinese Women Artists 1300-1912*, the first project ever dedicated to the works of Chinese women painters.⁵

The fact that there have been many forgeries of Ma Shouzhen's orchid paintings through the ages bears witness to the acceptance and popularity of Ma Shouzhen's orchid painting in the male-dominated history of Chinese art. Orchids had been one of the favorite subjects in flower paintings by literati artists since the Southern Song (1127-1279). During the latter part of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), the orchid began to gain popularity among courtesan artists. In Tang Shuyu's 湯漱玉 compilation *Yutai huashi* 玉台畫史 (The Jade Terrace History of Painting), a history of women painters from ancient times through the early nineteenth century, one can see that a great number of courtesan artists in the Ming dynasty were recorded for their expertise in orchid painting (Table 1 a and b). The orchid had become so prevalent in courtesans' art that the seminal painting manual of the seventeenth century *Jiezi yuan huazhuan* 芥子園畫傳 (The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting) juxtaposed the courtesan-painters with the predominant literati painters in its "Book of the

⁵ Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 72-81.

Orchid” section. Given that there are a considerable number of orchid courtesan-painters recorded in historical sources and that Ma was not the first courtesan well-versed in orchid painting of the Ming period, I was curious about what distinguished Ma’s orchids from those of other courtesans so much that the works by her rather than others have been collected and forged in the intervening centuries.

In traditional China, women would seldom have made contributions to Chinese art history if their male counterparts, scholar-officials, had not practiced painting in their pastimes as vehicles for self-expression or social intercourse but left it to the professional painters in the craft market. Except a few wives or daughters of professional artists, most women painters recorded in Chinese art history were either members of scholar-official families or courtesans who served this gentry class, and all can be connected to the scholar-officials whose art theories and practices came to predominate in Chinese painting during the Ming and Qing (1644-1912) dynasties.⁶ As the arbiter of Chinese art, the scholar-officials’ writings were constitutive of the power establishing the position of their female counterparts in Chinese art history. Given the paucity of information about women artists in comparison to the wealth of available materials on male painters, the limited records that are available for women painters, especially those written by their contemporary scholar-officials, could yet raise some intriguing issues. By what standards and rules was the female painter recorded in history? Did the writing about the female painter reflect the

⁶ Marsha Weidner, “Women in the History of Chinese Painting”, in *Views from Jade Terrace*, 13.

scholar writer's own ideas about art of his day? Did the scholar have his own cultural agenda when he delighted in extolling his female counterpart? What role did the female painter actually play in her social interactions with contemporary scholar-officials? How should the role or function of the female painter be perceived within the entire context of male-dominated Chinese art history? Such issues of women painters in current Chinese painting studies, however, have only received a cursory glance and brief discussion: most of art historians' attention, both in the West and the East, has long been paid to prominent scholar figures who have played markedly active roles in a series of social, political, and artistic networks on a national level and are usually categorized into groups or schools, such as the Zhe School and the Wu School of the Ming period; against such background, women painters seem to be tangential or irrelevant, just as they are usually placed last with clear separation from male artists in most compilations. With the advent of the seminal exhibition of *Views from Jade Terrace: Chinese Women Artists 1300-1912* in 1988, the study of Chinese women artists came to attract some scholars' attention. Yet many of this exhibition's scholarly articles focus upon providing biographical introductions of women artists and demonstrations of women painters' creative capabilities and collaborations within their female communities, partially in an effort to give women greater recognition. Although it has been widely acknowledged by scholars that women painters worked chiefly within the boundaries of contemporary stylistic trends led by their male counterparts, which seems to be their main connection with the male history of Chinese painting, the functions

and roles of women painters in the male-dominated Chinese painting history and their intricate artistic interactions with scholar-artists still await in-depth investigations. Remarkably, benefiting from Dorothy Ko's cultural study of Chinese women in the seventeenth century, more recent works by Jean Wetzel on the phenomenon of the success of late-Ming courtesan-painters examine the subject, style, and practice of courtesans' painting, and offer a bird's eye view of courtesan-painters' role as a connection between various realms of art and culture.⁷ Wetzel's preliminary study provides a theoretical ground to explore the artistic connection between the male and female worlds, and inspires to envisage artistic associations between courtesan-painters and literati patrons.

This thesis aspires to address the above questions through an exploration of the courtesan-painter Ma Shouzhen's engagement with her intimate patron Wang Zhideng 王穉登 (1535-1612), an exponent of Wu School art. By an examination of historical records and painting materials, a contextualized reading of Ma Shouzhen's poems and paintings, as well as a consideration of modern scholars' research, it will characterize Ma Shouzhen's relationship with Wang Zhideng, which has only received superficial notice in current art historical scholarship, and will reveal Wang Zhideng's crucial role in shaping Ma Shouzhen's image and position in history and the courtesan-painter's role in

⁷ Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); Jean Wetzel, "Hidden Connections: Courtesans in the Art World of the Ming Dynasty," in *Women's Studies* (Oxford: Taylor & Francis, 2002), 645-669; "The Mirror in the Garden: Courtesans' Painting of the Late Ming Dynasty," in *Tradition and Transformation: Studies in Chinese Art in Honor of Chu-Tsing Li*, ed. Judith G. Smith (Lawrence and Seattle: Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas: University of Washington Press, 2005), 198-219.

the dissemination of art theories and practices advocated by the Wu School exponents.

As a typical figure of versatility in the courtesan world, Ma Shouzhen has been frequently but briefly discussed in many modern scholarly works concerning Chinese courtesans' art and culture. Within the study of Chinese painting, a number of orchid paintings by Ma Shouzhen have been examined and discussed.⁸ Current art historical scholarship on Ma Shouzhen has observed stylistic similarities between Ma Shouzhen's works and those of Wu School artists when cataloguing and analyzing her paintings and justified their observation by a brief discussion of Ma's close associations with Suzhou scholars, in particular her lifelong lover Wang Zhideng. However, their discussion of the courtesan-painter's relation with Wang Zhideng does not go far enough. How did Ma's relationship with Wang affect Ma's artistic references to the Wu School artists and why?

⁸ Most of scholarly works on women painters touch upon Ma Shouzhen. The art historical works related to Ma Shouzhen are listed chronologically as follows: Osvald Sirén, *Chinese Painting: Leading Masters and Principles*, Part II, vol. V (London: Lund Humphries and New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1958), 71-72; Tseng Yu-ho, "Hsüeh Wu and her orchids: the collection of the Honolulu Academy of Arts," in *Arts Asiatiques*, 2.3 (Paris: A. Maisonneuve, 1955), 197-208; Marsha Weidner, et al., *Views from Jade Terrace: Chinese Women Artists 1300-1912* (Indianapolis and Rizzoli, NY: Museum of Art, 1988), 72-81; Ellen Johnson Laing, "Women Painters in Traditional China," in *Flowering in the Shadows: Women in the History of Chinese and Japanese Painting*, ed. Marsha Weidner (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 81-102; Li Shi, "Tan mingdai nü huajia Ma Shouzhen hua lan 談明代女畫家馬守真畫蘭" in *Wen Wu*, issue 7 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1991), 81-83; Tseng Yu-ho, "Women Painters of the Ming Dynasty," in *Arbitus Asiae*, Vol. 53, No. 1/2, 1993, 249-259; Jean Wetzel, "Hidden Connections: Courtesans in the Art World of the Ming Dynasty," in *Women's Studies* (Oxford: Taylor & Francis, 2002), 645-669; Jean Wetzel, "The Mirror in the Garden: Courtesans' Painting of the Late Ming Dynasty," in *Tradition and Transformation: Studies in Chinese Art in Honor of Chu-Tsing Li*, ed. Judith G. Smith (Lawrence and Seattle: Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas: University of Washington Press, 2005), 198-219; Li Shi, "A Study of the Entry on Ma Shouzhen's Scroll Painting Titled Molan Tu (Black Ink Orchids) in the Catalogue Shiju Baoji" in *Palace Museum Journal*, issue 4

The sole English monograph devoted to Ma Shouzhen is Eileen Grace Truscott's M.A. thesis in 1981.⁹ As a pioneering work on this courtesan-painter, Truscott's original study provides useful biographical information about Ma Shouzhen and a catalogue of Ma's works on various subjects. Truscott characterizes Ma's painting and relates Ma's style through comparison to that of Wu School literati artists such as Shen Zhou and Wen Zhengming. Although Truscott has touched upon Ma's relationship with Wang Zhideng, which in her view enabled the courtesan-painter to have access to Wu School artists, Truscott has not yet plumbed the nature of Ma's social relationship with Wang in any depth.

A more in-depth study of Ma Shouzhen's art was conducted in 2004 by Xu Wenmei in her treatise *Wanming qinglou huajia Ma Shouzhen de lanzhu hua* 晚明青樓畫家馬守真的蘭竹畫 (On Orchid Paintings by the Courtesan Painter Ma Shouzhen of the Late Ming Period).¹⁰ Having great access to a number of source materials, Xu reconstructs the courtesan's associations with literati clients and involvement in intellectual activities, and traces Ma's stylistic debts to Wu School artists with particular reference to Wen Zhengming. Remarkably, Xu attributes Ma's stylistic reference to Wen Zhengming in part to Wang Zhideng's influence on Ma's painting. However, Xu does not delve deeply into Wang's

(Beijing: Palace Museum, 2009), 50-63.

⁹ Eileen Grace Truscott, "Ma Shou-chen: Ming Dynasty Courtesan/Artist" (MA thesis: University of British Columbia, 1981).

¹⁰ Xu Wenmei, "Wanming qinglou huajia Ma Shouzhen de lanzhu hua 晚明青樓畫家馬守真的蘭竹畫" in *The National Palace Museum Research Quarterly* (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 2004), 81-115.

intervention in Ma's art: she does not explain how Wang Zhideng influenced Ma's art or why he did so.

While greatly indebted to art historians' research on Ma Shouzhen, this thesis will distinguish itself from the above scholarly works in several respects. First of all, this study is neither an ambitious endeavor to exhaust all of Ma Shouzhen's paintings on diverse subjects, as other art historians attempt, nor a monographic account of this courtesan's entire life and artistic achievements; instead, I narrow my focus to the artistic interactions between Ma Shouzhen and Wang Zhideng to connect the courtesan's art with the Wu School and to look into Wang Zhideng's influence on the courtesan's art. Relying upon available historical materials and a contextualized interpretation of Ma's reliable works of art that involve Wang's participation, my study will construct and clarify through painting the social relationship between Ma Shouzhen and Wang Zhideng. It will complement current scholarship on the courtesan-painter's artistic life and enrich our understanding of the intricate artistic interactions between the courtesan and her literati patrons; on the other hand, it can provide new perspectives on familiar literati groups in Chinese painting studies and expand the context within which painters of both genders can be involved and related.

Another important way in which this thesis differs from other scholars' studies is through its source materials. When considering several works of art by Ma Shouzhen that have been discussed in previous scholarship, this thesis will also draw heavily upon other sources that have not been well exploited by

scholars. Most historical records of Ma Shouzhen's relationship with Wang Zhideng are based on the late-Ming, eminent scholar Qian Qianyi's 錢謙益 (1608-64) biographical sketch of Ma, which is often used in current Western scholarship as her standard biography.¹¹ Nonetheless, its original source—*Ma ji Zhuan* 馬姬傳 (Biography of Ma Shouzhen) written by Wang Zhideng himself—has been scarcely noticed.¹² Wang Zhideng's writing provides insight into the cultural discourse of Ma's day, and I will use his biography of Ma as the primary source in this thesis to explore how the contemporary literatus depicted the courtesan and shaped her image in the history of literature and painting and how the courtesan responded to the literati's desires through her works of art. Another type of resource for this thesis is two important painting manuals. A discussion of the popular painting manual *The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting* and a painting manual by a contemporary of Ma Shouzhen, *Jiuwan yirong* 九畹遺容 (The Portrait of Nine Acres of Orchids), will demonstrate how Wu School artists substantiated their art ideas on painting orchids through these painting manuals and established themselves evolving narratives of Chinese art history.

In addition to connecting itself to accounts of Ma Shouzhen and her art, my thesis also draws on and situates itself in several other fields of study. First among them is the study of Wu School art, the leading group of literati artists in fifteenth-sixteenth-century Suzhou. In addition to studying the lives and works

¹¹ Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 列朝詩集小傳 (Shanghai : Gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1957), 765-766.

¹² Wang Zhideng, "Ma ji zhuan" 馬姬傳, an appendix to "Jinling liren ji" 金陵麗人紀 in *Pin hua jian* 品花箋, ed. Qing shao hua shi 清苔花史, n.p. Copy in the National Central Library, Taipei.

of individual artists of this school and presenting their work in exhibitions, scholars have offered overall views of Wu School art and its important social-economic developments and have observed the collaborative activities among artists of this group.¹³ My thesis derives from and aspires to contribute to this diverse field through a discussion of such issues as Ma Shouzhen's use of the Wu School's favored motifs and the Wu School exponent's intervention in Ma's oeuvre.

My study also allies itself with literary scholarship. Such art and cultural historians as Jean Wetzel and Dorothy Ko have provided broad overviews of courtesans' success in the late-Ming dynasty. However, as in other artistic fields, such as poetry, the phenomenon of the Ming courtesan as a notable force within the world of the arts was largely circumscribed by their powerful literati patrons. Current literary studies have greatly articulated the complex interactions between courtesan-writers and literati, who jointly formed the distinguished literary culture of the late Ming and early Qing periods, and enable my study to contextualize Ma Shouzhen's works of art within cultural discourses of the late Ming period.¹⁴ This thesis in turn adds a case study to this body of scholarship,

¹³ Exemplary studies of the Wu School include Alice R.M. Hyland, *The Literati Vision: Sixteenth Century Wu School Painting and Calligraphy* (Memphis: Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, 1984); "Wen Chia and Suchou Literati: 1550-1580," in *Artists and Patrons: Some Social and Economic Aspects of Chinese Painting*, ed. Chu-tsing Li (Lawrence, Kansas: Kress Foundation Department of Art History, University of Kansas, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City in association with University of Washington Press, 1989), 127-132; Kwan S. Wong, "Hsiang Yüan-Pien and Suchou Artists," in *Artists and Patrons: Some Social and Economic Aspects of Chinese Painting*, 155-158; Craig Clunas, *Elegant Debts: The Social Art of Wen Zhengming* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004).

¹⁴ Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang, ed. *Writing Women in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Chang, Kang-i Sun. *Feminist Readings: Classical and Modern Perspectives* (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue, 1998); "Gender and Canonicity: Ming-Qing Women Poets in the eyes of the Male literati," in *Critical Essays on Chinese*

seeking to enrich our understanding of the distinguished culture of literati and courtesans in the late-Ming dynasty.

Employing an interdisciplinary approach, my study is an initial exploration of Ma Shouzhen's success in the courtesan world and in the history of orchid painting. I situate Ma Shouzhen's works of art and the discourse about her into their social, literary, and art historical contexts to see what they can tell us about the courtesan's artistic life with the literatus patron's intervention in the late Ming period. Due to the scarcity of historical records on Ma Shouzhen and many forgeries of her paintings, I am aware of the limits in my study. It is on the paintings mostly selected from the exhibition of *Views from Jade Terrace: Chinese Women Artists 1300-1912* that I have based my hypothetical construction of the artistic interactions between Wang Zhideng and Ma Shouzhen, which inevitably limits our understanding of a complete picture of Ma Shouzhen's artistic life. Yet I have attempted to reconstruct the most recoverable part about this courtesan-artist, aiming to give a more nuanced picture of the courtesan's artistic life and to shed more light on Ma Shouzhen's place in the entire history of Chinese painting.

Chapter one is a biographical introduction of Ma Shouzhen that focuses upon her artistic achievements, particularly her orchid painting, and on her intimate relationship with the leading Suzhou scholar Wang Zhideng. It will begin to articulate some of the manners in which Wang Zhideng played an

Women and Literature, Vol. 2 (Taipei: Daoxiang chuban she, 1999), 135-151; Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, ed. *The Red Brush: Writing Women in Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

instrumental role in shaping Ma Shouzhen's image in history. In Chapter two, I attempt to connect Ma Shouzhen's orchid works with the art of the Wu School, to which her lover Wang Zhideng belonged, and to explore the courtesan's success in the courtesan world. This chapter consists of two parts. The first part is a review of orchid painting traditions through a discussion of the popular painting manual *The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting* and a painting manual from Ma Shouzhen's day. An analysis of some orchid paintings by prominent literati painters will show how Wu School artists in Suzhou justified their artistic ideas on painting orchids through these painting manuals. Analyses of Ma Shouzhen's orchid works in the second part will demonstrate that Ma Shouzhen's paintings were under the sway of Wu School orchid art, and a contextualized reading of poetic inscriptions in Ma's works indicates the ways Ma Shouzhen established herself and may have exerted influence in the courtesan world. Chapter three explores Wang Zhideng's participation in Ma Shouzhen's production of works of art and reconstructs Wang Zhideng's artistic interactions with Ma Shouzhen. It will suggest that Wang Zhideng's knowledge and theory of painting may have shaped Ma Shouzhen's oeuvre. Through a consideration of Wang Zhideng's scholarly activities, it concludes that Wang Zhideng's participation in Ma Shouzhen's painting, namely his anticipated instruction and addition of inscriptions, rendered the courtesan painter an agent of his Suzhou coterie. The courtesan painter's prestige in the courtesan world probably mirrors the prominent position of the Wu School in Chinese painting.

CHAPTER ONE

MA SHOZHEN AND HER ART

Ma Shouzhén 馬守真, *zi* 字 (style name) Xuan'er 玄兒 and Yuejiao 月嬌, *hao* 號 (assumed name) Xianglan 湘蘭 or Xianglan zi 湘蘭子,¹⁵ was one of the most celebrated courtesans at the Qinhuai 秦淮 pleasure quarters (in present Nanjing 南京) of the late-Ming period (approximately the late sixteenth century to the end of the Ming dynasty in 1644).¹⁶ Born in 1548, Ma Shouzhén rose to prominence during the Jiajing 嘉靖 era (1522-66) and reached the peak of her career in the Wanli 萬曆 period (1573-1620) during which she died of illness (1604).¹⁷ The most extensive biographical sketch of Ma Shouzhén was written

¹⁵ It is asserted by some contemporary scholars that Xuan'er and Xuanjue 玄覺 are Ma Shouzhén's *zi* and that Yuejiao is her *hao*. See Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 72; Goodrich and Fang, 1362. However, according to the biography of Ma Shouzhén written by her contemporary Wang Zhideng and other primary historical accounts of Ma, Yuejiao and Xuan'er should be her *zi* while Xianglan zi is her *hao*. The name of Xuanjue is far less frequently mentioned in most of primary sources to be examined here. These primary sources are listed as follows: Wang Zhideng, *Maji zhuan* 馬姬傳, an appendix to "Jinling liren ji" 金陵麗人紀 in *Pin hua jian* 品花箋, ed. Qing shao hua shi 清茗花史, n.p., copy in the National Central Library, Taipei; Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 列朝詩集小傳 (Shanghai: Gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1957); Zhu Yizun, *Mingshi zong* 明詩綜 (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 2007); Jiang Shaoshu, *Wusheng shishi* 無聲詩史, Siku quanshu (Ji'nan: Qilu shushe), juan 5; Li E, *Yutai shushi* 玉台書史 in *Meishu congshu*, ed. Huang Binhong and Deng Shi (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1997); Tang Shuyu, *Yutai huashi* 玉台畫史 in *Meishu congshu* ed. Huang and Deng. Xu Shumin and Qian Yue, ed. *Zhong xiang ci* 眾香詞 in *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao* 歷代婦女著作考, ed. Hu Wenkai (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1957), 121; Wang shilu, ed. *Gonggui shiji yiwen kaolue* 宮閨氏籍藝文考略 in *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao* 歷代婦女著作考, ed. Hu, 121; Anonymous, ed. *Yujing yangqiu* 玉鏡陽秋 in *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao* 歷代婦女著作考, ed. Hu, 121.

¹⁶ Ma Shouzhén was said to be one of the Eight Famous Courtesans of the Ming dynasty. See Tseng, 205-206; Ellen Johnston Laing, "Wives, Daughters, and Lovers: Three Ming Dynasty Women Painters" in *Views from Jade Terrace*, 37.

¹⁷ Wang, n.p.

by the late-Ming noted scholar Qian Qianyin 錢謙益 (1608-64), which has been commonly used as her standard biography:

The personal name of courtesan Ma was Shouzhen; her style name was Xuan'er (in childhood) and Yuejiao, but because she was skilled in the painting of orchids, she was best known by the name of Xianglan ("Xiang River Orchid"). Her figure and face were quite ordinary, but she was always high spirited and as carefree as the early oriole in the spring willow; spouting her phrases and casting her glances, she was able to cleverly gauge each person's mood, and none who say her could avoid being captivated by her charms.

Her establishment was located at the finest spot on the Qinhuai River. Its ponds and halls were clear and sparse, its flowers and rocks were elegant and pure; with its winding corridors and secret chambers it was a labyrinth from which one could not escape. She had her girl apprentices instructed in the theatrical arts and each day they would provide entertainment to the banqueting guests: the sounds of drum and lute would mingle with those of gold strings and red ivory clappers.

By nature she was given to acts of light-hearted largesse. Time and again she would shower money on young men. Although richly ornamented hairpins that happened to fall to the floor would often end up at the pawnbroker's, she did not care.

Once when she was threatened by Mo Cilang, Mister Wang Bogu (Wang Zhideng) saved her from disaster. She then wanted to become his concubine, but he refused her request. In the autumn of the *jiachen* year of the reign period Wanli (1604), Bogu turned seventy and Xianglan came to Suzhou from Nanjing to arrange a banquet for him in celebration of his birthday. The eating and drinking went on for several months and the singing and dancing lasted each day until dawn. It was the most elaborate celebration Suzhou had seen in decades. Shortly after her return (to Nanjing), Xianglan fell ill. She lit a lamp, paid homage to the Buddha, after which she bathed and changed into a fresh set of clothes. Then, at the age of fifty-seven, she passed away seated in the lotus position. She left a collection of poetry in two chapters. In the *xinmao* year of the reign period Wanli (1591), Bogu wrote a preface to her collection, saying[...]. After Xianglan's death, Bogu wrote her biography and twelve elegiac stanzas. Up to now visitors who stopped by the Old (prostitution) Compound all wrote poems in commemoration of Xianglan.¹⁸

¹⁸ Qian, 765-766; Most of the translation is by Idema and Grant, 366-367. The preface written by Wang Zhideng is omitted here and will be discussed later.

The above account basically elucidates the courtesan's charms, preferences, personality and her romantic relationship with Wang Zhideng 王穉登 (1535-1612). Living at the finest place of the Qinhuai pleasure quarters, Ma Shouzhen was considered to be one of the most talented and prestigious courtesans.¹⁹ Her establishment with labyrinthine design and elegant decoration suggested her scholarly taste and character. Ma Shouzhen's disdain for money and her generous gifts to young men earned her reputation of a female knight-errant (*nüxia* 女俠). As the late-Ming scholar Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 (1629-1709) wrote, for such conducts, she had a knight-errant temperament, and lived a defiant and unconventional life.²⁰ The lavish celebration she arranged for her lover's birthday, her tranquil death and Buddhist detachment presented her unrestrained, unconventional way of life.

As an eminent courtesan, Ma Shouzhen was not only renowned for her physical charms and chivalrous spirits but also highly praised for her accomplishments in literature, calligraphy, painting and musical performances. Ma Shouzhen's contemporary Zhou Tianqiu 周天球 (1514-95), a famous calligrapher and orchid painter active in Suzhou, lauded Ma as the only person after Cai Wenji (Cai Yan 蔡琰) and Madame Guan (Guan Daosheng 管道升), two illustrious female artists of the gentry class in Chinese history and claimed that Ma was sufficiently well refined in the "female arts" to be head of the

¹⁹ According to Yu Huai's 余懷 (1616-1696) *Banqiao zaji* 板橋雜記, all the well-known singing girls of the southern quarter and the foremost-ranking officials prostitutes lived in *jiuyuan* 舊院 (the Old Compound), the finest place on the Qinhuai River. See Wetzel, "Mirror in the Garden", 205.

²⁰ Zhu, *juan* 98, 4528.

pleasure quarters.²¹ In these “female arts”, Ma Shouzhen achieved considerable success: she instructed her girl apprentices in the theatrical arts and led them to perform plays around the Jiangnan area.²² She even wrote an opera.²³ Her poems were published at least three times during her lifetime.²⁴ Her paintings were not only valued by the elegant dandies of her time but also well-known overseas: even emissaries from Siam knew to buy and collect her painting fans.²⁵ Ma’s intimate Suzhou patron Wang Zhideng wrote that among all the above artistic skills, the one at which Ma was most accomplished was depicting the orchid; therefore her name “Ma Xianglan” 馬湘蘭 (the orchid at the Xiang River) was more renowned.²⁶

Ma Shouzhen painted other plants, such as bamboo, lotus, narcissus, and plum blossoms, but it is for her orchid painting, particularly her portrayals of the plant in the “double-outline” (*shuanggou* 双勾) technique that Ma is widely acclaimed today.²⁷ Among all the extant paintings attributed to Ma Shouzhen as well as the works recorded in catalogues by pre-modern Chinese collectors and

²¹ Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 72.

²² Xu Wenmei, 87; Zhang Huijian, *Mingqing Jiangsu wenren nianbiao* 明清江蘇文人年表 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2008), 391.

²³ This opera entitled *Sansheng zhuan yuzanji* 三生傳玉簪記 was an adaptation of the tale of a poor student who lacked gratitude for his courtesan-lover’s aid, failed to be faithful to her and married a high official’s daughter instead. Two scenes of this opera are extant in *Qunying leixuan* 群英類選. See Goodrich and Fang, 1362; Idema and Grant, 367-368; Hua Wei, “Ma Xianglan yu Mingdai houqi de qutan 馬湘蘭與明代后期的曲壇” in *Zhonghua Xiqu*, issue 1 (Linfen: Shanxi shifan daxue yanjiusuo, 2008), 151-177.

²⁴ Ma’s anthology in two volumes was first published around the year of 1591 for Wang Zhideng wrote a preface in 1591; the second time was in the contemporary Mao Yuchang’s collection under the title *Poems by the Four Talented Courtesans of Qinhuai* (Qinhuai siji shi 秦淮四姬詩); the third was in Sang Zhenbai’s collection *Poems of Trousseaus* (Xianglian shi 香奩詩) with a preface dated 1595. See also Xu, 103.

²⁵ Jiang Shaoshu, *juan* 5, 4a.

²⁶ Wang, n.p.

²⁷ Truscott, 36; Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 73.

scholars, depictions of orchids are the most numerous, with a large number of them depicted in the double-outline technique (Fig.1-4).²⁸ Kong Shangren 孔尚任 (1648-1718) praised that Ma's double-outlined orchid work was delicate and alive with elegant and strong brushstrokes.²⁹ Most of Ma's orchid works were executed in ink monochrome, a favored practice by literati artists. In his *Ming hua lu* 明畫錄 (Records of Painting in the Ming Dynasty), Xu Qin 徐沁 (a.1677) remarked that Ma Shouzhen "developed a special style of painting orchids in ink monochrome, natural and unrestrained, tranquil and elegant, with exceptional spirit resonance".³⁰

Art historians in pre-modern China traditionally associated Ma Shouzhen's painting style to old masters of the past. The late-Ming scholar Jiang Shaoshu 姜紹書 (1573-1638) wrote that Ma's orchids followed the model created by Zhao Mengjian 趙孟堅 (1199-1267?) and that her bamboo imitated that of Guan Daosheng.³¹ Both Zhao Mengjian and Guan Daosheng were renowned artists of the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368), specializing in orchid and bamboo respectively. Whether or not Ma Shouzhen availed herself of the painting styles of Zhao Mengjian and Guan Daosheng awaits further investigation; however, this conventional stylistic association with the past

²⁸ So far as the author knows, there are approximately 43 paintings attributed to Ma Shouzhen extant around the world. See Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 183; Pei Jingfu, *Zhuangtao ge shuhua lu* 壯陶閣書畫錄, vol.11 (shanghai: shangwu yinshuguan, 1937); Kong Shangren, *Xiang jin bu* 享金簿 in *Meishu congshu*, 425; Li E, *Yutai shushi* 玉台書史 in *Meishu congshu*, 2170; Tang Shuyu, *Yutai huashi* 玉台畫史 in *Meishu congshu*, 2199.

²⁹ Kong, 425.

³⁰ Xu Qin, *Ming hua lu*, *Congshu jicheng chubian* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), juan 6, 70.

³¹ Jiang, *juan* 5, 3b- 4a.

masters, like Zhou Tianqiu's paralleling Ma with outstanding women artists in history, unquestionably graced Ma's art and enhanced the market value of her painting in the commercial urban society of the Ming dynasty.³²

Current scholarship relates Ma Shouzhen's art to that of literati artists in the Ming period.³³ Scholars have noted that courtesans were trained to cater to their literati patrons' tastes and inevitably worked within contemporary stylistic trends led by literati artists. It has been suggested that Ma's paintings have a scholarly taste, spontaneous and untrammelled, and her style was under the sway of Shen Zhou and Wen Zhengming, two leading scholar artists in the fifteenth-sixteenth Jiangnan area.³⁴ However, this simplistic attribution to the influence of such towering figures is partially due to their profound influence on all the painters who came after them and still needs to be further examined. Moreover, whereas most scholars have noticed the general influence of the literati class on Ma Shouzhen's painting, given the nature of the courtesanship, their discussion of the intricate artistic interactions between Ma and her contemporary literati yet does not go far enough. Even the artistic interaction between Ma Shouzhen and her intimate client Wang Zhideng has only received superficial notice.

The few historical accounts of Ma Shouzhen written by Chinese scholars remember Ma primarily through a few stories related to Wang Zhideng, a

³² For a discussion of the commercial urban culture of the Ming dynasty, see Ko, 30-34; Victoria Cass, *Dangerous Women: Warriors, Grannies, and Geishas of the Ming* (Lanham, Boulder, New York and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999), 6-17.

³³ These scholarly works are listed chronologically as follows: Tseng, "Hsüeh Wu and her orchids"; Truscott, "Ma Shou-chen: Ming Dynasty Courtesan/Artist"; Li Shi, "Tan mingdai nü huajia Ma Shouzhen hua lan 談明代女畫家馬守真畫蘭"; Wetzel, "Hidden Connections"; Xu Wenmei, "Wanming qinglou huajia Ma Shouzhen de lanzhu hua 晚明青樓畫家馬守真的蘭竹畫"; Li Shi, "A Study of the Entry on Ma Shouzhen's Scroll

leading poet and calligrapher in Suzhou: (1) Wang saved Ma from being threatened by a criminal but declined Ma's request to become his concubine; (2) Ma arranged a fairly elaborate celebration in Suzhou for Wang's seventieth birthday, shortly after which Ma died of illness; (3) Wang wrote a preface for the publication of Ma's two-volume collection of poems and a eulogy with twelve elegiac stanzas for Ma's death. Their romance even came to be adapted into a play entitled *Bai lian qun* 白練裙 (White Silk Skirts).³⁵

One historiographical reason for these conventionally similar records of Ma's romantic life is that most of the biographical accounts of Ma Shouzhen in the late Ming and early Qing periods, such as the ones in *Mingshi zong* 明詩綜 (Poems in the Ming Dynasty), *Yutai shushi* 玉台書史 (The Jade Terrace History of Calligraphy) and *Yutai huashi* 玉台畫史 (The Jade Terrace History of Painting), are essentially based on a biographic sketch of Ma Shouzhen in the preeminent scholar Qian Qianyi's extensive anthology *Liechao shiji* 列朝詩集 (Collected Poems of Successive Reigns) of 1652, which highly extolled the romantic stories of Ma Shouzhen's relationship with Wang Zhideng.

While the account of Ma in Qian's anthology has been commonly used in Western scholarship as her standard biography,³⁶ scarcely noticed is the earlier biography of Ma Shouzhen (*Ma ji Zhuan* 馬姬傳) written by Wang Zhideng

Painting Titled Molan Tu (Black Ink Orchids) in the Catalogue Shiju Baoji".

³⁴ Tseng, "Hsüeh Wu and her orchids", 207; Truscott, 45-48; Xu Wenmei, 93-98.

³⁵ This opera was written by the late-Ming playwright Zheng Zhiwen 鄭之文 (active.1605). Its main theme yet related the romance between Wang Zhideng's friend Tu Long 屠龍 and a courtesan named Kou Si'er 寇四兒. See Goodrich and Fang, 1362.

³⁶ Tseng, "Women Painters of the Ming Dynasty", 252-253; Goodrich and Fang, 1362; Idema and Grant, 367-368.

himself in 1605, one year after Ma's death.³⁷ Surprisingly, the descriptions of Ma Shouzhen in Qian Qianyi's anthology are either identical to those in Wang Zhideng's writing or abbreviated versions of Wang's account (Appendix II). Considering the thorough description of the stories between Ma and Wang in Qian's sketch as well as Qian's enormous admiration of Wang,³⁸ it is extremely likely that Qian's biographical account of Ma was drawn exactly from Wang's writing (Appendix II).³⁹

As a renowned poet and calligrapher, Wang Zhideng demonstrated his talents and made fame in the Wu prefecture at a tender age. His calligraphy was chiefly influenced by his senior and admirer Wen Zhengming. After Wen's death (1559), Wang Zhideng played a leading role in the literary circles of Suzhou for over thirty years. People gathered around him and often crowded his house, and visitors from distant places frequently requested his writings and treasured them as a precious souvenir. His poetry was greatly appreciated by the

³⁷ Wang Zhideng, "Ma ji zhuan" 馬姬傳, an appendix to "Jinling liren ji" 金陵麗人紀, in *Pin hua jian* 品花箋, ed. Qing shao hua shi 清茗花史, n.p., copy in the National Central Library, Taipei.

³⁸ In Qian Qianyi's *Collected Poems Successive Reigns*, Qian generously selected 203 poems from Wang Zhideng's works and regretted his missing fine companionship with Wang in the laudatory biographical sketch of Wang. See Goodrich and Fang, 1362.

³⁹ In addition to Ma's stories with Wang Zhideng recorded in Qian's account, a complete preface written by Wang Zhideng to Ma Shouzhen's two-volume anthology of poetry was also included. Kang-i Sun Chang claimed that the section on women-poets ("Runji 閨集") in Qian's anthology was actually edited in the main by the famous courtesan Liu Rushi 柳如是 (1618?-64) who later became Qian's concubine and that the annotations on the poets were the joint works by Liu and Qian. Even if it was Liu Rushi that mainly did the entry of Ma Shouzhen, it is equally likely that Liu cited Wang Zhideng's biography of Ma considering her husband's and her own admiration of the leading scholar, Ma's achievements in the courtesan world probably mirroring Liu's own, and the romantic coupling of Ma and Wang, a parallel of her own relationship with Qian. See Kang-i Sun Chang, "Ming and Qing Anthologies of Women's Poetry and Their Selection Strategies", in *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*, ed. Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 153.

Grand Secretary Yuan Wei 袁煒 (1507-1565) when he visited Beijing and became Yuan's house guest in 1564. Once Yuan passed away, Wang returned to Suzhou and revisited Beijing in 1567.⁴⁰ During the reign of Emperor Shenzong (1573-1620), Wang Zhideng declined the offer of participating in the compilation of the national history, and spent the rest of his life in artistic pursuits at home.⁴¹

According to *Ma ji Zhuan*, Wang had acquaintance with Ma through his delivering her from being threatened by a criminal during his sojourn in Nanjing. An orchid painting dated 1572 by Ma Shouzhen bears Wang Zhideng's inscription, which indicates Wang's acquaintance with Ma started no later than 1572 (Fig.5). Around 1574, Wang and Ma made an engagement to meet each other in Suzhou since Ma had never been to Suzhou.⁴² It was after thirty years that their engagement was realized: in 1604, Ma purchased a sumptuous boat and brought a number of singing girls to Wang's residence in Suzhou where Ma arranged a lavish celebration for Wang's seventieth birthday, which lasted several months and had been regarded as the grandest event Suzhou had seen in decades.⁴³ It is surprising that the Qinhuai courtesan Ma Shouzhen had never been to Suzhou until the last year of her life, given the convenience from

⁴⁰ Qian, 481-482.

⁴¹ For more biographical information of Wang Zhideng, see Goodrich and Fang, 1361-1363.

⁴² That Ma Shouzhen had never been to Suzhou until 1604 can be confirmed by writings of other contemporary scholars. For instance, the scholar Shen Defu 沈德符 (1578-1642) wrote in his *Wanli yehuo bian* 萬曆野獲編 that Ma Shouzhen regretted she had never been to Suzhou in her life and therefore brought around fifteen girl apprentices to Suzhou and played an opera there in the Jiachen year (1604). See Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuo bian* 萬曆野獲編 in SKQS, *juan* 25, 646.

⁴³ Wang, n.p.

Nanjing to Suzhou by way of the Grand Canal. Nevertheless, Ma Shouzhen kept close associations with many Suzhou scholars. Wang Zhideng's friends Peng Nian 彭年 (1505-1566), Zhou Tianqiu, Zhang Xianyi 張獻翼 (1527-1613) and Xue Mingyi 薛明益 (late sixteenth century) were all Ma's patrons and composed complimentary poems.⁴⁴

In Wang Zhideng's biography of Ma, much ink was spent on depicting Ma Shouzhen as a female knight-errant who at fifty had a lover half her age, had a cavalier attitude toward money, and gave liberal gifts away to young men. Thirteen years older than Ma Shouzhen, Wang Zhideng's lauding of Ma's unconventional conducts with a young man half her age probably justified his own relationship with Ma Shouzhen. Unwilling to be criticized as a villain that possessed Ma through saving her from adversity, Wang refused Ma's request of becoming his concubine; however, their friendship henceforth lasted for ever. Wang Zhideng believed that there was a solid bond between Ma Shouzhen and himself, and their hearts were in perfect union, just as "the fish drinking water knows itself whether it's cold or warm".⁴⁵ Perhaps mirroring his own prestige in the literary circles, Wang Zhideng generously described Ma Shouzhen's fame in the courtesan world: "Whatever the royalty, nobles, frontier warriors, hawkers and servants, none did not know Ma Xianglan. When Xianglan was getting more

⁴⁴ Tseng, "Women Painters of the Ming Dynasty", 252; Peng Nian was a famous calligrapher and art connoisseur in Suzhou literati society, and Ma Shouzhen painted an eight-leaf orchid album for him in which an explanatory colophon by Zhou Tianqiu was included, See Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 72; Zhang Xianyi was prominent with his two brothers in Suzhou literati circles, and in the collection of Ma Shouzhen's poems, several romantic poems were dedicated to Zhang Xianyi, see Xu Wenmei, 96; The 1572 orchid painting by Ma Shouzhen bears Xue Mingyi's inscription, see Chapter 2.

⁴⁵ Wang, n.p.

famous, all other courtesans were jealous of her... When Ma's fame increased, loafers, dandies and brothel clients were all disgraced by not knowing her. Various carts and horses lingered outside Ma's house".⁴⁶ Since they were in perfect accord, Wang Zhideng's commendation of his lover appears to approve of himself to some extent.

The literatus patron's writing occupied a significant role in shaping and promoting this public image of the courtesan in Chinese history. In addition to the biography, Wang Zhideng composed in 1591 a complimentary preface to an anthology of Ma's poems.⁴⁷ In this preface, Wang also highly praised Ma's artistic accomplishments and knight-errant temperament, comparing the courtesan to the famous male knights-errant: "She set little store by money, treating it as mere dust and earth—a veritable Zhu Jia 朱家 with green sleeves. She took promises seriously, as if they were unalterable as mountains—no less than a Ji Bu 季布 wearing rouge and powder".⁴⁸ It was probably a common practice in the courtesan world that literatus patrons contributed such a preface to the courtesan's publication or wrote a eulogy, which definitely graced the courtesan's works and reinforced her image in public.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Wang, n.p.

⁴⁷ Qian, 765-766.

⁴⁸ Translation by Wai-ye Li in Widmer and Chang, 62. Both Zhu Jia and Ji Bu were two famous knights-errant from the Han dynasty (202 BC-9). For their biographies, see "The Biographies of Ji Bu and Luan Bu" and "The Collected Biographies of Wandering Knights" in Sima Qian, *Shiji* 史記, *juan* 100 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 124.

⁴⁹ For instance, Wang Zhideng also wrote a preface to *Nan you cao* 南遊草, the anthology of Xue Susu 薛素素, another celebrated courtesan at the Qinhuai pleasure quarters; the famous literatus Mao Xiang 冒襄 (1611-93) wrote a romantic memoir *Yi mei an yi yu* 影梅庵憶語 for his relationship with the famous courtesan Dong Xiaowan 董小宛. See Berg, 176; Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 98-99.

Apart from the common practice of writings by literati gilding a courtesan's career, as we will see in the discussion of Ma's painting below, the literatus patron might have partaken in the production process of the courtesan's art in pursuit of his own agenda; and distinguished by her mastery of "his" art,⁵⁰ the courtesan may even have received her patron's instruction. Before discussion turns to the literatus client's intervention in the courtesan's oeuvre, the next chapter will provide a brief review of orchid painting traditions by literati artists and a short examination of the courtesan-painter's orchid works to acquaint the reader with the field of Chinese orchid painting.

⁵⁰ Ko, 253.

CHAPTER TWO
ORCHID PAINTING

Introduction to Orchid Painting

With its simple techniques and symbolic functions, the orchid was one of the favorite subjects in flower paintings by literati artists. In his treatise on the Yuan-dynasty monk-painter Pu Ming 普明, Chu-tsing Li has given a clear picture of Chinese orchid-painting traditions since the Southern Song, when the orchid attained its first popularity among literati artists.⁵¹ According to Li, it was the late Song scholar painter Zheng Sixiao 鄭思肖 (1241-1318) who gave the orchid a special character as a symbol of loyalty. In Zheng's painting, the orchid was depicted without earth around its roots, for the earth in Zheng's own words had been stolen by the Yuan conquerors, an emblem of Zheng's rejection of the Mongolian rule and his allegiance to Song (Fig. 6).⁵² As such, the orchid became a very popular subject among literati artists in the Yuan period; The Yuan literati artists identified the orchid with a loyal and/or noble-minded literatus, often associating it with bamboo as a symbol of the gentleman.⁵³

For his purpose of positioning Pu Ming in the history of orchid painting, Li simply discusses the evolution of the orchid-painting tradition from its beginning to the time of Wen Zhengming in the sixteenth century, omitting the

⁵¹ Chu-tsing Li, "The Oberlin Orchid and the Problem of P'u-ming," in *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America*, Vol.16 (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press for the Asia Society, 1962), 49-76.

⁵² Li, 52.

⁵³ Ibid.

development of orchid painting after Wen from discussion. Fortunately, the “Book of the Orchid” volume of *Jiezi yuan huazhuan* 芥子園畫傳 (The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting), a seminal and popular painting manual of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, provides a brief history of orchid painting from the Southern Song through Ming times, although the monk-painter is excluded. For the sake of convenience for later discussion, it is worth quoting its introduction at length in here:

畫法源流

畫蘭墨自鄭所南、趙彝齋、管仲姬，後相繼而起者代不乏人，然分為二派：文人寄興，則放逸之氣見於筆端；閨秀傳神，則悠閒之姿浮於紙上。各臻其妙。趙春谷及仲穆，以家法相傳；楊補之與湯叔雅，則甥舅媲美；楊維幹與彝齋，同時皆號子固，且具善畫蘭，不相上下。以及明季，張靜之、項子京、吳秋林、周公瑕、蔡景明、陳古白、杜子經、蔣冷生、陸包山、何仲雅輩出，真墨吐眾香，硯滋九畹，極一時之盛。管仲姬之後，女流爭為效顰。至明季馬湘蘭、薛素素、徐翩翩、楊宛若，皆以煙花麗質，繪及幽芳。雖令湘畹蒙羞，然亦超脫不凡，不與眾草為伍者矣。⁵⁴

General background of orchid painting

Since Zheng Suonan (Sixiao), Zhao Yizhai (Mengjian), and Guan Zhongji (Daoshen), there have been many painters renowned for their ink monochrome paintings of orchids. They may be divided into two general groups: the literati, who in certain inspired moments produced extraordinarily spontaneous results in brushwork; and some women painters of orchids, in whose works the *shen* (divine) quality seemed to float across the painting. Both groups were wonderful. Zhao Chungu and Zhongmu worked in what might be called a family style. Yang Buzhi and Tang Shuya (of the Song era), nephew and uncle, both were extraordinarily skillful. Yang Weigan and Zhao Yizhai, of the Yuan period, had the same *zi*, Zigu. All of these painters were famous for their pictures of orchids. Up to Ming times, there were Zhang Jingzhi (Ning), Xiang Zijing (Yuanbian), Wu Qiulin, Zhou Gongxia (Tianqiu), Cai Jingming (Yihuai), Chen Gubai (Yuansu), Du Zijing (Dashou),

⁵⁴ Wang Gai, et al., *Jiezi yuan hua zhuan* 芥子園畫傳, vol.2 (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe 北京圖書館出版社, 2000), 454.

Jiang Lengsheng (Qing), Lu Baoshan (Zhi), and He Zhongya. Their ink conjured forth a variety of fragrances; from their inkstones grew nine fields of orchids. Each was at the peak of his period. In painting orchids, women painters followed (Lady) Guan Zhongji; There were Ma Xianglan (Shouzhen), Xue Susu, Xu Pianpian, and Yang Wanruo. All were beautiful courtesans, a fact that some may think casts a shadow on the orchid. However, (ever since the two princesses of Xiang were given as concubines by their father to his successor), the orchid fields of the River Xiang have reflected a blush of shame and yet continue to bring forth no ordinary flowers or common grass.⁵⁵

It seems from the above history that orchid painting reached its florescence in Ming times when a considerable number of male and female artists were recorded as excelling in depicting orchids. Interestingly, many of the male orchid painters in the Ming period listed above were active in the Jiangnan area of the sixteenth century and had more or less to do with the Wu School, the leading group of literati artists in fifteenth and sixteenth-century Suzhou, the most cultured city and brilliant art center in China at the time.⁵⁶

The Wu School painters, represented by Shen Zhou in the fifteenth century and Wen Zhengming in the sixteenth century, consistently advocated a scholarly, amateur manner of painting, as is differentiated by scholars from the professionalism of the Zhe School artists in Hangzhou 杭州. By their dedication

⁵⁵ This translation is based on that by Mai-mai Sze, trans. and ed. *The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 324.

⁵⁶ Both Zhang Ning 張寧 (a.1457-1464) and Xiang Yuanbian 項元汴 (1525-1590) were natives of Jiaxing 嘉興 in Zhejiang 浙江 province, and Xiang had close associations with the Wu School artists such as Wen Zhengming and Wen Jia, and his orchid paintings were under their influences; Wu Qiulin 吳秋林 was a native of Shexian 歙縣 in Anhui 安徽 province but lived in Jiaxing and his painting was said to follow that of Zhou Chen 周臣, a professional master in Suzhou; Zhou Tianqiu 周天球 (1514-1595) was a native of Taicang 太倉 in Jiangsu 江蘇 province, and was a student of Wen Zhengming at early ages; Both Chen Yuansu 陳元素 and Du Dashou 杜大綬 were natives of Suzhou, active in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; Lu Zhi 陸治 (1496-1576) was a native of Suzhou and learned painting from Wen Zhengming. For more information of these painters, see Jiang, *juan1*,

to the literati tradition of the preceding dynasties, the Wu School attracted a tremendous number of followers, and literati painting became the most critically esteemed form of painting in the Ming dynasty. Toward the end of the sixteenth century, however, the Wu School fell into decline, and its influential role was assumed by artists of the neighboring Huating 華亭 area.⁵⁷

Among the painters of the Wu School, Wen Zhengming was regarded as the most influential, with a large following including such famous orchid painters as Lu Zhi and Zhou Tianqiu. As an exponent of literati tradition, Wen Zhengming was deeply devoted to the study of the past and systematically explored the styles of the Tang, Song, and Yuan masters. Like his teacher Shen Zhou, Wen found the Yuan artists most inspiring, particularly Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫 (1254-1322) and Wang Meng 王蒙 (c. 1308-1385), and utilized them as his primary models.⁵⁸ Wen Zhengming was a specialist in the art of the orchid, and he had many followers adept at orchids. His orchids even earned the name of “Wen lan” 文蘭 (“Wen’s orchid”, or “the cultured and refined orchid”).⁵⁹

According to writings by Wen and his descendants, Wen often referred to Zhao

22a; *juan3*, 12b-13a, 21b-22a; *juan6*, 21b-22a; *juan7*, 7a, 7a-7b, 15a, 11b, 22a.

⁵⁷ For a discussion of the Wu School and other groups of the Ming painting, see Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting: Su Shih(1037-1101) to Tung Ch'i-ch'ang (1555-1636)* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971); James Cahill, ed. *The Restless Landscape: Chinese Painting of the Late Ming period* (Berkeley: University Art Museum, 1971); James Cahill, *Parting at the Shore: Chinese Painting of the Early and Middle Ming Dynasty, 1368-1580* (New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1978); Alice R.M. Hyland, *The Literati Vision: Sixteenth Century Wu School Painting and Calligraphy* (Memphis: Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, 1984); Yang Xin, *Paintings of the Ming Dynasty from the Palace Museum* (Beijing: the Palace Museum and Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1988).

⁵⁸ Hyland, 17.

⁵⁹ Wang Lianqi, “Wen Zhengming ‘lin Zhao Songxue lanshi tu’ kao 文徵明《臨趙松雪蘭石圖》考” in *Palace Museum Journal* (Beijing: Palace Museum, 1993), 68.

Mengfu in his orchid works and attributed his mastery to Zhao's inspiration.⁶⁰

Wen Zhengming and his followers and descendants, such as his son Wen Jia 文嘉 (1501-1583), are thus regarded as following Zhao Mengfu in the orchid art.⁶¹

While there are many similarities and close relations between Wen's and Zhao's orchid works, as traditional scholarship stresses, a reexamination of compositions in their orchid works will give a more nuanced picture of the orchid tradition in literati art.

In addition to its "general background", the "Book of Orchid" section of *The Mustard Seed Manual* provides "Rules of painting the orchid arranged in four-word phrases". In conformity with what literati artists of the Wu School claimed for scholarly painting, the Rules first state that the secret of orchid painting rests in "the circulation of the spirit (ch'i yün)".⁶² After introducing methods of painting various parts of the orchid, the section provides advice on composition in the painting of orchids:

石須飛白，一二傍盤；車前等草，地坡可安；或增翠竹，
一竿兩竿；荊棘旁生，能助其觀。師宗松雪，方得正傳。⁶³
Stones should be drawn in the method of flying white (fei bai),
Place one or two orchid plants accompanied by a stone;
Such ordinary grass as plantain trees could be added on a
secluded bank; or add one or two stalks of green bamboo;
Thorny brambles could be drawn beside them, to improve the
composition. Follow Songxue (Zhao Mengfu), for that is
the true tradition.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Wang Lianqi, 66.

⁶¹ For a discussion of Wen Jia's art, see Alice Rosemary Merrill, "Wen Chia (1501-1583): Derivation and Innovation", Ph.D. dissertation: University of Michigan, 1981.

⁶² Sze, 327.

⁶³ Wang Gai, 457.

⁶⁴ This translation is based on that by Sze, 328.

According to the rules, the common “orchid-bamboo-rock-grass” composition is the so-called “true tradition” in orchid painting, and the greatest exemplar of that tradition was Zhao Mengfu, the leading scholar-artist of the early Yuan period who upheld literati tradition of painting in all his endeavors.

The Cleveland Museum’s scroll by Zhao Mengfu has been traditionally titled in both Chinese and English sources as *Bamboo, Rocks and Lonely Orchids*, which seems to highlight the orchid as the foremost subject among clumps of bamboo and rocks (Fig.7).⁶⁵ However, if one scrutinizes the painting’s title written by Zhao himself, one finds that it is “*Zhu shi you rong* 竹石幽榮” rather than “*Zhu shi you lan* 竹石幽蘭” (Fig.7.a). As the character “*rong* 榮” is a general term denoting luxuriant plants or flowers, the title means “bamboo, rocks and lonely plants”, which indicates that there are a few kinds of plants depicted in the painting. Truly, apart from bamboo and orchid, one can find that there is at least one kind of small plant somewhat like grass depicted in the lower part of the painting. It appears that the title does not privilege the orchid itself.

Arranging his form around a central focal point, Zhao utilized “a balanced, symmetrical composition”:⁶⁶ around the central rock, one cluster of orchids accompanies one clump of bamboo, alternately taking equal space alongside each other in the plane. Both orchid and bamboo appear to be given the same priority in the picture. Its inscription reads: “Mengfu wei Shanfu zuo 孟頫為善

⁶⁵ These Chinese and English sources are: Hyland, 51; Li Tinghua, *Zhao Mengfu*, Zhongguo ming huajia quanji 中國名畫家全集 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2004), 100-101.

⁶⁶ Hyland, 51.

夫作” (Mengfu wrote for Shanfu), which clearly tells us this work was presented to his friend Gu Shanfu 顧善夫, a scholar-official and calligrapher (Fig.7.b).⁶⁷ For Zhao, like his contemporaries Zheng Sixiao and Zhao Mengjian, both orchid and bamboo are a symbol of the gentleman and each occupies an equally important role of symbolism in his work. The coupling of orchid and bamboo comes to symbolize the close friendship between Mengfu and Shanfu, each of whom is a noble-minded scholar-official like the elegant orchid and bamboo.

In another painting presented to his friend Gu Shanfu (Fig.8), Zhao Mengfu appeared to employ the same symbolic meanings of the “orchid-bamboo” combination: bamboo and orchid are placed symmetrically on opposite sides of the central rock, behind which stand two branches of thorny brambles, probably indicating obstacles and predicaments each would face. The coupling of orchid and bamboo becomes the embodiment of two scholar-officials of virtue, a symbolic representation of their pure and impregnable friendship.

In comparison with Zhao Mengfu’s orchid painting, Wen Zhengming’s orchid is displayed in a bolder and dramatic way with the long, sinuous leaves intensively weaving a close net, occupying a dominant place in the plane (Figs.9-10).⁶⁸ Wen Zhengming’s work seems to highlight the orchid, whereas bamboo is relegated to a secondary place. The bamboo in dark ink chiefly serves as a backdrop to spotlight the sharp contrast of ink tones with the light orchid.

⁶⁷ For the information of Gu Shanfu, see Wang Lianqi, 63.

⁶⁸ Hyland, 51.

Wen Jia did not favor “the display of technical virtuosity and dramatic patterning” by his father Wen Zhengming but “returned to the more modest elegance of Zhao mengfu”;⁶⁹ however, it is evident in his orchid work that unlike in Zhao’s balanced treatments of bamboo and orchid, Wen Jia’s bamboo became a secondary companion beside the orchid (Fig.11). The bamboo, like the stone, basically functions as a foil to highlight their ink’s contrast with that of the orchids in the picture plane.

It is apparent from the above comparison that the composition introduced in *The Mustard Seed Manual* was much closer to the two Wens’ favored composition than Zhao’s. The privileged orchid is accompanied by the stone, with green bamboo, ordinary grass, and thorny brambles added as foils on a secluded bank.

It has been noted that the contents of *The Mustard Seed Manual* and the attitudes toward painting it conveys are based upon traditional ideas and beliefs, and that many passages are drawn directly from fundamental works of earlier periods.⁷⁰ Indeed, the Manual’s introduction to orchid painting, with its generous list of Wu school orchid painters as well as its emphasis on literati tradition, was presumably based on beliefs and theories of the influential Wu School. Notably, the “Rules of painting the orchid arranged in four-word phrases” in its “Book of the Orchid” section is drawn very exactly from a Ming painting manual, *Jiuwan yirong* 九畹遺容 (The Portrait of Nine Acres of Orchids), which Ma Shouzheng’s

⁶⁹ Merrill, 65.

⁷⁰ Mai-mai Sze, Introduction in *The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), xii.

contemporary, the prolific poet and calligrapher Zhou Lǔjing 周履靖,⁷¹ composed no later than the year of 1590 when the manual's reviser Xiang Yuanbian 項元汴 (1525-90) died.⁷²

Both Xiang Yuanbian and Zhou Lǔjing were natives of Jiaxing 嘉興 in Zhejiang 浙江 province. Given the revision by Xiang, who was one of most renowned and influential collectors and connoisseurs since the mid-sixteenth century and who also excelled in painting the orchid, it is conceivable that Xiang's knowledge and ideas of orchid painting shaped Zhou Lǔjing's outline of the orchid-painting tradition in his painting manual. Xiang Yuanbian had close associations with such Wu School artists as Wen Zhengming and Wen Jia, and he learned painting from his own large collection, in which a great number of paintings by Wen Zhengming and Wen Jia were collected.⁷³ His orchid, bamboo and rock works were drawn from models by both Wen Jia and Wen Zhengming.⁷⁴ Interestingly, the illustrations of painted orchid leaves in Zhou's painting manual present brushwork similar to that of the orchids in Wen Jia's 1561 scroll (Figs. 12-13). Moreover, according to Zhou Lǔjing's autobiography, Zhou had contacts with scholars in Suzhou including Wen Jia and Wang Zhideng.⁷⁵ It is thus extremely likely that Zhou Lǔjing's statements of rules of

⁷¹ Zhou Lǔjing was born in the Jiaping period and died during the Wanli period, yet the specific dates for Zhou's birth and death are unknown. See Du Lianzhe, ed. *Mingren zizhuan wenchao* 明人自傳文鈔 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshu guan, 1977), 136.

⁷² Zhou, Lǔjing, *Jiu wan yi rong* 九畹遺容, Congshu ji cheng chu bian (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 1-3.

⁷³ Wong, 156-157.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Zhou Lǔjing, "Luoguanzi zi xu" 螺冠子自敘 in *Mingren zizhuan wenchao* 明人自傳文鈔, 137-140.

painting orchids expressed the idea of composition of painting orchids advocated by literati artists of the Wu School in Suzhou.

It has previously been demonstrated that, despite its assertion of Zhao Mengfu's initiation, the composition introduced in Zhou's manual resembles more closely the composition by the two Wens than that of Zhao Mengfu. Given the fact that Wen Zhengming and his followers endorsed Zhao Mengfu as their forerunner, the attribution of the composition of painting orchids to Zhao Mengfu in Zhou's manual is probably due to the justification and consolidation of the rules of painting orchids proposed by Wu School artists.

Zhou Lüjing's painting manual was published in Nanjing. Conceivably, the orchid tradition established by literati artists in Suzhou already gained its popularity in the neighboring area of Nanjing. Its prevalence in Nanjing can be reinforced by the composition in the orchid works of Ma Shouzhen, the courtesan artist in Nanjing.

The Courtesan's Orchid Painting

Among all the available and reliable orchid works by Ma Shouzhen, a number of Ma's orchid painting employ the "orchid-bamboo-stone-grass" model described in Zhou Lüjing's painting manual: the privileged orchid dominantly stands in the central plane; the stone and bamboo are set as the background while the ordinary grass is added on a secluded bank at the foreground (Fig. 1-5).⁷⁶ The following will examine two orchid paintings, typical of Ma's "orchid-bamboo-stone-grass" composition.

⁷⁶ For entries of Ma's orchid paintings, see Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 183.

The first painting to be examined is dated 1563, when Ma was a young courtesan (Fig.4). The scroll bears a poetic inscription wherein the poem reads:

雖與小草伍， Though companion to small grass,
幽芬出谷中。 Furtive orchid fragrance emanates from the valley;
素心托君子， Its true heart is entrusted to a gentleman,
時可拂清風。 To be brushed by a clear breeze from time to time.⁷⁷

The poem corresponds fairly well with the painting: set on a slope with sparse grass, the central, double-outlined orchid is backed by the V-shaped rock, indicating a hollow valley, and is accompanied by an elongated bamboo, a traditional emblem of the gentleman. As the first two lines in the poem go, though accompanied with small grass, the orchid still keeps aloof from the lowly crowd, which is redolent of the circumstances of a courtesan in the floating world. The last couplet conveys the courtesan's longing for companionship and bond of love with the literatus: the courtesan would like to entrust her heart to a gentleman whom she believes to have the moral and intellectual equality of “*qing* 清” which was highly valued by the scholarly gentlemen of the Ming dynasty.⁷⁸ The coupling of orchid and bamboo seems to become in Ma's work a symbolic representation of the relationship between the courtesan and her patron, and the orchid—a traditional symbol of male scholars in seclusion—was thus at Ma's hand depicted as a mixture of feminine eroticism and masculine attributes.

⁷⁷ Translation by Irving Lo in Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 72.

⁷⁸ The concept of *qing* 清 denotes a complex moral of purity, genuineness and elegance, which had long been appreciated as a high virtue for male scholars, particularly in the Ming and Qing dynasties. For a detailed discussion of *qing* 清, see Ko, 109-112; Chang, *Feminist Readings*, 82-83; “Gender and Canonicity,” 140-147.

Similar compositional planning and poetic expression appear in the Metropolitan Museum painting with a 1572 date (Fig.5). Written on the top of the painting are three poetic inscriptions: one is by Ma, and the other two are by her contemporary literati Wang Zhideng and Xue Mingyi.⁷⁹ Given the imbalance that would be created without the literati's inscriptions, the inscriptions by Wang and Xue were probably written the same time Ma's painting and inscription was executed.⁸⁰

Ma's inscription reads,

翠影拂湘江， Jasper shadows brush against Xiang River,
清芬瀉幽谷。 A pure fragrance floats from the secluded valley.⁸¹

The couplet apparently alludes to Ma's name "Xianglan" 湘蘭: the first line indicates the location of the green-leaved plant *Xiang* 湘 while the second line unveils the fragrant orchid *lan* 蘭 in seclusion.

Although Ma's own inscription does not carry any erotic undertone or the declaration of her compatibility with the literati, the poems by Wang Zhideng and Xue Mingyi appear to collaboratively define Ma's work:

芳澤三春雨， Sweet nourishment from the rain of Prime Spring,
幽蘭九畹青。 Secluded orchids from hundreds of green acres—

⁷⁹ It is introduced in Weidner's book that Xue Mingyi (act.c.1600) was the son-in-law of Wen Zhengming (1470-1559). However, Craig Clunas notes that the assertion there seems questionable given the disparity in their dates. According to *Shanhu wang* 珊瑚網 and *Huaicheng tang shu hua mulu* 懷澄堂書畫目錄, Xue Mingyi was the most accomplished calligrapher in standard script after Wen Zhengming and he executed a calligraphy work dated 1538. Therefore, it is probable that Xue Mingyi was active in the same periods as Wang Zhideng (1535-1612). See Yu Jianhua, ed. *Zhongguo meishujia renming cidian* 中國美術家人名辭典 (Shanghai: renmin meishu chubanshe, 1981), 1460; Craig Clunas, *Pictures and Visuality in Early Modern China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 203.

⁸⁰ Truscott, 27.

⁸¹ Translation by Irving Lo in Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 76.

山齋人獨坐， In a mountain studio sits someone alone
對酒讀騷經。 Facing wine and reading *the Classic of Li Sao*.⁸²

——王穉登 Inscription by Wang Zhideng

As the leading scholar in Suzhou, yearning for the secluded life of hermits (*shanren* 山人),⁸³ Wang Zhideng was probably the persona of “someone in a mountain studio”, and he highly praised Ma’s poetic painting by connecting it with *the Classic of Li Sao* from which the orchid growing at the Xiao 瀟 and Xiang Rivers becomes one of most famous thematic subjects in Chinese culture, a symbol of loyalty, purity, delicacy, and reclusion. When it alludes to Ma’s name, “the Orchid at the Xiang River”, the association with *the Classic of Li Sao* favoured by male scholars is a declaration by Wang Zhideng in Ma’s orchid that the courtesan is as erudite as literati and has the comparable temperament and shared interests with literati.

Xue Mingyi’s poetic inscription, especially its last couplet, as Craig Clunas suggests, explicitly has the “rich intertextual associations of seclusion and purity but also of sexually available lushness”:⁸⁴

空谷幽蘭茂， In a deserted valley, secluded orchids grow dense—
無人亦自芳。 Unnoticed, but naturally fragrant;
迎春舒秀色， Unfurling elegant colors to welcome the spring,
浥露發清香。 Dew-moisted, sending off their pure fragrance.⁸⁵

——薛明益 Inscription by Xue Mingyi

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Daria Berg, “Cultural Discourse on Xue Susu, A Courtesan in Late Ming China,” in *International Journal of Asian Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 185-186.

⁸⁴ Clunas, *Pictures and Visuality in Early Modern China*, 159.

⁸⁵ Translation by Irving Lo in Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 76.

Remarkably, one of the orchid stalks heavy with five blossoms in the painting is surprisingly wavy and slim, a tempting indication of the fragility and femininity of the courtesan like this delicate flower (Fig. 5. a).

As Wai-yee Li points out, the late Ming was an epoch of “self-conscious passion, dramatic gestures, and deep concern with the meaning of creating a self or a persona. The appeal of the late Ming courtesans stems in part from the idea of self-invention”.⁸⁶ Through the union of pictorial image and poetic interpretation in her orchid painting, Ma Shouzhen unveiled this fragrant flower in seclusion and created an androgynous persona for herself, a way of advertising the courtesan herself and attracting patrons to her abode. The androgynous self, an embodiment of an unconventional spirit transcending gender boundaries, was widely appreciated in the late Ming cultural aura.⁸⁷ As has been introduced in chapter one, Ma Shouzhen’s biographer Wang Zhideng portrayed Ma as an androgynous woman: a sexually charming courtesan equipped with a knight-errant’s temperament— “a veritable Zhu Jia with green sleeves” and “a Ji Bu wearing rouge and powder”. Ma’s androgynous self-definition through the visible orchid with its popular model favored by the influential Wu School artists was definitely appealing to her literati audience, who viewed and consumed the painting with well-equipped sensitivity and intellectual acumen. Her self-identification with the orchid was further

⁸⁶ Wai-yee Li, “The Late Ming Courtesan: Invention of a Cultural Ideal”, in *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*, 53.

⁸⁷ For a discussion of androgyny in the late Ming period, see Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang, ed. *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*; Chang. *Gender and Canonicity: Ming-Qing Women Poets in the eyes of the Male literati; Feminist Readings: Classical and Modern Perspectives*.

manifested by her emphatic self-naming in the works: “Xianglan”, the orchid at the Xiang River, probably reinforced her image in public and secured her a unique place in the courtesan world.

It is noteworthy in the “general background of orchid painting” of *The Mustard Seed Manual* that other than the privileged initiator Lady Guan Daosheng, the wife of the prestigious scholar-official Zhao Mengfu, all the women painters were courtesans in the late Ming period. For the author of the manual, courtesans were “a blush of shame” given their low legal status, assumedly not comparable with noble scholars and ladies. That the author identified a revered gentlewoman as the initiator of the tradition of female painters is in part a rationalization of the artistic works by courtesans who lived in the floating world but assumedly followed Lady Guan in pursuit of high spirits. After Lady Guan, the first identified among those courtesan painters is Ma Shouzhen. According to Table 1, it can be known that most orchid courtesan-painters in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) were active in its late phase, from Wan-li period (1573-1620) to the downfall of Ming dynasty, and that Ma Shouzhen (1548-1604) was one of the early figures active in the initial phase. This was probably conducive to the establishment of her reputation as an orchid painter in the courtesans’ world.

Ma Shouzhen’s poetry had been published at least three times during her lifetime, and the theme of “orchids at the Xiang River” is expressed frequently in Ma’s poems.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Xu Wenmei, 101.

詠蘭

On the Orchid

楚蘭紛遶室， The orchid of Chu luxuriantly surrounds the room,
 啞影傍瑤台。 With its mute shadow beside the jade terrace;
 清風天際至， A clear breeze comes from a corner of the heaven,
 願度幽香來。 Wishing to seize the furtive orchid fragrance.

寄張補軒

To Zhang Buxuan

獨坐空庭記往年， Sit alone in the empty yard, recalling the past years,
 蘭湯欲共晚風前 wishing to share the orchid-fragrance water before
 the night breeze comes,
 即今兩地欹孤枕， but now we lean upon a lonely pillow at two places,
 何日重逢醉綺筵。 When shall we meet again to get drunken at a feast?
 萬疊楚山人去遠， You has gone far away from the ten-thousand-
 humped mountains of Chu,
 千尋湘水夢相連， I look for you thousand times along the Xiang River
 with our dreams connected,
 音書雖見人難見， Though the letter has been seen, it's hard to see you.
 悶倚雕闌淚灑然。 I thus lean upon carved balustrades and shed tears
 in sorrow.

題蘭竹圖扇

Inscription on a Orchid and Bamboo Painting Fan

風過幽香迢遞， The wind passes, and the furtive fragrance flows
 incessantly,
 月明環珮琳琅。 The moon is bright and the pendants glisten.
 空憶美人千里， Think in vain of the beauty who is in distance,
 那知只隔瀟湘。 Yet we are separated only by the Xiao and Xiang
 rivers.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ For a further discussion of Ma Shouzhen's poems with the theme of "orchids at the Xiang

By painting orchids and publishing poems, Ma Shouzhen may have consolidated and popularized this practice of presenting the orchid as a self-image in the courtesan world. Xue Susu 薛素素 (c.1575- before 1652), another prominent courtesan one generation after Ma, used the orchid in her poetry epitomizing the courtesan's fusion of "feminine eroticism with masculine erudition".⁹⁰ According to the late-Ming scholar Yu Huai, the celebrated Qinhuai courtesan Gu Mei 顧媚 (1619-64) specialized in orchids, also "following in the footsteps of Ma Shouzhen".⁹¹ Another well-known courtesan Dong Xiaowan 董小宛 (1624-1651) was acclaimed as "a fragrant orchid flower growing in a secluded valley".⁹² It appears that the orchid and its symbolism were widely used in the courtesan world after Ma's time to create a fascinating persona. This was probably due in part to Ma Shouzhen's endeavors.

The above discussions of orchid composition advocated by Wu School artists and of Ma Shouzhen's orchid works provide a connection between this courtesan-painter and the Wu School art. As has been mentioned in chapter one, most scholarship on Ma Shouzhen traces the courtesan-painter's stylistic debts to such prominent Wu School leaders as Shen Zhou and Wen Zhengming, which testifies to the courtesan-painter's certain relation with the Wu School. Such a

River", see Xu Wenmei, 99-103.

⁹⁰ Berg, 184.

⁹¹ Yu Huai, *Banqiao zaji*, Congshu ji cheng chu bian (Beijing: Zhonghua Shu Ju, 1985), 8; See also Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 96-97.

⁹² Mao Xiang, "Ying mei an yi yu" 影梅庵憶語, in *Gui zhong yi yu* 閨中憶語, ed. Tu Yuanji (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 2006), 12; See also Berg, 184; Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 98-99.

relation was not established merely by the general influence of those towering Wu School figures on young generations but also, as we will see in the next chapter, by the Wu School exponent Wang Zhideng's intervention in his lover's art.

CHAPTER THREE
WU SCHOOL LITERATI

It has been suggested by scholars that the Ming courtesan-artists' eminence was chiefly owing to their image in art and literature as "ideal women", an image that was created both by themselves and by their literati clients.⁹³ In the 1572 orchid scroll, we have seen that Ma Shouzhen's literati patrons collaborated to define the courtesan's work by articulating both scholarly and feminine themes. More interestingly, if one compares the sparingly dry brushwork of the orchid with those of three inscriptions atop, it appears that Wang Zhideng's calligraphy was executed in as much dark and dry ink as the orchid, in particular its leaves (Fig.5. a and b). Given this homogenous brushwork as well as the balancing of the inscriptions, it is tempting to speculate that the 1572 orchid painting may have been a joint work by the courtesan and her literatus patron. Since the brushwork in paintings of such subjects as orchid, bamboo and rock has close affinities with that of calligraphy, which enabled scholar-artists to turn their brush of writing to painting, it was not a difficulty for the calligraphy master Wang Zhideng to apply several calligraphic brushstrokes to the orchid leaves. According to Pei Jingfu's 裴景福 (1854-1926) catalogue, if it is to be believed, a narcissi painting with a 1599 date was done by Ma Shouzhen for Wang Zhideng, and Wang stated in his inscription that he added the rock at the same time in Ma's narcissi painting.⁹⁴ In addition to painting, it

⁹³ Wetzel, *the Mirror in the Garden*, 204.

⁹⁴ Pei Jingfu, *Zhuangtao ge shuhua lu* 壯陶閣書畫錄 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan,

has been noted that Wang Zhideng may have partaken in the production process of Xue Susu's poems.⁹⁵ The collaborative work between the literatus patron and the courtesan was further made possible by the fact that collaborations were not unusual among literati artists of Wang Zhideng's day.⁹⁶

Perhaps unaware of Wang Zhideng's participation in Ma's oeuvre, some scholars contend that in contrast to Ma's earlier works, such as the 1563 scroll, the brushwork in the orchid of the 1572 painting reflects Ma's stylistic reference to Wen Zhengming.⁹⁷ This seems plausible, considering Wang Zhideng's close relationship with the Wen family and his enormous admiration of Wen Zhengming, although the younger Wang had few direct dealings with Wen.⁹⁸ Compared with the brushwork of Wen Zhengming and Wen Jia in their orchid works (fig.9-11), however, the brush stroke of the orchid leaves in the 1572 scroll, characterized by its coolness and restraint, is much closer to that of Wen Jia: Wen Zhengming's long and compact orchid leaves are rendered with boldness and animation whereas Wen Jia's orchids display modesty and elegance in restraint.

Moreover, the inimitably close association between Wen Jia and Wang Zhideng may advance further evidence of Wang's artistic reference to Wen Jia in Ma's 1572 scroll. As two of the leading scholars in Suzhou following the death of Wen Zhengming, Wen Jia and Wang Zhideng collaborated most often

1937), vol.11.

⁹⁵ Berg, 176.

⁹⁶ For a discussion of the collaborations among scholar artists such as Wang Zhideng's coteries, see Hyland, "Wen Chia and Suchou Literati", 127-132.

⁹⁷ Xu Wenmei, 93.

⁹⁸ Xu Wenmei, 98; Hyland, "Wen Chia and Suchou Literati", 131-132.

with each other despite the difference in their ages. Their relationship was further cemented when Wang's daughter married Wen's son. As a noted calligrapher, Wang wrote colophons and poetic inscriptions for many of Wen Jia's paintings. Remarkably, four poems by Wang Zhideng were appended to the 1561 orchid painting of Wen Jia. Notwithstanding his tremendous respect and acclaim of Wen Zhengming, Wang extended equal praise to Wen Jia's paintings.⁹⁹

Although his eminent father Wen Zhengming played a predominant role in his literati circles during the 1550s, Wen Jia was also a fairly active participant in intellectual activities and had more contact with his father's coterie than Wen Zhengming did himself; After Wen Zhengming's death in 1559, Wen Jia rose to greater prominence and made more contributions to literati artistic collaborations.¹⁰⁰ Not wholly conforming to his father's art, Wen Jia independently experimented with divergent treatments of such subjects as orchids and techniques in his painting, and many of his experiments were continued and developed by literati painters of the succeeding generation.¹⁰¹ Wen Zhengming's *Bamboo, Orchids and a Rock* and the orchid work of 1561 by Wen Jia clearly exemplify the two Wen's divergence in artistic experimentation.

Wang Zhideng's active involvement in artistic activities and intimate association with such Wu School masters as Wen Jia may have enabled him to put painting into practice in the manner demonstrated in his joint work with the

⁹⁹ Hyland, *The Literati Vision*, 51; *Wen Chia and Suchou Literati*, 127-132.

¹⁰⁰ Hyland, "Wen Chia and Suchou Literati", 127-132.

¹⁰¹ Hyland, *The Literati Vision*, 59.

courtesan and to write out a *Record of Painters in the Wu prefecture* (*Wujun danqing zhi* 吳郡丹青志) which testifies to his well-refined connoisseurship and immense erudition of the painting traditions in Suzhou.¹⁰²

Apart from Wang's participation in Ma Shouzhen's painting, it is also possible that Wang Zhideng's knowledge and perspectives of painting exerted a certain influence on Ma Shouzhen's works. Despite a scarcity of direct evidence of Ma's instruction from Wang, an interpretation of Ma's paintings and available literary sources allows us to advance understanding of Wang's influence on Ma. According to Qian Qianyi, the Suzhou scholar Wang Zhideng was an active participant in scholars' activities in Nanjing during the early years of the Wanli period (1573-1620).¹⁰³ Interestingly, several of Ma's orchid paintings, including a collaborative work with other courtesans, were executed in the year of 1576, and all the inscriptions indicated those works were done for Wang Zhideng.¹⁰⁴ Notably, the Tokyo National Museum owns a landscape painting by Ma Shouzhen, a rare subject in Ma's oeuvre (Fig.14). It is interesting that the painting also bears a date of 1576 and that a colophon written by Wang Zhideng follows the painting. Wang noted in the colophon that this work was in the style of Ni Zan 倪瓚 (1301-74), a Yuan scholar artist of lofty purity who was highly

¹⁰² Wang Zhideng, *Wujun danqing zhi* 吳郡丹青志 in *Meishu congshu*, 742-745.

¹⁰³ Qian Qianyi, 462-463.

¹⁰⁴ These paintings with a 1576 date are as follows:

- (1) A flower scroll collaborated by four courtesans in which Ma Shouzhen painted orchid. See Yang Han, ed. *Zhong guo mei shu quan ji* 中國美術全集, vol. 9 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 2006), 23.
- (2) *Orchid and Rock*, mounted together with the colored orchid handscroll dated 1566 in University of Alberta Museum.

praised by literati artists of the Wu School.¹⁰⁵ The sparing use of dry and light ink as well as the void effect of the composition in Ma's painting aptly suggests Ni Zan's style, whereas the boat is humanized beyond Ni's manner, as was experimented by the Wu School leader Shen Zhou.¹⁰⁶ As the predominant subject in Chinese painting preferred by literati artists, this landscape was possibly an endeavor under Wang Zhideng's instruction to experiment with the literati's practice. It is conceivable that when sojourning in Nanjing during the 1570s, Wang Zhideng had frequent contacts with the courtesan. As an exponent of the Wu School's literati traditions, Wang Zhideng probably circulated the ideas and beliefs of the Wu school artists during his communication with the courtesan and provided some artistic suggestions on the courtesan's art.

The inscription on one orchid painting with a 1592 date reads:

萬曆壬辰長夏坐秦淮水榭畫呈百穀社兄正

“During the Wanli reign in the renchen year [1592] on a long summer's eve sitting in the Qinhuai water pavilion, I painted this to present to my social brother Baigu [Wang Zhideng] for correction”.¹⁰⁷

The orchid without a ground plane in this painting reminds the audience of orchid works by scholars such as Zheng Sixiao in the Yuan period (Fig.3). Based on loyal scholars' portrayals of the orchid, Ma produced this work to ask for comments and correction by Wang, who was familiar with literati art and well equipped to provide guidance and suggestion.

¹⁰⁵ For a discussion of Wu school painters' stylistic affinities to Ni Zan, see Cahill, *Part at the Shore*; Hyland, *The Literati Vision*; Merrill, *Wen Chia (1501-1583): Derivation and Innovation*.

¹⁰⁶ Hyland, *The Literati Vision*, 15.

¹⁰⁷ Translation by Irving Lo in Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 78.

The Qing gentlewoman Wang Duanshu 王端淑 commented on Ma

Shouzhen in her anthology of women poets:

詩有才情，為百穀薰陶，自是此種香氣。¹⁰⁸

(Ma Xianglan's) poetry has brilliant expression of emotions;

for nurtured by Baigu (Wang Zhideng), naturally came such fragrance.

In Wang Duanshu's view, Wang Zhideng exerted an uplifting influence on the courtesan's poetry. Notwithstanding the possibility that Wang Duanshu's remark stems in part from the women gentry's prejudice against the courtesan, it is an indication that there may have been artistic interactions between Wang Zhideng and Ma Shouzhen.

The following poems that Wang and Ma wrote for each other also deliver the message that Wang and Ma frequently had artistic exchanges through poems and orchid paintings.

愴別

A Distressful Separation

——馬湘蘭

by Ma Xianglan

病骨淹長書，	Buried my sick body in writing,
王生曾見憐。	You used to take pity on me.
時時對蘭竹，	I depicted orchid and bamboo frequently,
夜夜集詩篇。	and collected poems every night.
寒雨三江倩，	Three rivers looks pretty in the cold rain,
秋風一夜眠。	One night sleep in the autumn wind.
深閨無箇事，	Nothing happened in my boudoir,
終日望歸船。 ¹⁰⁹	Just looking forward to the returning boat.

¹⁰⁸ Wang Duanshu, ed. *Mingyuan shiwei chu bian* 名媛詩緯初編, 1667, 24.3b, from The McGill-Harvard-Yenching Library Ming-Qing Women's Writings Digitization Project

馬湘蘭挽歌詞十二首 Twelve Elegiac Stanzas for Ma Xianglan

(之十二) (the 12th)

——王穉登

by Wang Zhideng

描蘭寫竹寄卿卿， Depicting orchid and bamboo to send your intimate,
遺墨都疑淚染成。 The ink trace was suspected to be dyed by tears.
不遇西川高節度， If not encountering such a Governor Gao in Xichuan,
平康淚得較書名。¹¹⁰ Tears will be so much as to gain the female reviser
in Pingkang.

After the death of Wen Zhengming, Wang Zhideng and Wen Jia were intensely involved in augmenting Wen Zhengming's paintings by adding explanations and commentaries.¹¹¹ Living in an age of self-consciousness and self-identification, their enthusiasm for expounding on this Suzhou master was probably due in part to their legitimization of the painting traditions of Suzhou and their ambitious formulation of art history for the sake of Suzhou literati artists. Wang Zhideng's *Record of Painters in the Wu Prefecture* in 1563 expressed his great pride in numerous outstanding painters in Suzhou, with such literati artists as Shen Zhou, Wen Zhengming and Wen Jia placed in the top ranks. In his biography of Ma Shouzhen, Wang wrote that Ma's orchid had mastered the secrets of the orchid art by Zhao Wuxing (Mengfu) and Wen Daizhao (Zhengming).¹¹² Although it gilded the courtesan's works and enhanced

(<http://digital.library.mcgill.ca/mingqing/english/index.htm>).

¹⁰⁹ Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji* 列朝詩集 (Shanghai: Shenghuo, dushu, xinzhi sanlian shu dian, 1989), 665.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Hyland, "Wen Chia and Suchou Literati", 131-132.

¹¹² Wang zhideng, *Biography of Ma*, n.p.

her reputation, Wang's acclaim also grouped his female companion into his proud Suzhou circle and circumstantially approved and expanded the influence of Suzhou literati artists. When elevating the courtesan's image in public, Wang Zhideng's intervention in Ma's painting through his participation and instruction rendered the courtesan an agent for him and his Suzhou coterie. As Jean Wetzel suggests, courtesans may have played a crucial role as an intermediary in the dissemination of Ming artistic trends.¹¹³ During her associations with clients, Ma Shouzhen probably spread and reinforced the painting styles created by Suzhou literati artists. Ma Shouzhen's prestige in the courtesan world, partly through Wang's construction and intervention, probably mirrors the prominent position of the Wu School in the Ming art, as is indicated by this courtesan painter's parallel with the Wu School orchid painters in *the Mustard Seed Manual*.

¹¹³ Wetzel, "Hidden Connections", 648.

CONCLUSION

The late Ming, an age of self-consciousness and self-invention, was a period when Chinese literati took the initiative in formulating and shaping the history of Chinese painting. Art theory of the Ming period provided a framework for Chinese aesthetics and criticism used up to present times.¹¹⁴ Two of the literati's products, *Mustard Seed Manual* and *The Portrait of Nine Acres of Orchids*, embody the art theory of orchid painting advocated by literati artists of the Wu School who played important roles in the formulation of the scholarly traditions of Chinese painting. After the death of their towering leader Wen Zhengming, such Wu School exponents as Wen Jia and Wang Zhideng made their endeavors to consolidate and spread the ideas and beliefs of this school through a series of scholarly activities. When augmenting their master's paintings with explanations and commentaries and writing books on painting and painters facilitated by burgeoning mass printing of their day, these literati artists found another efficacious way—the courtesan painter—to disseminate their art theories and practices.

Trained to correspond to the literati's tastes, the courtesan painter inevitably used contemporary models favored by her clients. In her orchid painting, Ma Shouzhen employed the “orchid-bamboo-stone-grass” composition established by the Wu School artists. While increasing her popularity in the elites' world, Ma Shouzhen's orchids through their social circulation reinforced

¹¹⁴ Bush, 183-184.

and spread the theory of painting of orchids by Wu School artists. In the meantime, Wang Zhideng's intervention through his writing, participation and instruction in the courtesan's painting further unveils the courtesan's intermediary role in the dissemination of Wu School art ideas and beliefs. As Dorothy Ko points out, courtesans played "an indispensable role in the public life of scholar-officials" and helped to "introduce new dramas and poems created by their clients and themselves".¹¹⁵ The case of Ma Shouzhen can now serve as a new evidence of courtesans' great value in the field of painting to the literati's careers.

Although the courtesan-painter demonstrated her creative capability by her self-identification with the orchid in works of art, Ma Shouzhen's success in the courtesan world would be made impossible without the aid of her male patrons. It was Wang Zhideng in particular who played a crucial role in constructing the courtesan's image and position in history. In writing about this courtesan-painter, the scholars applied the standards and judgments they did when discussing their masters, a way to establish the female painter in the male-oriented history of Chinese painting and an endeavor to expand the influence of their proud school of art. The scholars' lauding of this female painter was in part a self-ratification and consolidation of their own advocacy of Chinese painting theory. The acceptance and popularity of Ma Shouzhen's orchid works in the history of Chinese painting mirrors the prominence of the Wu School in this field.

¹¹⁵ Ko, 255-256.

This study of Ma Shouzhen shows us how a female painter was involved and constructed by male scholars in their formulation of the history of Chinese painting. Although the limited historical records on women painters confine our understanding of those women's creative abilities and artistic personalities, they also provide insights into the criteria and intentions of male arbiters who write women painters into their histories of Chinese painting. Women painters' involvement in literati circles indicates to some extent their instrumental roles as an intermediary in the development of Chinese art history. Their participation brings us much closer to a complete picture of Chinese painting.

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APPENDIX I:

TABLES

Courtesan-painters	Painting Subjects	Active periods
Lin Nuer 林奴兒	landscape, figures, willows	in Chenghua (1465-1487)
Ge Ji 葛姬	orchid	the first half of 16 th century
Hu Wenru 呼文如	orchid	during Wanli (1573-1619)
Zhu Douer 朱斗兒	landscape	the first half of 16 th century
Ma Xianglan 馬湘蘭	orchid	b. 1548- d. 1604
Ma Wenyu 馬文玉	orchid	during Wanli (1573-1619)
Ma Ruyu 馬如玉	unknown	unknown
Zhao Lihua 趙麗華	unknown	during Wanli (1573-1619)
Xu Pianpian 徐翩翩	orchid	during Wanli (1573-1619)
Xue Susu 薛素素	Buddha, landscape, orchid and bamboo	c.1575-before1652
Dun Xi 頓喜	orchid , bamboo and rock	during Wanli (1573-1619)
Wu Qi 吳綺	orchid and rock	unknown
Bian Sai 卞賽	orchid	in Chongzhen (1628-1644)
Bian Min 卞敏	orchid	in Chongzhen (1628-1644)
Zhang Qiao 張喬	orchid	unknown
Jiang Ruzhe 姜如真	orchid	during Wanli (1573-1619)

Table 1 a. Ming Courtesan-painters in *The Jade Terrace History of Painting*

Courtesan-painters	Painting Subjects	Active periods
Yang Yan 楊研	orchid , bamboo and trees	the end of the Ming
Wu Meixian 吳梅仙	unknown	unknown
Lin Xue 林雪	landscape	the first half of 17 th century
Wang Youyu 王友雲	landscape	the first half of 17 th century
Fan Jue 范珏	landscape	in Chongzhen (1628-1644)
Kou Mei 寇湄	orchid	in Chongzhen (1628-1644)
Fan Zhu 范珠	landscape	during Wanli (1573-1619)
Yang Wan 楊宛	orchid and rock	the first half of 17 th century
Chu Xiu 楚秀	landscape	unknown
Yang Qiuji 楊璆姬	orchid	the end of the Ming
Xu Fo 徐佛	orchid	unknown
Zhu Fu 朱馥	orchid	during Wanli (1573-1619)
Li Zhenli 李貞儷	unknown	unknown
Cui Lianfang 崔聯芳	orchid	unknown
Hu Maosheng 胡茂生	bamboo	during Wanli (1573-1619)
Wang A'zhao 王阿昭	landscape	in Chongzhen (1628-1644)

Table 1 b. Ming Courtesan-painters in *The Jade Terrace History of Painting*¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Tang Shuyu, *Yutai huashi* 玉台畫史, in Meishu congshu ed. Huang Binhong and Deng Shi(Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chuban she, 1997), 2199-2202; See also Xu Wenmei, 105-106.

APPENDIX II:
BIOGRAPHY OF MA SHOUZHEN

Notes:

Although I am not proficient in the classical Chinese language and English translation, I have attached to my thesis the primary Chinese text with my own punctuation and translation, hoping that it will be of some help to the reader. My inclusion of Ma Shouzhen's biography written by Wang Zhideng provides the full details of the scholar's laudatory writing about the courtesan, and facilitates the reader's comparison of Wang Zhideng's writing with Qian Qianyi's biographical sketch of Ma introduced in Chapter one. I have attempted to keep my translation as literal as possible. Some parts of the text, i.e. those identical to Qian's sketch, have been translated in previous literary scholarship and thus I use their translation noted in *Italic* for attention of the relation between the two texts.

In this biography, Wang Zhideng basically described Ma Shouzhen's fame as a charming and chivalrous courtesan, illustrated Ma's chivalrous and unconventional behaviors, and depicted his lifelong friendship with Ma and her death in Buddhist ceremony.

馬姬傳

王穉登云：

嘉靖間，海宇清謐，朝野熙熙，江左最稱饒富，而金陵為之甲。平康諸姬先後若而人，風流豔冶，鵲黑鴉黃，傾人城國者何限。在馬姬先者，劉、董、羅、葛、段、趙；與姬同時者，何、蔣、王、楊、馬、褚，青樓所稱十二釵也。

馬氏同母姊妹四人，姬齒居四，故呼四娘，小字玄兒，列行曰守真，又字月嬌，以善畫蘭，號湘蘭子，而湘蘭獨著。無論宮掖戚畹、王公貴人，邊城戍士、販夫廝養卒，雖烏丸屠各番君貊長之屬，無不知馬湘蘭者。湘蘭名益噪，諸姬心害之，及見馬姬高情逸韻，濯濯如春柳早鶯，吐辭流盼，巧伺人意，人人皆自顧弗若也。姬聲華日盛，凡游閨子、沓拖少年、走馬章臺街者，以不識馬姬為辱。油壁障泥，雜沓戶外，池館清蹊，花石幽潔，曲室深閨，迷不可出。教諸小鬟學梨園子弟，日為供帳燕客，

羯鼓胡、琵琶聲，與金縷、紅牙相間。北斗闌干挂屋角，猶未休，雖纏頭錦堆床滿案，而金鳳釵、玉條脫、石榴裙、紫【袷盃】襪，常在子錢家，以贈施多，無所積也。

祠郎有墨者，以徵遣逮捕之，攫金半千，未厭，捕愈急。余適過其家，姬被髮徒跣，目哭皆腫，客計無所出，將以旦日，白衣冠送之。渡秦淮，會西臺御史，索余八分書，請為居間，獲免。姬歎：王家郎有心人哉！欲委身於我。余謝姬念我無人爬背癢，意良厚，然我乞一丸茅山道士藥，豈欲自得姝麗哉。脫人之厄，而困以為利，去厄之者幾何？古押衙而在，匕首不滔於胸乎！由是不復言歸我。而寸腸綢繆，固結不解，政猶禪人云：如魚飲水，冷暖自知。亦惟余與姬兩心相印，舉似他人，不笑即唾耳。

烏傷一少年游太學，慕姬甚，一見不自持，留姬家不去，俄聞門外索逋者，聲如哮虎，立為償三百緡，呵使去。姬本俠也，見少年亦俠，甚德之。少年昵姬，欲諧伉儷，指江水為誓，大出裏蹠，治耀首之飾，買第秦淮之上，用金錢無算，而姬擊鮮為供具，僕馬費亦畧相當。是時姬政五十，少年春秋未半也。錦衾角枕相嬾婉，久而不少覺姬老，娶姬念愈堅。姬笑曰：“我門前車馬如此，嫁商人且不堪。外聞以我私卿，猶賣珠兒絕倒不已，寧有半百青樓人，纔執箕帚作新婦耶。”少年戀戀無東意，祭酒聞而施夏楚焉，始鞅鞅去。

盜聞之謂姬積錢貨如山。暮入其室，大索寶玉，不滿望，怒甚，盡斬書畫玩好，投池水中。姬貧乃次骨。後樓船將軍於江中捕得盜，搜其篋，出馬氏負子錢家券纍纍，而後知姬室中靡長物也，然其俠聲由此益著。

先是姬與余有吳門烟月之期，幾三十載未償。去歲甲辰秋日值余七十初度，姬買樓船，載嬋娟，十十五五，客余飛絮園，置酒為壽，絕纓投轄，履舄繽紛，滿四座，丙夜歌舞達旦，殘脂賸粉，香溢錦帆，涇水彌，月煙煨。蓋自夫差以來，龍舟水殿，絃管綺羅，埋沒斜陽荒草間。不圖千

載而後，彷彿苧蘿仙子之精靈，鸞笙鳳吹，從雲中下來，游故都，笑倚東窗白玉床也。吳兒嘖嘖誇美盛事，傾動一時。

未幾，復游西湖。梅雨淹旬，暑氣鬱勃，柔肌膩骨，不勝侵灼，遂決西歸之策。約明年楓落吳江，再過君家三宿，邀君同刺蜻蛉舟，徧窮兩高三竺之勝，不似今年人客流連，令主人厨中荔枝鹿脯都盡也。余方小極扶病，登舟送之，射瀆分袂之頃，姬握手悲號，左右皆泣，余亦雙淚龍鍾，無乾袖矣。比蒼頭送姬自金陵返，述姬所以悲號者，憐余病骨尪然，不能俟河清也。嗚呼！孰意姬忽先朝露哉！

余別姬十六寒暑，姬年五十七矣。榮華雖小減於昔，而風情意氣如故。脣膏面藥，香澤不去手；鬢髮如雲，猶然委地。余戲調：“卿雞皮三少若夏姬，惜余不能為申公巫臣耳。”歸未幾，病【耳曷】已、病滯下皆不在死法中，醫師妄投藥，絕口不能進粥糜水食者幾半月。先是姬家素佞佛龕事，黃金像滿樓中，夜燈朝磬，奉齋已七年。將逝之前數日，召比丘，禮梁武懺，焚旃檀龍腦，設桑門伊蒲之饌，令小娟掖而行遠，猊座胡跪膜拜，連數晝夜不止。趣使治木狸首具矣，然後就湯沐，袒服、中羣悉用布，坐良久，瞑然而化，此高僧道者功行積歲所不能致。姬一旦脫然超悟，視四大為粉妝骷髏革囊盛穢，棄之不翅敝屣。非賴金繩寶筏之力疇，令蓮花生于火宅乎？彼洛妃乘霧，巫娥化雲，惟離四天慾界，惡得與姬並論哉！

姬稍工筆札，通文辭。擘箋題素，裁答如流。書若游絲弱柳，婀娜媚人。詩如花影點衣，烟霏著樹，非無非有而已。然畫蘭最善，得趙吳興、文待詔三昧。姬亡後廣陵散絕矣。姬姿容雖非絕代，而神情開朗，明忝豔異，方之古名妓何忝蘇小薛濤李娃關盼諸人之亞匹與？胡不擇名流事之，縱未能貴齊汧國，燕子樓中不堪老乎？欲作王家桃葉桃根，余強學吾宗處仲解事，事遂不諧，以此負姬，惜哉！俠骨雖香，不逮蟬蛻污泥耳！

Biography of Courtesan Ma

Wang Zhideng said:

During the Jiajing period (1522-1566), the world was peaceful and prosperous; the southern area of the lower Yangtze River was the richest of the world, and Jinling (Nanjing) was at the top in this area. There had long been numerous courtesans in Pingkang quarters (1); among them, those pretty and coquettish enough to overthrow states and cities were countless. Before Courtesan Ma, there were Liu, Dong, Luo, Ge, Jia, Zhao; He, Jiang, Wang, Yang and Chu were Ma's peers. These courtesans were acclaimed as Twelve Beauties of the courtesan world.

Courtesan Ma was one of four girls born to her mother. Ma was the youngest and thus was called Siniang (the fourth young girl). Her childhood name was Xuan'er, personal name was Shouzhen and style name was Yuejiao, but she was best known by the name of Xianglan (the Orchid at the Xiang River) for her accomplishment in painting orchids. Royalty, nobles, frontier warriors, hawkers, servants, and tribute chiefs knew Ma Xianglan. As Xianglan grew famous, other courtesans were jealous of her, but when they saw that she had high spirits and untrammelled charms, and was *as carefree as the early oriole in the spring willow; spouting her phrases and casting her glances, she was able to cleverly gauge each person's mood* (2), every courtesan looked at herself and felt Ma was unrivalled. When Xianglan's fame increased, loafers, dandies and brothel clients all felt disgraced if they did not know Courtesan Ma. Various carts and horses lingered outside Ma's house. *Its ponds and halls were clear and sparse, its flowers and rocks were elegant and pure; with its winding corridors and secret chambers it was a labyrinth from which one could not escape. She had her girl apprentices instructed in the theatrical arts and each day they would provide entertainment to the banqueting guests: the sounds of drum and lute would mingle with those of gold strings and red ivory clappers* (3). Such banquets were non-stop. Although clients' gifts filled beds and tables, golden phoenix hairpins, jade bracelets, pomegranate skirts, and purple coats often

ended up at the pawnbroker's. She gave away so many gifts that she could not keep them all.

Once, a tattooed criminal from the ancestral temple arrested Xianglan for taxation. Having grabbed half thousand of gold, his desire were still unsatisfied. He treated Xianglan more severely. Coincidentally, I passed by her house. With disheveled hair and barefoot, she was crying and her eyes were swollen. Her clients could think of anything to do except sent her off the next morning white clothing for funeral. At that time, I crossed the Qinhuai River to meet the Xitai censor ⁽⁴⁾. He asked me for my official script calligraphy, and I petitioned for mediation. Xianglan was thus released. Xianglan sighed, "Mr. Wang was a man of kindness!" and wanted to become my concubine. I thanked her for the kind consideration that I had no one to attend upon me, but I was just a Taoist man praying for longevity, how I could have the desire of acquiring a beauty? A man profiting by releasing others from adversity was no difference from that villain making adversity. If Gu Yaya ⁽⁵⁾ was alive, he would have stabbed me. Thus, Ma never spoke of becoming my concubine. However, Xianglan's heart was still knotted and had a strong attachment to me, as Chan practitioners say, "Like a fish drinking water one knows whether it is cold or warm." Xianglan and I had a perfect union of minds, and let others know of that by either laughing or spitting.

Once, a young man from Wushang visiting the Imperial College became enamored with Xianglan. Seeing Xianglan, he could not restrain himself and stayed at her house all the time. Suddenly there was a man outside the door, roaring like a tiger and asking for debts. The young man unhesitatingly paid three hundreds strings of copper coins for Xianglan and drove him away to leave. As a chivalrous woman, Xianglan appreciated the young man's chivalry and valued him highly. The young man became infatuated with Xianglan and wanted to marry her, pointing to the river as a witness. He afforded the food, bought a mansion at the Qinhuai River, and spent countless amounts. Xianglan provided fresh livestock and seafood to serve servants and workers, which was approximately equal to the young man's expense. At that time, Xianglan was fifty while the man was no older than twenty-five. Having been together with her

as luxurious pillows and quilts for a long time, he did not think Xianglan was old and his desire of marrying her became even stronger. Xianglan said with laughter: "With so many people visiting me, I wouldn't marry a merchant. But if people heard I favored you, even jewel sellers would faint with surprise. How could a courtesan at her fifty be with you as a new bride?" The young man was still unwilling to give up. Only when the chancellor of the Imperial College heard and exerted a physical penalty on him did the young man leave in depression.

A thief heard someone saying that Xianglan's money and goods were piled as hills. Thus, he entered her chamber at dusk and extorted jewels from Xianglan. With his desires unsatisfied, the thief was so angry that he destroyed all the calligraphies, paintings and other antiquities, and threw them into the pond. Ma's poverty then became extreme. Afterwards, General Louchuan⁽⁶⁾ arrested the thief in the central area of the lower Yangtze River, and searched out Ma's suitcases and found there were innumerable pawnbroker's bonds. Thus, it was found that Xianglan really had nothing at home, and her fame for a chivalry therefore increased all the more.

In our early days, Xianglan and I had made a romantic appointment at Suzhou. However, it had not been realized for almost thirty years. Last autumn of the Jiachen year (1604) when I turned seventy, Xianglan purchased a multi-storey boat, brought a number of girls to my Garden of Willow Catkins, and arranged a banquet in celebration of my birthday. Men and women had their fling; shoes were in disorder and the house was full of guests. At midnight the singing and dancing lasted until dawn; the fragrance of remaining face powders overflowed beautiful sailing boats; river was overflowing and moonlight was hazy. Perhaps since the time of the king Fuchai ⁽⁷⁾, the dragon boats, water palaces, the musical instruments and woven silk, were all buried in the sunset and weeds; who could have imagined that one thousand years later the spirit of the fairy lady in the Zhuluo mountain⁽⁸⁾ would come down from clouds with phoenixes playing instruments, visiting the former capital and resting with laughter on a

white jade bed near the eastern window. People in Suzhou praised highly of this grand event that powerfully affected the times.

Soon, we also went around the West Lake again. As mould rains lasted long and summer heat began to grow vigorous, Xianglan's fragile body could not bear the weather and thus she decided to return. Xianglan appointed to visit my house again the next year when maple leaves fell down to the Wu River, and invited me to row a small boat to visit such scenic spots as two high peaks and three Buddhist temples, instead of the hectic occasion of this year that exhausted lichee and venison in the host's kitchen. Slightly tired and sick, I got on the boat to see her off. When parting at the Shedu, Xianglan held my hands and cried mournfully. Others all cried and I also shed my decrepit tears, drenching the sleeves. When the servant escorting Xianglan back returned from Jinling, he explained that the reason why Xianglan cried mournfully was she felt sympathetic to me who was poorly sick and shaky and won't live forever. Alas! Who can anticipate that Xianglan would first passed away suddenly!

I had been apart from Xianglan for sixteen years, and Xianglan had turned fifty-seven. While her physical beauty was reduced, her charms and spirits still remained. Lips were creamy and face was radiant; fragrance and radiance had not left her hands; her dark hair was dense enough to hang down to the ground. I teased Xianglan: "Like Concubine Xia, you look even younger when growing old; it was a pity that I could not become a Shengong Wuchen (9)." Shortly after returning, despite the fact that such illness as dysentery cannot cause one's death, the doctor prescribed medicine recklessly, and Xianglan had been unable to eat congee and other liquid diet for almost half a month. Prior to this, Buddhist ceremonies had been favored in Xianglan's household, and golden statues of Buddha filled the building with lamps at night and inverted bells at dawn serving them. Xianglan had been a Buddhist devotee for seven years. In the days before she passed away, she summoned monks, chanted the Emperor Liang Repentance (10), burned borneol and sandalwood, prepared Buddhists' vegetarian food, ordered her girl apprentices to walk around with the food tucked, and sat on a lion-throne with knees bent for worship. The ceremony lasted

several days and nights. Once the inner and outer coffins urged were ready, Xianglan then took a bath; both her Buddhist garment and underwear were made of cloth. After a long sitting, she passed away with eyes closed, which eminent monks could not achieve by several years' virtuous deeds. Once Xianglan was detached and awakened, she regarded Four Elements ⁽¹⁾ as food, skeleton, body, and filth, and discarded them simply like worn-out shoes. Can the lotus not grow in Three Realms ⁽²⁾ without relying on the power of the golden rope and precious raft ⁽³⁾? As for Goddess Luo rising on mist and Witch E turning into clouds ⁽⁴⁾, they had not left the world of desire in the four heavens. How can they be placed on a par with Xianglan!

Xianglan was versed in writing letters and had a good knowledge of literature. She could cut paper well, write inscriptions on silk, and could answer questions on the spot. Her calligraphy was as graceful and delicate as gossamer and willow, very alluring; her poetry was as ambiguous and intangible as flower shadow skimming clothes and smoky mist surrounding trees. However, she was most accomplished in depicting orchids, and mastered the secret art of Zhao Mengfu and Wen Zhengming. After Xianglan's death, the Guangling tune ⁽⁵⁾ was extinct. Xianglan's figure and face was not extraordinary, but with her high spirit was she not the equal of the extraordinary beauties of the antiquity, like Su Xiaoxiao, Xue Tao, Li Wa, and Guan Panpan ⁽⁶⁾? Why not choose a celebrity and attend upon him? Even if one is unable to become honored like Duchess of Qianguo, who can bear senility in the Swallow building? While Xianglan wanted to become a Taoye or Taogen in the Wang family ⁽⁷⁾, I took Wang Chuzhong's ⁽⁸⁾ behaviors as an example and declined Xianglan's request, thus disappointing Xianglan. What a pity! Her chivalrous spirits was fragrant, but unlike a cicada she could not escape from the muddy world.

Translation Notes:

1. A pleasure quarter of the Tang capital. Here it refers to pleasure quarters in Nanjing.
2. Translation by Idema and Grant, 366.

3. Ibid.
4. Censor-in-chief.
5. A title of general since the West Han dynasty (202BC-209).
6. A famous chivalrous person in a Tang tale who sacrificed himself to save others.
7. The last king of the Wu state in the Spring and Autumn Period, reigned 495 BC-473BC.
8. Xi Shi, one of the famous Four Beauties of ancient China who was offered as tribute to Fu Chai.
9. A famous beauty in the Spring and Autumn period who looked even younger when growing old and had love affairs with Shengong Wuchen, a minister of the Chu state.
10. A major Buddhist repentance service named after Emperor Liangwu, the first emperor of the Liang dynasty (502-557) who was known for fostering Buddhism in China.
11. A Buddhism term. It refers to earth, fire, water, and wind these four elements of nature constituting all the objects of the world.
12. A Buddhism term. It refers to the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm.
13. Golden ropes are used in Buddhism to mark the realms; the precious raft ferries over the sea of mortality to the state of being free from suffering.
14. Goddess of Luo was a famous goddess from Cao Zhi's (192-232) prose-poem on Goddess of the River Luo; Wu E was the goddess of the Wu Mountain in Song Yu's (3rd century BC) prose-poem on Gaotang.
15. Guangling tune was a famous *qin* solo since the Han dynasty and was said to disappear for the music master Ji Kang (224-263) died.
16. Su Xiaoxiao was a famous courtesan in the Southern Qi dynasty (479-502); Xue Tao was a celebrated courtesan-poet in the Tang dynasty (618-907); Li Wa was a courtesan in a Tang tale entitled Duchess of Qianguo for her womanly virtues, and "Duchess of Qianguo" was later used as an allusion for courtesans who left the courtesan world and became regular members of literati society;

Guan Panpan was a courtesan in Xuzhou of the Tang dynasty who had preserved chastity after the death of her husband in the Swallow building for over ten years.

17. Taoye was a concubine of the well-known Jin calligraphy Wang Xianzhi (344-386); Taogen was said to be Taoye's younger sister.

18. Wang Chuzhong was a general in the Wei-Jin dynasty who had used to be fond of women and got worn, and thus let all of his concubines gone.

列朝詩集·錢謙益

馬姬，名守真，小字玄兒，又字月嬌，以善畫蘭，故湘蘭之名獨著。姿首如常人，而神情開滌，濯濯如春柳早鶯，吐辭流盼，巧伺人意，見之者無不人人自失也。所居在秦淮勝處，池館清疎，花石幽潔，曲廊便房，迷不可出。教諸小鬟學梨園子弟，日供張燕客，羯鼓琵琶聲，與金縷紅牙聲相間。性喜輕俠，時時揮金以贈少年，步搖條脫，每在子錢家，弗顧也。常為墨祠郎所窘，王先生伯穀脫其厄，欲委身于王，王不可。萬曆甲辰秋，伯穀七十初度，湘蘭自金陵往，置酒為壽，燕飲累月，歌舞達旦，為金閨數十年盛事。歸未幾而病，燃燈禮佛，沐浴更衣，端坐而逝，年五十七矣。有詩二卷。萬曆辛卯，伯穀為其序曰：“秣陵佳麗之地，青樓狹邪之間，桃葉題情，柳絲牽恨。胡天胡帝，登徒於焉駘目；為雲為雨，宋玉因而蕩心。誠妖冶之奇境，溫柔之妙鄉也。有美一人，風流絕代。問姓則千金燕市之駿，託名則九畹湘江之草。輕錢刀若土壤，居然翠袖之朱家；重然諾如丘山，不忝紅粧之季布。珮非交甫曷解，梭不幼輿焉投。文慚馬卿，綠琴挑而不去；才謝藥師，紅拂恨其安適。六代精英，鐘其慧性；三山靈秀，凝為麗情。爾其搦琉璃之管，字字風雲；擘玉葉之箋，言言月露。蠅頭寫怨，而覽者心結；魚腹緘情，而聞者神飛。寄幽悵於五字，音似曙鶯之囀谷；抒孤抱於四韻，情類春蠶之吐絲。按子夜之新聲，翻庭花之舊曲。瓦官閣下之潮，儂欲渡而吟斷；征虜亭前之樹，歡不見而歌殘。語夫乘霧洛妃，未聞飛絮之詠；避風趙後，甯工明月之什。不謂柔曼，詞兼白雪；豈云窈窕，才擅青箱。既高都市之紙價，遑惜山林之棗材。俾流蘇帳底，披之而夜月窺人；玉鏡臺前，諷之而朝煙縈樹。奚特錦江之薛濤，標書記之目；詎止金閨杜韋，惱刺史之腸而已哉！”湘蘭歿，伯穀為作傳，附挽詩十二絕句。至今詞客過舊院者，皆為詩吊之。

APPENDIX III:

FIGURES

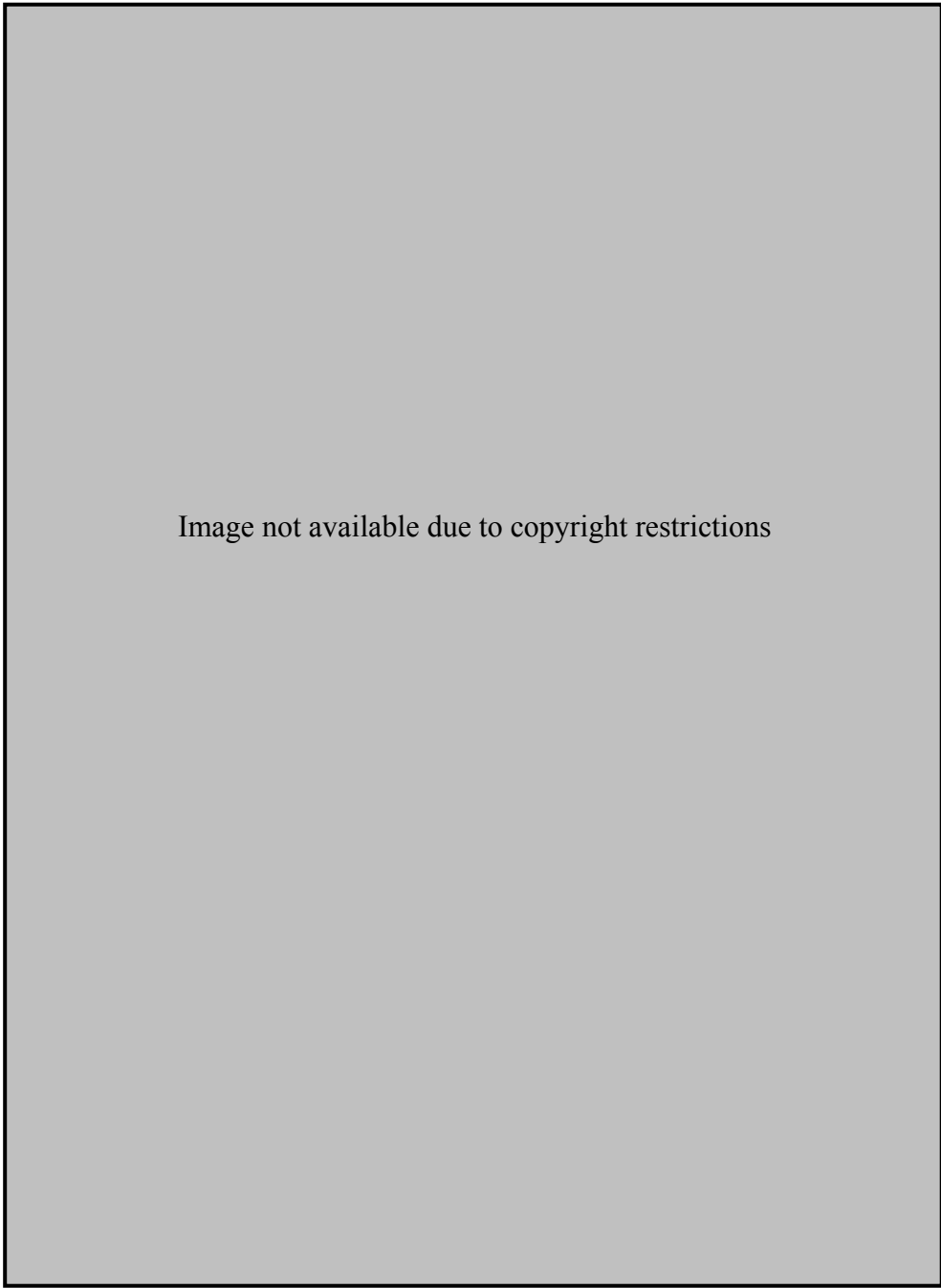


Figure.1. Ma Shouzhen, *Orchid and Bamboo*, 1601, Jilin Provincial Museum



Figure.2. Ma Shouzhen, *Orchid and Rock*, 1602, National Palace Museum, Beijing

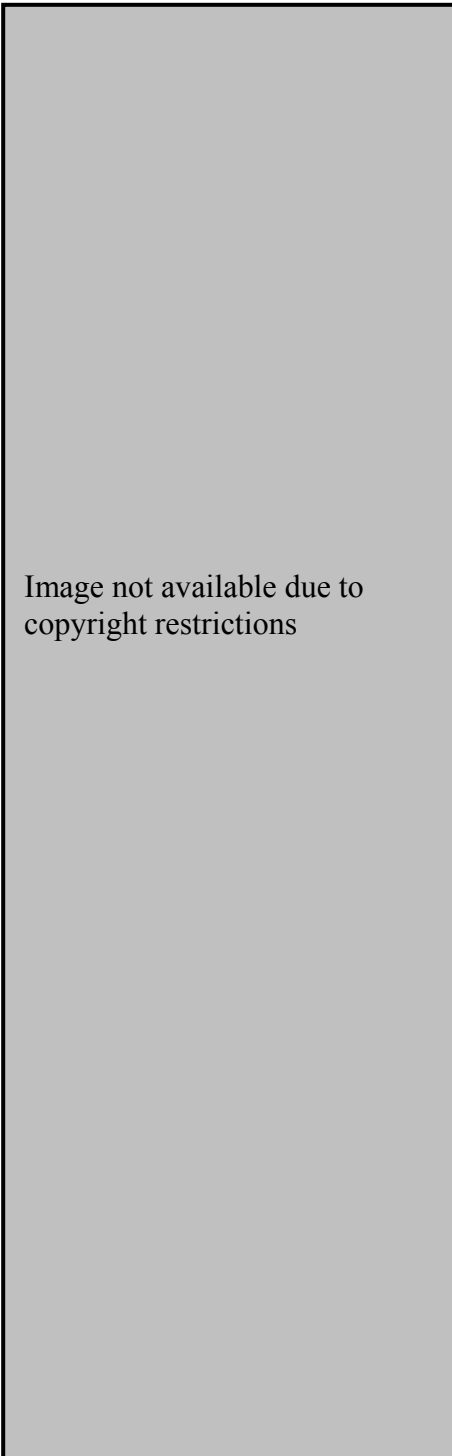


Figure.3. Ma Shouzhen, *Colored Orchids*, 1592, Kurokawa Institute of Ancient Cultures, Japan

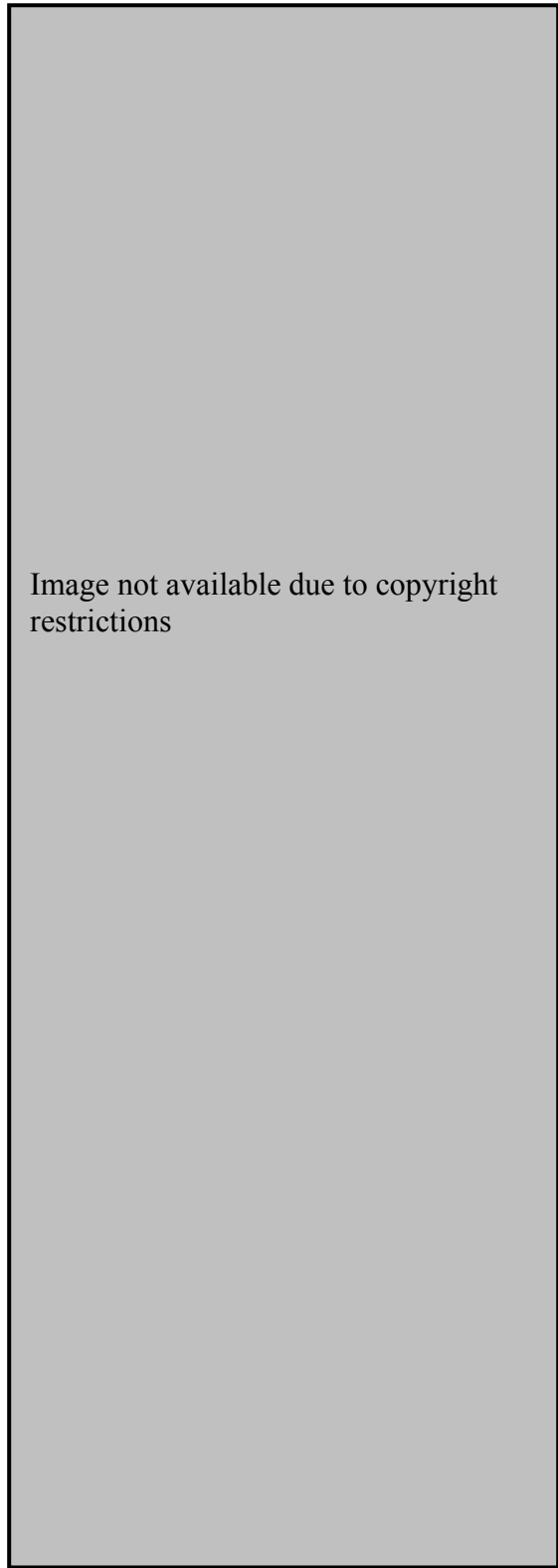


Figure.4. Ma Shouzhen, *Orchids, Bamboo, and Rock*, 1563, Private Collection

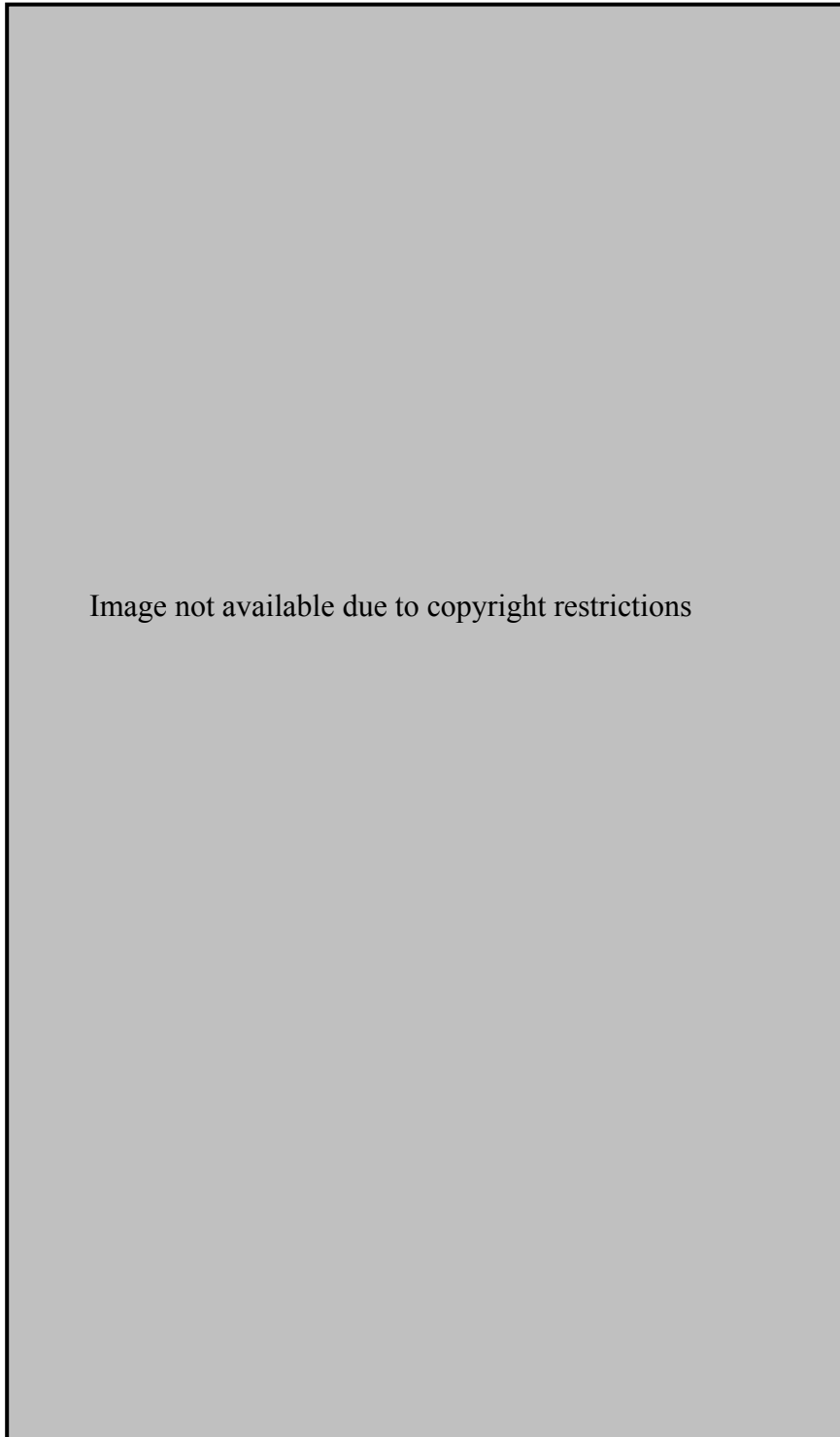


Figure.5. Ma Shouzhen, *Orchid and Rock*, 1572, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Edward Elliot Family Collection, the Dillon Fund Gift, 1982

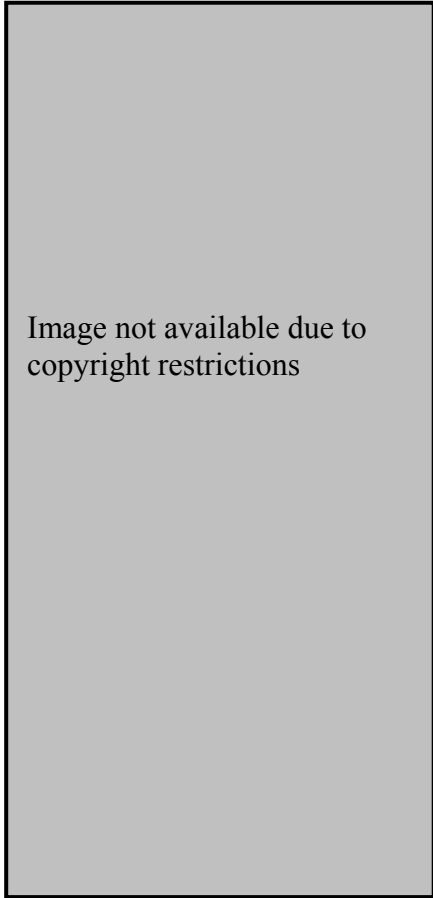


Figure.5.a



Figure.5.b



Figure.6. Zheng Sixiao, *Orchid*, 1306, Abe Collection, Japan



Figure.7. Zhao Mengfu, *Bamboo, Rocks, and Lonely Orchids*, the Cleveland Museum of Art, John L. Severance Fund by exchange

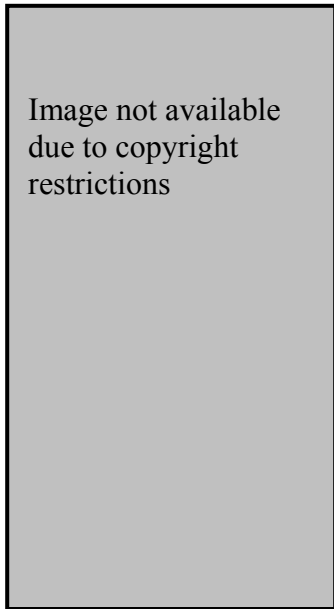


Figure.7.b

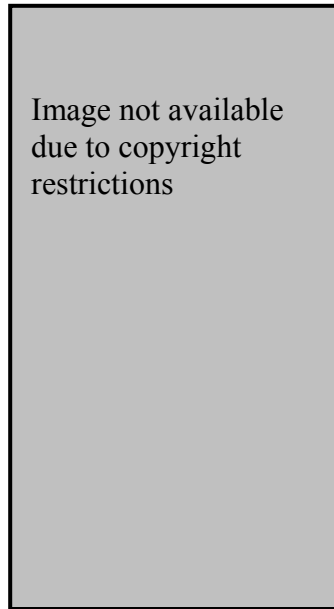


Figure.7.a




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Figure.8. Zhao Mengfu, *Bamboo, Orchid and Rock*, National Palace Museum, Beijing, Reproduction.




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Figure.9. Wen Zhengming, *Bamboo, Orchids, and Rock*, c. 1530, Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, Massachusetts, Charlotte E.W. Buffington Fund, 1960.10.

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Figure.10. Wen Zhengming, *Orchids, Rocks, and Bamboo* (part),
National Palace Museum, Beijing




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Figure.11. Wen Jia, *Orchids, Rocks, and Bamboo*, 1561, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of Mr. Edward Bernat, Cat.no.27.

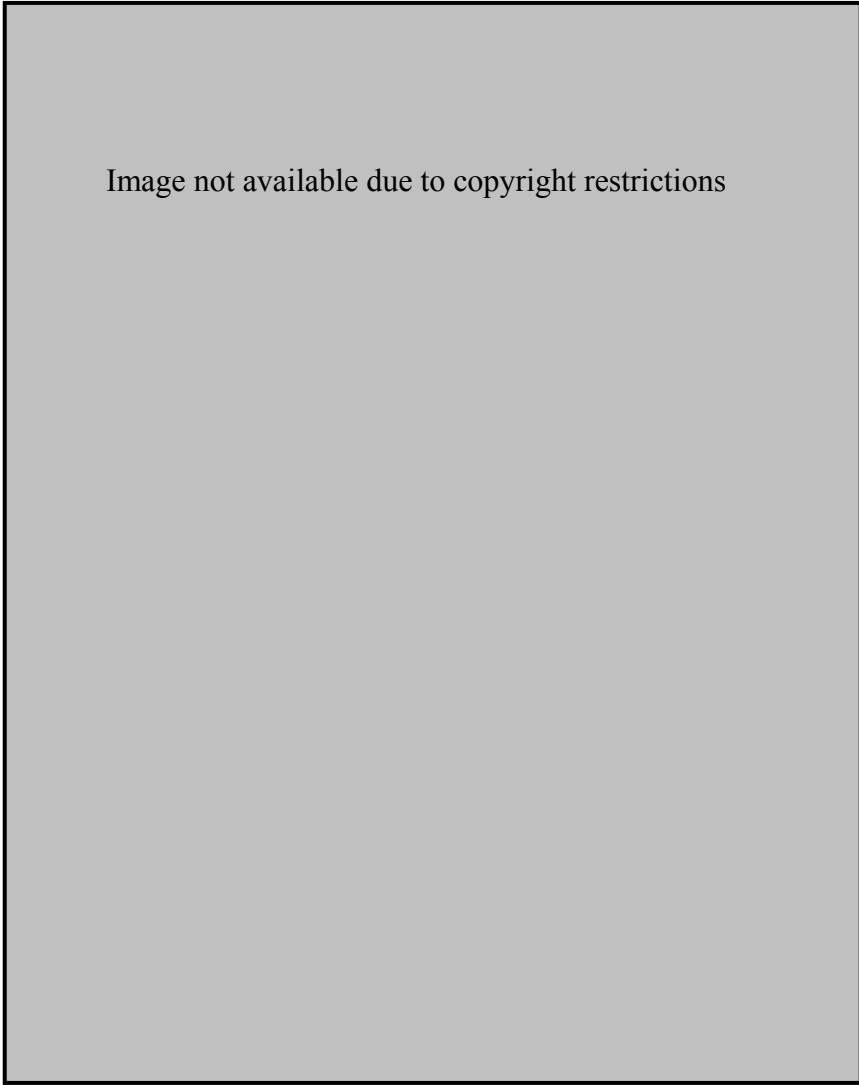


Figure.12. an illustration of painting orchid leaves in *The Portrait of Nine Acres of Orchids* by Zhou Lǔjīng

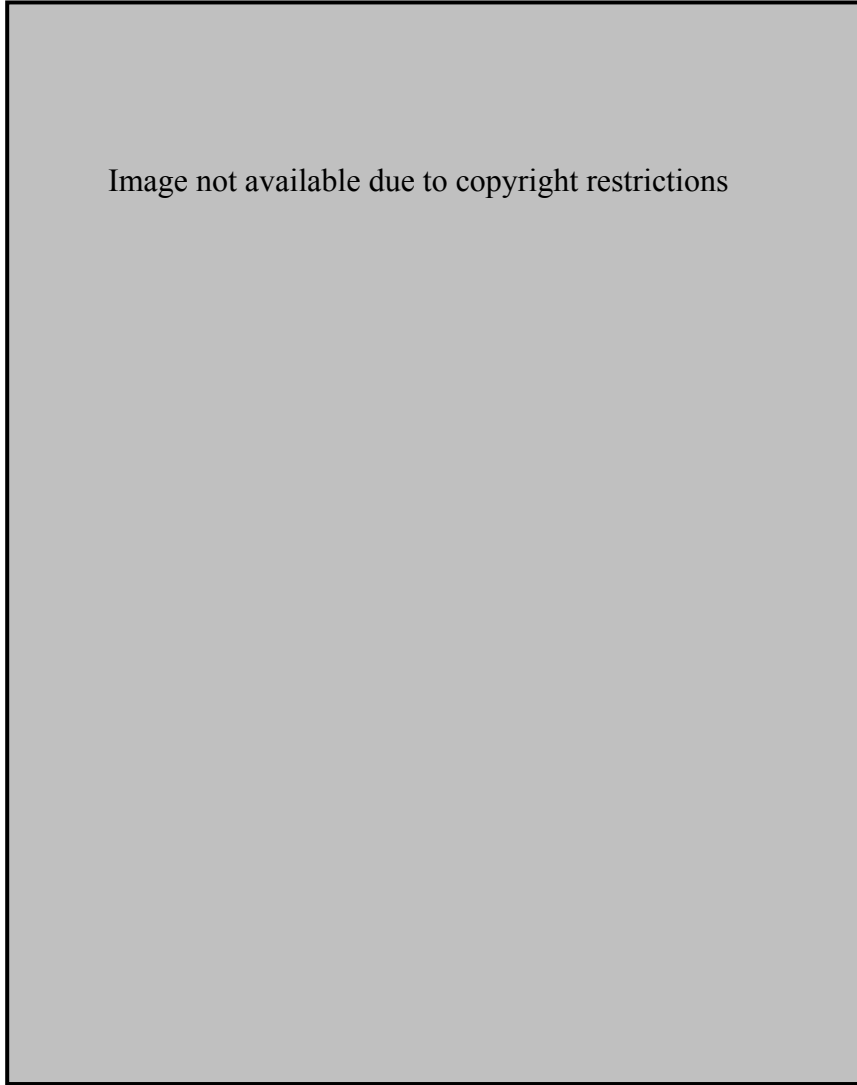


Figure.13. an illustration of painting orchid leaves in *The Portrait of Nine Acres of Orchids* by Zhou Lǔjīng




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Figure.14. Ma Shouzhen, *Boating by a Cliff*, 1576, Tokyo National Museum