

Romantic Identity in the Funerary Inscriptions (*muzhi*) of Tang China

During the long-lasting and culturally receptive Tang dynasty (618–907), the ninth century in particular draws our attention because of a new phenomenon – the discursive culture of romance.¹ This aspect of culture emerged in the various circles of China’s elite young men and among demimonde women (for example, courtesans and concubines). These men and women, fascinated with love affairs and passions, participated in the discourse of romance by writing and sharing poems and stories on the subjects of erotic desire, passion and love.

I refer generally to such expressions as “romantic sentiment.” For example, many poems and stories describe a scene in which an elite man and a demimonde woman become attracted to each other: the woman first falls in love with a poem and then with its poet. For his part, the man is charmed by the woman’s physical beauty and talent for performance, for instance in song, dance, or composition.² One recurring image is that of the “abandoned woman” awaiting her absent beloved’s

I WOULD like to thank Stephen Owen and Tian Xiaofei for reading and commenting on the early draft of this paper. I am also grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their very helpful questions, corrections, and suggestions.

¹ Stephen Owen suggests that a discursive culture of romance appeared in the early-ninth century. See “What Did Liuzhi Hear? The ‘Yan Terrace Poems’ and the Culture of Romance,” *Tang Studies* 13 (1995), pp. 81–118; “Romance,” *The End of the Chinese ‘Middle Ages’: Essays in Mid-Tang Literary Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 130–48.

² For example, Li Shangyin 李商隱 (812–858) describes how Liuzhi 柳枝, the daughter of a Luoyang merchant, pursues him after hearing one of his poems. Likewise, in “Huo Xiaoyu’s Story” 霍小玉傳, Huo’s love for Li Yi’s 李益 poetry leads to an affection for Li himself. See Li Shangyin, “Five Poems to Liuzhi” 柳枝五首, in Peng Dingqiu 彭定求 (1645–1719) et al., comp., *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960; hereafter *QTS*) 541, p. 6232; Li Fang 李昉 (925–996) et al., comp., *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961; hereafter *TPGJ*) 487, pp. 4006–11. For descriptions of elite male fascination with courtesans, see Xue Feng 薛逢 (ca. 806–876), “Watching a Courtesan at a Night Banquet” 夜宴觀妓, *QTS* 548, p. 6326; Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846), “When Drunk: On Two Courtesans Li and Ma” 醉後題李馬二妓, *QTS* 438, p. 4876; Li Qunyu 李群玉 (ca. 813–861), “When Drunk: Presented to Courtesan Feng” 醉後贈馮姬, *QTS* 569, p. 6601. Jinghua Wangling discusses poems written by ninth-century poets on the subject of infatuation with courtesans; idem, “Singing Lips in Observation: Ninth Century Chinese Poetry on Female Entertainers” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2009).

return. During her interminable wait, the lonely woman often sends her lover a heartfelt poem, letter, or self-portrait. In many stories, these passionate dispatches are followed by the woman's death – often at her own hand – the sad consequence of her immense loneliness and grief.³ Male passion is depicted in poems and stories too. In one example, You Wei 油蔚 vows eternal love for a courtesan in a parting poem.⁴ And in another, Ouyang Zhan 歐陽詹 (758–801) dies of grief after receiving news of his courtesan lover's death.⁵

Accompanying this growing discourse was a new social identity that was related to it. Prior to the ninth century, the identities of men and women were generally defined by family lineage, social status, or moral character. Those deemed praiseworthy were then esteemed as members of the elite, or as upright officials, filial sons and daughters, virtuous wives, and kind mothers. During the ninth century, however, men and women began to be judged by the quality of their romantic sentiments. Consider the case of the just-mentioned Ouyang Zhan. Following the death of Ouyang Zhan, who was a Fujian native of the same *jinshi* cohort as Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824), Meng Jian 孟簡 (*jinshi* 791) wrote “Recounting Ouyang Xingzhou's Affairs” 述歐陽行周事, a work largely devoted to a description of Ouyang's affair with a courtesan – an affair that ended with the deaths of both lovers. In Meng's account, Ouyang Zhan falls deeply in love with a courtesan from Taiyuan. Unable to take her with him when he leaves, Ouyang promises to return for her. The courtesan patiently waits, slowly grows ill with grief, and dies. Receiving news of her death, Ouyang Zhan falls ill and dies of grief. The love story circulated widely, even long after Ouyang's death, causing him to be remembered as a devoted lover.⁶

³ For example, Cui Hui 崔徽 sends Pei Jingzhong 裴敬中 a self-portrait and then falls ill; the courtesan Liu Guorong 劉國容 sends Guo Shaoshu 郭昭述 a letter after he leaves for a new post; and Yuxiao 玉簫 commits suicide after Wei Gao 韋臯 (745–805) fails to return to her. See *QTS* 423, p. 4652; *Tang Wudai biji xiaoshuo daguan* 唐五代筆記小說大觀 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2000), pp. 1733, 1277.

⁴ You Wei, “Presenting a Poem to Bid Farewell to My Love, a Military Camp Courtesan” 贈別營妓卿卿, *QTS* 768, p. 9719. It is preserved in the tenth-century anthology *Caidiao ji* 才調集; see Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮, ed., *Tangren xuan Tang shi xinbian* 唐人選唐詩新編 (Xi'an: Shanxi renmin jiaoyu, 1996), p. 867.

⁵ *TPGJ* 274, pp. 2161–62.

⁶ The reference to Ouyang Zhan's love story in an anecdote in *Yunxi youyi* 雲溪友議, a collection of anecdotes written by Fan Shu 范攄 (fl. 875–888), suggests that the story about Ouyang was widely known during the second half of the ninth century. In the *Yunxi youyi* anecdote, when Fang Qianli's 房千里 concubine leaves him for another man, his agony is compared to that felt by Ouyang Zhan after learning of his courtesan lover's death. See *Tang Wudai biji xiaoshuo daguan*, pp. 1268–69.

Many socially elite men of the ninth century wrote of their amorous experiences in order to underscore an aspect of personal character known as *fengliu* 風流. The term's association with romantic sentiment had not appeared until this time. During the Liu Song period 劉宋 (420–479), for example, *fengliu* had been associated with certain Eastern Jin 晉 (317–420) elites who were widely known for having a nonconformist spirit and unrestrained demeanor.⁷ During the ninth century, however, *fengliu* came to be associated with romantic sentiment. For example, the poet Du Mu's 杜牧 (803–852) *fengliu* image was closely associated with his frequent visits to the courtesan quarter, where he had affairs and wrote poems on the subject of flirtation, passion, and love.⁸

Some ninth-century demimonde women were also remembered for romantic sentiment. The romanticized image of Xue Tao 薛濤 (ca. 768–ca. 831), an official courtesan of the region of Shu 蜀 (present-day Sichuan), was famous for her amorous relationships with Wei Gao 韋臯 (745–805) and Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779–831).⁹ Moreover, her poems have often been interpreted in the context of her love affairs. Xue Tao's "Ten Poems on Separation" 十離詩, for example, have been interpreted as an attempt at regaining the good graces of Yuan Zhen (or Wei Gao, depending on the version), who had grown angry with Xue Tao due to her unrestrained behavior.¹⁰

In what follows, I examine the emergence of romantic identity in a particular type of written contemporary evidence – the great wealth of inscribed funerary inscriptions, or *muzhi* 墓誌, which were transmitted via rubbings and printed transcriptions over the centuries and

⁷ Feng Youlan 馮友蘭 (1895–1990) discusses the relationship between Daoist spontaneity and the Jin Dynasty ideal of *fengliu* in *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, trans. Derk Bodde (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), pp. 231–40. In her study of the Xie family members of the Southern Dynasties, Cynthia L. Chennault translates *fengliu* as “debonair manner” to describe the grace and urbanity associated with upper-class breeding; idem, “Lofty Gates or Solitary Impoverishment? Xie Family Members of the Southern Dynasties,” *Toung Pao* 85 (1999), p. 273.

⁸ On the new meaning of *fengliu* and ninth-century poets' efforts to construct their *fengliu* self-image, see Jinghua Wangling, “Singing Lips in Observation: Ninth Century Chinese Poetry on Female Entertainers,” pp. 183–229.

⁹ The anecdote concerning Xue Tao's affair with Yuan Zhen is preserved in *Yunxi youyi*; see *Tang Wudai biji xiaoshuo daguan*, p. 1308. The story about Xue Tao's relationship with Wei Gao is preserved in *Jian jie lu* 鑒誠錄, an anecdote collection written by He Guangyuan 何光遠 (fl. 934–965); see *Jian jie lu* (Shanghai: Han fen lou, 1922) 1, p. 12.

¹⁰ According to *Tang zhi yan* 唐摭言, a collection of anecdotes on the subject of the Tang civil examination written by Wang Dingbao 王定保 (870–940), Xue Tao wrote “Ten Poems on Separation” to regain the good graces of Yuan Zhen after accidentally injuring his nephew during a drinking game of dice; see *Tang Wudai biji xiaoshuo daguan*, pp. 1690–91. But according to *Jian jie lu*, Xue Tao wrote them to regain the favor of Wei Gao, who disapproved of her associations with other elite men; see *Jian jie lu* 1, pp. 12–14.

which lately have received considerable cataloging and analysis. By analyzing three somewhat unusual inscriptions, each celebrating the quality of the deceased woman's romantic sentiment (or the romantic sentiment felt for her by another), I will argue that through the writing of an inscription, its author could make new claims regarding the meaning of a person's life – namely, that a person's worth might be determined by the quality of his or her emotional life, rather than kinship and social status.

THE FUNERARY INSCRIPTION AS A GENRE IN THE TANG

Before addressing the specifics of the three selected inscriptions, it will pay to look more closely at certain features common to most Tang-period funerary inscriptions, particularly those written for and about women. Among the many categories of funerary writing, some relatively well-known ones are: funerary inscriptions, accounts of conduct (*xingzhuang* 行狀), prayer texts (*jiwen* 祭文), dirges (*lei* 誄), lamentations (*diao* 吊), and words of mourning (*aici* 哀辭). Funerary inscriptions arguably belong to the most conservative of all Tang literary genres; both it and the accounts of conduct are particularly formulaic, likely as a consequence of their political and biographical importance.¹¹ In his dissertation on funerary inscriptions of the Tang and Song dynasties, Neil Weinberg observes that Tang funerary inscriptions were typically organized around such themes as family ancestry, political career, and descriptions of moral character.¹² Each of these themes includes such formulaic details as the deceased person's lineage, honorific and taboo names, age at the time of death, place of burial, names and social status of next of kin, and descriptions of noteworthy professional achievements such as the submission of memorials to the imperial court. For women and children, Weinberg writes, “[C]areer highlights were replaced by other determinants of social status.”¹³ He also remarks that great emphasis was placed on a person's relationship to his or her clan. On the one hand, he writes, “Male or female, young or old, official or hermit, the virtues extolled are often portrayed as emanating from the

¹¹ The political and biographical importance of funerary inscriptions was well documented in Tang sources. Such inscriptions were intended to be preserved as political and biographical records for the purpose of obtaining posthumous titles and preserving the fame and reputation of family lineages. See Anna Shields, “Words for the Dead and the Living: Innovations in the Mid-Tang ‘Prayer Text’ (*jiwen* 祭文),” *Tang Studies* 25 (2009), p. 115.

¹² Neil Weinberg, “*Muzhi*: the Transformation of a Ritual Genre” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2002), p. 62.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

merit of the clan.” In other words, worthy families produced filial sons, beautiful daughters, prominent officials, and virtuous women. On the other hand, the significance of the deceased’s life was also measured against his or her contribution to the clan’s overall prosperity. Typically, a long list of official and honorific titles sufficed to testify to a man’s contribution, while a woman’s was established by the respectability of her natal family lineage and the number of sons she produced for her marital family. In short, funerary inscriptions were reflections of wealth and status. As one would expect, this being the case, the majority of Tang funerary inscriptions were written by and for members of the social elite.

The few funerary inscriptions written to celebrate non-elite women were generally produced in order to extol a woman’s contribution to an elite family. Han Yu, for example, composed an inscription for his wet-nurse that celebrated her role as his surrogate mother.¹⁴ Likewise, inscriptions written for concubines from humble family backgrounds usually emphasized the role they played as mother figures. In an inscription written to honor a former courtesan turned concubine, Li Hong 李肱 (fl. 841–873) praised her as the mother of his five sons.¹⁵ The emphasis on her role as mother is captured in the inscription’s title – “Funerary Inscription for Taiyi, Mother to Former Prefect of Xingzhou Li Hong’s Sons” 前邢州刺史李肱兒母太儀墓誌. Indeed, the inscription tells us very little about the deceased woman. Such inscriptions suggest that a woman’s value was almost entirely dependent on her ability to give birth to male heirs.

In addition to her success in bearing sons, a woman’s excellence might also be measured by certain highly esteemed womanly virtues. Concubines were frequently praised for such virtues as “modesty and self-restraint” 鳴謙自收, “respectful, cautious, tender, and obedient” 恭謹柔順, and “serving her superiors with respect and obedience, and interacting with her inferiors with modesty and amiability” 奉上以敬順, 接下以謙和.¹⁶ In an inscription written by Yuan Zhen for a deceased concubine, he focuses on two virtues: her unquestioning obedience and ability to endure hardship without complaint.¹⁷ Concerning the latter,

¹⁴ Han Yu, “Inscription for My Wet-nurse” 乳母墓銘, in Ma Qichang 馬其昶, ed., *Han Changli wenji jiaozhu* 韓昌黎文集校註 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1986) 7, pp. 563–64.

¹⁵ Zhou Shaoliang 周紹良 et al., ed., *Lidai muzhi huibian* 歷代墓誌彙編 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1997), p. 2401.

¹⁶ *Lidai muzhi huibian*, pp. 1561, 2425, 2442.

¹⁷ Yuan Zhen, “Record of Burying Ms. An” 葬安氏志, in Ji Qin 冀勤, ed., *Yuan Zhen ji* 元稹集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982) 58, pp. 614–15.

Yuan Zhen provides details. After his concubine's death, Yuan Zhen examines her possessions and is shocked at how little she owned: "No ten-foot bolt of silk; no complete set of clothes; no silk-lined quilt" 無盈丈之帛, 無成襲之衣, 無帛里之衾. Only then does Yuan Zhen understand that, "Although her possessions had been insufficient when she was alive, she never mentioned her lack of food or clothing" 其生也不足, 不以飢寒告. The concubine's virtue is thus defined by a series of negative terms: "to not have" (*wu* 無), "insufficient" (*buzu* 不足), and "to not mention" (*bugao* 不告). Such womanly virtues, as noted in Yuan's inscription, are commonly found in Tang inscriptions for concubines.

In some funerary inscriptions from the late-eighth and the ninth centuries, however, elite concubines are not celebrated for their womanly virtues or ability to produce sons; rather, a concubine is celebrated for the excellence of her romantic sentiment or the refined quality of the author's romantic sentiment for her. In the three inscriptions that are discussed below, Cui Zhuo 崔倬 (fl. 780–783) describes his patron's concubine principally as a charming performer; Shen Yazhi 沈亞之 (ca. 781–ca. 832) praises his concubine for the strength of her passion for performance; and Yuan Kuangxiu 源匡秀 (fl. 870) celebrates a courtesan who became his lover.¹⁸

A CHARMING PERFORMER

Let us first look at Cui Zhuo's inscription, entitled "Inscription for the Daughter of the Hao Clan" 郝氏女墓誌銘. The inscription begins with a brief prose section that offers general biographical details and praise for the deceased. This is followed by an expression of sorrow marked by the phrase *wuhu* 嗚呼 (Alas!), and ends with a rhymed verse inscription (*ming* 銘) summarizing the merits of the deceased. The prose account reads:

This daughter of the Hao clan was named Gui, style-name Jiuhuazi. She was born to Ms. Li of Zhao Prefecture. Her father Xian, General-in-Chief of the Left Militant Guard, inherited an honest, gentle, and courteous character. Her grandfather Dang, the revered Prefect of Shaozhou, was from an eminent clan that enjoyed the carriages and fine garments of high officials. As a result of accumulated blessings, fragrant flowers were bestowed [on the family],

¹⁸ For Cui Zhuo's inscription, see Zhou Shaoliang et al. ed., *Lidai muzhi huibian xuji* 歷代墓誌彙編續集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2001), p. 728; for Shen Yazhi's inscription, see Xiao Zhanpeng 肖占鵬 and Li Boyang 李勃洋, *Shen Xiaxian ji jiaozhu* 沈下賢集校註 (Tianjin: Nankai daxue chubanshe, 2003), pp. 250–51; for Yuan Kuangxiu's inscription, see *Lidai muzhi huibian xuji*, p. 1085.

and therefore Jiuhua was born.¹⁹ 郝氏女名閨，字九華子，出於趙郡李氏。父暹，左武衛大將軍，稟溫恭之純行。外祖暹，皇詔州刺史，爲軒冕之著姓。儲祉舍芳，而生九華。

Jiuhua was smart, sharp, gentle, and virtuous. She was also agreeable, fine, bright, and elegant.²⁰ Slim and graceful, her manner was calm; charming and seductive, her face was quite beautiful.²¹ She was good at playing the reed-pipe, and could dance to “Zhezhi” and more than ten other tunes.²² When the moment came for her to move her fingers and make music, to turn her glances in response to the rhythm, those who listened devoted themselves

¹⁹ “Fragrant flowers” (*fang* 芳) are associated with purity. In *Li sao* 離騷, the phrase “fragrant flowers” refers to those who are “pure and perfect”: “The three kings of old were most pure and perfect / then indeed fragrant flowers had their proper place” 昔三后之純粹兮 / 固衆芳之所在。See Hong Xingzu 洪興祖 (1070–1135), *Chuci buzhu* 楚辭補注 (Taipei: Da’an chubanshe, 1995), p. 10; tr. David Hawkes, *The Songs of the South* (Penguin, 1985), p. 69. Hao Gui’s style name Jiuhua 九華 (lit., “Flowers of the Ninth”) also symbolizes purity. “Flowers of the Ninth” refers to chrysanthemums that bloom at the time of the Double Ninth Festival. The *Li sao* protagonist suggests that he purifies his body and mind on a diet of dew and chrysanthemums: “In the morning I drank the dew that fell from the magnolia / At evening ate the petals that dropped from chrysanthemums // If only my mind can be truly beautiful / It matters nothing that I often faint for famine 朝飲木蘭之墜露兮 / 夕餐秋菊之落英 // 苟余情其信姱以練要兮 / 長顛顛亦何傷。See *Chuci buzhu*, p. 17; tr. *Songs of the South*, p. 70.

²⁰ These are formulaic expressions of one’s disposition and virtue. While “smart and sharp” (*congmin* 聰敏), “virtuous” (*yi* 懿), and “bright and elegant” (*mingxiu* 明秀) are used to describe both men and women, “gentle” (*rou* 柔) and “agreeable” (*wan* 婉) are mainly used to describe women. In his “Nüshi zhen” 女史箴 (Admonitions of the Court Instructress), Zhang Hua 張華 (232–300) writes: “Regarding feminine virtue, gentleness is admired” 婦德尚柔; see Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501–531), comp., *Wen xuan* 文選 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1998) 56, p. 783. An English translation of “Nüshi zhen” is by Michael Farmer, “On the Composition of Zhang Hua’s ‘Nüshi zhen,’” *Early Medieval China* 10–11, no. 1 (2004), pp. 173–75.

²¹ The phrase “slim and graceful” (*tingting* 亭亭) was often used to describe slender plants and graceful women. See Yuan Zhen, “Tall Lotus Flower” (*gao he* 高荷): “Slim and graceful, it lifts itself up” 亭亭自擡舉, in *QTS* 403, p. 4502; and Shen Yue 沈約 (441–513), “Rhapsody on Beautiful Woman” (Liren fu 麗人賦), “Slim and graceful, she looks like the moon” 亭亭似月, in Yan Kejun 嚴可均 (1762–1843), ed., *Quan shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen: Quan Liang wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文: 全梁文 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958) 25, p. 3097. The phrase “charming and seductive” (*yanyan* 艷艷) was often used to describe a woman’s alluring appearance. For example, a *yuefu* poem attributed to Xiao Yan 蕭衍 (464–549) begins with the line: “Charming and seductive is the woman of the golden tower” 艷艷金樓女; see Lu Qinli 遼欽立, ed., *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi: Liang shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩: 梁詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983) 1, p. 1518.

²² A “Zhezhi” tune is described as “vigorous dance music” 健舞曲 in two works: *Jiaofang ji* 教坊記 (Records of the Music Bureau; preface dated circa 758), a collection of anecdotes on the subject of the Music Bureau at Chang’an during the Kaiyuan reign (713–742) written by Cui Lingqin 崔令欽; and *Yuefu zalu* 樂府雜錄 (A Music Miscellany; dated circa 804), a collection of anecdotes dealing with the same bureau during the ninth century written by Duan Anjie 段安節 (fl. 880). See *Tang Wudai biji xiaoshuo daguan*, p. 124; *Jiegu lu/ Yuefu zalu/ Biji manzhi* 羯鼓錄/樂府雜錄/碧雞漫志 (Shanghai: Gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1957), p. 28. Many Tang poems describe the “Zhezhi” dance, eighteen of which include the phrase “Zhezhi” in the title. Xiang Da 向達 studies the origin of the “Zhezhi” dance and its representations in the Tang and earlier sources; idem, “Zhezhi wu xiaokao” 柘枝舞小考, *Tangdai Chang’an yu xiyou wenming* 唐代長安與西域文明 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2010), pp. 86–94.

to listening, and those who watched devoted themselves to watching. Indeed [her charms] could topple men and cities. 九華聰敏柔懿, 婉淑明秀; 亭亭閑態, 艷麗麗容. 善吹笙, 舞柘枝等十餘曲. 每至移指遺聲, 迴眸應節, 則聞者專聽, 覩者專視, 而傾人城矣.

At the age of sixteen she began to serve towel and comb in the family of Censor Gentleman Mr. Li.²³ In four years she was never once disobedient. Mr. Li's family customs are strict and pure, which this person [Hao Gui] by nature admired and respected. She recited the *Songs* and studied the *Rites*, and she never left her curtained chamber. To those of her contemporaries who still longed to see her, she remained so distant and obscure that it was like trying to gaze at an immortal on the other side of the clouds. 年十有六, 侍巾櫛於柱史李君之門. 歷四年而無<.>順. 李君門風肅素, 之子性所慕尚. 誦習詩禮, 不出維房. 時人思復見之, 杳杳然如隔雲霄而望神仙矣.

What a pity that, during the eighth month of her pregnancy, she became ill and lingered at the point of death. On the seventh day of the eighth month, in the fourth year of the Jianzhong reign (September 8, 783), she passed away in [Mr. Li's] private household in Hualin hamlet, Heyang county. She was nineteen years old. On the twenty-first day of the eighth month of that same year (September 22, 783), she was buried in the plain to the east of Houshi county capital (present-day Houshi county in Henan). As it was nearby, she was buried in the graveyard of her maternal grandfather. 悲夫, 懷孕八月而搆疾彌留, 以建中四年八月七日終於河陽縣花林里之私第. 享年一十有九. 即以其年八月廿一日窆於緱氏縣之東原. 從外祖之塋, 塗邇故也.

Cui Zhuo's inscription shares a number of characteristics seen often in funerary inscriptions. It includes basic biographical information of the deceased person: her name, hometown, family lineage, marital status, age, time and cause of death, and time and place of burial. We learn that the name of the deceased woman was Hao Gui, that she died at the age of nineteen, and that she died as a result of complications during pregnancy. We also learn from the inscription that prior to becoming an official's concubine she was the daughter of an elite family who had become a successful courtesan.

That Hao Gui was formerly a courtesan is clearly implied. One of Cui Zhuo's scenes – an audience enchanted by Hao Gui's dancing and music playing – suggests a courtesan who is performing publicly.

²³ "Serve towel and comb" (*shi jinzhi* 侍巾櫛 or *zhi jinzhi* 執巾櫛) refers to a wife's or concubine's duty to serve her husband.

Given that Tang courtesans enjoyed a lower social status than even the average commoner, young women from elite families would have been discouraged from learning to sing and dance, much less performing in public. Indeed, once Hao Gui became the concubine of an elite official, she ceased her performing and learned to “recite the *Songs* and study the *Rites*.” This important change underscores Hao Gui’s transition to respectability.

It is unclear how this female member of a high official’s family became a courtesan. It could be that Hao Gui was indentured to the Music Bureau following a criminal conviction of a family member. Many contemporary anecdotes concern young girls from elite families who were compelled to become courtesans for such reasons. It may also be the case that Hao Gui became a courtesan as a result of her mother’s humble social status. Cui Zhuo’s description of Hao Gui’s mother as “Ms. Li of Zhao Prefecture” gives no indication of Ms. Li’s lineage or marital status: it is possible that she was neither the daughter of an elite family nor the proper wife of Hao Gui’s father. Ms. Li was likely a bondmaid or concubine. Tang literature abounds with descriptions of the daughters of elite officials and lowly concubines who lost their elite status. In a funerary inscription written in 859, for example, a concubine produces four daughters and two sons for her elite husband. While both sons successfully pursue official careers, several of the daughters eventually become courtesans.²⁴ Another example is “Huo Xiaoyu’s Story,” in which the daughter of a Tang prince and his maid loses her noble status when her father dies and his legitimate children force her to leave the household. These types of change in social status indicate that it is likely, yet impossible to prove, that the low social status of Hao Gui’s mother contributed to Hao Gui’s slide from elite daughter to courtesan.

One unusual aspect of Hao Gui’s funerary inscription is that, unlike most inscriptions written for concubines with courtesan backgrounds, it was written by a secretarial assistant in the office of her husband Mr. Li, and not by her husband or one of his family members. We know very little about the inscription’s author Cui Zhuo, except that he was a native of Qinghe 清河 (near present-day Linqing 臨清 in Shandong) and served as “Chief-Secretary for the Cherishing Defense Military Commissioner of Heyang Prefecture and Case Reviewer for the Court of Judicial Review” 河陽懷衛節度使掌書記大理評事, information provided in the inscription itself. The husband’s full name is not given, but there

²⁴ *Lidai muzhi huibian*, p. 2375.

is reason to believe it was in fact Cui Zhuo's boss Li Peng 李芄.²⁵ The inscription provides only partial information: Hao Gui was chosen to be a concubine by a certain "Attendant Censor Mr. Li" 柱史李君 in 779. We know that during the Tang, Attendant Censor (an alternative title for *shiyushi* 侍御史) was an honorific title (*xianxian* 憲銜) given to regional and military officials. Like normal official titles, honorific titles were organized into various ranks, and were bestowed on officials according to the relative importance of their everyday titles. In the year 779, Li Peng was indeed serving as a Prefect 刺史, and at that time the matching honorific title for Prefect was Attendant Censor. Therefore, Li Peng's surname and honorific title match those stated in Cui Zhuo's inscription. In 783, the year that Cui Zhuo wrote the inscription, Li Peng apparently had risen to Military Commissioner of Heyang. Given such evidence, it is likely that Li Peng commissioned his Chief Secretary, Cui Zhuo, to compose the funerary inscription for Hao Gui.

The most striking characteristic of Hao Gui's funerary inscription is that she is esteemed less for her virtue than for her skill and charm as a performer. To be sure, Cui Zhuo does praise Hao Gui's wifely virtues, but he does so in highly formulaic, unremarkable terms. Describing Hao Gui's four years as a concubine, Cui Zhuo writes, "She was never disobedient...She recited the *Songs* and studied the *Rites*." In contrast to this, the description of her skills as a performer is refreshingly vivid and elaborate. Rather than employ set-phrases (e.g., "She was good at playing musical tunes, and excellent at singing and dancing" 善音律, 妙歌舞; "With white teeth, she excelled at singing; with long sleeves, she danced charmingly" 皓齒工歌, 長袖妙舞; "She could dance the 'Seven Plates' with long sleeves, and played such excellent music that it lingered for three days" 七盤長袖之能, 三日遺音之妙),²⁶ Cui Zhuo instead describes a specific, enchanting moment from a Hao Gui performance. He writes, "Whenever [Hao Gui] moved her fingers to create the lingering music or turned her glance in keeping with the rhythm, those who listened devoted themselves to listening and those

²⁵ For the dating of Li Peng's official titles, see his biography in *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975) 132, p. 3655.

²⁶ See *Lidai muzhi huibian*, p. 2375; p. 1724; and *Lidai muzhi huibian xujì*, p. 625. "Seven plates" is the name of a particular dance with seven plates placed on the floor and the dancer dancing on the plates. It is recorded as early as the second century in Zhang Heng 張衡 (78–139), "*Fu on Dancing*" 舞賦, in Yan Kejun, ed., *Quan Shangu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen: Quan Hou Han wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文: 全後漢文 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965) 53, pp. 10a–b. The connection between the "Seven Plates" and long sleeves is seen in Bao Zhao's 鮑照 (ca. 414–466) line "From the seven plates, long sleeves rise" 七盤起長袖 in his "Poem on Counting Names" 數名詩. See Lu Qinli, ed., *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi: Song shi* 宋詩 9, p. 1300.

who watched devoted themselves to watching.” By highlighting Hao Gui’s ability to seduce an audience, Cui Zhuo assigns pride of place to her skill as a performer.

Cui Zhuo’s praise of Hao Gui’s skill as a courtesan differs dramatically from the dominant tone of most conventional rhetoric regarding concubines who had once been courtesans. The inscription that Yang Chou 楊籌 wrote for his concubine Wang Jiaojiao 王嬌嬌 in 864 is a good example.²⁷ Yang states that, although Wang Jiaojiao was a skilled courtesan who “learned to sing and dance from her elder sisters, and eventually surpassed them in excellence” 習歌舞于女兒，頗得出藍之妙，it was her exceptional loyalty that allowed her to transcend her humble status.²⁸ Yang Chou offers the following bit of detail in order to illustrate his point: after Yang Chou had been severely punished for committing a crime, Wang Jiaojiao chooses not return to her fellow sisters as she might have been expected to do. Instead, Yang writes, “[Wang Jiaojiao] refused to leave, preferring to endure hardship together in the wilds” 堅不去，願同疚於荒野。As a consequence of Wang Jiaojiao’s unwavering loyalty, Yang Chou claims, “I forgot about her former excellence [in performing]” 遂忘前所謂出藍之妙。In other words, Wang Jiaojiao’s background as a courtesan was considered an obstacle to assuming a new role as a virtuous concubine. This being the case, in order for Yang Chou to esteem her moral excellence, he first finds it necessary to “forget about” his concubine’s experience as a courtesan.

Unlike Yang Chou, Cui Zhuo does not attempt to explain away Hao Gui’s courtesan background. On the contrary, he goes out of his way to emphasize and celebrate this aspect of her past. How should we understand this unconventional approach? We must assume that Cui Zhuo’s praise for Hao Gui’s skill as an entertainer is meant to please Li Peng, Hao Gui’s husband and Cui Zhuo’s patron. During the late-eighth and the ninth centuries, patronage at both the imperial and regional levels became increasingly important in order for elite men to advance within the official bureaucracy. Anecdotes from this period of time describe how elite young men sought patronage from civil and

²⁷ *Lidai muzhi huibian*, p. 2407.

²⁸ Both *Jiaofang ji* and *Beili zhi* 北里誌 (Account of the Northern Wards) record that music bureau entertainers and courtesans addressed each other as *xiongdì* 兄弟 (brothers) or *nüdi nǚ-xiong* 女弟女兒 (female brothers). See *Tang Wudai biji xiaoshuo daguan*, p. 125; p. 1404. *Beili zhi* (preface dated 884), written by Sun Qi 孫榮, is a collection of anecdotes on the subject of Chang’an’s courtesan quarter during the 870s. An English translation is by Howard S. Levy, “The Gay Quarters of Chang’an,” in *Orient/West* 7, no. 10 (1962), pp. 121–28; 8, no. 6 (1963), pp. 115–22; 9, no. 1 (1964), pp. 103–10. A French translation is by Robert des Rotours, *Courtesanes chinoises à la fin des Tang entre circa 789 et le 8 janvier 881: Pei-li tche (Anecdotes du quartier du Nord) par Souen K’i* (Paris: Press universitaires de France, 1968).

military officials in order to pass the civil examination and secure positions within officialdom. Likewise, civil and military officials endeavored to recruit elite young men in order to increase their cultural and political capital. The post that Cui Zhuo held (that of Chief-Secretary to a Military Commissioner) was considered one of the most promising positions for a talented and ambitious young man. In his *Tangdai jiceng wenguan* 唐代基層文官, Lai Ruihe 賴瑞和 describes the ideal career path for a late-eighth and ninth-century elite man: after passing the *jinshi* and advanced examinations, one would first serve as a Collator in the Imperial Library 校書郎 (or some similar post within the capital); following this, one would then be invited to serve as Chief-Secretary to a Military Commissioner or Surveillance Commissioner 觀察使 whose recommendation might help with future professional advancement at court.²⁹ When Cui Zhuo composed Hao Gui's funerary inscription, he was on the very "career path" that Lai Ruihe describes and so must have understood that his relationship with his patron, Li Peng, was critical to his advancement. As such, Cui Zhuo would have chosen his rhetoric with Li Peng in mind. Moreover, the fact that Cui Zhuo's inscription was approved for use in burial suggests that Li Peng was satisfied with it.

The reason why such uncommon praise for a concubine would please Cui Zhuo's patron must be understood within the context of ninth-century elite romantic culture. At that time, it was common for wealthy officials and members of elite society to display their household performers at parties, as well as to request party guests to compose poems in response. Li Shangyin's preface to "Composed at a Party" 席上作 describes just such a situation. It reads, "I was serving in Guilin when Mr. Zheng of my former office brought out his household performer and ordered me to write a poem on Gaotang" 予爲桂州從事, 故府鄭公出家妓, 令賦高唐詩.³⁰ As Stephen Owen points out, "The poem requested is erotic in tone."³¹ In this kind of poem, the poet celebrates a woman's erotic charm by articulating his desire for her. At times, as

²⁹ Lai Ruihe, *Tangdai jiceng wenguan* (Taipei: Lianjing, 2004), p. 440.

³⁰ *QTS* 539, p. 6167. I use Stephen Owen's translation of the poem; see Stephen Owen, *The Late Tang: Chinese Poetry of the Mid-Ninth Century (827–860)* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), p. 362. "Gaotang" refers to "Rhapsody on the Gaotang Shrine" 高唐賦, which is about the alluring goddess of Mount Wu 巫山 in the state of the Chu. It is included in *Wen xuan* 19, pp. 270–72; tr. David Knechtges, *Wen xuan or Selections of Refined Literature*, vol. 3 (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1996), pp. 325–39. In Tang poetry, the phrase "gaotang" is a common metaphor used to refer to erotic desire and/or romantic encounters between elite men and courtesans. See Li She 李涉, "Sending Jingniang's Portrait" 寄荆娘寫真, *QTS* 477, p. 5424; Xue Neng 薛能, "Writing Playfully" 戲題, *QTS* 558, p. 6477.

³¹ Stephen Owen, *The Late Tang*, p. 362.

Li Shangyin does in this poem, a poet may even describe the woman's desire for him.

淡雲輕雨拂高唐	Pale cloud and light rain brush Gaotang,
玉殿秋來夜正長	Autumn comes to the jade halls, the nights grow longer.
料得也應憐宋玉	I suspect she surely must have loved Song Yu,
一生惟事楚襄王	But all her life she only served King Xiang of Chu.

In the second couplet, Li Shangyin styles himself as Song Yu, with Mr. Zheng assuming the role of King Xiang of Chu. In doing so, Li is suggesting that the performer prefers him (Song Yu) to her master (King Xiang), although he (Li) is most careful to reaffirm that the performer serves only her master.³² Such flirtatious composition, with its pronounced erotic undertones, was not only allowed but frequently encouraged. Despite the mutual desire between poet and performer, the performer's master, Mr. Zheng, is the only person who enjoys her performance both at public parties and within the private bedchamber. In the end, the poet's expression of desire for the performer serves to emphasize her value. Likewise, the poet's unfulfilled desire for the performer highlights her master's exclusive access to her.

The language that Cui Zhuo employs to celebrate his patron's dead concubine shares much in common with that used by Li Shangyin in his poem about his host's household performer. By describing the audience's enchantment with Hao Gui, Cui emphasizes her irresistible charms. Furthermore, although Cui makes clear that the audience desires Hao Gui, he is careful to note that Li Peng is her one and only master. "To those of her contemporaries [other than Li Peng] who still longed to see her," Cui Zhuo writes, "she remained so distant and obscure that it was like trying to gaze at an immortal on the other side of the clouds." In short, public romantic sentiment adds to Hao Gui's value: the more her audience desires her, the more valuable she is to her husband. This relationship between public and private interests also reappears in the second part of Cui Zhuo's inscription, in which sorrow for the departed Hao Gui is expressed, as well as in the rhymed verse that ends the inscription.

Alas! As soon as the red petal snapped, the autumn frost suddenly descended. When spring had just come to the dance hall, she had already gone west to the nether world. In alleys and lanes people are startled and saddened, and people on the road sob in sorrow.

³² Ibid., p. 362.

Because her admired [performance] moved the eyes of the crowd,
so sadness affected the feelings of the public. Let alone her relatives!
Let alone her beloved! 嗚呼! 紅萼初折, 秋霜忽零。舞榭方春,
泉臺已夕。閭巷驚惶, 行路悽愴。蓋賞動群目, 而悲牽眾情。況其親屬乎,
況其寵愛乎。

The rhymed verse reads:

玄堂閉兮黃壤深	The tomb closed, the yellow earth deep,
笙聲絕兮舞態沉	Her reed-pipe music ceased, her dancing gestures have sunken away.
綺羅萎兮親愛隔	Embroidered silk dress ruined, loved ones separated,
唯有悲風兮吹柏林	Only a mournful wind blows upon the cypress trees.

A PASSIONATE GIRL

The second funerary inscription to be considered here was written by Shen Yazhi in 814 for his concubine Lu Jinlan 盧金蘭. Unlike Cui Zhuo, about whom we know very little, Shen Yazhi's more substantial body of work allows us to reconstruct his life and his contemporary reputation.³³ Shen Yazhi was born around 780. Although a distant relative of Empress Shen, his immediate family was not prominent.³⁴ Shen rarely mentions his father – who passed away during his early youth – or his grandfather, absences that may indicate that neither man was influential or well-connected enough to provide the resources necessary for Shen Yazhi to advance. Shen Yazhi passed the *jinshi* examination in 815 when he was in his mid-thirties. Prior to that, he traveled from place to place in search of patronage from both capital and regional authorities.

³³ Shen Yazhi's literary collection in nine *juan* was compiled in the eleventh century and has been preserved; see the annotated edition *Shen Xiaxian ji jiaozhu* (n. 18, above). For a biographical study of Shen Yazhi, see Wang Meng'ou 王夢鷗, "Shen Yazhi shengping jiqi xiaoshuo" 沈亞之生平及其小說, *Tangren xiaoshuo yanjiu erji* 唐人小說研究二集 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1973), pp. 97–106.

³⁴ Empress Shen, a native of Wuxing, was the wife of Emperor Daizong 代宗 (r. 762–780) and mother of Dezong 德宗 (r. 780–805). Shen was selected for the East Palace (the heir-apparent's establishment) near the end of the Kaiyuan reign (713–742), when Daizong was still King Guangping 廣平王. During the An Lushan rebellion, Shen was captured by rebel forces and went missing. Despite Daizong's efforts, she was never found. When Dezong, Shen's son, assumed the throne, he gave his mother the posthumous title of Empress Dowager and appointed many men from the Shen clan to high offices. Empress Shen's biography can be found in *Jiu Tang shu* 52, pp. 2188–90 and *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975) 77, pp. 3501–02. Shen Yazhi describes his relationship with Empress Shen's immediate family in his "Funerary Inscription for Ms. Li, the Late Wife of Adjutant Shen" 沈參軍故室李氏墓誌, in *Shen Xiaxian ji jiaozhu*, p. 247.

By the time that Shen Yazhi wrote the funerary inscription for Lu Jinlan in 814, his work was already quite well known. In his “A Song for Seeing Off Shen Yazhi” 送沈亞之歌 of 812, Li He 李賀 (790–816) describes Shen Yazhi as a talented and romantic poet.³⁵ The first stanza reads:

吳興才人怨春風	The talented man of Wuxing is saddened by the spring breeze,
桃花滿陌千里紅	With peach blossoms filling up the paths, a thousand <i>li</i> of pink.
紫絲竹斷驄馬小	Purple silk, bamboo fish-weir, a piebald horse small, ³⁶
家住錢塘東復東	He lives to the east, east of Qiantang.

Qiantang was the hometown of Su Xiaoxiao 蘇小小, a celebrated courtesan and favorite subject of ninth-century poets.³⁷ Long before Li He composed his poem, it had become a place associated with romance and sensuality. By associating Shen Yazhi with Qiantang – as well as with the spring breeze, peach blossoms, and a piebald horse – Li He establishes an image of Shen Yazhi as a romantic talent.

Shen Yazhi clearly took pride in his literary reputation, as he wrote about receiving occasional commissions based purely on his reputation.

³⁵ *QTS* 390, p. 4394.

³⁶ The phrase “purple silk” (*zisi* 紫絲) may refer to a *Shishuo xinyu* story about two men vying with each other to show off their wealth. While Wang Kai 王愷 (fl. late 3rd c.) constructed a forty-*li*-long purple silk windbreak with dark blue-green lining, his rival Shi Chong 石崇 (249–300) constructed a fifty-*li* brocaded one. This story is included in Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 (403–444), *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語; see Yang Yong 楊勇, *Shishuo xinyu jiaojian* 世說新語校箋 (Taipei: Zhengwen shuju, 2000) 30, p. 787; tr. Richard B. Mather, *A New Account of Tales of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), p. 459. The image of purple silk (or purple silk windbreak), juxtaposed with the image of pink peach blossoms in the previous line, serves to depict Shen Yazhi’s hometown as a land of color and sensuality. The meaning of the phrase *zhuduan* 竹斷 is difficult to determine. This is the only Tang poem in which *zhuduan* appears. I would like to thank Howard L. Goodman for suggesting that the character *duan* 斷 might be a misprint for the character *duan* 斷, meaning “fish weir.” During the ninth century, the word *duan* 斷 was a variation of the word *hu* 滬 in Wu dialects. In his poems on fishing tackles (*yuju* 漁具), Lu Guimeng 陸龜蒙 (d. 881) writes about “*hu*” 滬, or “fish weir,” and notes that “at present *hu* is called *duan* by the people of the Wu” 吳人今謂之斷. See *QTS* 620, p. 7136. *Zhuduan* is used to emphasize that Shen Yazhi’s hometown is in the Wu region. The phrase “piebald horse” (*congma* 驄馬) had been associated with the image of gallant young men long before Li He composed this poem. One example is Bao Zhao’s lines in “Imitating ‘The Song of Young Gallantry’” 代結客少年場行: “A piebald horse is adorned with a golden halter/ A sickle-shaped sword hangs from my embroidered belt” 驄馬金絡頭/ 錦帶佩吳鉤. See Lu Qinli, *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi: Song shi* 7, p. 1267. A translation of Bao Zhao’s poetry is by Robert Shanmu Chen, “A Study of Bao Zhao and His Poetry: With a Complete English Translation of His Poems” (Ph.D. diss., University of British Columbia, 1989).

³⁷ For example, Bai Juyi celebrates her “abundant feelings” 多情 in his poem “Willow Branches” 楊柳枝, in *QTS* 28, p. 397; Li He commemorates “Su Xiaoxiao of Qiantang” 錢塘蘇小小 in “The Seventh Night” 七夕, in *QTS* 390, p. 4394.

In one essay, he mentions being commissioned to “write about feelings” 撰為情語 on behalf of a certain scholar’s former-courtesan-turned-concubine 妓婦, that Shen might “express that which she desired” 以導所欲.³⁸ The scholar explains his request by claiming that Shen’s talent for expressing “subtle thoughts” 窈窕之思 was well-known.³⁹ In 815, one year after composing the funerary inscription for Lu Jinlan, Shen wrote an essay entitled “A Report about Liu Xunlan” 表劉薰蘭, in which he praised Liu Xunlan, the young concubine of an official.⁴⁰ In his “Writing after ‘A Report about Liu Xunlan’” 題劉薰蘭表後, Nan Zhuo 南卓, a friend to both Shen Yazhi and the official, writes “Xiaxian (Shen Yazhi) is indeed talented, and has a particular talent for the words of the Grand Historian” 下賢誠才, 尤精為太史公言.⁴¹ Nan Zhuo then goes on to playfully suggest that Shen Yazhi’s talent was a good match for Liu Xunlan’s beauty, making Shen the right person to write about her. Nan Zhuo writes, “I’d known of Liu Xunlan’s beauty, which had been waiting for a talent such as Shen’s. His talent and her beauty suit each other perfectly” 余知薰之色而待沈之才, 才色兩相宜也. Shen Yazhi’s reputation as a romantic talent continued long after his death. In 845, a decade after Shen Yazhi’s death, Li Shangyin wrote the poem “Imitating Shen Xiaxian” 擬沈下賢, in which he depicts Shen as a dashing, romantic man.⁴²

As aware as he was of his own reputation, Shen Yazhi likely had his contemporaries and later generations of readers in mind when he composed the work. That is to say, Shen Yazhi’s inscription for his deceased concubine was intended not only as a burial text, but as a literary work meant to be circulated and preserved. In fact, the inscription is included in an eleventh-century collection of Shen Yazhi’s literary works, suggesting that Shen preserved a copy for himself. As both burial text and literary work, the inscription shares many characteristics with both Tang funerary inscriptions and ninth-century romantic literature. I discuss this point below.

³⁸ Shen Yazhi, “Composing An Essay Praying for Deftness on Behalf of Another” 為人撰乞巧文, in *Shen Xiaxian ji jiaozhu*, pp. 28–30.

³⁹ “Subtle thoughts” (*yaotiao zhi si* 窈窕之思) refers to those concerning the pairing of a man with a woman. It alludes to a line in the first *Shijing* poem “Guanju” 關雎: “Fine maiden, pure and fair/ Fit mate for a prince” 窈窕淑女/君子好逑.

⁴⁰ *Shen Xiaxian ji jiaozhu*, pp. 251–52.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 252–53.

⁴² *QTS* 539, p. 6172.

Inscription for Lu Jinlan 盧金蘭墓誌

Lu Jinlan, style name Zhaohua, was originally the child of a respectable family from Chang'an. Though Lu had no brothers, she had four older sisters. Because Zhaohua was born soon after her father passed away, her mother loved her dearly. Thus, Zhaohua alone was able to indulge in her fancy. As she desired to learn the skills of performance, her mother allowed her to become a pupil in her master's house. A year or so later she could dance to the tunes of "Lüyao" and "Yushu."⁴³ Lu fashioned wide sleeves for her blouses and long trains for her skirts, drew stylish, frown-shaped eyebrows, and combed her hair into small buns that she piled atop her head.⁴⁴ When she returned from her master's house, her sisters did not treat her as one of them. Because of this, she wept angrily, saying to her mother, "Since I am now no longer one of them, I'd better follow a [path that] suits me." 盧金蘭字昭華,本亦良家子。家長安,中無昆弟,有姊四人。其母以昭華父歿而生,私憐之,獨得縱所欲。欲學伎,即令從師舍。歲餘爲綠腰玉樹之舞,故衣製大袂長裾,作新眉愁頰,頂鬢爲娥叢小鬢。自是而歸,諸姊不爲列矣。因恚泣,謂其母曰:今不等我,不若從所當耳。

At the age of fifteen, Lu Jinlan became a concubine to Mr. Shen. Two years later she followed Shen southeast by river on his travels to Wu and Yue. Only after accompanying Shen for seven years did she return to the capital. Two years after returning, Shen journeyed southeast yet again, though [this time] Lu remained in the capital and was unable to follow. She soon became ill and died.

⁴³ According to *Yuefu zalu*, "Lüyao" 綠腰, also called "Liuyao" 六么 and "Luyao" 錄要, belonged to "soft dance music" 軟舞曲; see *Jiegu lu/ Yuefu zalu/ Biji manzhi*, p. 28. "Yushu" 玉樹, a short term for "Yushu houting hua" 玉樹后庭花, was a tune created by Chen Shubao 陳叔寶 (553–604), the last emperor of the Chen dynasty (557–589). The tune later was considered inauspicious due to associations with the ruin of the Chen; see *Sui shu* 隋書 (completed 656), "Treatise on Five Elements" 五行志 and "Treatise on Music" 樂志 (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1980) 22, p. 637; 13, p. 309.

⁴⁴ Lu Jinlan's hairdos and makeup habits, popular fashions of the Yuanhe era (806–820), are described vividly in Bai Juyi's *yuefu* "Current Fashion: An Admonishment" 時世妝儼戒也; see *QTS* 427, p. 4705. For example, Lu's "frown-shaped eyebrows" echo Bai's lines: "[Women] painted their eyebrows in the shape of the character 'eight'" 雙眉畫作八字低 and, "Made up, everyone looked to be weeping and sorrowful" 妝成盡似含悲啼. Likewise, Lu's hair combed into small buns piled atop her head resemble the hair of the women described in Bai's line: "Their hair hung down not in tresses, but piled up in buns" 圓鬢無鬢堆髻樣. Note that these hairdos and makeup fashions, as Bai declares in his poem, "Were not those of the Han" 非華風. The "frown-shaped eyebrows" might have something to do with the image of the legendary beauty Xishi 西施. One anecdote in the "Tianyun" 天運 chapter of *Zhuangzi* 莊子 describes how Xishi looks charming and lovely even when she suffers from pain. One day, a heartsick Xishi knits her brows and presses her chest. Impressed by Xishi's charming expression and gesture, an ugly woman in the village imitates her and becomes a laughing stock.

Altogether, Lu Jinlan followed Shen for eleven years. She was twenty-six years old. She gave birth to one son and one daughter. She was buried beneath the level land of Yin village to the south of the city walls. 年自十五歸於沈。居二年，從沈東南浮水，行吳越之間。從七年，乃還都。又二年，沈復東南，而昭華留止京師不得隨。病且逝。從沈凡十一年。年二十六。生男一人，女一人。葬於城南尹村原之下。

In line with the structure of many other Tang inscriptions, Shen's too consists of a title, a prose account, and a section of rhymed verse known as a *ming*. In addition, the prose account includes such common themes as the deceased's family lineage, marital status, age, number of children, time and cause of death, and place of burial. We know that Lu Jinlan was born into a commoner family, grew up in Chang'an, became Shen Yazhi's concubine at fifteen, bore a son and a daughter, and died of illness at twenty-six. We also know that she was buried in a village just south of Chang'an.

What distinguishes Shen Yazhi's inscription from most others is the inclusion of details from Lu Jinlan's life that describe her transformation from "daughter of a respectable family" 良家子 to professional entertainer. Lu Jinlan's ambitious pursuit of the skills of performance was decidedly uncommon among girls of her social status. In expectation of marriage, a girl like Lu Jinlan was far more likely to spend her time learning practical skills that would make her an attractive marriage prospect and a valuable addition to her future husband's family. This emphasis on practical skill often appears in the description of a woman's proper education. One funerary inscription, for example, describes the virtuous woman this way: "At three she understands how to modestly decline. At five she understands discipline. And at seven she can do women's work" 三歲知讓，五歲知戒，七歲能女事。⁴⁵ Proficiency in the skills of performance, on the other hand, prepared a young girl for a career as a professional entertainer or courtesan. Because courtesans enjoyed a lower social status than commoners, this training marked a decline in social status.

Because courtesans enjoyed such low status, the decision to become one was typically described as resulting from an unfortunate event – e.g., a parent's death, kidnapping, or the criminal conviction of an important family member. This being the case, it is perhaps not surprising that funerary inscriptions, a genre meant to honor and give praise, largely leave such transitions unexplained. Cui Zhuo, for example, does not describe how Hao Gui went from being a member of

⁴⁵ *Lidai muzhi huibian xuji*, pp. 853-54.

the social elite to working as a courtesan. In contrast to this, Shen Yazhi describes his concubine's transformation from commoner to courtesan in great detail. He does not portray the transition as a decline in social status; rather, he describes it as the natural consequence of a young girl's passion for music and dance. Shen makes it clear that Lu Jinlan was not forced by circumstances to study performance – it was her choice. Shen writes, “[Lu Jinlan] desired to learn the skills of performance” 欲學伎。

Shen Yazhi's celebration of Lu Jinlan must be examined within the context of ninth-century romantic literature. Indeed, his description of Lu shares much in common with Li Shangyin's description of a girl named Liuzhi in his preface to “Five Poems on Liuzhi,” a recollection of a romantic encounter.⁴⁶ Lu Jinlan and Liuzhi have a great deal in common. Both women came from commoner families living in the capital – Lu's in Chang'an, Liuzhi's in Luoyang. Moreover, since the girl's fathers died when they were young, both were raised by doting single mothers. The urban setting and absence of a father figure suggest a lack of protection, on the one hand, and greater liberty, on the other. Also like Lu Jinlan, Liuzhi was uninterested in the kinds of practical skills that would have prepared her to engage in a proper marriage. Instead, Li Shangyin writes, “[Liuzhi] blows shrill notes on leaves, and chews the stems of flowers. She plays the zither strings and fingers the pipes, making melodies of wind and billows on the sea, notes of hidden remembrance and intense grievance” 吹葉嚼蕊，調絲擊管，作天海風濤之曲，幽憶怨斷之音。⁴⁷ In addition to sharing a fascination with music, Liuzhi and Lu Jinlan are both willful and determined to follow their passions. Viewed in this way, they are romantics. In the words of Liuzhi's neighbor, they are “dreamers in a drunken sleep” 醉眠夢物。

In each case, the girl's pursuits are frowned upon as unconventional behavior unbecoming a proper girl commoner. In the case of Liuzhi, her neighbors and relatives “break connections with her and make no offers of marriage,” while Lu Jinlan's own sisters reject her completely. Both Lu Jinlan and Liuzhi are described as passionate girls whose unconventional behavior is misunderstood by others. This emphasis on disapproval contrasts sharply with the two authors' far more positive views. By praising Liuzhi and Lu Jinlan, Li Shangyin and Shen Yazhi demonstrate that they are as unconventional and romantic as the two

⁴⁶ Li Shangyin, “Five Poems to Liuzhi,” *QTS* 541, p. 6232.

⁴⁷ Translations are Stephen Owen's with modification. See Stephen Owen, “What Did Liuzhi Hear,” p. 89.

girls. In both cases, a union between writer and girl takes place: Li Shangyin and Liuzhi meet briefly, and Shen Yazhi takes Lu Jinlan as his concubine. In Shen's inscription, Lu Jinlan's wish to find an understanding partner is followed by Shen's decision to take her as his concubine. In this way, their union is presented as one between two like-minded persons who both understand and appreciate each other.

Examining Li Shangyin's and Shen Yazhi's works within the context of ninth-century romantic literature, we find that they share many formulaic characteristics in common with romantic tales, anecdotes, and poems. However, because of the genres in which they wrote, Li Shangyin's and Shen Yazhi's romantic expressions assume particular significance. By writing about his romantic encounter in the preface to "Five Poems to Liuzhi," Li Shangyin represents himself as an unconventional romantic poet in his own right. For his part, Shen Yazhi, by writing so approvingly of Lu Jinlan's romantic passion, is making an unconventional claim regarding the meaning of a person's life. That is, he suggests that the value of Lu Jinlan's life has little to do with how many sons she produced for the Shen family or the magnitude of her womanly virtue. Instead, Shen Yazhi asserts that her value lies in the magnificence of her uncompromising, romantic personality.

A COURTESAN LOVER

Let us now consider an 870 inscription for a courtesan named Shen Zirou 沈子柔, the only extant Tang inscription written for a courtesan who never became an elite concubine.⁴⁸ Given the elite status of most of the recipients of Tang inscriptions, the relatively few written for women of lesser backgrounds were generally undertaken because the women later became the concubines of elite men. Shen Zirou, however, was not an elite concubine, and remained a courtesan until her death. In this section, I examine some of the characteristics of her funerary inscription, and discuss how it might be understood in a contemporary context.

The inscription begins with some basic biographical information about Shen, followed by a description of the final meeting between her and the author. It reads:

⁴⁸ According to Yao Ping 姚平, *Tangdai funü de shengming licheng* 唐代婦女的生命歷程 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2004), p. 212, and Chen Shangjun, "Xin chu shike yu Tangdai wenxue yanjiu" 新出石刻與唐代文學研究, in *Liuchao Sui Tang xueshu yantaohui lunwen ji* 六朝隋唐學術研討會論文集 (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 2004), p. 720.

Inscription for Ms. Shen, a native of Wuxing (present-day Huzhou 湖州 in Zhejiang) of the Tang.⁴⁹ 有唐吳興沈氏墓誌銘 Composed and inscribed by Kuangxiu, the third day of the fifth month in the eleventh year of the Xiantong reign (June 5, 870) 咸通十一年五月三日匡秀撰並書。

Shen Zirou, a native of Wuxing, was a beautiful woman in the blue mansions of Luoyang.⁵⁰ She was registered to the courtesan quarter of Luoyang.⁵¹ Among her peer group, she was first-rate. She received particular attention from Yuan Kuangxiu, the Assistant of the Attendant Censor.⁵² Zirou's baby name was Xiaojiao. All the dashing noblemen and all the knowledgeable and refined gentlemen of Luoyang would attempt to invite her with a thousand pieces of gold. [Such gentlemen] were also certain to inquire about her and respond to her frequently. Whether of noble or humble character and manner, her discussions with them never compromised her aspirations. She lived in Luoyang's Sigong Ward. She was truly born by Madam Liu.⁵³ She had a younger brother and

⁴⁹ The Shen clan of Wuxing was a prominent southern clan during the Six Dynasties period. For a study of the Shen clan during the Six Dynasties, see Tang Xiejun 唐燮軍, *Liuchao Wuxing Shenshi jiqi zongzu wenhua yanjiu* 六朝吳興沈氏及其宗族文化研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue, 2007). For a study of the Shen clan during the Tang Dynasty, see Zhou Yangbo 周揚波, *Cong shizu dao shenzu: Tang yihou Wuxing Shenshi zongzu de bianqian* 從土族到紳族: 唐以後吳興沈氏宗族的變遷 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang daxue, 2009).

⁵⁰ "Blue mansions" (*qinglou* 青樓) refers to courtesan quarters.

⁵¹ *Liufu* 留府 or *liutai* 留臺 refers to the officials who were ordered to stay and manage the bureaucratic offices in the capital when the emperor was not in residence. During the Tang and Song, the phrase also referred to the bureaucratic offices that were established in the secondary capital. Here *liufu* refers to Luoyang, the secondary capital of the Tang.

⁵² Charles O. Hucker explains that *congshi* 從事 referred to an "unmarked subofficial found on the staffs of various dignitaries of the central government ... and especially those in units of territorial administration, mostly particularly Regional Inspectors (tz'u-shih)" from Han to Sui, until it was terminated with the abolition of Regional Inspector by Sui. See Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Taipei: Nantian shuju, 1995), p. 535. The term *congshi* continued to be used during the Tang, not as a specific official title, but as a general term referring to the staffs of such regional authorities as Prefects, Military Commissioners, and Surveillance Commissioners. For example, when Han Yu served as Judge (*tuiguan* 推官) and Xu Mengrong 許孟容 served as Chief-Secretary (*zhangshuji* 掌書記) under the Military Commissioner Zhang Jianfeng 張建封 (735-800), they were both called *congshi*. See *Jiu Tang shu* 140, p. 3824; 154, p. 4100. *Zhushi* was an alternative title for *shiyushi* 侍御史, Attendant Censor. As noted earlier, it was also given to regional and military officials as an honorific title. It is likely that *congshi zhushi* refers to two different official titles that Yuan Kuangxiu held: staff in regional government and Attendant Censor at court. In fact, first serving as staff in the regional government and then advancing to Attendant Censor at court was a common career path during the Tang; see Lai Ruihe, *Tangdai zhongceng wenguan* 唐代中層文官 (Taipei: Lianjing, 2008), pp. 68-71.

⁵³ According to *Beili zhi*, the courtesans living at the Northern Ward in Chang'an were sold to courtesan houses under the control of the house madams, also called "foster mothers" (*jia mu* 假母); see *Tang Wudai biji xiaoshuo daguan*, p. 1404. Yuan Kuangxiu uses "truly" (*shi* 實) here to emphasize that Shen Zirou, unlike most courtesans, was the biological daughter of Madam Liu.

an aunt, both of whom were blood relations. She understood the musical pitch-standards very well, and was excellent at singing and playing stringed instruments. She received her intelligence and kindness from heaven. Filial piety and compassion were her nature. 吳興沈子柔, 洛陽青樓之美麗也。居留府官籍, 名冠於輩流間, 爲從事柱史源匡秀所矚殊厚。子柔幼字小嬌。凡洛陽風流貴人, 博雅名士, 每千金就聘, 必問答辛勤。品流高卑, 議不降志。居思恭里, 實劉媪所生, 有弟有姨, 皆親骨肉。善曉音律, 妙攻絃歌; 敏惠自天, 孝慈成性。

During the *yin* year of the Xiantong era (870), epidemics occurred frequently. Whether in alleyways or wards, no one was fortunate enough to remain untouched. One evening when Zirou was going to bed late in her sweet-scented bed chamber, she reclined on her quilt and received me. The banquet was displayed and our pleasure was intense. Suddenly, however, she sighed with grief and said, “I have been fortunate to receive your generous regard, and I am certain that your commitment is firm. However, I have not been granted a very long lifespan. Moreover, I suspect that in ten days or a month I will be swept away by the current of epidemics. Although I was told by a fortune-teller that it is possible to exorcize my bad fortune, I worry that I will not be able to escape [this fate].” I believed that her words were caused by resentment about my negligence in caring for her. At the time, the scenery was luxuriant, and the flowers around the railings were blooming vigorously. I called over those who shared the same lodging house with me to get happily drunk.⁵⁴ Fewer than ten days later, her maid came to report her illness. She was as if struck by thunder and lightning, ruined by violent fire in the wind. Neither doctors nor medicines helped, and she passed away abruptly. 咸通貞年, 年多癘疫。里社比屋, 人無吉全。子柔一日晏寢香閨, 扶衾見接, 飮展歡密。倏然吁嗟曰: 妾幸辱郎之顧厚矣。保郎之信堅矣, 然也。妾自度所賦無幾, 甚疑旬朔與癘疫隨波。雖問卜可禳, 慮不能脫。余祇謂撫訊多闕, 怨興是詞。時屬物景喧穠, 欄花競發, 余因招同舍畢來醉歡。俄而未及浹旬, 青衣告疾。雷轟電掣, 火烈風摧; 醫救不施, 奄忽長逝。

It is striking that the author introduces Shen Zirou as a beautiful woman who worked in a Luoyang courtesan quarter. Inscriptions for women from less elevated social backgrounds typically begin with a description of their more respectable domestic roles – e.g. mother (“mother of my sons” 子母), concubine (“my concubine” 吾室人), or daughter

⁵⁴ To cheer up Shen Zirou, Yuan Kuangxiu invited his friends to a banquet at Zirou’s place.

(“daughter of a respectable family” 良家子). But none of these roles applied to Shen Zirou.

Another unusual characteristic of the inscription is the relationship between the author, Yuan Kuangxiu 源匡秀 (dates unknown), and the deceased. Yuan was Shen Zirou’s client, and it is possible that Shen’s family (or Shen herself) commissioned Yuan to write the funerary inscription. A similar situation is described by Sun Qi 孫檠 in his work *Beili zhi* 北里誌, in which a dying courtesan named Yan Lingbin 顏令賓 holds a banquet at which she requests her elite clients to compose dirges to see her off.⁵⁵

In spite of certain shared themes, Sun Qi’s account of Yan Lingbin and Yuan Kuangxiu’s inscription of Shen Zirou represent very different kinds of relationships between a courtesan and her client. The relationship between Yan Lingbin and her elite clients is one of mutual appreciation for the other’s poetic talent. In fact, Yan Lingbin’s love of poetry is described as her prominent characteristic. Sun Qi writes that she was “esteemed highly by worthy scholars of the time” 為時賢所厚 due to her “romantic and carefree manner” 舉止風流, “refined tastes” 好尚甚雅, and her interest in writing and collecting verse. Yan’s decision to hold a final banquet for the purpose of collecting dirges from elite poets illustrates her fondness for poetry. After becoming ill, she wrote a quatrain in which she expresses her wish to throw a farewell banquet. She then commands her servant boy to show her poem to those “who have recently passed the examination or who are now candidates” 新第郎君及舉人 and to invite them to attend her banquet. In doing so, Yan was searching for those who could appreciate her sentiment and were willing to respond to her poem with one of their own.

While Yan Lingbin’s relationship with elite men was based on poetic practice, Shen Zirou’s relationship with Yuan Kuangxiu was based on their feelings for each other. At the beginning of his inscription, Yuan makes it clear that his relationship with Shen was special, that “his care for her was especially great.” Moreover, Yuan writes that Shen Zirou’s prediction of her death took place in the privacy of her bedchamber, when she and Yuan were alone together. This emphasis on the intimate circumstances of Shen’s prediction hints at the intimate nature of their relationship. A similar strategy is used in *Beili zhi* when Sun Qi describes his long-term relationship with the courtesan Funiang 福娘. He writes that, in the midst of a banquet, Funiang suddenly became quite sad. He goes on to say that she explained the reasons for her sadness

⁵⁵ *Tang Wudai biji xiaoshuo daguan*, p. 1408. (On Sun and his work, see n. 28, above.)

only later when the two were alone together. By emphasizing Funiang's decision to reveal her concerns only to him, Sun Qi suggests that their relationship transcended the normal courtesan-client relationship. Indeed, Funiang later asks Sun Qi to make her his concubine.

Yuan's love for Shen is best illustrated in the final section of his inscription, an expression of sorrow for the deceased. It reads:

Alas! Among the myriad things created by heaven, some are most extraordinary – not least of which are human beings, who are the most intelligent. Is it possible that humans do not know when they will die? What I resent is that she left her love behind to those of us who are still alive, while her soul disappeared like an echo stirred by striking. In vain I make sacrifices to her soul in the hills and valleys.⁵⁶ Thus I engrave the following. 嗚呼! 天植萬物, 物固有尤, 況乎人之最靈. 得不自知生死. 所恨者, 貽情愛於後人, 便銷魂於觸響. 空虞陵谷, 乃作銘云:

麗如花而少如水	Her beauty resembled flowers; her youth resembled water.
生何來而去何自	Where did she come from? Where did she go?
火燃我愛愛不銷	The fire is burning my love, yet my love is not extinguished;
刀斷我情情不已	A knife is severing my feelings, yet my feelings are not finished.
雖分生死	Although we are divided by life and death,
難坼因緣	Our karmic connections will not break.
刻書貞珉	I carve and write the entombed epitaph,
吉安下泉	Hoping that she will enjoy peace in the afterlife. ⁵⁷

This verse contains four motifs:

⁵⁶ The phrase "hills and valleys" (*linggu* 陵谷) may refer to an anecdote about a well-known Western Jin official named Du Yu 杜預 (222–284). Anxious that knowledge of his deeds be passed down to future generations, Du Yu made two steles inscribed with his deeds. One was placed in the highlands and another in the deep valley, so that knowledge of his deeds might survive even after the highlands had turned to valleys and the valleys to highlands. This story is included in Du Yu's biography in *Jin shu* 晉書 (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1980) 34, p. 1031. In Tang poetry, the phrase *linggu* is often used to form a contrast with the human world. Sometimes it represents the indifferent, unchanging landscape in contrast to the seemingly abrupt changes of the human world. At other times it represents changes of nature brought by the passage of time in contrast to such everlasting human qualities as love and friendship. The former interpretation of the term is likely more useful here – i.e., while the eternal highlands and valleys remain, Shen Zirou is gone forever.

⁵⁷ This verse inscription consists of two stanzas of four lines each. The first stanza rhymes AABA, and the second ABCB.

1. praise for the deceased;
2. concern for the current wellbeing of the deceased;
3. expressions of passionate love for the deceased; and
4. prayer for the deceased's comfort and safety in the afterlife.

Of the four motifs, numbers 1, 2, and 4 are common to verse inscriptions. For example, the following verse inscription by Li Shiyu 李史魚 (706–761), Vice Minister of the Ministry of Justice, for a female Daoist priest named Ma Lingxu 馬凌虛 (733–756) focuses on 1 and 2 – praise for the deceased and concern for the deceased's wellbeing in the afterlife.⁵⁸

惟此淑人兮穠華如春	Ah this fine woman, a luxuriant flower in the spring,
豈與茲殊色兮而奪茲芳塵	How could it be that she was given such outstanding beauty, and yet was taken away from this fragrant dust?
爲巫山之雲兮	Will she become the clouds of Mount Wu? ⁵⁹
爲洛川之神兮	Will she become the goddess of the Luo River? ⁶⁰
余不知其所之	I do not know where she will go,
將欲問諸蒼旻	Let me ask the heavens about it. ⁶¹

This verse does not include a prayer for the deceased. When such prayer motifs do appear, they frequently are concerned with the comfort of the deceased (Yuan Kuangxiu's verse) or a call for the return of the soul of the deceased (Shen Yazhi's verse inscription for Lu Jinlan: "Come back, sweet-scented soul, back to this graveyard" 馨魂魄歸來兮復此園塋). Moreover, they typically appear near the end of a funerary inscription and constitute the final words that the living speak to the dead before allowing them to disappear into the afterlife.

While Yuan Kuangxiu's treatment of three of the four motifs, above, is completely conventional, his use of motif 4 is not. By the

⁵⁸ It is preserved in *Lidai muzhi huibian*, p. 1724. For Li Shiyu's life, see his funerary inscription written by Liang Su 梁肅 (753–793), in *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983) 520, pp. 5289–90.

⁵⁹ "Clouds of Mount Wu" alludes to the Goddess of Mount Wu described in "Rhapsody on the Gaotang Shrine." The Goddess of Mount Wu sometimes manifests as clouds.

⁶⁰ According to one tradition, the Goddess of the Luo River was the daughter of the ancient hero Fuxi 伏羲. According to another tradition, the Goddess of Luo River was Cao Pi's 曹丕 (187–226) wife, Empress Zhen 甄. The best known work on the subject of the Goddess of Luo River is Cao Zhi's 曹植 (192–232) "Rhapsody on the Luo River Goddess" 洛神賦; see *Wen xuan* 19, pp. 275–77; tr. David Knechtges, *Wen xuan*, vol. 3, pp. 355–65.

⁶¹ This verse consists of two stanzas: the first is a couplet rhyming AA, and the second is a quatrain, with a shift in meter, rhyming AABA.

舉懷銷愁愁更愁 I raise my wine cup to drown my sorrow, but
my sorrow becomes more sorrowful.⁶⁷

Both Li Bai and Yuan Kuangxiu describe natural forces that cannot be stopped. In Li's couplet, the forces are water and the poet's own sorrow; in Yuan's, the force is his love for Shen. The repetition of words referring to an unstoppable force (*shui* and *chou* in Li Bai's couplet, and *ai* and *qing* in Yuan Kuangxiu's) creates a sense of urgency. Such direct and passionate expression of an elite man's love for a courtesan is rare within the tradition of verse inscription.

Yuan's expression of love for a courtesan is also unique within the context of late-ninth-century representations of courtesans and their clients. The main source of information concerning life in ninth-century Chang'an's courtesan quarter is *Beili zhi*, in which Sun Qi recounts his experiences during the 870s, roughly the same time that Yuan Kuangxiu composed his funerary inscription for Shen Zirou. Within the discourse of courtesan culture as represented in *Beili zhi*, appreciation for a courtesan's wit and talent was accepted; love for a courtesan was not. Sun Qi's representation of his long-term relationship with Funiang outlines the accepted norms of conduct in ninth-century courtesan culture. In the longest entry in *Beili zhi*, Sun Qi carefully writes of his appreciation of Funiang's delicate character, his sympathy for her unfortunate experiences, his concern for her well-being, and his appreciation for the special attention that Funiang pays him. By depicting his relationship with Funiang in such a way, Sun Qi grants himself qualities that were regarded highly in the discourse of courtesan culture: his appreciation of and sympathy for Funiang shows that he is sensitive to what is beautiful and vulnerable, and Funiang's special feelings for him demonstrate his relative competitiveness within elite circles.

Sun Qi, however, never expresses his love for Funiang. In the community described in the *Beili zhi*, an elite man's expression of passion and love for a courtesan is generally characterized by pronounced anxiety. In his study of *Beili zhi*, Paul Rouzer observes that the courtesan quarters are not described as a private space in which clients and courtesans fall in love; rather, they are described as "a unique public place where social lessons could be learned and competitions played out."⁶⁸ One of the more important lessons to be learned was to avoid

⁶⁷ Li Bai, "On the Xie Tiao Tower in Xuanzhou, I See off Editing Clerk Shuyun at a Farewell Banquet," 宣州謝朓樓餞別校書叔雲, in Qu Tuiyuan 瞿蛻園 et al., ed., *Li Bai ji jiaozhu* 李白集校註 (Taipei: Liren shuju, 1981) 18, p. 1077.

⁶⁸ Paul Rouzer, *Articulated Ladies: Gender and the Male Community in Early Chinese Texts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), p. 256.

being *huo* 惑 (i.e., enamored or smitten). Sun Qi uses the word *huo* to “define the emotion that develops in a client when he continues to show a strong preference for one particular courtesan at the expense of others.”⁶⁹ Given the negative implications of a client’s passion for a courtesan, Yuan Kuangxiu’s expression of love for Shen was more likely to be ridiculed than praised by the elite community described in *Beili shi*. Why, then, did he make such a claim? I’d like to suggest two scenarios.

First, it is possible that the “private” nature of Yuan Kuangxiu’s inscription – the possibility that his inscription was written for the purpose of burial only, and not for circulation or preservation – may have provided the space in which to make bold claims without fear of elite society’s response. The anticipated audience of each funerary inscription varied depending on the social status of the deceased and the inscription’s author. If the deceased person was an official or belonged to the social elite, his or her inscription might be preserved as biographical material for later inclusion in official and/or local histories. If the author was a well-known writer, his inscription might be preserved and circulated the same way his other literary work might. In each case, in addition to their funerary functions, the inscriptions possessed political, historical, and literary value. The funerary inscriptions preserved in *Wenyuan yinghua* 文苑英華 are such inscriptions.⁷⁰

On the other hand, many inscriptions were written only for the purpose of burial. If the deceased was not an important elite or official, if the author who wrote the inscription did not consider himself a notable writer, one would not expect the inscription to be preserved for political, historical, and literary purposes. In such cases, the inscription was addressed only to a limited audience – for example, the spirit of the deceased and his or her family members. Many excavated inscriptions for low-rank officials, commoners, and women belong to this type of inscription. Because of its limited readership, this type of inscriptions is a relatively “private” composition, which may have allowed writers more leeway to express socially heterodox thoughts and feelings.

My second explanation for why Yuan Kuangxiu would risk openly expressing his love for a courtesan is that Yuan may have belonged to a subset of the social elite that valued such expression. If we accept that

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 260.

⁷⁰ *Wenyuan yinghua*, commissioned by Emperor Taizong of the Song 宋太宗 (r. 976–98) and completed in 987, is an anthology of prose and poetry dating from the early sixth to tenth centuries. It is an important source for the study of Tang literature because it preserves many works that otherwise would not have survived.

different elite communities might embrace different values, we might then consider the possibility that an elite man's love for a courtesan could be condemned by one community and praised by another. In fact, not only do contemporary writings confirm that such disparate attitudes existed, but they were sometimes evident within the very same text. Meng Jian's account of Ouyang Zhan written in 801, for example, portrays Ouyang Zhan's affair with his courtesan lover in sympathetic terms as one of mutual love and devotion, while also characterizing it as a destructive force that ultimately leads to their deaths. Likewise, in a story from *Tang que shi* 唐闕史 (a collection of anecdotes compiled by Gao Yanxiu 高彦休 dating from 884), an elite man dies of grief following the death of his courtesan-lover.⁷¹ On the one hand, the man is portrayed in sympathetic terms as a man of profound feeling; on the other, he is also condemned as a fool who allowed an infatuation to lead to his own destruction. Given the coexistence of such dramatically different attitudes regarding elite male passion for courtesans, Yuan Kuangxiu's funerary inscription for Shen Zirou would have been viewed differently by various elite circles. That is, Sun Qi and his community may very well have mocked Yuan for his intemperance; Yuan's own community would likely have understood.

Each of the three women discussed in this paper was remembered for her romantic sentiment or for the romantic sentiment directed toward her by others. Hao Gui was praised for musical and dance performances that arouse the longing of her audience, and Lu Jinlan for pursuing her passion and dream. Shen Zirou was revered as the author's beloved. In each of the inscriptions, the author has constructed an identity based on romantic sentiment instead of kinship and social status. By doing so, each offered a new way of assigning meaning to the lives of courtesans. The implications of this are evident in the increasing number of inscriptions written for women of courtesan backgrounds between the late-eighth and ninth centuries. According to statistics provided by Yao Ping, of the eighteen Tang inscriptions written for women from courtesan backgrounds, none dates from the seventh century, five date from the eighth, and thirteen date from the ninth century.⁷²

⁷¹ *Tang Wudai biji xiaoshuo daguan*, p. 1356. While the story tells that a certain Wei took a courtesan as his concubine, it uses the term *ji* 妓 (courtesan) instead of *qie* 妾 (concubine) to refer to the woman throughout the story.

⁷² Yao Ping, *Tangdai funü de shengming licheng*, p. 202.

Judging the excellence of the deceased women by the quality of their romantic sentiment allowed elite writers to explore new ways of constructing their own self-identities. Describing an elite audience's infatuation with Hao Gui allowed Cui Zhuo to demonstrate his own talent and sensibility to his patron. Shen Yazhi, a well-known writer of his day, targeted a general literary audience when he composed his inscription for Lu Jinlan. Celebrating his concubine's passionate pursuit of her dream – rather than praise her traditional womanly virtues and ability to produce sons – made it possible for Shen Yazhi to fashion himself as a man of refined sentiment and establish his reputation as a romantic writer for generations to come. In the case of Yuan Kuangxiu, describing his intimate relationship with Shen Zirou made it possible to distinguish himself from other elite clients and demonstrate his competitiveness within elite circles.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- QTS* *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩
TPGJ *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記