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Triangulating Filial Piety, Ethnicity, and Nation in Late-Qing China: The Lilac Affair in Zeng Pu's *Niehai hua*

The extraordinary actions of a particular father and son became a popular topic of literati writers during late-Qing times and furthermore fueled an ongoing intellectual dispute. The father, Gong Zizhen 龔自珍 (1792–1841), was a renowned scholar credited by Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929) for having initiated the important late-Qing intellectual turn from excessive evidential research to discussions of pragmatic statecraft.¹ As we see in this study, various personal records and literary inventions, taken as a whole, make an ambiguous case for his having engaged in a love affair with a Manchu woman, Gu Taiqing 顧太清 (ca. 1799–1877), who was the consort of a Manchu prince.² Both parties of the alleged romance were celebrated poets, and it was through poetry that the name “Lilac Affair” (*dingxiang an* 丁香案) came about. The affair was savored with interest by many at the turn of the twentieth century and it garnered numerous details through memoirs and fiction. Yet it was vehemently denied by those who defended Gong’s and Gu’s reputations.

¹ Although Liang Qichao criticizes Gong Zizhen’s scholarship as less than profound and his unrestrained writing style distracting, he concludes that Gong contributed to the reorientation of intellectual thought during the late-Qing period. According to Liang, most of the so-called “scholars of the New Text School” during the Guangxu reign (1875–1908) worshiped Gong Zizhen, a phenomenon satirized later in a chapter of *Niehai hua*. For details about Liang Qichao’s relevant views, see section 22 of Liang, *Qingdai xueshu gailun* 清代學術概論 (Intellectual Trends in the Qing Period) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1954).

² Her Manchu surname is Xilin jueluo 西林覺羅, given name Chun 春, and literary name Taiqing 太清. She usually signs her works as Xilin chun taiqing 西林春太清, Taiqing xilin chun 太清西林春 or Taiqing chun 太清春. When she married the prince, the surname she reported to the Office of the Imperial Clan (*Zongren fu* 宗人府) was Gu 顧. Therefore historically she is also commonly known as Gu Taiqing. Her novelistic counterpart in *Niehai hua* is Taiqing xilin chun, or Taiqing. There are various accounts of why she adopted the surname “Gu,” a surname usually used by the Han. The most accepted version is that her grandfather was sentenced to death by the Qianlong emperor (r. 1736–1796), which made her the descendant of a criminal. To be able to marry into the royal family, she was given another identity as the daughter of Gu Wenxing 顧文星, a guard of the Manchu prince’s family. Due to scarcity of

Decades later, Gong Zizhen's son, Gong Cheng 龔橙 (1817–1878), committed a highly visible political act that he later would not even consider political, but personal. The existing historical records and miscellaneous notes about Gong Cheng show that somehow he was among, or with, foreign troops in 1860 as they approached Beijing. As the troops made their way to Yuanming Yuan 圓明園 (Garden of Perfect Brightness, commonly known as the Old Summer Palace), he was said by some to have directed them to destroy this marvelous Qing royal garden.³ However, whether he gave this direction or was even a voluntary collaborator invited decades of speculation. Unlike the Lilac Affair concerning his father, Gong Cheng's action in 1860 was seriously questioned and largely condemned by contemporaries. Although some of his close friends vigorously defended him, Gong Cheng himself did not seem to care about his reputation. This sort of apathy only further complicated the situation then, and still does. To gain a new interpretation, we must weave together history, intellectual culture, and literature.

The actions of this father and son were a favorite subject of late Qing writers, among whom probably the most influential was Zeng Pu 曾樸 (1871–1935). The present article pays specific attention to his famous novel *Niehai hua* 孽海花 (A Flower in a Sea of Retribution),⁴ which was one of the best-selling novels of the late Qing and Republican era. Its main thread is the rise and fall of a fictional Qing ambassador and his concubine, but the anecdotal nature enables it to address major historical events of the moment. *Niehai hua* has a complicated textual history.

historical materials, Taiqing's life has been a mystery to scholars. It was not until Zhang Juling 張菊玲 read the full version of the manuscript of *Tianyou ge ji* 天遊閣集 (Tianyou Studio Collection) that many of the questions regarding her life were answered. See Zhang Juling, "Taiqing shengping luebiao" 太清生平略表 (Summary Chronology of Taiqing) in idem, *Kuangdai cainu Gu Taiqing* 曠代才女顧太清 (The Unrivaled Female Talent Gu Taiqing) (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 2002), pp. 1–4.

³ This infamous action has been called the Gengshen Incident (Gengshen zhi bian 庚申之變). It occurred during the final year of the Second Opium War (1856–1860). When British and French allied troops occupied Beijing, the Xianfeng emperor (1840–1860) fled the capital, and the Qing government eventually signed the Convention of Peking. The myth involving Gong Cheng's role is discussed in detail, below.

⁴ The lives of the Gongs have interested modern Western historians. In his monograph on China's last emperor, Pu Yi, Henry McAleavy takes delight in elaborating the Gong-Gu affair as well as Gong Cheng's (Kung Ch'eng) connection with the Western forces. According to McAleavy, the Gong vendetta is largely derived from *Niehai hua*. In addition, McAleavy enlivens the story regarding Gong Zizhen with anecdotes that he heard one night at Professor Lu Aizhi's home in Beijing in 1937. Apparently, even in the 1930s, the story of the Gongs was still of great interest among intellectuals; *A Dream of Tartary: The Origins and Misfortunes of Henry Pu Yi* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1963).

Zeng Pu published the first twenty chapters in two installments in 1905, the success of which prompting 50,000 copies in fifteen printings in the next few years.⁵ Later, between 1928 and 1931, he revised the first six chapters and published a thirty-chapter version. It was only here, at the beginning part of the revised version, that the actions of Gong Xiaoqi and his father are brought out, but only second-hand through the lively discussions of the ambassador and his literati friends.

The novel, while following the lives of the ambassador and his concubine, tries also to “represent as much as possible the history of the past thirty years.”⁶ Its time span is ambitious, covering the Taiping Rebellion (1851–64), the Second Opium War (1856–1860), the Self-Strengthening Movement (ca. 1861–1895), the Sino-French War (1884–1885), the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), and the Reform Movement (1898), to name a few. In his seminal study of late-Qing fiction, David Der-wei Wang points out that writers at the time showed an unprecedented urge “to record topical events and portray contemporary figures, thereby presenting the nation’s crisis in all its immediacy.”⁷ With its panoramic description of contemporary society, *Niehai hua* provides an excellent venue in which the perennial problems of the late-Qing and early-Republican governments are represented and examined.⁸ Regarding the narrative of the Lilac Affair, the fact that the

⁵ A Ying 阿英, *Wanqing xiaoshuo shi* 晚清小說史 (A History of Late Qing Fiction) (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1980), p. 22. Theodore Hutners points out that it was unique for its time *Niehai hua* was published in book form without first being serialized in a magazine; *Bringing The World Home: Appropriating the West in Late Qing and Early Republican China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), p. 174.

⁶ Zeng Pu, “Xiugai hou yaoshuo de jiju hua” 修改後要說的幾句話 (A Few Words for the Revised Edition), in Wei Shaochang 魏紹昌, ed., *Niehai hua ziliao* 孽海花資料 (Research Materials on *Niehai hua*) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982; hereafter, *Ziliao*), p. 128.

⁷ David Der-wei Wang, *Fin-de-Siecle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849–1911* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1997), p. 43.

⁸ As a novelistic recounting of contemporary history, almost every character in *Niehai hua* from the emperor and subjects to lowly prostitutes has a real-life equivalent. Zeng Pu once talked about the risk of writing a novel of contemporary history, saying: “If the historical novel you write is about the Tang, Song, Yuan or Ming dynasties, those who lived in the past cannot argue with you. However, if the novel is about recent history, those real-life counterparts who are still alive can question you” 倘然你寫唐宋元明的歷史小說，古人不會向你拌嘴舌。你寫近代歷史小說，有許多人還活著，他們都可以向你質問。In fact, shortly after the first ten chapters were published by Xiaoshuo lin she 小說林社 (Forest of Fiction Press), several letters arrived questioning Zeng Pu’s portrayal of the characters. See Bao Tianxiao 包天笑, “Guanyu Niehai hua” 關於孽海花 (On *Niehai hua*), *Ziliao*, pp. 214–25. Zeng Pu himself made a list of the main historical figures portrayed in *Niehai hua* (included in the last few pages of the first volume of his manuscript). In addition, the identification of the characters with their historical equivalents accompanied the circulation and study of *Niehai hua*. The most comprehensive list enumerates 278 characters with their real-life names, geographical origins, social statuses and official titles; Shi Yin 時蔭, *Zeng Pu yanjiu* 曾樸研究 (Studies on Zeng Pu) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982), pp. 135, 172. The list can be found in *Ziliao*, pp. 323–53.

Gong Cheng character, as a Han Chinese, takes revenge on a Manchu family by “borrowing” the might of the Western powers creates a dynamic triangle consisting of Han-Manchu-West. Meanwhile, the fact that a family feud conducted in the name of fulfilling Confucian filial piety is elevated to the state level causes intersection of that triangle with another one – family-state-nation.

Zeng Pu’s novel links together in dramatic fashion the two events concerning the father and the son. Gong Xiaoqi 龔孝琪 is the fictional counterpart of Gong Cheng,⁹ and his reason for committing a “betrayal” is connected by Zeng directly to the father’s Lilac Affair. The character of Gong Cheng’s father is, however, given his real-life name – Gong Zizhen. In the story, the latter is poisoned by the Manchu prince because of his love affair with Taiqing xilin chun (the fictional double of Gu Taiqing). Therefore, in order to exact revenge on this Manchu family, Gong Xiaoqi has the foreign troops destroy the Manchu pleasure garden. Ultimately, Gong Xiaoqi denies every grand label attached to him, including praise for his being an anti-Manchu revolutionary and accusations of treachery. Instead, he insists that the sole motive for his assistance to the foreign forces is to avenge his father’s murder.

In what follows, we examine the rise of openly anti-Manchu nationalism during the last decade of the Qing and how it affected the retelling of the Lilac Affair and Gong Cheng’s actions at Yuanming Yuan. The fictional representations of both were caught in the web of dynamic ethnic, national, and cultural tensions, and hence serve as a valuable source for analyzing the climate of literate opinion and elite Han attitudes toward Manchus, as well as China’s own cultural traditions at the turn of the twentieth century. I start by taking a close look at the contentions over the love affair. While its authenticity/historicity per se is debatable, it was in fact portrayed and appreciated as a “scholar-beauty” love scandal. Yet, the latter paradigm encounters an added crisis in its representation in *Niehai hua*. I show that the narrative of the Lilac Affair in *Niehai hua* is torn between the conventional “scholar-beauty” paradigm and the revolutionary discourse of “Manchu-Han” conflict. In addition, I argue that Zeng Pu’s rewriting of the Lilac Affair anachronistically projects the early-twentieth-century anti-Manchu racial hatred back to the 1860s. Rising anti-Manchu sentiment also influences the novel’s depiction of Gong Cheng, revealing the predicament towards China’s own cultural traditions that Han elite faced later on, in

⁹ The name Gong Xiaoqi is a combination of the courtesy names (*zi* 字) of Gong Cheng (“Xiaogong” 孝拱) and his younger brother (“Baoqi” 寶琪).

the early-twentieth century. In the story, since Gong Xiaoqi “borrows” Western troops to intervene in a domestic dispute between Manchu and Han, he simultaneously acquires two distinct labels – “*geming*” 革命 (revolutionary) and “*hanjian*” 漢奸 (traitor). I see these two labels as fashioned according to a changing “primary Other,” from the point of view of ethnic Hans.¹⁰ Meanwhile, since Gong Xiaoqi uses the cardinal Confucian virtue of filial piety as a shield in the novel, we have a chance to explore the central tension between an individual and a polity at this time in history. I end by taking up briefly the transformation of the images of Gong Zizhen and Gong Cheng in mainland China after 1949.

SCHOLAR-BEAUTY ROMANCE OR MANCHU-HAN CONFLICT?

Gu Taiqing’s early life has been a mystery to scholars: all biographical accounts of her early years involve speculation and imagination. Zhang Juling, a contemporary scholar who worked with Gu Taiqing’s descendants for her chronological biography, suggests that Gu was brought up in Beijing and might have visited Jiangnan 江南 (the lower Yangtze delta) around the age of twelve. However, no information is available regarding where she lived between twelve and twenty-six, the year she married the Manchu Prince Yi Hui 奕繪 (1799–1838, the historical counterpart of Gu Taiqing’s husband Mingshan in *Niehai hua*). The assertion that her life before twelve was spent in Beijing is solely built on information derived from her poetry, with no corroborating evidence. Not surprisingly, some speculate that she was brought up in southern China. In contrast to the opacity of her early experience, her literary talent clearly brought her fame and attention in later life. Her *ci* 詞 (lyric poetry) was highly praised by late-Qing poetry critics and she was often compared with Nalan xingde 納蘭性德 (1655–1695), an eminent lyric poet.¹¹ With a prestigious social background as a royal concubine and outstanding literary talent, it is no wonder that speculation about her private life abounds.

Reference to the Lilac Affair is said to have first appeared in Gong Zizhen’s own works. Several lyric poems from Gong Zizhen’s anthol-

¹⁰ The concept of “primary Other” is borrowed from Kai-wing Chow, who argues that in the Chinese intellectuals’ enterprise of nation building, “the white race in the Social Darwinian narrative scheme and European imperialism in the Hegelian narrative of history constituted the primary Other before 1903”; Chow, “Narrating Nation, Race, and National Culture: Imagining the Hanzu Identity in Modern China,” in Chow et al., *Constructing Nationhood in Modern East Asia* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2001), p. 53.

¹¹ Zhang Juling et al., *Qingdai Manzu zuojia shici xuan* 清代滿族作家詩詞選 (Selected Poetry of Manchu Poets of the Qing Dynasty) (Changchun: Shidai wenyi chubanshe, 1987), p. 270.

ogy *Wuzhuo ci* 無著詞 (Poetry of Non-Attachment, written mostly in his early twenties) allude to a love relationship between the narrator and a literate woman. One particular poem written after Gong Zizhen left Beijing for the last time in 1839 – “Yi Xuanwumen nei Taiping hu zhi dingxiang hua” 憶宣武門內太平湖之丁香花 (“In Memory of the Lilacs by Taiping Lake inside Xuanwu Gate”) – is read by many people as a direct reference to his relationship with Gu Taiqing. Nearly a century after this was written, however, Meng Sen 孟森 (1868–1937), the pioneer scholar of Qing studies in mainland China, and Su Xuelin 蘇雪林 (1897–1999), writer-cum-scholar of the Republican era, both wrote lengthy articles to argue that the romantic relationship between Gong Zizhen and Gu Taiqing was more the result of over-reading and imagination than historical fact.¹² Clearly, the Lilac Affair had been so widely known and influential that certain scholars felt compelled to clarify the facts surrounding the people involved. The strong interest in this affair was certainly not groundless. Many compelling parallels could be drawn between the situation described in Gong Zizhen’s lilac poem and that of Gong and Gu in real life, causing some *haoshi zhe* 好事者 (tattlers) to believe that the female protagonist was none other than Gu Taiqing. Gong’s poem reads:

空山徒倚倦遊身	Lingering on a desolate mountain, tired with travel,
夢見城西閬苑春	I dream of spring in the ethereal park west of the city,
一騎傳箋朱邸晚	Where, as dusk descended on the vermilion mansion, a horseman once delivered a letter

¹² Meng Sen’s main argument appeals to common sense. He argues that if what is recorded in *Wuzhuo ci*, compiled around 1822 and printed the next year, is what had truly happened between Gong and Gu, how could it have remained in obscurity for almost twenty years and not emerge until 1839? If Prince Yi Hui was already dead when Gong Zizhen left Beijing in 1839, the story that Gong Zizhen died from persecution by Yi Hui cannot be true. Meng Sen admits that the “lilac poem” is about Gu Taiqing, but because Meng follows Zhu Xi’s 朱熹 (1130–1200) annotation to *Shijing* 詩經 (The Book of Odes) and reads “*gaoyi*” 綈衣 as “shabby clothes for women,” he believes that instead of being an exchange between Gong and Gu, the poem portrays literary activities between Gu Taiqing and Gong Zizhen’s wife. See Meng Sen, “Dingxiang hua” 丁香花, in *Ming Qing shi lunzhu jikan xubian* 明清史論叢輯刊續編 (Supplementary Collection of Articles on Ming and Qing History) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), pp. 397–410. Su Xuelin concurs with Meng Sen’s main argument, although she questions some of the minor evidence he cites. Primary support for her interpretation is the age difference between Gong Zizhen and Gu Taiqing. She points out that one of Gong Zizhen’s lyric poems indicates that he got to know this woman five years before he wrote the poem. By then Gu Taiqing was only six years old, hence Su’s deduction that the love relationship between them was not possible. See Su Xuelin, “Qingdai nannü liangda ciren lianshi zhimi” 清代男女兩大詞人戀史之謎 (The Enigma of a Love Affair of Two Celebrated Qing Poets), in *Su Xuelin wenji* 蘇雪林文集 (Hefei: Anhui wenyi chubanshe, 1996), p. 380.

臨風遞與縞衣人 To the one dressed in white, facing the
breeze.¹³

Several associations are apparent in this poem. First, another name for Gu Taiqing is Gu Chun 顧春, “chun” meaning “spring”. Therefore, readers familiar with the traditional interpretive strategy of classical poetry would immediately read the term “spring” in the second line as a reference to her name. Secondly, the word “*zhudi*” 朱邸 suggests the unusual social status of the heroine. As a royal concubine of a prince, Gu Taiqing undoubtedly matches this criterion as well. Also in the poem, the Taiping Lake to the west of Yi Hui’s mansion seems to be the place where the romantic relationship burgeons. Legend has it that Gu Taiqing often viewed lilacs there in a white garb, which echoes the description of the attire of the female protagonist. With these “coincidences,” it is not surprising that the poem was interpreted as containing evidences of the affair.

Aside from such details, two circumstantial coincidences also contribute to the plausibility of the Lilac Affair. On the one hand, only three months after Yi Hui’s death in 1838, Gu Taiqing was driven out of Yi Hui’s mansion by his family. Though recent scholarship attributes this to the friction between Gu Taiqing and Yi Hui’s oldest son, Zajun 載鈞,¹⁴ the timing of the move led to speculation that it was due to the exposure received by her relationship with Gong Zizhen. On the other hand, there has been considerable speculation about why Gong Zizhen suddenly abandoned his official title and left Beijing in 1839, the year following Yi Hui’s death.¹⁵ Such a mysterious departure also served as a catalyst for rumor. A chronological biography of Gong Zizhen compiled in 1900 by Wu Changshou 吳昌綬 (1868–1924), a modern epigraphist and *tongxiang* 同鄉 (fellow townsman) of Gong, suggests two reasons. First, Gong’s unrestrained expenditures far exceeded his income and

¹³ For a translation, see Shirleen S. Wong, *Kung Tzu-chen* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975), p. 34; for original, see Wang Peizheng 王佩諍, comp., *Gong Zizhen quanji* 龔自珍全集 (Complete Collection of Gong Zizhen’s Works) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1999; hereafter, *Quanji*), p. 529.

¹⁴ Zhang Zhuling states that at the time rumor had it that Zajun, who was born to Yi Hui’s late principal wife and acquired the royal title after Yi Hui died, could not get along with Gu Taiqing. Consequently, he borrowed authority from his grandmother, Gu Taiqing’s mother-in-law, and had Gu sent out soon after Yi Hui’s funeral. For a discussion of Gu Taiqing’s relationship with her husband’s family and the life she lived after being driven out of the mansion, see Zhang, “Taiqing shengping luebiao,” p. 16.

¹⁵ Geremie Barmé, “Gong Xiaogong and the Sacking of the Garden of Perfect Brightness,” *China Heritage Quarterly* 8 (December 2006) (retrieved at <www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/features.php?searchterm=008_gong_xiaogong.inc&issue=008>), discusses Gong Zizhen’s interaction with the prominent statesmen of the time and his mysterious departure in 1839.

caused serious financial problems. Second, Gong's distinguished talent made him an irritation to men of power of his time.¹⁶ This latter reason is referenced in historian Qian Mu's 錢穆 (1895–1990) study. That is, Gong quit the capital because of political disagreements with the Manchu Chief Grand Councilor regarding the strategy over the opium issue.¹⁷ However, just like the reaction to Gu's domestic friction, some chose to believe that Gong Zizhen hurriedly left the capital to escape possible persecution from Yi Hui's family.¹⁸

Gong's lilac poem is where this alleged romance received its name and this profile was later heightened by Mao Heting 冒鶴亭 (1873–1959), a celebrated scholar, poet and publisher. In 1907 Mao wrote six commemorative poems for Taiqing – “Du Taisu mingshan tang ji gan Gu Taiqing yishi zheshu liu jueju” 讀太素明善堂集感太清遺事輒書六絕句 (Six Poems in Memory of Gu Taiqing after Reading Yihui's Collection), and the last one in the series is said to have inspired Zeng Pu's portrayal of the affair. It reads:

太平湖畔太平街	Taiping Street next to Taiping Lake,
南谷春深葬夜來	The night is buried at South Valley in the late spring.
人是傾城姓傾國	The person who could cause the city to fall,
丁香花發一低徊	Wandering among the blooming lilac. ¹⁹

Gu Taiqing's and Yi Hui's family compound is located between Taiqing Lake and Taiping Street, and South Valley (“nangu”) is where the two of them were buried. Therefore, the first couplet clearly refers to the life of Gu Taiqing and Mingshan. The third line alludes to Taiqing's surname “Gu” by appropriating Li Yannian's 李延年 (?–87 BC) famous line “一顧傾人城，再顧傾人國” (She glances once, a city falls; a kingdom falls when she glances again).²⁰ The last line deliberately refers to Gong's lilac poem and subtly alludes to the perplexing triangular love relationship.

¹⁶ Wu Changshou, “Ding'an xiansheng nianpu” 定盦先生年譜 (Chronological Biography of Gong Zizhen), in *Qianji*, p. 622.

¹⁷ Qian Mu, *Zhongguo jin sanbainian xueshu shi* 中國近三百年學術史, referred to in Young-tsu Wong, *A Paradise Lost: The Imperial Garden Yuanming Yuan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), p. 35; Barmé, “Gong Xiaogong,” also acknowledged this speculation.

¹⁸ Considering the *tongxiang* relationship between Wu Changshou and Gong Zizhen (which implies possibly more accurate access to information about Gong Zizhen), the two reasons Wu Changshou lists are fairly convincing. As for the second reason, given the fact that this chronological biography was written when the Qing court was still in charge of China, this seemingly vague reason might be something that cannot be explicitly spelled out at that time.

¹⁹ See Mao Heting, “Niehaihua xianhua,” 孽海花閑話, in *Ziliao*, p. 228.

²⁰ Trans. Stephen Owen, *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), p. 69.

This is how the Lilac Affair is said to have appeared in Gong Zhen's own work and how it was circulated among some intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century. It should be noted that the liaison, whether the romantic moment sketched in the protagonist's poem or the later scholarly critique, is largely a love relationship generated from a mutual appreciation of the other's literary talent. Neither party's ethnic background was explicitly mentioned, let alone emphasized. However, when the love affair is retold in *Niehai hua*, the readers see how the narrative of the Lilac Affair is torn between a sensational love affair (the long-established scholar-beauty paradigm) and an ethnic conflict advocated by early-twentieth-century revolutionary discourse (the scholar-beauty paradigm's "time-sensitive" discontent).

The image of Gu Taiqing in *Niehai hua* is largely consistent with the description of her in the poems examined above. In *Niehai hua*, the affair is brought into the narrative through a conversation at a social function between Chu Ailin 褚愛林, Gong Xiaoqi's concubine, and Jin Wenqing 金雯青, a recent *zhuangyuan* 狀元 (a holder of the first-degree in the civil service examination) and scholar-ambassador-to-be. Jin is modeled after the actual Hong Jun 洪鈞 (1830-1893), a *zhuangyuan* of 1868 and a Qing ambassador from 1888 to 1891. Chu Ailin relays what Gong Xiaoqi has mentioned to her about the Lilac Affair concerning his father. It must be noted that both the retelling process and its participants reflect Zeng Pu's deliberate choices. First, the father's love affair needs to be introduced through Gong Xiaoqi's perspective, since he is the one who later connects it to his own act of burning down Yuanming Yuan. However, as readers soon find out in *Niehai hua*, since Gong Xiaoqi has already cut himself off from the literati circle, his voice could only be heard in the literati community in an indirect way. Therefore, a retelling, or relay process (which I will discuss below) from Chu to Jin and his scholar friends serves to introduce Gong Xiaoqi's words. In addition, the act of retelling also provides a circumstance in which the intellectuals' reception of the Gongs' actions could be registered. Chu Ailin tells Jin Wenqing what Gong Xiaoqi told about his father's affair:

Lord Mingshan was a great prince with more than usual ability. His concubine was called Taiqing xilin chun (Purity and Spring of the Western Forest), who was very beautiful and talented. They wrote and replied to each other in the inner chamber. Those poems are well-known to people... It was all very romantic, and they thought of themselves as the equals to Zhao Mengfu and Guan Zhongji”
『明善主人』是個才華蓋世的名王。明善的側福晉，叫做太清西林春，也

是個艷絕人寰的才女，閨房唱和，流布人間。... 韻事閑情，自命趙孟頫管仲姬，不過爾爾。²¹

According to this, the depiction of Gu Taiqing as the Manchu woman who later becomes responsible for Gong Xiaoqi's hostility towards Manchu people as a whole is quite consistent with the traditional "*cainü*" 才女 (talented women) trope prevalent in Chinese literary history. Furthermore, her relationship with her husband perfectly illustrates the meaning of "*caizi cainü*" 才子才女 (talented men and women). This couple's self-comparison to Zhao Mengfu (1254–1322), the Han literatus with multiple talents in poetry, calligraphy, painting and music, and Guan Zhongji (1262–1319), Zhao's almost equally talented wife, tellingly reveals their self-perceived skills as well as their identification with the Chinese cultural tradition.

This depiction echoes some of the narrative regarding the unsolved mystery of Gu's early life. The modern scholar Qian Jibo 錢基博 describes her as "*wuren*," 吳人 (literally, people of the Wu region, the area of the lower Yangtze delta – one of China's major, long-standing cultural centers), which further renders her into a typical "*jiangnan cainü*" 江南才女 (talented women of the Yangtze delta).²² Due to the scarcity of the records on Gu's earlier life, her expressed literary excellence comes to define her origin. Overall, contained in the paradigm of traditional *cainü*, the heterogeneous "Manchu" character of Gu Taiqing and even that of her husband, Mingshan are not emphasized in the description.

If the literary exchange between Gong and Gu reminds readers of a traditional scholar-beauty story, then the description of their secret tryst contains elements that people usually find in description of a classical clandestine rendezvous. In *Niehai hua*, Gong Xiaoqi continues to tell Chu Ailing what happened after his father secretly met with Gu Taiqing:

My father lost consciousness and knew nothing more for a time. When he came to his senses, the first thing he noticed was a warm fragrance in his nostrils, and a soft body pressed against his own. All his limbs felt weak, and he could not even move... He knew that he was not in some gloomy dungeon – on the contrary, it was a chamber of enchantment. His head was resting on an embroi-

²¹ Zeng Pu, *Niehai hua* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2001; hereafter, *Niehai hua*), p. 19. The above translation of *Niehai hua* is that of Rafe de Crespigny and Liu Ts'un-yan, "A Flower in a Sinful Sea," *Renditions* 17 (Spring 1982), pp. 137–92, with several alterations.

²² Qian Jibo, "Niehai hua kaixin lu" 孽海花考信錄 (A Study of the Authenticity of the Stories in *Niehai hua*), in *Lu nanzi Niehai hua* 魯男子孽海花 (Taipei: Guiguan tushu gufen youxian gongsi, 1984), p. 439.

dered pillow, his body was covered by a quilt of fine brocade, and under the coverlet, pressed closely against him and deep in sleep, was a smooth-skinned, delicate and graceful young woman, separated from him only by blouse and pantaloons of the thinnest fine silk. There came from her a soft, intoxicating scent, entering the marrow of his bones. 我老子暈倒後人事不知, 等到醒來, 忽覺溫香撲鼻, 軟玉滿懷, 四肢無力, 動彈不得. 睜眼看時, 黑洞洞一絲光影都沒有. 可曉得那所在不是個愁慘的石牢, 倒是座縹緲的仙闈. 頭倚繡枕, 身裹錦衾. 衾裡面, 緊貼着身朝外睡着一個嬌小玲瓏的妙人兒, 只隔了薄薄一層輕綃衫褲, 滲出醉人的融融暖氣, 透進骨髓.²³

The description of this secret rendezvous apparently tries to achieve a balance between celebrating the sexuality of Gu Taiqing and keeping the obscenity of the encounter at an appropriate level. This balance is achieved through the use of established literary codes as well as multiple layers of retelling. First, suggestive codes such as “*wenxiang*” “*ruanyu manhuai*” “*xianta*” “*jinjin*” “*xiannü*” 仙女 (female immortals) and “*dengxian*” 登仙 (ascending to the terrace of immortals) used in describing their encounter are long-established euphemisms with sexual connotations. Therefore, the description is voyeuristic enough for the audience (both Wenqing and his friends who are listening to Chu Ailing, as well as the readers of *Niehai hua*) to become “intoxicated” with Taiqing, as is Gong Zizhen in the story. Yet, the clichéd nature of these terms prevents the description of the scene from getting too personal with Gu Taiqing. Also, it should be noted that the eroticism is not only distanced through the choice of words, but also through multiple layers of narrative voice. Wenqing and his friends hear Chu Ailing reiterate how Gong Xiaoqi told the story to her in the manner that it was told to him by his father. For the readers of *Niehai hua*, they have one more layer – Zeng Pu’s own retelling. With euphemism and distance created by layers of retelling, the audience/reader is able to preserve an image of Gu that is as refined as that given in the lilac poem.

However, even such a reserved description of their tryst offended those who perceived Gu Taiqing as a typical “*Jiangnan cainü*.” Mao Heting considers Zeng Pu’s description of the amorous details as “*tangtu*” 唐突 (indiscreet). Since he thinks it is his poem that inspired Zeng Pu to write about the love story, as we learned above, Mao because of that must now condemn himself to be punished into the hell where the dead get their tongues pulled out.²⁴ Su Xuelin, in her work, smooths

²³ *Niehai hua*, p. 21.

²⁴ Mao, “*Niehai hua xianhua*,” in *Ziliao*, p. 228.

out the empirical evidence by opining that Gu Taiqing's was, in fact, a "female with strong commitment to the Confucian norms."²⁵ Based on her own reading of Gu Taiqing's poetry, Su claims that Gu Taiqing lived a harmonious life with her husband and was loyal to their family, making it unlikely that she would have an affair with another man. What is interesting here is that the Han scholars, from Qian Jibo to Su Xuelin, would like to overwrite Gu's ethnic identity by emphasizing her adherence to Confucian norms. To these scholars, the cultural identity as traditional literati that Gu Taiqing and her husband have assumed through their linguistic facility and literary talent easily displaces their "biological identity" as Manchus, and seems to have been more attractive.

In this sense it is hard to say whether the ethnic edge is completely displaced. One may even argue that the presented "Chinese-ness" of Gu Taiqing is exactly where the ethnic tension lies. Wu Hung's study of the Yongzheng emperor's twelve *meiren* 美人 (beautiful women) portraits and the painting of the emperor's merrymaking titled "Qianlong xingle tu" 乾隆行樂圖 points out a profound irony – what was presented in these paintings was actually forbidden.²⁶ The painted ladies are all dressed in traditional Han Chinese clothing. It seems that the stern imperial edicts on banning Manchu-Han marriage and wearing Han Chinese clothes only stimulated the Manchu lords' private interest in the things they publicly prohibited. In this light, Gu's ethnic ambiguity – a Manchu woman with Han Chinese characteristics – becomes a double-edged sword. Her exotic-turned-erotic quality makes her enchanting to both her husband (the Manchu) and her reputed lover (the Chinese); and such ethnic tension, as seen in the portrayal of Gong's and Gu's rendezvous in *Niehai hua*, is expressed as sexual tension. However, when Gong Xiaoqi uses the affair as the justification for his act of treason in 1860, we see a nuanced but crucial change in the narrative. The ethnic tension emerges, repacked in twentieth-century revolutionary terminology, and becomes a vital element in transforming the orientation of the plot.

²⁵ Su, "Qingdai nannü," p. 382.

²⁶ Wu Hung, "Beyond Stereotypes: The Twelve Beauties in Qing Court Art and *The Dream of the Red Chamber*," in Ellen Widmer and K. S. Chang, eds., *Writing Women in Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1997), pp. 306–65.

ANTI-MANCHU RHETORIC OR NOVELISTIC SENSIBILITY?

Gong Zizhen's sudden death plays an important role in this transformation. Just like his inexplicable departure from Beijing, his mysterious death also caused considerable speculation. Local gazetteers of his native place claim that he died of a certain disease, a relatively less attractive explanation available for a novelist. Alternatively, some claim he was poisoned by Lingxiao 靈蕭, his concubine-servant – this being a more interesting explanation, consistent with his image as an amorous man. A third version is that he was murdered as a consequence of publicly offending a high official, which also speaks to his reputation for political courage.²⁷ *Niehai hua* associates Gong's death with Gu Taiqing and the royal family behind her – he is murdered as the price he pays for his affair with the Manchu concubine. As Gong Xiaoqi recalls one night, after gambling with a former colleague for two nights, Gong Zizhen had realized that he was poisoned. “On his deathbed, he told me the whole story, and asked me to avenge him” 臨死，把這事詳細地告訴了我，囑我報仇。Although Gong Xiaoqi admits that he had not got along well with his father during his lifetime, as a son he still feels obligated to take up revenge: “Ever since then I have held an urgent sense of taking revenge against *the Manchus*” (emphasis added) 我從此就和滿人結了不共戴天的深仇。²⁸ This is where the subtle replacement in the narrative is made. Instead of saying that he has a vendetta with that particular Mingshan family who is chiefly responsible for murdering his father in order to save their own reputation, Gong Xiaoqi says that the target of his enmity is the Manchu people as a whole. This subtle change leads to a significant transformation – what was previously viewed as battle of love and hatred between two families is now elevated to the level of conflict between the two ethnic groups.

This is where the anti-Manchu rhetoric of the early-twentieth century surfaces in the narrative of *Niehai hua*. A further analysis of this problem involves some understanding of the unique situation regarding the production of late-Qing fiction, in addition to *Niehai hua*'s own complicated textual history. The years between 1902 and 1910 witnessed a boom in fiction writing. Liang Qichao advocated “*xiaoshuo jie geming*”

²⁷ On such speculation about Gong Zizhen's death, see Fan Kezheng 樊克政, *Gong Zizhen nianpu kaolue* 龔自珍年譜考略 (Chronological Biography of Gong Zizhen) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, 2004), p. 642. Wu, “Ding'an xiansheng nianpu,” p. 627, states that Gong Zizhen died of *baoji* 暴疾 (an acute disease), which is also the case reported in a Suzhou local gazetteer; also Fan, *Gong Zizhen*, pp. 642–45. However, considering that “acute disease” is usually a euphemism for something perhaps unsuited for Chinese historiographical writing, it cannot be certain that Gong Zizhen did die of disease.

²⁸ The preceding two quotations are at *Niehai hua*, p. 23.

小說界革命 (revolution in fiction) in 1902, and the successive appearance of four important fiction journals contributed to this wave.²⁹ The majority of late-Qing fiction works was first serialized in journals or newspapers before being published in book form. While some novels were never finished, others took a long time to complete and their narrative directions became changed.³⁰ *Niehai hua*, as the most popular late-Qing novel, underwent this complicated process of textual evolution. Its first six chapters were written by Jin Tianyu 金天羽 (1874–1947), Zeng Pu’s good friend, and the first two chapters were published in 1904 in Japan before they were passed on to Zeng Pu. Zeng edited them, added several chapters, and published the first twenty chapters in two installments with the publisher Xiaoshuolin she 小說林社 in 1905 (in the first and the eighth lunar months). In 1907, chapters 21 to 25 were serialized through Xiaoshuolin and widely circulated. Between 1928 and 1931, Zeng revised a few chapters and published a thirty-chapter version with Zhenmeishan 真美善 (Truth, Beauty and Goodness Press), the Shanghai publishing house he founded in 1927.³¹ The most visible change between the Xiaoshuolin version and the Zhenmeishan version is that Zeng Pu considerably revised the first six chapters. Importantly, the story of the Lilac Affair was not included in the 1905 version but was now added. This change not only reflects the particular sociopolitical situation in China at the turn of the twentieth century but also speaks to Zeng Pu’s own choices as a novelist.

A quick look at the anti-Manchu rhetoric at this time is required in order to clarify the point. These years witnessed efforts of the revolutionary nationalists to create a China based on the racial identity of the Han people, in opposition to the race of the Manchu monarchy. An effective strategy was the revival of consciousness of a “*han*” 漢 ethnic identity. Kai-wing Chow points out that although the new identity of

²⁹ The four leading late-Qing fiction journals were *Xin Xiaoshuo* 新小說 (New Fiction) (1902–10), *Xiuxiang xiaoshuo* 繡像小說 (Fiction Illustrated) (1903–1906), *Yueyue xiaoshuo* 月月小說 (Monthly Fiction) (1906–1908), and *Xiaoshuo lin* (Forest of Fiction) (1907–1908).

³⁰ For a discussion of the publication and circulation of late-Qing fiction, see Chen Pingyuan’s 陳平原 *Ershi shiji zhongguo xiaoshuoshi* 二十世紀中國小說史 (History of Chinese Novels in the Twentieth Century) (Beijing: Beijing Daxue chubanshe, 1989), vol. 1, and Tsau Shu-ying, “The Rise of ‘New Fiction,’” in Milena Doleželová-Velingerová, ed., *The Chinese Novel at the Turn of the Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), pp. 18–37.

³¹ Information on the textual evolution of *Niehai hua* is found in Wei Shaochang 魏紹昌, “*Niehai hua* banben xiaokao” 孽海花版本小考 (A Brief Study of Various Editions of *Niehai hua*), in idem, ed., *Wanqing sida xiaoshuojia* 晚清四大小說家 (Four Prominent Novelists of the Late Qing Period) (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1993), p. 208; Shi Yin, “Zeng Pu shengping xinian” 曾樸生平系年 (Chronological Biography of Zeng Pu), in idem, *Zeng Pu yanjiu*, pp. 23–28 and 46–55; and Ouyang Jiang 歐陽健, *Zeng Pu yu Niehai hua* 曾樸與孽海花 (Zeng Pu and *Niehai hua*) (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 1993), pp. 28–29.

the so-called yellow race helped to resituate the Chinese within world-wide race taxonomies just as social Darwinist racialism was being introduced, the new racial distinction in China was less helpful in dealing with the Chinese-Manchu power struggle. To articulate the difference between Han and Manchu, Han-Chinese intellectuals re-excavated the word *han*. Chow notices an interchangeable use of the neologisms *hanzu* 漢族, *hanzhong* 漢種, and *han renzhong* 漢人種 around 1903–1906. Other than revealing a confusion about the connotations of “zu” and “zhong,” these newly coined words lived up to the task of distinguishing Han from Manchu.³² In addition to creating a racial China under the name *hanzu*, the pervasiveness of the slogan “*geming*” (revolution) was another token of anti-Manchu rhetoric at the beginning of the twentieth century. The most influential use of the word was in Zou Rong’s 鄒容 (1885–1905) widely-circulated pamphlet of 1903, *Geming jun* 革命軍 (The Revolutionary Army), in which he called for the “revolutionary independence of the great Han people.”³³ Under such anti-Manchu propaganda, the more than 200 years of Manchu rule over China became increasingly viewed as the primary cause for China’s decline. Consequently, it was argued that Manchu, as an alien ethnicity, should be eradicated from China so as to make a pure-Han nation.

In the 1905 version of *Niehai hua*, a brief encounter between Jin Wenqing and Chen Qianqiu 陳千秋 (1869–1895), Kang Youwei’s 康有為 disciple, appears in the place where the Lilac Affair would be inserted later. This is followed by a lengthy introduction to the historical development of the so-called *mimi huishe* 秘密會社 (secret society) phenomenon in China. Two underground organizations are emphasized. One is the Tiandi hui 天地會 (Society of Heaven and Earth), an anti-Qing peasant organization said to preserve the “*minzu zhuyi*” 民族主義 (anti-Manchu-ism) left by the resistance forces from the time of the Ming-Qing transition in the mid-1600s.³⁴ The other is the Qingnian hui 青年會 (Youth Society), which transferred from overseas the idea of “*geming zhuyi* 革命主義 (revolution-ism).”³⁵ This part of the novel then

³² Chow, “Narrating Nation, Race, and National Culture,” p. 55.

³³ Translation is that of John Lust, *The Revolutionary Army: A Chinese Nationalist Tract of 1903* (Mouton 1968), p. 126.

³⁴ Usually the word “*minzu zhuyi*” would be translated as “nationalism.” However, in the context of this chapter in *Niehai hua* the word “*minzu zhuyi*” refers to the anti-Manchu idea and movement, both dating back to the Ming-Qing transitional period.

³⁵ *Qingnian hui* here stands for Xingzhong hui 興中會 (Revive China Society), founded by Dr. Sun Yat-sen in 1894.

ends with a member of the Qingnian hui preaching to devoted fellow revolutionaries the urgency of effecting revolution in China.³⁶

Compared to this straightforward narration of anti-Manchu propaganda, the Lilac Affair reflects the nationalistic milieu of the early-twentieth century through Gong Xiaoqi's bewilderment over his own identity. After Gong Xiaoqi confesses to leading the allied troops to Yuanming Yuan to avenge his father, he explains his indifferent attitude about the subsequent judgments: "People can call me *hanjian* (a traitor to the Han people), or they can say that I *paiman* 排滿 (rebel against the Manchu). I could not care less." Also, when Chu Ailin tells Jin Wenqing, "Some people cursed him (Gong Xiaoqi) as a *hanjian*, but he would not accept that. Others praised him as *geming*, but he would not accept that either." To have the characters active in the storyline's 1860s label themselves with distinct cachets from several decades later, such as "*hanjian*," "*paiman*" and "*geming*," is an interesting anachronistic mistake. By putting into the characters' mouths these temporally misplaced slogans, the hidden ethnic dimension in the Lilac Affair is brought to the fore, and the love scandal is repackaged to carry the heaviness of ethnic confrontation.

The reasons why Zeng Pu replaced the introductory remarks on anti-Manchu movements with the Lilac Affair in the Zhenmeishan version are multifold. First, Zeng Pu states that Jin Wenqing wins the *zhuangyuan* title in 1868, but the Xingzhong hui (referring to the Qingnian hui in the novel) was active in the 1890s. Hence having Jin Wenqing meet with Chen Qianqiu soon after he excels in the examination would be an anachronism.³⁷ Second, using the Lilac Affair instead of a straightforward sermon to discuss ethnic revolution is yet another demonstration of *Niehai hua*'s mixing the miscellaneous with grand history. The most prominent example in this respect is Zeng Pu's treatment of Sai Jinhua 賽金花, the real-life controversial courtesan associated with the actual ambassador Hong Jun (mentioned, above). Her image in *Niehai hua* becomes interwoven with the anecdotal historiography of the closing decades of the Qing dynasty, since her fictional double Fu Caiyun 傅彩雲 takes a trip to Europe with her ambassador husband, and engages in what becomes a legendary love relationship with the German General Waldersee (modeled after Alfred von Waldersee [1832–1904], who served as the Supreme Commander of the allied forces in China

³⁶ The original chapter is included in *Ziliao*, pp. 35–42.

³⁷ "Xiugai hou yaoshuo de jiju hua," in *Ziliao*, p. 132.

in 1900). Here is where China's sociopolitical crises in the second half of the nineteenth century are conceptualized and represented.

Zeng Pu once explained the design of *Niehai hua*, saying, "I wanted to use the protagonist as the thread to encompass the history of the past thirty years... I chose to write about interesting anecdotes to provide the context of major events" 想借用主人公做全書的線索，盡量容納近三十年來的歷史... 專把些有趣的瑣聞逸事，來烘托出大事的背景。³⁸ Reluctant to discuss the anti-Manchu campaign directly, Zeng Pu opts for an artistic depiction of the ethnic revolutionary idea.³⁹ Instead of advocating the grand revolutionary cause, as does the young activist in the original version, Gong Xiaoqi denies the opposing labels (traitor or hero) imposed on him and is clearly troubled by his problematic identity. Zeng Pu's reassessment of the Manchu-Han conflict through a sexual adventure and his preference for the ambiguously odd, rather than the simple, traitor-hero dichotomy provide clear evidence of his self-perception as ultimately a novelist, not a politician.

Zeng Pu was meticulous and conscious about the structure of his novel, and used the metaphor of weaving, or applique, even further. He described *Niehai hua* as a beaded flower, "... an umbrella-shaped beaded flower... It all emanates from the central stem, but (the beads) are interconnected and turn into a large flower something like a ball" 是傘形花序，從中心干部一層一層的推展出各種形象來，互相連結，開成一朵球一般的大花。⁴⁰ This description by Zeng addressed critics, particularly Hu Shi 胡適 (1891-1962), who had stated that the novel lacked an integrated structure. Yet, by looking at the flow of chapters, we can see Zeng's beaded-flower structure even more clearly. For example, a "bead" is left off abruptly at chapter 2 in the Zhenmeishan version, when Gong Xiaoqi's puzzling behavior in 1860 has been brought up to Jin Wenqing in a conversation with his literati friends. But Gong's actions in 1860 are left off there without any explanation. By letting Gong re-emerge later in the narration of the Lilac Affair, his actions are explained and the appearance of his character is given proper narrative closure.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 128-29.

³⁹ The first six chapters of *Niehai hua* were written by Jin Tianyu and edited by Zeng Pu. Their work is so intertwined that even Zeng Pu claims that it is hard to differentiate what is written by whom for these six chapters. When Jin Tianyu first started *Niehai hua*, he labeled it as "*zhengzhi xiaoshuo*" 政治小說 (a political novel), which was later changed by Zeng Pu to "*lishi xiaoshuo*" 歷史小說 (a historical novel). Given Jin Tianyu's advocacy for revolution, it is likely that this part was written by him. Ouyang Jian offers similar speculation on this issue. See Ouyang, *Zeng Pu*, pp. 18-21.

⁴⁰ "Xiugai hou yao shuo de jiju hua," in *Ziliao*, p. 130.

At the level of narrative mechanics, other than the bead-flower's "echoing" of previous contents, there is also the device of handing off the story from person to person, in a sense the relaying of the story of the Lilac Affair. This device parodies the problematic relationship of the protagonist couple of the novel, Fu Caiyun and Jin Wenqing, but it also readdresses the crisis found in scholar-beauty master plots. Hu Ying convincingly argues that as Caiyun embarks on the journey to Europe, she starts to experience layers of transformation. Departing from countless passive courtesan-concubines portrayed in traditional fiction and drama, Caiyun thus prefigures several qualities later to be cherished by the May Fourth generation of modern women; and it calls into question the conventional scholar-beauty narrative of her relationship with Jin Wenqing.⁴¹ Meanwhile, the relationship between Chu Ailing and Gong Xiaoqi also cannot not be sustained, due to Gong's very troubled identity (discussed in detail below). Therefore, in the relay process the following structure develops: the amorous relationship of the couple in the story (Gong Zizhen and Gu Taiqing), the couple transmitting the story (Gong Xiaoqi and Chu Ailing), and the couple receiving the story (Jin Wenqing and Fu Caiyun) all form ironic references to each other as well as to the single-model paradigm for their specific love relationship. Zeng Pu once explicitly stated that when his friend Jin Tianyu first approached him with the prototype story of Sai Jinhua, he was concerned that *Niehai hua* could easily turn into a work like *Haishang hua* 海上花 (Flowers in the Sea) – a story of courtesans and their patrons.⁴² Zeng Pu's worry did not materialize, because the drastically changing world of that time also caused a significant crisis in the stereotypical literary paradigm. None of the couples mentioned above is able to sustain a relationship according to the traditional model. With three layers of parody constructed around the relay device, the narrative of the Lilac Affair becomes a venue in which the insufficiency of the scholar-beauty mode is valorized.

⁴¹ Hu Ying, *Tales of Translation: Composing the New Women in China, 1899–1918* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 2000), p. 24.

⁴² Zeng Pu once reflected on the evolution of the above-mentioned story in *Niehai hua*, saying that when Jin Tianyu approached him with it he considered it good subject-matter. However, Jin's story is nothing more than that of an extraordinary courtesan, which, at most, did not break from the paradigm of *Haishang hua*; see Zeng, "Xiugai hou yaoshuo de jiju hua," in *Ziliao*, p. 128. Here, probably for the sake of making a comparison, Zeng reduces *Haishang hua* to a continuation of the "scholar-beauty/courtesan" paradigm. Scholars have complicated the reading of *Haishang hua* by situating it in the historicity of what may be called late-Qing cultural production, on which see Alexander Des Forges, *Mediasphere Shanghai: The Aesthetics of Cultural Production* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007) and Chloë Starr, *Red-light Novels of the Late Qing* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 176–87.

In *Fin-de-siecle Splendor*, David Der-wei Wang argues that late-Qing fiction is considerably more innovative and “modern” than many literary historians have acknowledged. As a dynamic body of work, it embodies the “incipient modernities” that were later disavowed and repressed by the May Fourth literary discourse. These modernities are characterized by “topical urgency, vigorous cynicism, and a compulsive need to laugh at everything high and low.”⁴³ We have clearly seen these characteristics in Zeng Pu’s depiction of the Lilac Affair as well as his sardonic caricature of intellectuals. In his study of courtesan novels (*xiaxie xiaoshuo* 狹邪小說), Wang uses Fu Caiyun, the female protagonist in *Niehai hua*, to tackle issues such as fantasies of lust and subversions of romantic convention. The latter theme, as demonstrated so far in this paper, is even illustrated in the minor relationships (such as the Lilac Affair and that between Gong Xiaoqi and Chu Ailin) depicted in the novel. In this light, *Niehai hua* truly testifies to what Wang observes as “the disorderly literature of late Qing China.”⁴⁴

In addition to adding to the structural sophistication, the narrative of the affair also contributes a certain gender politics to *Niehai hua* that the straightforward record of revolutionary speeches does not carry. As readers would observe from Gong Xiaoqi’s words, no matter how irreconcilable the Manchu-Han antithesis is represented, Gu Taiqing, the Manchu royal concubine, is never rendered as an “enemy” in the story. When it comes to male attitudes towards her, the ethnic malice gives way to “qing” 情, desire (usually translated as intense emotion). As we revisit the narrative of the rendezvous, the tell-and-listen (and finally “-read”) cycle places her (and ultimately her “body”) under at least four layers of male “gaze.” As for Gong Zizhen in the “original encounter,” the “gaze” is actually the “smell.” In the dark space, her body is not seen, but is described through heat, physical distance, and friction; it is tactile. Gong is on the site to have his heart “immediately captured” by a “smooth-skinned, delicate and graceful young woman” with “a soft, intoxicating scent.”⁴⁵ He then passes a vivid real-time report on to his son Gong Xiaoqi, who as listener-cum-reteller, registers and distributes the feminine charms of his father’s lover with a possible incestuous pleasure. The male literati audiences who gather at Chu Ailing’s place envision the fatal encounter at the “enchanted chamber” through listening to this story with amazement and, probably, envy.

⁴³ Wang, *Fin-de-siecle Splendor*, p.182.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 16.

⁴⁵ *Niehai hua*, p. 19.

Finally, the readers of *Niehai hua* consume Gu's sexuality and, possibly, the despicable "vulgarity" of the literati as they ponder the encounter (on this matter, the novelist Zeng Pu may not be that distant from his readers). Therefore, as desirable as Gu Taiqing is presented and as engaged as the male protagonists and spectators are, it is difficult to make a Manchu enemy out of her. Later when the love affair is exposed, Gu Taiqing maintains a friendly image as she sends a secret letter together with a sample of poison to warn Gong Zizhen against possible danger from the royal family. However, the male protagonist Mingshan and his offspring are not as lucky. Despite the characterization of Mingshan as "a great and talented prince" when Gong Zizhen is still his guest, he and his offspring are rendered as representatives of the Manchu, made into the target of Gong Xiaoqi's rage, and ultimately sacrificed when a scapegoat is needed as the outlet of this anti-Manchu conspiracy.

FILIAL SON, TRAITOR, OR REVOLUTIONARY?

If the narrative of the father's alleged affair provides a window for us to see the sort of influence that nationalistic consciousness exerted on people of this time, then connecting the affair with the son's action twenty years later demonstrates the way that *Niehai hua* conceptualized and imagined Chinese intellectuals' encounter with the West. This linking of the father-son scandals is underscored by two particular aspects. First, if the narrative of the Lilac Affair has foregrounded the Manchu-Han conflict, then claiming that the son led foreign troops to Yuanming Yuan to avenge the father's unjust death adds a Western-powers dimension. Second, when the son's adherence to "*xiao*" 孝 is seen as a cause in the linkage, it further reveals the challenge and predicament that traditional Confucian ideology in general faced in confronting what I am terming "the Manchu-Han-West triangle."

Collaboration with invaders is never a minor charge, and thus some of Gong Cheng's friends tried to account for his act of apparent "betrayal." Wang Tao 王韜 (1828–1897), the celebrated late-Qing reformer and publisher, who claimed to be on good terms with Gong Cheng, admitted that the latter did in fact accompany British troops on their way north, but did not participate in the atrocity.⁴⁶ Another friend, Tan Xian 譚獻 (1832–1901), the renowned Qing scholar of the

⁴⁶ Being the drinking companion of Gong Cheng in his last years, Wang Tao's biography of Gong Cheng is usually deemed the most comprehensive of contemporary accounts. However, as if he is reluctant to comment on this incident, Wang Tao records Gong's conduct in the Gengshen Incident extremely briefly: "During the Second Opium War, the British armadas broke into Tianjin. Gong Cheng was with them, which aroused criticism" 庚申之役, 英師

Old-Text School, uses the word “*xie*” 挾 (to be held under duress) to euphemistically indicate Gong Cheng’s reluctantance to be involved in the military action.⁴⁷ Aside from these mild exculpations, however, some exalted him as a hero who led the foreign force to Yuanming Yuan as a roundabout tactic intended to save most of Beijing from potential peril.⁴⁸ Contrary to this grand excuse, it was also suggested that Gong Cheng acted out of personal interest.⁴⁹ Complicating the situation even further, some scholars insist that the hearsay about Gong Cheng’s betrayal was in fact fabricated. They claim that it was only because he once worked for foreigners and accompanied them north that he was falsely accused of directing the foreign enemies to destroy Yuanming Yuan.⁵⁰ Gong Cheng’s exact relationship with the foreign force thus becomes another mythic narrative.

Why in fact were there such strikingly different interpretations of his action? Gong Cheng’s chameleon-like character, accurately projected onto Gong Xiaoqi in *Niehai hua*, may be part of the answer. In his brief debut scene, Gong Xiaoqi impresses Jin Wenqing with his multi-lingual talent. When Jin is sightseeing in a park in Shanghai, the

船闖入天津，孝拱實同往焉，坐是爲人所詬病。See Wang Tao, “Gong Jiang liangjun yishi” 龔蔣兩君軼事 (Anecdotes of Gong Cheng and Jiang Dunfu), in idem, *Songbin suohua* 松濱鎖話 (Anecdotal Stories from the Banks of the Wusong River) (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2004), p. 95. Barmé’s “Gong Xiaogong” also has details of Gong Cheng’s putative involvement in the sacking of Yuanming Yuan.

⁴⁷ Tan Xian claims that he always treated Gong Cheng as his elder brother, therefore it is unsurprising that he would defend Gong Cheng. In his “Wangyou zhuan: Gong gong xiang zhuan” 亡友傳，龔公襄傳 (Biographies of Late Friends: Biography of Gong Cheng) Tan writes: “In the tenth year of the Xianfeng reign (1860), British troops entered the capital. Someone said: ‘They forced Gong Cheng to be their guide. That’s why he gave information to the British chief.’ Later they renewed their treaty and retreated, but people began to criticize Gong Cheng” 咸豐十年，英吉利入京師，或曰：挾龔先生爲導，君方以言讐長酋，換約而退，而人閑逐相訾訾。See Qian Yiji 錢儀吉 et al., eds., *Qingdai beizhuan quanji* 清代碑傳全集 (A Complete Collection of Qing Epitaphs) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987), p. 1232a.

⁴⁸ S. K. Leung 梁紹傑, “Gong Cheng shiji kaoshu” 龔橙事跡考述 (A Study of Gong Cheng’s Life) offers comprehensive information on the primary sources of Gong Cheng. According to him, Deng Shi 鄧實 came up with this opinion in 1910; see Leung, *Bulletin of Ming-Qing Studies* 4 (1999), p. 168. Barmé, “Gong Xiaogong,” points out that Chai Xiaofeng, writing in the 1930s, echoes this version.

⁴⁹ One account states that when Yuanming Yuan was on fire, Gong Cheng rode in ahead of the others and took back many treasures; see Qju Yulin 裘毓馨, “Gong Banlun zhuan” 龔半倫傳 (Biography of Gong Cheng), in idem, *Qingdai yiwen* 清代佚聞 (Anecdotes of the Qing Dynasty) (Taipei: Huawen shuju, 1969), pp. 314–15; and Yi Zongkui 易宗夔, “Ren shi Gong Cheng wei guaiwu” 人視龔橙爲怪物 (People Take Gong Cheng as a Weird Creature), in idem, *Xin shishuo* 新世說 (New Tales of the World) (Taiyuan: Shanxi guji chubanshe, 1997), p. 383.

⁵⁰ As Raogong 龔公 once speculated: “It is only because people abominated his working for the foreign enemies and accompanying them north that they rumored him to be the guide of the foreigners”; see Wu Zuxiang 吳祖湘, *Jindai shishi luncong* 近代史實論叢 (A Collection of Essays on Chinese Modern history) (Taipei: Zhuanji wenxue chubanshe, 1978) 1, p. 21.

most important treaty port in China, he and his friend Bengru 萃如 “see a foreigner coming along with a Chinese man... The two people converse with one another in a foreign language, and Wenqing and Bengru have no clue as to what he is talking about” 忽見對面走進一個外國人來，後頭跟著一個中國人... 兩人嘖哩呱囉，說著外國話。雯青、萃如茫然不知所謂。⁵¹ At this time in China, the fictional Jin Wenqing as well as the readers of *Niehai hua* were experiencing a tremendous conceptual change in their intellectual horizons, namely the new learning, or “*xuewen*” 學問, the imported Western natural and social sciences that were keenly needed for China to catch up with the West. In this light, the ability to master a foreign language and by implication the possible privileges from the new “*xuewen*” make Gong Xiaoqi, like the man in the park talking with a foreigner, seem to surpass Jin Wenqing, who was simply a traditional *zhuangyuan*.⁵²

Descriptions of the fictional Gong Xiaoqi’s foreign language ability may have their origins in the records of the real Gong Cheng’s contemporaries.⁵³ However, these records in fact do not explain how Gong Cheng became fluent in a foreign language and in the end give us nothing concrete on the matter. We must return to *Niehai hua*, where Shuyun 淑云, one of Jin Wenqing’s friends, tells him: “Before, Gong Xiaoqi did not know any English. Sir Thomas Wade, then the British ambassador, wanted to read a Chinese book and was in need of a translator. No one but Gong Xiaoqi dared to go. He recommended himself, and Thomas Wade trusted him very much” 他本來不識英語，因為那威妥瑪要讀中國漢書，請一人去講，無人敢去，孝琪挺身自薦，威曾甚為信用。⁵⁴ Although it is never explicitly explained in the novel how Gong Xiaoqi learns English, it becomes apparent that he did so quickly. This is not an isolated case in *Niehai hua*. Fu Caiyun, the prostitute-turned-ambassador’s wife, also magically masters European languages as she and Jin Wenqing journey to Europe. Incidentally, this enables her to challenge the traditional conception of “women’s space.”⁵⁵ Zeng Pu is one of the few late-Qing intellectuals who have a keen awareness of

⁵¹ *Niehai hua*, 10.

⁵² Both Hu Ying and Theodore Hutters discuss in great detail Wenqing’s incompetence in Western languages and learning, especially when compared with Fu Caiyun; see chapter I in Hu’s *Tales of Translation*, and chapter 7 in Hutters’ *Bringing the World Home*.

⁵³ On this event, there is a slight difference between the account in *Niehai hua* and Wang Tao’s record of Gong Cheng. Wang Tao informs us that when Gong Cheng was in Shanghai he became acquainted with a Cantonese named Zeng Jipu 曾寄圃, who recommended Gong Cheng to Thomas Wade; see Leung, “Gong Cheng shiji kaoshu,” p. 168.

⁵⁴ *Niehai hua*, 11.

⁵⁵ Hu, *Tales of Translation*, p. 24.

the importance of understanding foreign languages. Not only did he advocate for it, but he also studied French at the Tongwen guan 同文館 (Academy of Foreign Languages) for years. After founding Xiaoshuolin in 1907, he translated works of Victor Hugo, Emile Zola, and Gustave Flaubert, and published them in the journal. As a student of a foreign language and a translator himself, Zeng Pu's description of how seemingly effortlessly Gong Xiaoqi learns English is certainly not because of his ignorance in this area. Portraying Gong Xiaoqi in this way is explained more fully when we examine another linguistic capacity of Gong, as well as Zeng Pu's own anxieties over linguistic skill and modernity.

As the narrative continues, readers discover that English is not the only "foreign" language that Gong Xiaoqi is able to speak. According to Chu Ailin, Gong Xiaoqi is good at flirting with prostitutes in the Suzhou dialect and speaks Mongolian when practicing horse-riding and archery with non-Han people in the capital.⁵⁶ Gong Xiaoqi now begins to strike the readers as someone capable of fashioning himself into multiple and distinct identities. First of all, his status as a qualified traditional literatus is granted through family background and is further validated through his relationships with courtesans. In Chinese history, especially after the late Ming, patronizing courtesans almost became a preferred, if not required, characteristic of a renowned literatus. Similarly, Gong Xiaoqi's affiliation with the courtesans partially certifies his literati identity. The description of Chu Ailing, his concubine, as a high culture courtesan provides a good example of this point. The fact that she is well acquainted with Jin Wenqing and his other literati friends, and that she is able to amaze them with the antiques she acquires from Gong Xiaoqi as parting gifts, further indicates Gong Xiaoqi's membership in the literati community. Besides the traditional quality of *wen* 文 (culture), Gong Xiaoqi also demonstrates his *wu* 武 (martial) identity. By acting like a "hu'er" 胡兒 (young barbarian, a term usually referring to the non-Chinese who lived north of the Great Wall), Gong Xiaoqi breaks away from the stereotypical image of the effeminate Han elite. In addition to these two aspects, as discussed earlier, he is also represented as someone who has promptly realized the importance of foreign languages, was able to effectively communicate, and gained respect thereby from Westerners. Putting aside the exaggeration about his swift mastery of foreign languages, the fact that he has the qualities of both *wen* and *wu*, and a heightened modern consciousness, presents a sharp

⁵⁶ *Niehai hua*, 18. Also see Wang, "Gong Jiang liangjun yishi," p. 94.

contrast to those narrow-minded literati whom Zeng Pu sometimes describes with a subtle satirical tone in *Niehai hua*.⁵⁷

As a representative of a generation of intellectuals shaped by that transitional era, Zeng Pu himself possessed “an unusual mixture of the old literati and a new, yet unformed kind of modern intellectual.”⁵⁸ Reasonably well trained in classical education, Zeng Pu achieved moderate success in the civil service examination (a second-degree holder, or *juren* 舉人). At the same time, he also showed a surprising interest in foreign (especially French) literature and industrial entrepreneurship. This acute sense of being “caught-in-between” due to the unique socio-political constitution of his time can probably account for the ambiguity of Gong Xiaoqi’s identity in *Niehai hua*.⁵⁹ However, in straddling different cultures, Gong Xiaoqi’s uncanny behavior and multiple identities becomes poorly understood by most of his contemporaries. Consequently, he became a social outcast from literati circles and was labeled a “*guaiwu*” 怪物 (weird creature), which clearly reveals the contemporary anxiety of not fitting into an existing category.

Other than his fluid identity, Gong Xiaoqi’s “*guaiwu*” character is further demonstrated in his most notorious attribute – “*buxiao*” (being unfilial). Interestingly, in order to discuss Gong Xiaoqi’s “*xiao*” in the Lilac Affair, Zeng Pu has to start with his “*buxiao*” conduct. In *Niehai hua*, one night before Chu Ailin is sent out, she is shocked to find Gong Xiaoqi altering his father’s work with a red brush and beating a tablet (supposedly the repository of the soul of his father) with a short, thick rod. To answer her question of how a son could be so disrespectful to his father, Gong Xiaoqi says that although there are admirers everywhere “praising the fragrance of his farts” 捧着他的熱屁當香,⁶⁰ he does not think his father deserves the fame. Now since he is arranging his father’s works for publication, he wants to modify his writings so that those works will not leave too many errors for later generations. This description of Gong Xiaoqi also has its origin in the historical figure Gong Cheng. However, just like the interpretation of the lilac poetry

⁵⁷ Zeng Pu’s note on the versatility of Gong Cheng is accurately captured by McAleavy, who explains why Thomas Wade chose Gong Cheng as his secretary: “there was nobody in Shanghai more suitable for such a position than Kung Ch’eng, who in addition to Chinese scholarship has the rare qualification of being a master of the Manchu language”; McAleavy, *Dream of Tartary*, p. 26.

⁵⁸ Hu, *Tales of Translation*, p. 23

⁵⁹ As Barmé, “Gong Xiaogong” argues (see n. 15, above, for web citation), Gong Cheng’s personality and history “fit in neatly with Zeng Pu’s authorial motives in discussing thwarted Han aspirations and the quirky personalities of nineteenth-century Shanghai.”

⁶⁰ *Niehai hua*, 19.

and Gong Zizhen's death, Gong Cheng's relationship with his father is yet another contested site where conflicting interpretations emerge. Some of his friends and contemporary scholars noted that Gong Cheng disagreed with his father about matters of scholarship and once did alter his father's works.⁶¹ However, others such as Qian Jibo, who argued on the basis of his reading of Gong Zizhen's poetry, insisted that it is impossible that they would have disagreed much on interpretations of classical texts.⁶²

Similar to Su Xuelin's defense of Gu Taiqing, this type of defense based on arbitrary interpretations, probably only confirms how unacceptable it is for a son to make changes to his father's writings in traditional Chinese society, let alone beat his father's ancestral tablet. Gong Xiaoqi's disrespectful attitude toward his father's scholarship elicits relevant discussion from Jin Wenqing and his friends, which morphs into an evaluation of the intellectual schools of the Qing period. Characters in late Qing fiction often become the mouthpieces through which the author blatantly expresses opinions on the issue of the day. Contrary to Gong Xiaoqi's harsh criticism of his father, the character Cao Gongfang 曹公坊 talks about how crucial he thinks Gong Zizhen is to the orientation of Qing intellectual trends. Dividing these intellectual developments into three stages, Cao acknowledges the accomplishment of the Old Text School in terms of footnoting the Confucian classics but praises the New Text School (revived in the latter half of the eighteenth century as a reaction to the then excessive philological studies) for being able to generate original thoughts. Furthermore, Cao asserts that this trend toward independent thinking was simply the beginning of an era when the golden days of Chinese intellectual history, often called *baijia zhengming* 百家爭鳴 (the contending Hundred Schools of Thought), might recur. In this part of his novel, Zeng Pu lets Gong Xiaoqi satirize the "unrestrained" nature of Gong Zizhen's scholarship – a critique from within – yet lets a seemingly objective outsider counter-argue for the accomplishment of this master of the New Text School, with which Zeng Pu himself is often associated.

⁶¹ Che Xingjian 車行健 conducts a close study of this in "Gong Cheng qiren jiqi xueshu" 龔橙其人及其學術 (Gong Cheng and His Scholarship), in *Qingdai xueshu luncong* 清代學術論叢 (Collected Essays on Qing Scholarship) 3 (2003), p. 304. Deng Bangshu 鄧邦述, nephew of Gong Cheng's good friend Zhao Liewen 趙烈文, confirms that he hears from his cousin that Gong Cheng disagreed with his father on scholarship. Raogong 龔公, "Gong Cheng yu Yuanming Yuan" 龔橙與圓明園 (Gong Cheng and the Old Summer Palace), in *Ziyue congkan* 子曰叢刊 1 (1948), pp. 20–23, also claims that Gong Cheng considers his father's words illogical.

⁶² Qian, "Niehai hua kaoxin lu," pp. 437–39.

Despite Gong Xiaoqi's judgment of his father as a "celebrity who snatched some empty fame" 盜竊虛名的大人物, since "he is my father after all" 到底是我父親, Gong Xiaoqi decides to take revenge for Gong Zizhen's death. "During the Gengshen Incident, when I helped Sir Thomas Wade (1818-1895), what I really hoped to do was to overthrow the Qing dynasty of the Manchus and kill all of Mingshan's descendants. Even though I did not accomplish it as I wished, we did burn the Yuanming Yuan, which partially fulfilled my filial duties" 庚申之變, 我輔佐威妥瑪, 原想推翻滿清, 手刃明善的兒孫。雖然不能全達目的, 燒了圓明園, 也算盡了我做兒的一點責任。⁶³ As discussed above, Zeng Pu's appropriation of the contemporary miscellaneous records can be noted throughout the narrative of *Niehai hua*. However, to connect Gong Xiaoqi's behavior with the Lilac Affair, Zeng Pu has to be "selectively blind" to remarks that may have supported the alternative – Gong Cheng as an anti-Manchu figure. For instance, Wang Tao's diary and quite a few other late Qing jottings all note that around 1860 Gong Cheng worked as a negotiator (again, by using his linguistic ability) in helping the Qing government to "borrow" the British and French troops to suppress the Taiping Rebellion then threatening Shanghai.⁶⁴ As familiar as Zeng Pu is with these records concerning Gong Cheng, certain "unpleasant truths" are left to oblivion when simple hostility is all that is needed to indicate the character Gong Xiaoqi. Also, just as Zeng Pu chose to explain Gong Zizhen's death, what he eventually chose in order to account for Gong Xiaoqi's motive in the Gengshen Incident fits nicely with his overall tendency to filter politics and history through the personal – a choice evident in his rejection of labeling *Niehai hua* as a "political novel."

Now, in *Niehai hua*, as Gong Xiaoqi resorts to solving the problem by borrowing foreign forces, the very presence of the European imperialistic power transforms the Manchu-Han binary situation into a dynamic triangle. In this triangle the Han Chinese relationship with either Manchu or Western foreigner is defined by the link with the third party. When the domestic enemy – the Manchu ethnic – is the primary Other, Gong's leading the less threatening European troops into the capital becomes justified in terms of overthrowing the Manchu monarchy, and hence the label of "*paiman*" and "*geming*." Yet, as many scholars point out, at the turn of the twentieth century the time-hon-

⁶³ *Niehai hua*, 23. As for how Gong Cheng negotiated with both parties and the relevant records, see Leung, "Gong Cheng shiji kaoshu," pp. 163-66 and 175-79; Che, "Gong Cheng qiren jiqi xueshu," pp. 306-38.

⁶⁴ See Leung, "Gong Cheng shiji kaoshu," p. 175-78.

ored Confucian worldview of *tianxia* (the realm comprising all under heaven) has given way to a modern form of national consciousness.⁶⁵ Then, when European imperialism overtakes the Manchu and becomes the primary Other of the Han Chinese, the previously legitimate “borrowing” becomes an act of betrayal, hence the title of Gong Xiaoqi as “*hanjian*.” If Gong Xiaoqi’s own elusoriness earns him the “*guaiwu*” label, then his predicament in the Confucian world order is demonstrated in a distinctive *hao* 號 (pseudonym) that he adopts for himself. In *Niehai hua*, Chu Ailin says that Gong Xiaoqi denies all the labels that other people assign him and calls himself “*banlun*,” 半倫 (literally, half a relationship). As stated in antiquity by Mencius, the five cardinal relationships are the cornerstone of the Confucian ethical system. These are the harmonious relationships between father and son, emperor and subjects, husband and wife, elder and younger brother, and between friends.

In Gong Xiaoqi’s case, assisting the foreign troops against the existing regime suggests disrespect to the emperor. Beating Gong Zizhen’s spirit tablet and censoring his works demonstrates disrespect to the father. In addition, Gong Xiaoqi has not seen his wife for more than ten years and drives away his two sons when they come to visit, demonstrating alienation from his spouse and children. Also, it is said that he does not get along with his brother and his friends. Therefore, realizing that his behavior must be viewed as breaking away from almost all of the cardinal Confucian relationships, the only consolation Gong Xiaoqi could find is the company of Chu Ailing, which counts as *banlun* since she is merely a concubine, not his principal wife.⁶⁶ To say that Gong Xiaoqi is cut off from the relationship with his father is more of a self-mockery of their uncomfortable relationship since he claims that his actions in the Gengshen Incident are to avenge his father’s death. Yet this unique *hao* indeed reveals his very anxiety over his moral impasse in this dramatically changing period. On the one hand, he is able to fashion himself into multiple identities through his multi-lingual ability. On the other, it is exactly this dazzling mutability that causes him to fail on almost every single front in the Confucian society. He betrays his emperor, disrespects his father, and renounces

⁶⁵ See Joseph Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: The Problem of Intellectual Continuity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958).

⁶⁶ For a description on how Gong Cheng renounces these five relationships, see Yang Jing’an 楊靜齋, “Ji Gong Banlun” 記龔半倫 (Records about Gong Cheng), in Ji Guo’an 紀果庵, *Wanqing ji minguo renwu suotan* 晚清及民國人物瑣談 (Trivial Talk about Renowned Figures from the Late Qing to Republican Period) (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1972), pp. 55–56.

his wife, children, siblings and friends. Eventually he even has to dispatch Chu Ailin, his refined concubine, in a gesture which could be symbolically read as if he is partially giving up his traditional literati status. In this unprecedented identity crisis, the only redemption, as he repeatedly asserts, is to avenge his father's death – to resolve his double-betrayal in the public realm by reducing it to a private matter. Therefore, denying both the praise of him as a *revolutionary* and the condemnation of him as a *traitor*, Gong Xiaoqi only accepts the title of himself as a *filial son*.

The personal impasse that Gong Xiaoqi faces reflects the grand predicament that the time-honored Confucian worldview was experiencing at the turn of the twentieth century. In *Liji* 禮記 (Records of Rites), the relationship between a Confucian individual, on one hand, and his family, state and, ultimately, the cultural codes to which he should subscribe, on the other, should be as follows:

Their thoughts being sincere, their hearts were rectified. Their hearts being rectified, their persons were cultivated. Their persons being cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their States were rightly governed. Their States being rightly governed, the *tianxia* was made tranquil and happy 意誠而後心正,心正而後身修,身修而後家齊,家齊而後國治,國治而後天下平.⁶⁷

In this linear chain of Confucian moral codes, each realized stage leads to the next one. In essence, the codes are cumulative. Therefore, in this understanding, being filial to one's father (a crucial element in regulating a family) is in accordance with being loyal to the state as well as being faithful to the cultural belief that one is committed to. However, in Gong Xiaoqi's case, the linear movement in the Confucian ethical chain becomes problematic. Gong Xiaoqi is stuck at the "family" stage without being able to move on to "state" or "*tianxia*," because being filial to his father causes him to be disloyal to the state and to the cultural entity. This "antagonism" is not unprecedented. Putting filial piety above loyalty to the sovereign has a long history in the Confucian tradition, especially if the sovereignty is not a particularly moral one. In some of these cases, the son's unwavering dedication to filial piety could even be regarded as the first step toward the reestablishment of a beneficial social order. Also, in these situations resorting to *tianxia* is always an available redemption. However, what

⁶⁷ Trans. James Legge, *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning & The Doctrine of the Mean* (rpt. Mineola: Dover Publications, 1971), pp. 358–59. I have changed only Legge's rendering of "*tianxia*" as "the whole kingdom."

differentiates Gong Xiaoqi's case from the other ones is the unavailability of the last redemption – the effect that the dramatic changes of Chinese society caused on the intellectuals at that time. For this, we need to look deeper.

During the Ming-Qing transition, as a “barbarian” ethnic took over the sovereignty, many Han intellectuals refused to be subjects of the Qing court. Although they denied allegiance to the new dynasty, they kept faith in Confucian cultural cosmopolitanism. Scholars have observed a pervasive belief in “*cun dao*” 存道 (preserve the *way*) and “*cun tianxia*” 存天下 (preserve *tianxia*) among the intellectuals who experienced the collapse of the Ming empire. For these latter, the reign of a certain emperor could come to an end, and sovereignty could be taken over by alien ethnics, but as long as the *dao* is preserved, the Confucian values system was never doubted.⁶⁸ In fact, it is worth noting that the Manchu rulers apparently understood the significance of preserving the *dao*. It was exactly by claiming that they themselves were the true heir of the *dao* which had gone lost in the Ming regime that they tried to establish legitimacy and win the allegiance of the Han elites.

At this time, when the stage of “state,” in the aforementioned Confucian ethical chain, became problematic, loyalty to *tianxia* took precedence over loyalty to a particular state.⁶⁹ Compared to the situation in the mid-seventeenth century, the allegiance to the Manchu court again became an issue. However, unlike the late-Ming situation, this time Confucian cultural cosmopolitanism also proved to be incompetent, as confidence in *tianxia* gave way to the modern consciousness of “nation.” If, upon the fall of the Ming, belief in *tianxia* served as a consolation for the elite, then, as we can see in Gong Xiaoqi's case, such a refuge failed in the late-Qing period. When the stages that were supposed to be in accordance with each other now have become overtly antagonistic, Gong Xiaoqi has nowhere to go and is stuck at the stage

⁶⁸ For an excellent discussion of the intellectual mentalité after the fall of the Ming, see Zhao Yuan 趙園, *Mingqing zhiji shidafu yanjiu* 明清之際士大夫研究 (Study of the Literati during the Ming-Qing Transition) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1999).

⁶⁹ In this sense it is no wonder that Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610–1695), the renowned Ming historian who lived into the Qing regime, named his work “waiting for the dawn” (*Mingyi daifang lu* 明夷待訪錄). “*Mingyi*” is the thirty-sixth hexagram in the *Yijing* 易經 (Book of Changes); it contains the trigram associated with the sun situated underneath that for earth; “*daifang*” (waiting for a visit) suggests the interval required in order to be valued by later generations: hence, the sun will rise again. As a representative of literati “*yimin*” 遺民 (remnant subjects) who lived through the Ming-Qing transition, Huang's title clearly indicates his resistance to serve the Manchu court (i.e., the stage of “state” in the chain) and his hope for a revival of the Confucian “*tianxia*” political order. See William Theodore De Bary, trans., *Waiting for the Dawn: A Plan for the Prince: A Study and Translation of Huang Tsung-hsi's Ming-i tai-fang lu* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1993).

of “family.” If Zeng Pu’s rewriting of the father’s affair reflects the rise of open anti-Manchu nationalism at the turn of the twentieth century, then the arbitrary connection he made between the father’s affair and the son’s vendetta further explores the predicament that Chinese literati were experiencing at that time. In *Niehai hua*, Gong Xiaoqi’s repeated self-assertion as a “filial son” reveals nothing but the bankruptcy of the Confucian ethical system at this particular historical juncture.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As Zeng Pu repeatedly states, it is not the grand story but rather the minor events – events that may otherwise be routinely melded into the backdrop of the story – that were truly appealing to him. Yet, perhaps not all anecdotes discussed in *Niehai hua* are indeed as small as Zeng Pu’s self-deprecating claim suggests. While the narration of the Lilac Affair spans only several pages of text in *Niehai hua*, it provides an incredibly rich venue for a deeper critical discourse on topics such as ethnicity, nationalistic consciousness, gender relations, and Confucian ideology in China in the early-twentieth century. Zeng’s fictional rewrite of the Lilac Affair in *Niehai hua* involves a private romance that goes inexplicably public, as well as a domestic tension between a father and the son that eventually plays out on the national level. This study of Zeng Pu’s portrayal of the Lilac Affair is not aiming at discovering any historical truth through *Niehai hua*, but rather to examine how Zeng Pu creatively draws on various gossipy strands and recasts the affair to fit a particular early-twentieth-century agenda. The depiction of Gong Zizhen’s love affair demonstrates where a conventional interpretive frame of such a relationship falls short and how Gong Xiaoqi’s irresolvable paradox having to do with a chosen self-identity exposes the predicament of a broader value system. Putting these two together, the arbitrary connection between the son’s highly controversial heroic/depicable behavior and the father’s love affair exemplifies an intriguing dynamic between the personal and the historical as well as the climate of literate opinion toward it in the turbulent late-Qing era.

Interestingly, just as the images of Gong Zizhen and Gong Cheng were used by Zeng Pu in *Niehai hua*, they continued to serve as sites for the construction of national discourse after the founding of the People’s Republic of China. As shown in both the historical and fictional accounts, the life experiences of the father and the son depart significantly from people’s expectations during their lifetimes. Moreover, their images undergo a series of reconfigurations even long after their deaths.

As the grandson of the renowned evidential scholar Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (1735–1815), who significantly contributed to Qing empirical research, Gong Zizhen might have been able to reach such a similarly high level of achievement.⁷⁰ Yet, later he was greatly influenced by the New Text School and became what *Niehai hua* claimed was an iconoclastic figure who reoriented Qing intellectual history.⁷¹ His fame in the PRC received considerably high-profile support from Mao Zedong 毛澤東 (1893–1976). In 1945 Mao Zedong appropriated two lines from one of Gong Zizhen's poems ("I urge the Lord of Heaven to shake us up again and grant us human talent not bound to a single kind" 我勸天公重抖擻, 不拘一格降人才) during a nation-wide Communist Party convention to express his longing for a new generation of party elites.⁷² Since then, this late Qing poet has been unearthed from his tomb, honored as "aiguo shiren" 愛國詩人 (patriotic poet) and memorialized in high school textbooks. The "guo" in this title has undergone yet another redefinition. Celebrating the anti-imperialist aspect of Gong Zizhen, communist historiography in the PRC has subtly expanded the connotation of *guo* to be "zhonghua minzu" 中華民族 (the Chinese nationality), that is, the opposite of Western imperialism.

Contrary to the exaltation that his father has posthumously received, Gong Cheng's presence in literary/cinematic representations in the PRC has been negative. In the film *Huoshao Yuanming Yuan* 火燒圓明園 (The Burning of the Yuanming Yuan, 1983) that Chinese high school students in the 1990s watched as part of their patriotic education,⁷³

⁷⁰ At the age of twelve Gong Zizhen's grandfather Duan Yucai taught him *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字, the Han-era Chinese dictionary that was the first to offer a systematic etymology and concerning which Duan had established himself as a preeminent scholar. When Gong Zizhen was fourteen, he was undertaking an examination of bureaucratic titles in history. Two years after that, he began a study of the Qing-dynasty imperial manuscript collectanea, focusing on *Siku quanshu zongmu* 四庫全書總目 (Bibliography of the Complete Works of the Four Treasuries); see Fan, *Gong Zizhen nianpu kaolue*, p. 41.

⁷¹ For more information on the intellectual setting of the middle- and late-Qing periods, see chapter one of Hao Chang, *Chinese Intellectuals in Crisis* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987).

⁷² See Mao Zedong "Zai Zhongguo gongchandang diqi quanguo daibiao dahuishang de jielun" 在中國共產黨第七次全國代表大會上的結論 (Concluding Statement at the Seventh National Convention of the Chinese Communist Party), in *Mao Zedong wenji* 毛澤東文集 (Collected Works of Mao Zedong) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1996) 3, p. 416. The cited poem is no. 125 in Gong's "Jihai zashi" 己亥雜詩 (Poems Written in the *Jihai* Year [1939]); *Quanji*, p. 521. Translation is that of Stephen Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), p. 1147.

⁷³ The film was directed by Hong Kong director Han Hsiang Li 李翰祥 and co-produced by China Film Co-Production Corporation (mainland China's state-run film production corporation) and New Kwun Lun Film Production Co. Ltd. (Hong Kong). It won the "Huabiao Film Award Special Award" 華表獎特別獎 in 1983, a film award sanctioned by the PRC government.

Gong Cheng is represented as a man with a pigtail suppressing the local Chinese resistance force and leading the invading troops into the magnificent garden. Compared with the ambiguity of his identity in *Niehai hua*, Gong Cheng has only one label in this film – a notorious traitor. In PRC historiography, the China-West conflict is presented as the major one facing China for the past hundred years. Further, under the discourse of a unified “*zhonghua minzu*,” the Manchu-Han domestic conflict is clearly downplayed. Therefore, in this new historical context, both the “filial son” and “revolutionary” are erased, and “traitor” becomes the sole label for Gong Cheng.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- Niehai hua* Zeng Pu 曾樸, *Niehai hua* 孽海花
Quanji Wang Peizheng 王佩諍, comp., *Gong Zizhen quanji* 龔自珍全集
Ziliao Wei Shaochang 魏紹昌, ed., *Niehai hua ziliao* 孽海花資料