

Susan MANN and Yu-Yin CHENG (eds.), *Under Confucian Eyes: Writings on Gender in Chinese History*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2001. xiii + 310 pp. 16 Contributions, 19 Ill., Glossaries and References. ISBN 0-620-22276-8 (pb)

To introduce this long-awaited source book for Chinese women's history in the West, the editors make it clear that the title has been chosen to underline the discrepancy between Confucian norms and women's real experiences. It is an effort, rightly and successfully, to divert from conventional accounts of Chinese women as "victims" in Western scholarship and to give women back their many faces as reflected in a variety of topics and genres, particularly flourishing when print culture matured in late imperial China. The anthology contains eighteen pieces of original documents, all translated into English in a complete format for the first time. Except for two from the Tang and the period immediately following and three from the Song-Yuan era, the other fifteen texts come from the late imperial period. Although bundled together under a deliberately specific title, the relation to the Confucian tradition is more apparent in some texts than in others.

In her preface to the translation of the *Book of Filial Piety for Women*, Patricia Ebrey starts out by admitting that Confucian educational texts for girls are mostly predictable. Her tone is somewhat apologetic, perhaps due to the announced agenda of this collection. To show the historical interest of her translation, however, Ebrey compares this instructive tract with the original men-oriented *Book of Filial Piety* and demonstrates how the eighth-century author, Miss Zheng, understood the different moral roles women and men should play. Ebrey's choice is the only Confucian didactic text written by a woman in this compilation and the only one completed before the fall of the Tang dynasty. Had it been placed in the first chapter, it would have served wonderfully as a point of departure for a discussion of the editors' overall view on the state of the field. Instead, it is arranged as the third chapter, probably because of the date of its earliest extant version, making this somewhat chronologically ordered volume a bit disorienting. Notwithstanding, the way Ebrey presents this Confucian treatise sheds light on the familial context of the two religious texts that come before hers in the volume.

Du Guangting's stories of the female immortals, written in the tenth-century, have long provided a significant avenue for our

understanding of Tang religious women. His biography of the female Daoist saint, Wang Fengxian, translated here by Suzanne Cahill, is one of the most detailed, and yet representative, of his records. Like her male counterparts, Wang refrained from marriage, sought spiritual growth, and drew followers to her teaching. Unlike men engaged in Daoist pursuits, however, throughout her life Wang on the one hand defended her beliefs against Confucian expectations for women, while on the other hand she tried to convince her audience—as did Du Guangting—that she actually upheld the most primary Confucian values of filial piety through her Daoist practices.

Filial piety was almost always the issue thrust upon women in religious quests and women needed a role model as inspiration and as hope. The story of Princess Miaoshan, an incarnation of the Buddhist bodhisattva Guanyin, provided just such relief. Chün-fang Yü translates the earliest version of this legend, a stele inscription from the turn of the twelfth century, to show how a foreign deity could acquire tremendous support among Chinese people through exemplifying the alternative Buddhist way of a daughter's filial piety in a patriarchal family.

Being a filial daughter was a life-long enterprise. Chen Liang's funeral tablets, translated by Beverly Bossler, described how his married sister had supported her natal household during a family crisis. The intimate admiration shown by this twelfth-century scholar to his kinswomen reveals both family values and women's practices in upholding them. The case is different with Yang Jisheng's wife, who, despite Yang's vigorous dissuasion, committed suicide after his execution. Yang's final instructions to his wife and sons, also translated by Bossler, disclose the fierce burden a sixteenth-century widow would have to carry if she did not follow her deceased husband to the netherworld. Considering the Confucian ethics that required a woman, once married, to identify with her husband's family and to abide by his words, this choice of texts provides good examples of men's perceptions and women's convictions in non-conventional contexts.

Men praised women of different virtues, but most often as faithful wives and sacrificing mothers. Such was the tradition in most of the "biographies of exemplary women," but not in Zhang Xuecheng's works. Zhang's biographies, whether written for family members or for official records, unveiled the wisdom and intelligence of eighteenth-century women while describing their moral strength. He focused on the details of daily life and the physical condition his subjects

had endured. In her introduction and translation, Susan Mann particularly brings the readers' attention to Zhang's portrayal of the women's spouses, which illuminates his praise for his subjects through comparison with the other sex.

Luo Rufang is different: he focused on women's roles more as mothers than as wives. Yu-ying Cheng, who translates Luo's epitaphs of women, discovers that this sixteenth-century philosopher, unusual enough in his celebration of women's pursuit of religious interests, set out a mission to promote *ci* 慈, maternal love, for the first time as a central Confucian virtue. Men's storytelling of women depicted no less the experience of the latter than the imagination of the former. Tea-picking poems from the Tang to the end of imperial China, written mostly by men and translated here by Weijing Lu, reveal that the images of the woman laborer in these literary compositions could range from a living example of natural harmony to the symbol of social injustice.

For Confucian writers, women served as a mirror to reflect their views of men in particular and the society in general. For Han Chinese observers, gender relations worked as a measure in understanding and evaluating other cultures. Li Jing, a Han Chinese who served under Mongol rule, traveled to Yunnan in the early fourteenth century. In his report of the Southwest, translated by Jacqueline M. Armijo-Hussein, the different sex and marriage customs of various "barbarians" are described to determine their level of civilization and their affiliation to the Chinese ways. More than five hundred years later, a Qing official, Ding Shaoyi, visited Taiwan twice and compiled his *Brief Record of the Eastern Ocean*. A short piece of the text is translated by Emma Jinhua Teng, in which uxorial marriage and valuing women over men are depicted as only a few among the "savage customs" that Ding considers correctable as part of the Confucian mission of kingly governance.

It would have been interesting to know Ding Shaoyi's reaction to the other two texts included in this volume. Judith Zeitlin chooses two stories from Pu Songling's *Liaozhai zhiyi*, the famous seventeenth-century collection of ghost stories, that characterize Pu's belief in men's love and passion as the redemptive power for their girlfriends from the other world. Mark C. Elliott translates a piece of the eighteenth-century comic performance book—the bilingual youth book of "Eating Crabs," in which an ignorant Manchu husband and his annoyed Han wife struggle to bite the crab he bought from the market until their stylish aunt comes over to instruct them in

the proper way of consumption. Both disclose nothing Confucian at first glimpse, and yet to a certain extent convey the stereotypes of men and women in literary composition.

But all these were Chinese men's accounts and one cannot but wonder what the "barbarians" or the fox-ghosts would have written if they had gotten the chance. Fortunately, some Chinese women did speak out and the wonderful thing about this collection is that it includes many women's writings, thereby giving a glimpse of their side of the stories. In brief, some women may have seen themselves unsuitable for marriage because it dragged down their spiritual lives and literary accomplishments, while others seem to have felt confident as mothers and expressed their authority with no hesitation.

Grace Fong's translation of Ji Xian's autobiography shows this seventeenth-century devout Buddhist lamenting her predicament first in a fragile body because of her past karma, and second among the household responsibilities ensuing from her husband's prodigality. The nineteenth-century playwright Wu Zao, on the other hand, referred to a fourth-century woman poet as her alter ego and grieved in her long soliloquy, translated by Sophie Volpp, over the fact that her talent was not duly recognized. As a mother, however, Ji Xian's contemporary Gu Ruopu appears to have been extremely authoritative and practical, not a slice less even in Dorothy Ko's English version, in making decisions for her sons and in instructing her daughters-in-law. Both Ji and Gu came down to history for their poetry—the most accessible venue for women to express their talent in traditional China and a subject extensively explored by recent research. It is commendable that scholars chose their prose compositions for this anthology, so that the reader can know more about the family lives they carried not only as poets, but also as women.

Women poets flourished in late imperial China, a fact not acknowledged until recent decades. The conventional periodization of Chinese literature overlooks the gender factor and scholars who were interested in women writers searched to no avail for novelists among Ming-Qing documents. Fortunately the boundary is finally crossed and research has been done in such a remarkable way that we now read not only women's poems but also their letters discussing and commenting on each other's work. Yu-ying Cheng's translation of these letters completes the task, and Kathryn Lowry's rendering of the epistolary guides gives us a full picture of this letter-writing

culture in the seventeenth century. Even more touching are the works of the seventeenth-century Ming loyalist Wang Duanshu, translated by Ellen Widmer, which contain not only her own poems, but also her letters to other women poets and her anthology of poetry composed by women.

There are many valuable features in this volume. The documents selected, presented in reliable, clear translations, come from a variety of genres and cover all of women's family roles as well as their extra-kinship activities. The book provides a guide for both students and teachers at the beginning and recommends further readings at the end. Before each piece the translator expresses her or his scholarly interest and places the related text into historical as well as historiographical contexts. Many of the contributors also take pains to discuss their concerns and decisions in terms of style and wording in translation. The collection not only presents a significant resource to instructors of Chinese history but also represents some of the best Western scholarship to date on Chinese women's history. If we can see a sequel that includes more non-Confucian pre-Tang texts on gender issues in the near future, this overview of writings on gender in pre-modern China will be complete.

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Lenny HU (translated by, in collaboration with R.W.L. GUISO),
LING Mengchu 凌濛初, 1580-1644, *In the Inner Quarters: Erotic Stories from Ling Mengchu's Two Slaps*. Vancouver, Arsenal Pulp Press, 2003. 256 pp. Ill., Notes, Selected Bibliography, Glossary. ISBN 1-55152-134-2 (pb)

Lenny Hu propose la première traduction en anglais de quatre chapitres (6, 26, 32 et 34) du premier volume du *Chuke Pai'an jingqi* 初刻拍案驚奇 (Frapper sur la table de surprise émerveillée, 1628), et d'un chapitre (34) du second volume, le *Erke* 二刻 *Pai'an jingqi* (1633). Il peut se targuer de quelque expérience des érotiques chinois, puisqu'il a publié chez le même éditeur, en 2001, une traduction du *Xiuta yeshi* 綉榻野史 (*The Embroidered Couch*), roman attribué à Lü Tiancheng 呂天成 (ca. 1580-1620). Le public français en avait pu apprécier les obscénités dès 1997 grâce au fruit de la collaboration