

# In and Out: Love's Marketplace in Late Qing Fiction

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## Abstract

The aim of the present paper is first of all to analyze the complex and often contradictory ways in which love becomes a commodity in novels of the late Qing period. Secondly, it looks at how, in these sources, the characters' private pursuit of love and emotional fulfillment gets entangled with their quest for modernity at a personal as well as at a national level. In the fictional production of the late Qing period, the brothel, the space of fiction par excellence in the history of traditional Chinese erotic imagery, provides one of the best arenas to study the conflicts between private, public, hidden and sentiment. The qinglou, at the turn of the last century, is no longer a romantic, secluded heaven for few chosen ones, and is instead represented as the piaojie, a modern marketplace, marked by competition, reproducibility, and multiplicity. Here gender and class hierarchies, as well as cultural and national identities, come undone in this process of radical change. Courtesans looking like prostitutes, men of letters dressed as Western businessmen, famous opera actors, even "respectable" women, meet in the piaojie to sell, purchase, consume, and dispose of romance, a commodity that is

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only productive as long as it does not engender long-term attachment. In fact, as these works show, love can even be deadly if it stops being a public (or semi-public) monetary exchange and becomes a private exchange of feelings. By looking at sources such as *Jiuweigui* and *Haishanghua*, we shall see how late Qing authors used this “extended” brothel and its inhabitants, the most visible category of fictional heroes and heroines, to depict the tormented horizons of the public and private personae of Chinese men and women at the turn of the last century.

Many late Qing *xiaoshuo* 小說 dealing with love, sex, and prostitution are set in Shanghai.<sup>1</sup> By the late nineteenth century this city, due to historical and economic reasons, had become the Mecca of China’s leisure culture, as it were, and attracted all kinds of profligates and sex-workers.<sup>2</sup> Thus it is no surprise that fictional sources staged most of love-stories

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1 The present essay is based on the research I conducted at Academia Sinica on prostitution, fashion, identity and modernity in late Qing fiction, thanks to a post-doctoral position at the Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy, during the year 2001, as well as on my dissertation, “Lost Bodies: Images and Representations of Prostitution in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction,” University of California at Berkeley, 1999, and on my two articles “Clothes Matter: Fashioning Modernity in Late Qing Novels,” in *Fashion Theory*, volume 5, issue 2, 2001; “But I Never Learned To Waltz: The “Real” and Imagined Education of a Courtesan in the Late Qing,” in *Nan Nü*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill Academic Publishers, spring 1999). Due to space constraints, I have limited references to the primary sources I rely on. For a complete list of the novels employed, as well as for more detailed analysis of the different themes and contents presented here, see the above-mentioned works, especially chapters 1, 2 and 3 of “Lost Bodies.” My thanks go to the anonymous reviewer for his/her insightful comments and feedback.

2 Cheng, S. H. L., “Flowers of Shanghai” and the Late Ch’ing Courtesan Novel, Ph. D. dissertation, Harvard, 1980; Hershatter, G., *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth Century Shanghai* (University of California Press, 1997); Wakeman, F. E., *Policing Shanghai, 1927-1937* (University of California Press, 1995); Wakeman, F. E., and Wen-hsin Yeh, eds., *Shanghai Sojourners*, (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1992). See also Alexander Des Forges’ groundbreaking work on the Shanghai novel, “Street Talk and Alley Stories: Tangled Narratives of Shanghai from ‘Lives of Shanghai Flowers’ (1892) to ‘Midnight’ (1933)”, Ph. D., Princeton University,

and trysts on the Bund, and envisioned Shanghai as an eroticized and liminal space.<sup>3</sup> In order to understand this spatial assignment and the new erotic and romantic geographies of late Qing fiction, we have to briefly delineate the spaces assigned to romance within traditional Chinese literature, and its relationship to those sites occupied by courtesans and prostitutes.<sup>4</sup>

The home, the family and the people who occupied the family house in other words, those places which we would define as 'private' in modern parlance, were not meant to be spaces in which one gave and/or receive love and passion. Filial piety and respect were supposed to be the norms regulating the spatial and emotional world of wives and husbands, parents and children. Wives were chosen by parents, husbands were imposed on young women. Election and selection of sexual and romantic partners were a privilege limited to men of the upper classes who had the economic and social power to fulfill their needs.

Love stories of course blossomed in the pages of Chinese stories between beautiful maidens and young scholars, usually to end in fertile matrimony and blissful old age. But even these fictional representations were often marginal and temporary, spatially, chronologically, and emotionally. Men and women were restricted in the choice of time and places where they could enact feelings and emotions towards the oppo-

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1998, and "Opium/Leisure/Shanghai: Urban Economies of Consumption," in Timothy Brook, and Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, eds., *Opium Regimes. China, Britain and Japan, 1839-1952* (Berkeley: University of California Press), pp. 167-185.

3 It is true that Shanghai was also seen as a site where love was absent. But the focus of this present investigation is the novels and stories that depict various types of love that existed and circulated in fictional Shanghai that on those that lament its lack. About the eroticization of Shanghai, see also Zhang, Yingjin, *The City in Modern Chinese Literature & Film: Configurations of Space, Time, and Gender* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1996) especially, pp. 180-181.

4 From here onward, I will use interchangeably "courtesan" and "prostitute," as well as the term 妓, which, by late Qing times had come to include both meanings.

site sex not aimed at reproducing the family line. Home was not the place for romantic love: though of course, in spite of or because of this, the beautiful maiden pining for love in her boudoir was an icon of intense erotic desire, precisely because it transformed the inside in a space of transgression. The marginality of the sites where desire was envisioned and fulfilled ensured that it would be short-lived and thus its disruptive force less devastating. The disastrous consequences of permanently bringing passion to one's own household are epitomized, for example, in *Jinpingmei* 金瓶梅, and are usually envisioned as part of larger process of decay of national mores.<sup>5</sup> Desire and love, in other words, could not and should be "domesticated." Sex could, but it was a hard job to master the fine art of polygamous harmony, as Keith McMahan has shown.<sup>6</sup>

Passion was consumed at the borders of socially acceptable spaces, where established modes of control and policing weakened. Temples, brothels, entertainment quarters, cemeteries, strange cities, and/or various open, public and semi-public areas, that would be accessible only in certain times of the year, were ideal sites. The brothel worked especially well, because it was contained, its spatial boundaries well defined. Thus, while it did serve an important function in providing the local for passion, it simultaneously contained its subversive potential almost hermetically.

Furthermore, the season of love was meant to be brief and fleeting. The lakeside in spring at the time of a temple fair, for example, is a typical "chronotope" for the traditional Chinese romance.<sup>7</sup> Other ex-

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5 Lanling xiaoxiao sheng 蘭陵笑笑生, *Jinpingmei* 金瓶梅 (Taipei: Heluo tushu chubanshe, 1980).

6 McMahan, K., *Misers, Shrews and Polygamists: Sexuality and Male-Female Relations in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

7 Bakhtin, M., "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 84. For Shanghai as a chronotope, that is time and space made visible artistically and narrative-wise, in late Qing and modern Shanghai novels, see Alexander Des Forges, "Street Talk and Alley Stories," p. 142.

amples would be the spring road-trip of the young scholar on his way to the capital for the civil service exams held every three years, or the entertainment quarters of the capital before and after the exams. The "action" was staged at a time in which the young scholar's identity was highly unstable, not just emotionally but also socially. As he traveled to the capital, unmarried, rich in ambitions and usually with an empty purse, he was on his way to become a man and to make a name for himself and for his family. His naivete and his lack of human, romantic and sexual experience made him the perfect fictional character of a tale of emotional and erotic initiation. On the road, he was vulnerable to all sorts of seductions and dangers. Likewise, as an inexperienced sojourner in the capital, he was the perfect "victim" of romantic intrigues.

By the same token, the female romantic protagonists who inhabited these liminal places were characterized by their unstable social and sexual identities: they were virgins ready for motherhood, as well as courtesans, foxes, ghosts, disembodied souls.<sup>8</sup> These bewitching sexual and erotic partners were dangerous because they blurred the boundaries between social classes, fantasy and reality, different worlds and realms of existence. By assigning romance a feminine and supernatural character, the need to convey a warning often clashed with the desire for exoticism and wish fulfillment. But the election of the courtesan as the romantic heroine par excellence was not a late imperial phenomenon. Ever since the Tang dynasty and up until the Qing dynasty, the fictional brothel had offered the privacy and the physical, social and emotional

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8 See Levy, A., "Le renard, la morte et la courtisane dans la Chine classique," in *Etudes Mongoles* 15 (1984), pp. 111-139. In this article, Levy aims to show, in a very intriguing but not completely convincing manner, that the images of the dead woman in love, the vixen and the courtesan belong to the same paradigm and are but three different ways of imagining an alternative perceived as illusory to the traditional system of matrimonial alliance.

space necessary to some of the famous love affairs in literature, namely those between literati and courtesans. (It is important to stress here that often in this type of liaisons, once the man's social identity became clearer and less unstable, he would usually abandon his courtesan lover for better match, usually a young woman of respectable family. Thus while for the male character instability of social identity was temporary, for the female protagonist social mobility was still problematic, even in fiction).

Thus the courtesan had traditionally been constructed as the man of letters' perfect match, as well as a vital part of traditional China's rhetoric of the beloved. In late imperial fictional sources, the courtesan was the wenren 文人's Julietta and he her Romeo.<sup>9</sup> Because of their artistic, intellectual and sentimental education, courtesans were represented as able to gain an equal standing with their male partners in emotional and intellectual terms. By late imperial times, the concept that the courtesan's life mirrored and echoed that of the wenren had become a fixed trope, and they both were represented as suffering the same fate.<sup>10</sup> Men of letters found in the ji a soul mate, and wrote a good deal over their common plight: both were set on display and yet so little of their real souls was laid bare or looked at, that the emotional need for acceptance and recognition funneled the ideal of the zhiyin 知音 into a

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9 Owen, S., "Romance," 130, and "Conflicting Interpretations," 149, in Owen, S., *The End of the Chinese 'Middle Ages': Essays in Mid-Tang Literary Culture* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1996).

10 Scholars of different disciplines have pointed out that in many cultures exist similarities between the courtesan and the courtier. See Rosenthal, M. F., *The Honest Courtesan: Veronica Franco, Citizen and Writer in Sixteenth-century Venice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). It is important to keep in mind, however, that while European courtiers and courtesans competed with one another for the patronage of noblemen and politicians, the Chinese courtesan served the man of letters: thus between the caizi and the ji there was no competition to speak of.

veritable obsession. The *ji* and the man of letters were bound not only by romanticized ties but also by a very real “mutual admiration” economy, which tied them and their fortunes closely together.

Normally, a fictional courtesan “sleeps” her way to redemption, in the hope of finding the ideal mate who will rescue her. For her the brothel is epitomized by the *huokeng* 火坑, the fiery pit, a hellish residence where she often pays for sins she has committed in a previous life. Her behavior lives up to male expectations of the protagonists, the author, or the readers, who want her beauty enhanced by her sufferings, her body tainted by her fall. In this way, they can fictionalize themselves as the saviors, as the one and only *zhiyin*, whose soul can and will resonate with the one of the tattered beauty. There are endless examples of this pattern in most late imperial stories: the man is always portrayed as the savior who comes to the rescue of the frail, pitiful courtesan, fallen in the dust, her body lost. The *ji*'s goal, no matter what is done to her, is to find a *zhiyin* who will marry her and physically and socially elevate her to his level. It is true that already in Yuan plays the success rate of this kind of marriage is questioned by very world-savvy courtesans who do not believe in happy endings when it comes to marriages between the *ji* and her patrons. But Ming and Qing writers seemed oblivious to the absurdity of forcing women who had been trained to please men as entertainers and sex-workers to become good wives and mothers. They perpetuated the discourse of the poor girl from a good family as the helpless and reluctant victim of old crooked evil people. The rhetoric of the *zhiyin* in late imperial China applied to the scholar and courtesan relationship, when positive, almost invariably led to marriage.<sup>11</sup>

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11 At times the savior fails to perform his feat of rescue, like it is the case in Du Shiniang's story, but in those cases, there is enough space for the (male) reader to step in and fill the savior's shoes, as it were. Du Shiniang is the heroine of the late Ming story “Du Shiniang nu chen baibaoxiang 杜十娘怒沉百寶箱” in Feng Menglong 馮夢龍, *Jingshi tongyan* 警世

Another factor that may help explain the birth and the success of the lore that exalted the bond between the *ji* and the man of letters was that, as mentioned above in real life most marriages were arranged: at least for upper and middle class men, the process of what could be described as “romantic courtship” was often displaced onto the fictional courtesan-patron relationship. This of course brought as a consequence the necessity to hide the economic nature of the intercourse between literati and the *ji* to compensate the male desire for romantic conquest, and to assuage the male anxiety of being able to conquer a woman by himself, without his family’s intervention. This anxiety, combined with a strong component of narcissism, could be the source of a very interesting aspect of the fictional representations of the dynamic existing between the courtesan and the scholar. In sum, the rhetoric of the *zhiyin*, through centuries of literary tradition, had, by the nineteenth century, become an integral part of the literary representations of the bond between the *wenren* and the *ji*.<sup>12</sup>

This bond is deeply shaken in late Qing fiction. Up until mid-nineteenth century vernacular literature, the *ji* who were represented by the authors were almost always courtesans, who worked in high-class establishments and were beautiful and talented. Courtesans all played an identical role, that of the fallen beauty, often with heroic and self-effacing traits. Very few lower-class prostitutes appear in the pages of vernacular fiction, and often the negative characteristics of sexual and economic greed were assigned to them. Generally speaking the mainstream fictional accounts of courtesans and prostitutes in late imperial China tend to present a strikingly idealized portrait of these women’s lives or

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通言 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1989), p. 32.

12 There is, of course, the dark version of this story, where the *ji* is presented as a sexual vampire. But this plot, though quite established, in the end is less recurrent than the one under study here, especially before the second half of the nineteenth century.

to romanticize their difficulties. In late nineteenth century fiction this homogenous picture disintegrates and becomes multi-layered, fragmented, at times contradictory. And though it is true that most late Qing novels are still focused on the most famous *ji* of upper-class establishments, it is also true that *yeji* 野妓 and other lower-class prostitutes can become full-fledged protagonists.<sup>13</sup> *Qinglou meng* 青樓夢 is one of the few novels written in the nineteenth-century which holds on, stubbornly and nostalgically, to the idealized bond between the scholar and the courtesan: the male hero is surrounded by thirty-six beautiful courtesans, totally ecstatic about being nothing but his beautiful, self-effacing, self-sacrificing *zhiyin*. But these exceptions were far and few.

The courtesan changes and starts serving herself and her own desires. No longer an emblem of romantic and at times tragic love, or better yet, no longer just that, she reveals a new and troubling set of personalities. Aside from an increased emotional and economic agency, the speed, time and the spaces (meaning here the physical horizons) in which the *ji* socializes and is socialized are also important categories of analysis to understand what happens to love in these novels. Increasing acceleration is one of the main characteristics of the *ji*, who appears to live by the motto “live-fast-die-young.” Very likely this is due to the fact that the time of the *ji* is limited. She is constantly decaying, since by using her capital, i.e. her body, to advance in society and to produce

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13 See, for example, *Chousi zhuren* 抽絲主人, *Huitu Haishang mingji si da jingang qishu* 繪圖海上名妓四大金剛奇書, reprint of 1898, in *Shinmatsu shosetsu*, 15 (1992), 17 (1994), 18 (1995); *Han Ziyun* 韓子雲, *Haishanghua* 海上花 (Taipei: Huanggua zazhishe, 1983); *Hanshang mengren* 邗上夢人, *Fengyue meng* 風月夢 (Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 1989); *Li Boyuan* 李伯元, *Haitian hongxueji* 海天鴻雪記; *Luyixuan zhuren* 綠意軒主人, *Hualiu shenqing zhuan* 花柳深情傳 (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 1992); *Sun Jiazhen* 孫家振, *Haishang fanhuameng* 海上繁華夢 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji chubanshe, 1991); *Zhang Chunfan* 張春帆, *Jiuweigui* 九尾龜 (Beijing: Renmin Zhongguo chubanshe, 1993).

money, she also depletes it and cannot regenerate herself. In a way, the narrative indicates that “female sexuality is itself inevitably catastrophic, in the sense that the transition from virgin to nonvirgin is the equivalent of a fall from purity into corruption and from eternity to time.”<sup>14</sup>

Already in late Ming sources we see “the courtesan’s social mobility, her potential to cross barriers and make contacts up and down the social ladder”<sup>15</sup> that made her such an attractive character for fiction writers. Thanks to her social ambiguity, the *ji* seems to be able to occupy at once two different spaces, the *nei* 內, the inside, inherently female, and the *wai* 外, the outside, prevalently male.<sup>16</sup> But from the second half of the nineteenth century, the *ji*’s fast movements trace a fascinating itinerary across the physical, geographical and social itineraries horizons of late Qing fiction. The “official” space of residence of the *ji* is still the very ambiguous space of the brothel, a site of desire and consumption that is at once a specific site — with an address and a specific location — and a more generalized space — which, like a toilet, for example, is recognizable by its function anywhere —. Most late Qing novels locate the brothels within the metropolitan area of Shanghai, usually in the foreign concessions. And yet the *ji*’s range of action is not limited to the brothel. Her kingdom, the *piaojie* 嫖界, the world of whoring, in these late Qing novels can mean the street, the restaurant, the theater house, the park,

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14 Herbold, S., “Woman and Modernity in *Lolita*,” in Puar, J., Shackford-Bradley, J., and Zamperini, P., eds., *The Web of Modernity*, unpublished manuscript, p. 4.

15 See Bernheimer, C., *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth Century France* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 34.

16 As the anonymous reviewer of this paper points out, courtesans in real life were not expected to live by the same moral standards as women from good social background, except when they married, and this applies of course to their relationship to the *nei/wai* divide. However, in fiction, and especially in late Qing novels, we see that often there is a great deal of confusion as to what spaces which kind of women should occupy, and that often women of all social categories are judged by the same moral standards.

the private garden of a rich magnate, the boat, the carriage, the movie-theater, at any time of the day or of the year.<sup>17</sup> In other words, any space that can be semi-public and semi-private, in which she can show herself and advertise her wares, as it were, and also conduct trysts, meet potential clients, purchase goods that will increase her attractiveness and her competitiveness. She is an integral part of the metropolitan landscape, a landscape that she marks through her movements, of which she is an extension and which extends into her. The woman, just like the city, is offered as an object of desire and knowledge that can and should be penetrated, but at one's risk. From this perspective, Chang'an, Kaifeng, Shanghai, across the centuries, can be read as the "heterotopia" in which writers constructed romantic and sexual architectures.<sup>18</sup> And in a sense, the fictional construction of the city echoes the fictional brothel. They are both indeed a space of fiction, a space where everything and everyone at once is and is not really what s/he look like. The brothel looks like a private mansion but it is not. The women who work and live there look like rich, upper-class women who are loving and doting with their clients, while everybody knows they are not.<sup>19</sup> Their customers look like modern,

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17 It is true that even before the late Qing, courtesans would be depicted while traveling or on outings with clients. But usually they would go out and about with clients or only at specific time of the year. What is striking about late Qing novels is that courtesans and prostitutes are to be found everywhere and at any time of the year and of the day.

18 For an explanation of "heterotopia," see Foucault, M., "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics*, Spring 1986, vol. 16:1, pp. 22-27.

19 I have addressed elsewhere the question of "respectable" women looking like prostitutes on the streets of Shanghai; thus I will not address this issue here. It is true however, that writers of this period were concerned in general with a lack of clarity in visual codes on the streets of Shanghai and that they read it as a sign of the moral decadence of Chinese society. See Zamperini, Paola, "On Their Dress They Wore A Body: Fashion and Identity in late Qing Shanghai," in the special issue "Fabrications," edited by Tina Mai Chen and Paola Zamperini ed., *Positions*, (Durham: Duke University Press), 11.2, Fall 2003.

westernized citizens of a new and enlightened China, but they are not, and so on. In much of the fictional production of the late Qing period, the brothel loses its secluded nature of exclusive haven, where the man of letter could find solace for his soul and bond with his peers through poetry making and other cultural entertainment that would reaffirm his identity and pride as a member of the most advanced culture in his known universe. Instead, it is represented more markedly as a marketplace controlled by uncouth and ruthless women, where the main commodity on sale is sex more than true love, drugs rather than learned company and refined entertainment.

Narrative imperatives clearly play a determining role in directing the sites the courtesan occupies. The outward movement of the *ji* can be directed east or west, as long as it is towards an exotic, unknown territory where she can sell her wares in an enhanced and more extravagant and thus more entertaining for the reader fashion. As many scholars have pointed out, expansion of geographical horizons through travel is one of the main characteristics of late Qing fiction.<sup>20</sup> The lack of permanence traditionally associated with the persona of the courtesan makes her alluring as fictional characters and authors such as Wu Jianren and Zeng Pu, in employing it, are merely tapping into a previous literary tradition in the representation of courtesans.<sup>21</sup> The expanded hori-

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20 I will leave aside, for the present discussion, based almost exclusively on content analysis, the issues of style, language, and authorship: though these aspects are just as important as the ones I will be focusing on, there is just not enough space here to discuss them exhaustively. See Chen Pingyuan 陳平原, *Ershiji Zhongguo xiaoshuoshi 二十世紀中國小說史* (Beijing: Beijing Daxue chubanshe, 1989); Des Forges, A., "Street Talk and Alley Stories;" Dolezoleva-Velingerova, M., ed., *The Chinese Novel at the Turn of the Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980); Wang, David Der-Wei, *Fin-de-siecle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849-1911* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1997).

21 See articles in the section *Writing the Courtesan* in Kang-yi Sun Chang, and Widmer, E., eds., *Writing Women in Late Imperial China* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1997);

zon of Shanghai's late Qing modernities becomes the *ji*'s field of action: like the "fast girl" she veritably is, she moves across it astride her bicycle, or aboard a steamer. She is at the forefront of this particular kind of late Qing fictional modernity. In this sense "la cortigiana e' mobile," the courtesan is mobile, whimsical, to parody Verdi's line; she is mobile physically, but she is also mobile chronologically, she transcends time and space. She is simultaneously "in" (meaning at once trendy and inside the spaces that define modernity, such as the city, the cafe, the movie-theater, and so on) and "out" (meaning out and about).<sup>22</sup> And if she is not careful in promoting herself carefully, she also is "out" (meaning not fashionable anymore) very quickly.

In late Qing texts, the *ji* is one the main stars of a rising metropolitan leisure culture. As such she has to strive to maintain her visibility at the highest level possible. Unlike other categories of women whose (often not remunerated) work is better contained in invisibility, such as housewives and mothers, courtesans who appear in these texts are part of the

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Wolfe, B., *The Daily Life of a Courtesan Climbing Up a Tricky Ladder* (Hong Kong: Learner's Bookstore, 1980); Zamperini, P., "The Harlot's Progress: Fu Caiyun's Journey in the Sea of Retribution," M. A. Thesis, UC Berkeley, 1994. As Marsha Weidner has shown in her paper "Ladies of the Lake: Three Seventeenth-Century Women Painters of Hangzhou" (delivered at the seminar "Images and Imagination: Perspectives on Chinese and Japanese Art of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries" held in honor of James Cahill, Berkeley, May 1994), travel was a dimension of the daily life of some courtesans in Ming times and it is likely that this characteristic later became a part of the fictional representation of this category of women.

22 I have argued elsewhere that due to their connection to the entertainment world and to their charged eroticized role, courtesans and prostitutes were the ideal impersonators of a sort of modernity in drag(s), in other words as conveyors of new ideas and roles whose subversive influence was contained and restricted by their marginal social status. See Zamperini, P., "But I Never Learned To Waltz." See also, Wang, David, David Der-Wei, *Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Yeh Wen-hsin*, "Introduction: Interpreting Chinese Modernity, 1900-1950," as well as the other essays in the anthology Yeh Wen-hsin ed., *Becoming Chinese: Passages to Modernity and Beyond* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 1-28.

leisure culture and part of their job description is to be seen at their best. The ji's livelihood depends on visible display<sup>23</sup> Flashiness, exploitation of one's capital, I. E. one's body, makes a ji successful in the context of an ever-competitive market in a merciless city like Shanghai. Love's marketplace is funded on very tangible and visible corporeality. Talents such as poetry, calligraphy, beautiful singing are "out." The fin-de-siecle ji, with neither song nor dance, goes from man to man, from purse to purse, from city to another. Her wealth keeps growing, and the way she keeps her charms intact is by constantly reinventing herself as the newest, most exotic commodity on the market. These are not women who waste time. Resourceful and crafty, they always find a way to get what they want, at least in their prime.<sup>24</sup>

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23 We know that in real life, late Qing courtesans relied on many different tools to enhance their visibility, from photographs to ads in the many papers published and circulated within and outside of the metropolitan areas of Shanghai and Beijing, and so on and so forth. A propos of the historical realities of prostitution in the late Qing period, see Henriot, C., *Belles de Shanghai*; Hershatter, G., *Dangerous Pleasures*; Wang Shunu 王書奴, *Zhongguo Changjishi 中國娼妓史*, reprint of 1933 ed. (Shanghai: Sanlian shudian, 1988).

24 One clear and interesting example of this phenomenon is found in chapter 52 of Wu Jianren's *Sida Jingang*, where we find a very frustrated Wang Yuexian/Li Wenxian who aspires to become a courtesan. However, nobody wants her into a high-class establishment because of her unappealing Jiangbei accent. Determined to better her situation at any cost, she takes lessons in Suzhou dialect from Zhou Tongsun, an actor, until she manages to acquire the skill that will make her career move forward. In a similar fashion, as soon as Fu Caiyun steps on the steamer that is going to take her to Europe, she starts taking German lessons from a Russian nihilist. This linguistic ability should not surprise: already in Yuan drama courtesans are at once chastised and praised for their skill to achieve anything with their "flowery" words. See, for example, the Zhao Pan'er jiu fenchen. It is important to note that in this and other Yuan plays, the talents of the courtesans are expressed via games that involved verbal skills, tricks with words, composing poetry and matching couplets: the courtesan would entertain her patron with wine, wits and wiles, not with her cooking and embroidery. See also Sieber, P., "Rhetoric, Romance and Intertextuality: the Making and Remaking of Guan Hanqing in Yuan and Ming China," Ph. D. dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 1994; Sieber, P.,

The increased differentiation, in moral, geographical, spatial, as well as social terms and in terms of self-presentation and of the terminology employed to categorize different groups of sex-workers found in late Qing novels, is a reflection of actual changes taking place both in the demimonde.<sup>25</sup> For example, by the end of the Qing dynasty, the hierarchy of Chinese prostitution becomes even more differentiated, and many terms are very fluid and unstable, both semantically and socially: both in the novels and in real life, a girl could start as a mingji 名妓 and end up her life as a pauper, as it happened to Sai Jinhua 賽金花, or vice versa, she could start as a streetwalker and ascend to fame.<sup>26</sup> In other words, these representations mirror the fragmentation of previously relatively stable social categories and practices, and can help us detect them as symptoms of modernity.

Polyglossia, social and moral differentiation, metamorphosis, are all characteristics that go hand in hand with another feature that in late Qing novels is a permanent feature of the ji's personality: greed for money, and also for sex. These are "material girls" indeed, they live in the here-and-now and thirst for material possessions and physical pleasures. These two desires are so strong in the ji that they can hardly be separated and distinguished. Actually, in many cases greed for money is what allows her to buy the flashy clothes that she needs to be in business, and gives her the means to keep her lovers, who are not one and the same as her patrons, as we shall see below.

The ji as a representative of a fashionable and fashioned modernity,

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"Comic Virtue and Commendable Vice: Guan Hanqing's JIU FENGCHEN and WANG JIANG TING," in *Ming Studies* 32(1994).

25 By the turn of the century, many terms had been coined to identify different categories of jinü and mingji. See Henriot, C., *Belles de Shanghai*; Hershatler, G., *Dangerous Pleasures*, pp. 34-65.

26 See Zamperini, P., "But I Never Learned to Waltz."

the ji as a cunning businesswoman, the ji as a passionate and deranged pedophile, the ji as an opium and sex-addict, the ji as the breadwinner: all these roles that the courtesan plays are new and potentially disruptive precisely because they represent her as totally independent in her decisions. What happens then to these independent and reckless women, bound by their fates and yet unrestrained in their sexual and moral behavior precisely because of their status as untouchables, if we want to look at them from the angle of the “rhetoric of the beloved?” Is there no place for private love, only for public se 色? What happens to the caizi 才子, the man of letters, who had so often been the beloved zhiyin of the courtesan?

A good place to start is the explanation that Zhang Qiugu, a consumed brothel-goer and one of the male heroes of the novel *Jiuweigui*, gives to his friends. In the “good old times,” he explains, it was the literati who were the faithless lovers who broke their beloved ji’s hearts, and he quotes the stories of Cui Xiaoyu and Du Shiniang. Alas, he laments, in contemporary (meaning early twentieth century) Shanghai, the scene is quite the opposite, with the clients falling in love and the prostitutes breaking their hearts and ruining them financially.<sup>27</sup> The caizi goes from being the savior of the ji to being the one needing to be rescued from and by her, and she often lets him sink in his heartbreak and in his debts; at times, she also hastens his death. In truth, even if late Qing novels are full of proverbs about the ji’s lack of emotions, these women do appear capable of feeling se, lust, as well as to lose their heads and hearts for dashing boys. Sexual desire and true affection appear often intertwined in these texts, though the predominant emotion depicted is sexual desire. They go with their patrons exclusively for money, but they fall for beauty and masculine charms, two characteristics their

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27 Zhang Chunfan, *Jiuweigui*, pp. 59-60.

patrons seldom have. And these women can afford their vices.

In *Sida Jingang*, Wu Jianren, lamenting the general decay of Shanghai's life at the end of the nineteenth century, observes that "in the old times literati took joy in courtesans, but nowadays courtesans take joy in famous actors."<sup>28</sup> In other words, this observation tells us is that the emotional pact between wenren and courtesan is dramatically changed: up until the mid-nineteenth century, in the caizi-ji bond the man took his pleasure in the ji and was in an empowered position over her. According to Wu Jianren, in these new times the subject of the jouissance has shifted: the ji appropriates erotic agency and gets to have fun. This shift would not be so dramatic perhaps if the object of the jouissance were still the caizi. But to add humiliation to shame, actors, who belonged to the lowest social class, replace him in the ji's affection. We will turn now to these novel romantic and erotic geometries which bring together and apart the ji, old- and new-school wenren, and actors. Let us now look closely at who loves whom and where, who is paying what price and for what, and what kind of desires propel (and repel) the protagonists of our narrative.

In most fictional sources, courtesans are often barely teenagers when they start receiving clients. Their patrons, on the other hand, are older and usually not very attractive men. Many of them are profligates whose body has been prematurely aged from too much sex, wine and opium.<sup>29</sup> Not the best sexual and romantic partners for young women who are coming into their physical and emotional prime and who have been trained in the arts of physical pleasure. From this perspective, we cannot really blame the courtesans for choosing to run after the more handsome and clean-cut actors who, because of their

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28 Chouxi zhuren, *Haishang mingji si da jingang qishu*, chapter 51.

29 One wonders how much the physical decay of the wenren due to opium consumption has to do with his replacement as lover of the ji by the young and dashing actors.

profession, pay more attention to their appearance and their clothing. Weakened by age, stupefied by Western liquors too strong for their stomachs, and yellowed by drugs, the courtesans' customers have in their mind the very unrealistic expectations that their money will buy them not only the time and the sexual favors of the *ji*, but also her heart. In truth, their money buys them very little: a night, a week or a month of pleasure – sometimes not even that, as there are women who are skilled at extorting money without conceding their favors, in exchange for heartache, syphilis, scandal, financial ruin, and at times even death. In turn, the courtesans spend their money in clothes, opium, and gambling and young lovers. The *ji*'s lovers, in turn, are attracted to her precisely for the same reasons she is attracted to her customers, namely for the wealth that she can procure for them. Thus we see that economic exchange happens between three agents, the courtesan, her client, and her lover/s. Just as the client pays for the *ji*'s favors, she pays for her lover.<sup>30</sup>

This economy of desire is clearly expressed in economic transactions that are not hidden or disguised in flowery terms. Desire, for sex, companionship, drugs, is what moves the characters. Money is what allows them to get, albeit in a temporary and impermanent way, the object of their desires. The courtesan, her client and her lover are all equally fickle and unreliable. In the market place, no loyalty and no bond is permanent. Once the client has exhausted his money, he is kicked out of the brothel. Once the courtesan has no money to pay her debts, she is thrown out on the street. Once her lover has squeezed her dry, he moves

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30 In other words, just like in Yuan plays the love relationship between the *ji* and the *wenren* was complicated and often hindered by the presence of the rich and uncouth merchant, we see new triangles developing in late Qing vernacular fiction. See Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸, “Lun Yuanren suoxie shangren shizi jinu jiande san jiao lian’ aiju” 論元人所寫商人士子妓女間的三角戀愛劇, in *Wenxue jikan* 文學季刊 1:4 (1934), p. 169.

on to the next woman. But once a client sees a younger, “hotter” courtesan, he drops his current one with no hesitation. Once a courtesan who has gotten married gets bored of married life, she thinks nothing of getting a divorce. Once a young actor gets tired of his current lover, he very easily finds a replacement (or carries on with as many courtesans as he can get away with). Money replaces qing 情 as the currency that is at the base of narrative exchanges. In Shanghai everybody is on sale and at the same time has something to buy. The courtesan, just like her clients, buys her pleasure, along with many other objects of desire and consumption.<sup>31</sup>

In a way, one cannot help feeling sorry for the rows of old-style literati who, in the pages of late Qing novels, still buy into the rhetoric of the beloved that matches up the ji and the caizi. But by this time, the wenren has become just another customer to exploit, side by side with the very despised merchants, country bumpkins, corrupt officials and decadent scions of rich families. No longer represented as the young and handsome student arriving to the capital for the first time, but as an old, corrupt and disillusioned official or as a wealthy mandarin, the main attraction the caizi holds for the ji is his purse. The ji is not trained anymore to be the perfect zhiyin of the refined man of letters.<sup>32</sup> She is brought up to be a shrew businesswoman aware of competition, and she goes from being a helpless victim waiting to be rescued to being a very dangerous presence that can actually threaten the very existence of these old-style literati. As more and more courtesans appear in late Qing novels,

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31 See Zamperini, P., “Clothes Matter: Fashioning Modernity in Late Qing Novels,” for a discussion of consumerism and prostitution in late imperial fiction. For a path-breaking approach to the study of consumption in Chinese history and its relationship to modernity, see Finnane, A., “Yangzhou’s ‘Modernity’: Fashion and the City in the Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century,” “Fabrication,” 395.

32 See Zamperini, P., “But I Never Learned to Waltz.”

the role of the wenren as the heartless lover who does not repay the ji 's kindness and does not rescue her from the "living hell" of the brothel becomes marginal, and instead we see the old-style wenren more and more in the role of a victim, of an old fool unable to face up to reality. The economics of soteriology at play in late imperial vernacular sources within the context of the scholar and courtesan relationship is definitely reversed. The ji acquires temporary control over the superficial attributes of modernity and manages to enter history as a subject. On the contrary the wenren lags behind, and if he tries to gain access to the stream of historical changes, he becomes "hysterical," marked as feminine in terms of his lack of power.

The old-style wenren is unable to face up to the new challenges in the world around him. Obsolete as he is, he fails to sexually satisfy the young, westernized sex-worker he chooses for his mate: while she moves at the fast tempo of a waltz across the changes, he still moves at the rhythm of ritual music, encumbered by the heavy garb of Chinese tradition. While the ji 's world expands to include new countries, new languages, new roles, his world shrinks, his body fails, his mind falters. The feminized, non-productive, out-dated upper-middle class male is overpowered by an assertive, money-making, lower-class woman who takes away his money and his honor, leaving him standing as an object of ridicule to the woman, and to the reader looking on behind her shoulder, the modern reader of entertainment fiction who should know better than falling in love with a fast girl.<sup>33</sup> This story, with many variations, is to be found in virtually every late Qing novel in which the ji appears. It is a story told from a misogynist perspective against women who could find a way to carve a niche of empowerment within a patriarchal society: in

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33 For the relationship between Fu Caiyun and Jin Wenqing and how it intersects with the idea of modernity and the nation, see Zamperini, P., "But I Never Learned to Waltz;" Zamperini, P., "The Harlot 's Progress."

late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century China women did not have many choices when it came to making a living outside of a respectable marriage and motherhood or work in a factory among the growing masses of the urban proletariat. And these representations also speak of the threat that men felt vis-à-vis the new roles that the collapse of Qing dynasty seemed to bring about for women. This element of fear helps to explain not only the negativity in which most of these *ji*'s characterizations are steeped, but also the constant tone of mockery and debasement directed against these women.

Is there no match for this fast-moving *ji*? Her lovers are her dangerous sex-toys; her patrons her "money-trees," to use a Chinese expression usually applied to the courtesans themselves. Between the old-fashioned man of letters and the emerging urbanite, which we shall discuss presently, there emerges a very interesting character, a sort of a superhero of the brothel, well exemplified by the already mentioned Zhang Qiugu, the male hero of the novel *Jiuweigui*. He is a noble, martial-looking, awe-inspiring, talented, handsome young man. He is a powerful but marginal character, in the sense that he is a learned and wealthy person who has no intention of wasting his time by engaging with the corrupt world of officials. He lives among prostitutes and courtesans and is able to dominate these greedy women easily. Zhang Qiugu is the ultimate savior: he enlightens prostitutes and clients alike, acts as a mediator when there is a fight, plays the gallant, never falling in love and, even when is tricked into some trap, manages to pull himself out of trouble in some nice way. He is a great lover and a great friend, he fears nothing and he is successful in all his endeavors. If Shanghai and the world at large have become an endless *piaojie*, like the author of this novel so clearly illustrates, he is the ultimate *piaoke* 嫖客, brothel-goer.

Zhang Qiugu knows what to ask of these women. Obviously, not love:

prostitutes have feelings only if money is part of the equation. Deploring the fact that people want to marry prostitutes, he likens it to taking a beautiful flower and planting it into an unfamiliar ground with an unfamiliar climate. Of course the flower will suffer and wither: if it could speak, it would refuse to be taken away.<sup>34</sup> The problem lies, he explains, in the fact that the customers are in denial and do not understand that lying and deceit is part of the *ji*'s line of work.<sup>35</sup>

At the same time, Zhang Qiugu explains how one can get *ji* to have real feelings towards him. Just like in Tang times, one needs beauty, talent, and knowledge of ritual. Manners' principal and political role after all, in the bordello as elsewhere, is to relate the private, the social and the public. Thus the brothel, in late Qing novels as in earlier sources, is the ideal place to negotiate between public and private through a very strict code of behavior. But in the altered fin-de-siècle horizons, beauty equates with expensive foreign clothes, talent with money, and manners with a superficial patina of Western etiquette. The true successful brothel-goer is one who knows the rules and the proper behavior to keep in the brothel and in the company of courtesans. The rich, ignorant, country bumpkins who have the financial means to frequent these women lack the know-how to actively become connoisseurs. These ignorami are always laughed at, for not knowing how to compose poetry, how to dress properly and according to their social status. But officials and *wenren* do not fare better. In chapter 26, Zhang Qiugu explains the differences between patrons, dividing them into merchants and officials.<sup>36</sup> Merchants are incredibly greedy and do not like to spend money, while officials like to brag but have no money: "These officials are really parasites,

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34 Zhang Chunfan, *Jiuweigui*, chapter 9.

35 *Ibid*, chapter 15, 18 and ff.

36 *Ibid*, *Jiuweigui*, 17 and ff..

unable to learn the character piao 嫖, whoring!"<sup>37</sup> (He also says that if the prostitutes were to swap jobs with the officials, they would do a much better job!)

He is realistic in his approach to late Qing courtesans as sex-workers, and refuses to see them only as idealized icons of proper behavior. At times he also appears highly sympathetic towards the courtesans, by showing how these women are often stuck with uncouth, rude, aggressive clients who abuse them sexually, and how they also have to live with the stigma of not being true to their customers. Zhang Qiugu's point is, first of all, that one should not go with whores. But if one does, one must know the proper behavior, the etiquette, and also must know what to expect, have fun when in the brothel and leave the courtesans where they belong. And to have them love you, one must give them leeway and not push them unnaturally. They do fall for beauty and masculine charm, two characteristics their patrons seldom have, but that Zhang Qiugu happens to be very well endowed with.

In truth, there are times in which Zhang Qiugu seems more of a compass, as it is written at the end of the book by the curator of the novel, in other words, a sort of navigational device that shows the reader how to navigate in the world of prostitution. Zhang Qiugu travels like the ji, but he is a sex-tourist, and his movements map the piaojie. He is out to shop the world of sex and appears to be one of the few successful consumers, in the whole panorama of late Qing novels that deal with courtesans and their clients. Indeed "the smart shopper in the brothel," he is the true capitalist consumer, who, unlike so many old-fashioned characters, does not lose himself, his cash, and his life in his interactions with women in general and ji's in particular. But he does lose himself in his own desire to consume sex: he loses sight of boundaries and

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37 Ibid, Jiuweigui, 19.

morality. This abhorrent side of his drive to consume is best seen in his seduction of a young adolescent of a good family.<sup>38</sup> This episode shows how for Zhang Qiugu, the ultimate model of the modern patron of the brothel, the whole world is constructed as a brothel, and his main activity is penetration. He is modern in a very superficial sense: he too moves across China and expands his range of action from Shanghai to the rest of the metropolitan areas of turn-of-the-century China. He is more realistic in his expectations about his interactions with the courtesans, but it is because he treats all women as whores at his disposal, even a teenager who makes the mistake of getting a crush on him.

But there is yet another kind of man who gets entangled with the *ji* in the urban setting of Shanghai. He is not a nostalgic old-style *wenren*, not a dashing young actor addicted to money and expensive clothes, nor can he aspire to the status of “sexual Superman” played by Zhang Qiugu. It is extremely difficult to come up with a proper definition for such a character. This type of man is characterized by an idiosyncratic approach to modernity and progress, either in the form of unconditional embrace of anything western and foreign, or of total refusal of anything not Chinese. His social and economic situation is very unstable, going from extremely poor to extremely rich in a matter of days or even seconds. He appears constantly displaced: arriving too late to make a name a name for himself in the official examinations, he has often still a “bellyful of traditional learning under his belt” and no hope of putting it to good use. He restlessly travels and constantly changes careers. He possesses a tendency to addiction (to sex, drugs, gambling, and to self-created delusions in general) as well as a strong sexual drive often without means to carry to its conclusion.

His is a very ambiguous moral status, saintly one moment, and

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38 Ibid, chapter 107, p. 672; chapter 110, p. 685.

utterly perverted the following. Too neurotic to be labeled “flaneur,” he would be better identified by the word “amateur.” This definition refers quite clearly to his very unstable social and cultural boundaries and no real fixed skill or talent that can identify him, except for his inclination to love something or somebody often in a superficial way. “Schizophrenic,” on the other hand, can include the protean and restless multiple personality disorder that seems to affect him along with a general incapability to cope with the changing world around him.<sup>39</sup>

Enlarging the picture to include these, for lack of better words, “schiz (ophrenic amat)eurs,” we can see that their actions and reactions vis-à-vis the west, both as a commodity and as a historical force, represent interesting dynamics of assimilation and resistance that match those of the *ji*. Consumerism, once again, is the key. But unlike the case of Zhang Qiugu, who reduces the whole of China to a brothel, and all women to whores, the “schizeurs” are able to consume other things besides sex and *ji*. The young and displaced man of letters and the courtesan are two key players in the circuit of desire built around the landscapes of modernity. Unlike his father, the old *wenren*, the young literatus can become a journalist and thus successfully unite language, knowledge and technology. Or he can go abroad, very often to Japan, where he can study and master (or pretend to do so) medicine and engineering. Westernized modernity is less dangerous for him than other older Chinese men, and progress for him can become a life-style.

The “modern look” of which he can become at once a representative

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39 For a more complete analysis of this character, see Zamperini, P., “Lost Bodies,” chapter 1. For a very interesting definition of multiple personalities in connection to the construction of the identity of the [male] Shanghai in turn of the century journals and magazines, see Barbara Mittler’s “Multiple Personalities? Image and Voice of the Shanghai in,” chapter 5, p. 272, in *A Western Medium Creating Chinese Identity? Metamorphosis of the Newspaper in Shanghai 1872-1912* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press), forthcoming.

and a consumer, however, is also a marker of an ambiguous social identity. This problematic side of consuming modernity is, as a matter of fact, represented quite clearly in this kind of sources. The danger is located in the foreign nature of this attribute and most of all in its volatility: just like money, the new identities can change hands, they are not stable. While for the *ji*, contact with the West in any form, whether through clothing or sex, is just a marketing device, and not enough to redeem her socially, for few chosen young Chinese men, the successful appropriation of foreign languages and technologies can bring to the creation of new, empowered selves.<sup>40</sup> But these are few and rare exceptions. Chinese men in late Qing sources are lost in the maze of a modern life they are not able to fully understand. As Shanghai sojourners, they live in hotels and rented homes, and because of the facility with which they deplete their fortunes whoring and gambling, they are seldom able or willing to return home. And often even Shanghai residents move awkwardly in the new unfamiliar spaces of the foreign concessions and the troubled landscape of the Chinese walled city. When they leave the city, they travel reluctantly by boat and train, getting seasick and being robbed, refusing or unable to adjust to the new and unfamiliar ways they encounter. Strangers to themselves, and to their own kind, they very seldom manage to control the changing space and time around them.

At the turn of last century, the *caizi* is not the ultimate lover any longer. He is not even himself any longer. He becomes split at least in two figures, those of the father and the son, simultaneously standing side by side, the old and weakened scholar and the young and confused urbanite, both of them apparently doomed to failure. The differentiation

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40 See, for example, what happens to Du Shaomu 杜少牧 and his friends in Sun Jiazhen, *Haishang fanhuameng*.

and the fragmentation that one finds in the *ji*'s personality and career is also one of the main characteristics of these late Qing male fictional characters. The old-style *wenren* is delusional and disempowered. The "schizeur," his son and heir, is disoriented: younger than but often just as educated as the *wenren*, he is just at odds with the changing reality of the world around him. Even a self-proclaimed consumer of sex like Zhang Qiugu eventually falls in the consumerist trap of wanting to buy what everybody knows money cannot buy, namely love, and, even more absurdly, from courtesans, women who, as everybody knows, make their living selling sex and their bodies, and not their hearts. Emotional attachment, be it prompted by sexual attraction or by more romantic feelings, is productive only as long as it does not produce long-term attachment. In fact, as the sources under exam show, love becomes deadly if it stops being a public (or semi-public) monetary exchange and becomes a private exchange of feelings.

Just as love-stricken literati and public figures' hearts are broken and their fortunes shattered by these cruel and yet simultaneously passionate women, they, in turn, often lose all they have and often their own life by choosing to love a man of their choice. In fact, love and death have never been so closely entangled, and this connection becomes intersected with the characters' search for an identity that will allow them to function in the protean landscapes of the end of the Qing dynasty.<sup>41</sup> If

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41 There is one beautiful exception to this rather dismal commercialization, an exception that paradoxically exemplifies the impossibility of love between the *ji* and the *wenren* in the changed circumstances of late Qing society. In the already mentioned *Haishang hua*, we meet a veritable Romeo and Juliet, Tao Yufu and Li Shufang. He is a young scion of a rich family, and she is his beautiful, sweet and devoted *ji*. The two young ones love each other dearly but, since he cannot take her as his first wife, because of social restrictions, she dies of heartbreak. Her love cannot erase social barriers, and her incapability to adapt herself to a world that does not allow space for real affections, for feelings that do not aim to consume, exchange or produce any capital, brings about her demise. She does not play by the rules of the market, because she believes in the strength of her love, and

love is a labyrinth, then Shanghai is a perilous romantic labyrinth, with many ways in, but very few ways out. Unlike the classical labyrinth, Shanghai does not have one center where one monster lurks. Dangers are everywhere in Shanghai, because it is a space dominated by consumption dynamics, as well as by economic transactions and laws that transcend the control of the individual.

Given this rather gloomy scenario, it is legitimate to ask at this point: Who gets the most pleasure in this extended brothel? In late Qing novels everyone “puts out”, but perhaps the only one who wins in the end in the market place of love and sex of the novels is the reader. He possesses the characters and their stories *ad infinitum*, he knows that the courtesan’s syphilis will not affect him yet he can re-enact endlessly possessing her and her image.<sup>42</sup> Viewing the city and its inhabitants, their stories, their lives, from a bird’s view, from the top, as it were, the reader is the ultimate voyeur.<sup>43</sup> Though all these novels are accounts of private lives, the architectural structures in which the lives take place disappear under the greedy eyes of the reader. One of the most exciting sides of reading fiction is, after all, violating private spaces, transgressing, opening doors, peering through windows, just like we see in so many late imperial Chinese erotic prints and novels.<sup>44</sup>

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as a result she dies. Han Ziyun, *Haishang hua*, p. 181.

42 The question of the gender of the late Qing reader is a fascinating and complex one. In the case of the sources under exam here, the reader was very likely male, but that does not rule out the possibility of female readership. See Hu, Ying, *Tales of Translation: Composing the New Woman in China, 1899-1918* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2000); Zamperini, P., “Elective Affinities: Spiritual Resonance & Book-marketing in Late Qing Novels,” in *Late Imperial China*, forthcoming.

43 For a more complete elaboration of this later point, see Zamperini, P., “On Their Bodies They Wore a Dress: Technologies of Gender, Identity and Modernity,” forthcoming, as well as “Dreamscapes: The Vertical Horizons of Late Qing Fiction,” work in progress.

44 For a brilliant analysis of the relationship between voyeurism, privacy, and the birth of the novel in the West, see Brooks, P., *Body work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative*

As the walls of the refined upper-class brothels crumble, its inhabitants spill on the street and enter the pages of fictional accounts circulating in magazines, novels and journals. The pleasures of readers and of reading novels and newspapers are shown frequently in these texts, where, in a sort of amusing and realistic *mise-en-abyme*, tabloids expose the sentimental adventures of courtesans and men alike. In some cases, it is the characters themselves that write to newspapers to divulge the bitter lessons learned from their tragic love affairs with famous courtesans. In *Haishang fanhuameng* 海上繁華夢 Du Shaomu writes a long and sorrowful piece about his failed relationships with courtesans, that is later published in a newspaper at his brother's encouragement.<sup>45</sup> And the power exerted by newspapers and journalists in Shanghai is clearly shown in these novels. Pan Shao'an, another character in *Haishang fanhuameng*, blackmails a courtesan by hinting that a journalist may have seen her returning home with her lover-actor and thus may expose her in an article, causing her to lose face and many important clients. In the same text, a cruel madam blackmails a client who has slapped one of her girls because she had showed up late by threatening to give the story to the newspapers. The client, an arrogant and uncouth official, he knows she has no case, but still buys her silence as he is afraid of the power of the media to ruin his reputation.<sup>46</sup>

The novel then, exactly like the sensational article, unveils bodies and their stories and feeds the reader's desire to possess through the written medium and the imagination what cannot be possessed in flesh. The more socially marginal these bodies are, the more "storied" they become. Furthermore, fictional sources often deal with real characters and thus reflect the public's thirst for gossip about the private life of

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(Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993).

45 Sun Jiazhen, *Haishang fanhuameng*, pp. 669-672.

46 *Ibid.* chapter 25, p. 617, for first episode, chapter 12, p. 1288 for the second.

the very public individuals that inhabit a world where romance is sold, purchased, consumed and disposed of quickly. In a way, the text itself echoes this exchange and resembles most of the fetishized figures appearing in it, as it is a public and widely circulated commodity.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, even the extremely private act of reading is constantly represented in these sources, thereby offering the readers outside the text the possibility of becoming part of plot within the text.

So next to the courtesan, the wenren, the young schizeur, the reader appears as an important player in the piaojie. By his side, the actor, the new protagonist of the emerging star-system propelled by the leisure industry. All around them marginal creatures, beggars, gamblers, addicts, thieves, policemen, foreigners, hookers, cooks, entertainers: people lost at the end of a century, at the end of the dynasty, at the beginning of a new era. Lost in space and in time, truly “spaced out.” And all these characters, male and female, that crowd the pages of late Qing fiction, along with the reader, on the very brink of temporal-spatial collapse, keenly pursue narcissistic pleasures. At the end of the Qing dynasty, they enact, witness and enjoy the spectacle offered by the new triangles

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47 By the late Qing period, publishing was a profitable business, novels were items of mass consumption and fiction writers an emerging profession. A thin line, often none at all, separated fiction writers from journalists, who exploited the advances in printing technology to feed and generate at the same time the desire for news, sensationalized stories and fiction. See Ah Ying 阿英, *Wan Qing xiaoshuo shi 晚清小說史*, (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1980); Chen Pingyuan 陳平原, *Ershiji Zhongguo xiaoshuoshi*; Dolezoleva-Velingerova, M., ed., *The Chinese Novel at the Turn of the Century*; Leo Ufan Lee “The Cultural Construction of Modernity in Urban Shanghai: Some Preliminary Explorations,” in Yeh, Wen-hsin, *Becoming Chinese*, p. 31; Link, P., *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: Popular Fiction in Early 20th Century Chinese Cities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Reed, C. A., “Gutenberg in Shanghai: Mechanized Printing, Modern Publishing, and Their Effects on the City, 1876-1937,” Ph. D. dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 1996; Wang, David Der-Wei, *Fin-de-siècle Splendor*, for more complete explanation of the commercialization of the novel at the end of the Qing.

created by the ji and her patrons, who end up outside of the discourse about love, and are put within the circuit of an economy of desire, pleasure and consumption.

# 內與外：晚清小說裡「愛情的市場」

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## 摘 要

這篇文章將分析愛情在晚清小說裡，是如何透過既復雜又矛盾的方式而被商品化，進而藉此了解，這些小說的人物對愛情與幸福的追求，如何在個人與國家兩個層面上牽涉到他們對現代化的嚮往。

在晚清小說的作品中，無論是狹邪小說或譴責小說，青樓這種典型風花雪月的空間，對研究私、公、隱、情之間的衝突與矛盾，提供了最佳的資料。清末的青樓不再是一種極浪漫、僻靜的高級娛樂場所，而成為了一個現代市場，一種充滿競爭的、可以複製的、多重性的「嫖界」。在這個嫖界裡面，性別、階級差異及文化與國家的意識，都經歷巨大的變化，以致打扮成野雞的名妓、穿西裝的文人、京劇明星甚至「良家」婦人，通通來到嫖界進行愛情上的交易。不過，對他們而言，作為商品的愛情，只要沒有遷涉到長期的交往，才有市場，甚至在這些小說裡，愛情一旦不限於公開的（或半公開的）金錢上的交易，而成為私情的交流，就可能鬧出人命。藉著《九尾龜》、《海上花》之類的小說，我們可以了解晚清作家如何以嫖界這個廣義的妓院以及它的居民，展示清末的男女在公與私之間的日益複雜的處境與人生觀。

關鍵詞：晚清小說、愛情、市場、青樓、公／私

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